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IRAN

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Iran, Before The Bullets, Missiles And Body Parts Start Flying

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No fooling. This is the straight dope about Iran.



IRAN TODAY



Iran's men are having trouble dealing with the brave new world that's imposing itself on their bedrooms: an unnoticed tide of sexual change that could prove far more important in shaping the country's cultural and political values than the 2009 democratic elections

"It is still widely accepted," Negar Farshidi writes, "that a groom can make his marriage conditional on the bride remaining a virgin, and cancel it if it turns out she isn't. Traditionally, a blood-stained sheet was produced after the wedding night as evidence of an intact hymen, but nowadays many men and their families ask for a 'virginity certificate' in advance."

Similar practices are common throughout the entire world. The majority of newlyweds still want their brides to be virgins in most countries.

But an official Iranian study, Farshidi records, has determined that more than half of all young people in Iran have had premarital sex – which means those certificates probably aren't worth a whole lot.

Iran's powerful clerical establishment embraced the technological products of modernity, like computers and the internet, while railing against its cultural manifestations. But the fact is that modernity imposes its own culture. More and more young Iranians are working independently of their families. More and more Iranians are marrying late. More and more young Iranians are having premarital sex.

Kelly Golnoush Niknejad had, a couple of years ago, written an insightful account of how the internet had made it increasingly difficult for the regime to censor what young people in Iran "see, hear and seek, especially when it comes to dating and sex."

Iran's clerics aren't stupid: unlike Xerxes, they see that even three hundred lashes aren't going to tame the sea. Ziauddin Sardar, in a must-read article, wrote of the clergy's efforts to battle this epidemic by promoting muta, or temporary marriages. Precisely how these marriages are distinct from hiring a sex worker, I am unclear – but the distinction at least keeps up the pretence that the new sexual culture doesn't violate religious order.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, has ruled that even if a married woman who claimed to be a virgin was proved to have had non-penetrative premarital sex, her husband could not divorce her unless the couple had agreed in advance that virginity meant no sex at all. Put crudely, it's OK to play.

Some clerics are putting their faith in technology. Ayatollah Sadeq Rouhani, a conservative cleric, issued a ruling that that hymenoplasties – the surgical reconstruction of virginity – was lawful in Islam. "There is no difference between a real and fake hymen," he reasoned, wisely putting pragmatism before principle.

The point is the claims to tradition and faith on which clerical authority rest are being eroded. Plastic surgery only allows the fiction of tradition to be sustained: everyone knows it's dead (interestingly, there are websites in the US offering hymenoplasties to married women who want to give their husbands something "really special" – virginity has been packaged as a retro cultural artefact).

Islamic cultures aren't alone in their attitudes to virginity. Pope Pius XII, in a 1954 address, extolled virginity as "something beautiful and holy." This attitude, I learn from the venerable *Journal of Orthoptera Research*, Volume Vol. 17, No. 2, 2008, is shared by *Poecilimon laevis*: *Tettigoniidae*, the Greek bush cricket, which values virginity more than body size when it comes to choosing a mate. There is a large literature on exactly why societies value virginity at particular points in their evolution. I'm not going to recapitulate it here: if you're interested there's scholarship out there on the practice and meaning of the state in every conceivable setting, from medieval England to South America, the Swahili of Mombasa, Spanish gypsies in Madrid, and Echo Island, wherever that is and of course right here in the USA as well, modern America.

HONEY BADLOO

Honey Badloo sashays through the streets of her beloved Tehran determined to find opportunity where Westerners see oppression.

True, the aspiring model and designer strolled the catwalk only once before Iranian authorities banned fashion shows.

And, no, her first magazine cover never made it past government censors.

But Persian style stretches back thousands of years, Badloo says with pride, and not even the austere regime can separate Iranians from their Gucci.

“Our Mr. President doesn’t like us to work on fashion,” said Badloo, 21, pouting her carefully painted lips. “But anyone you put in a cage wants to know what it’s like outside. Who’s Paris Hilton? Who’s Brad Pitt? What are the styles outside of Iran?”

These are rough times for Tehran’s fashionistas, but style-conscious young Iranians are turning to satellite channels, clandestine trunk shows and smuggled copies of Vogue to keep up with haute couture outside the conservative Islamic republic.

Even as the government warns of a new crackdown on dress-code violations — women must cover their heads, legs and arms — the capital’s fashion mavens keep testing the limits with head scarves that inch back a little farther every season. This winter, Badloo seriously pondered whether knee-high vinyl boots counted as covering her legs.

“All the foreigners think we’re stuck in chadors out in a desert, but we have everything here,” Badloo said, referring to the traditional cloak worn by Muslim women. She flashed a pearly smile and added: “Even Christian Dior.”

Fendi bags, Prada shoes and Chanel dresses flood into Iran from Dubai, the Persian Gulf’s shopping paradise. Brightly patterned head scarves come from Turkey, sequined tunics from Syria.

To follow the West’s changing hemlines, trend-obsessed Iranians tune their televisions to Fashion TV, the international channel devoted exclusively to style. Housewives have made small fortunes hauling back the latest styles from Europe and the United States. Unlicensed vendors send text messages via cellphones to alert loyal customers to coveted new cargo of Calvin Klein watches and Hermes scarves.

“When I go on a trip to Paris, Germany, Sweden, I always buy a lot of clothes to bring back to Iran,” said Sara Aliabadi, 23, who was dressed one day in an elegant fitted coat that she asked a local tailor to sew based on a Chanel design. “Even in those places, you see girls wearing long skirts. It’s the same thing here. You can maneuver around the restrictions.”

Under Iran’s previous reform-minded government, there was a small open-



ing for a fashion industry. The acclaimed designer Mahla Zamani staged five runway shows, women’s-only events that celebrated the colorful history of Iranian dress. She also started a magazine called Lotus, touted as the first Persian fashion journal, and published five issues, each government-approved before it went to press.

Badloo was one of her top models. Zamani and her models were invited to participate in a fashion show in Italy.

Then came Ahmadinejad’s stunning upset in last year’s elections. The new government shut down Lotus magazine. Badloo said she was denied permission to attend the fashion show in Italy.

The government renewed efforts to keep Western influences out. Google searches for “fashion” or “glamour” result in a red pop-up notice that reads: “Stop. Access to the page has been denied.”

Still, there’s been no dress-code crackdown yet.

Now that spring is here, Badloo’s government-mandated scarves are floral-print silk confections. She paid \$180 for the gigantic Dior sunglasses that perch atop her highlighted hair. Her jeans are Dolce & Gabbana, or at least high-quality knockoffs.



Badloo’s lithe body, high cheekbones and straight nose are all natural, she says. The only artificial thing about her is the Western variation of her traditional first name, which is actually Hanyeh, not Honey.

A few months ago, Badloo hired a professional photographer to take portraits for her ever-expanding portfolio. With a guilty giggle, she called them “my un-Islamic pictures.” Some photos show her sprawled across a couch with a come-hither look. Others are sultry shots of her in skimpy outfits, her long hair exposed and fluttering in a breeze. Badloo examines them with the eye of a veteran fashion editor.

“I think the sepia tones really bring out the contrasts and texture,” she mused.

Badloo knows she stands little chance of ever having the photos published in Iran, so she designs wallpaper, bathroom tiles, lampshades and other household decor while her modeling career is on hold. On the rare occasion she gets depressed over the state of Iran’s fashion industry, Badloo drags out her colored pencils and sketchpads and designs colorful alternatives to the country’s traditional chadors.

She calls Angelina Jolie her fashion icon, but her first inspiration comes from home. The garments she designs jingle with antique coins from the Shah’s era, shine with ancient Turkmen buckles and move like the skirts of whirling dervishes. An image of Cyrus the Great adorns one of her first batik patterns. “If you look at these clothes, you see the geography of Iran,” Badloo said, pointing to one of her Kurdish-inspired skirts. “Northern Iran is full of colors, and they use every single one in their designs. We are starting to change here in Tehran. We’re going from the grays and browns to sharp colors. Happy colors.”

Badloo’s mother, Maryaa, who passed her almond-shaped eyes and clear skin to her oldest daughter, was convinced of Badloo’s talent when she caught her drawing circles on her stomach with lipstick at age 3.

Badloo’s parents invested in painting classes, textile design school and a private English tutor to prepare her for a career in international fashion. They are skeptical now that the Iranian government will ever appreciate their daughter’s vibrant inventions and photogenic face.

Badloo knows her time will come.

“One day, I’ll have a factory that produces all my own designs, and every single label is going to say ‘Honey Badloo,’ not ‘Valentino,’” she said. “I’m going to show the world that we have fashion. In fact, we’ve been in style for 3,000 years.”

The publishers of this magazine don’t support any governments. We don’t support Badloos government and we don’t support our own but what we are opposed to in every way possible is bombing human beings anywhere in the world. Not Iran, not Palestine, not Congo, not Syria. We are opposed to all NATO war crimes disguised as incursions, humanitarian missions or war.



SCENES in IRAN

taken by a young man born in the USA who decided to move to Iran. Here are handicrafts good as gifts for your mom, specially if you haven't seen her in two years!



The Persian Gulf and the Straits of Hormuz

Bandar Abbas or Bandar-e 'Abbas (in Persian; formerly known as Gombroon) is a port city and capital of Hormozgan Province on the southern coast of Iran (Persia), on the Persian Gulf. The city occupies a strategic position on the narrow Straits of Hormuz, and it is the location of the main base of the Iranian Navy. It had an estimated population of 352,173 in 2005. Here are some pictures of Iranian fishermen shrimping in the northern Persian Gulf.





Tehran, Iran

A man selling two puppies (above) on the side of the street. Technically pets are illegal in Iran. But that doesn't stop people from buying their cats and dogs. Even if it takes buying them from a shady dude! And for some reason pet food isn't illegal. So you can actually buy pet food in most stores.

An alley (right) in central Tehran. You can still find little pockets of old Tehran. The brick wall to the right houses an older building and garden from Tehran's decades past.

By the way, Iranians aren't Arabs and feel insulted to be considered Arabs. They're Persians and there's a difference. As big a difference as the difference between the French and British or the Americans and Canadians.
Iranians aren't Arabs.

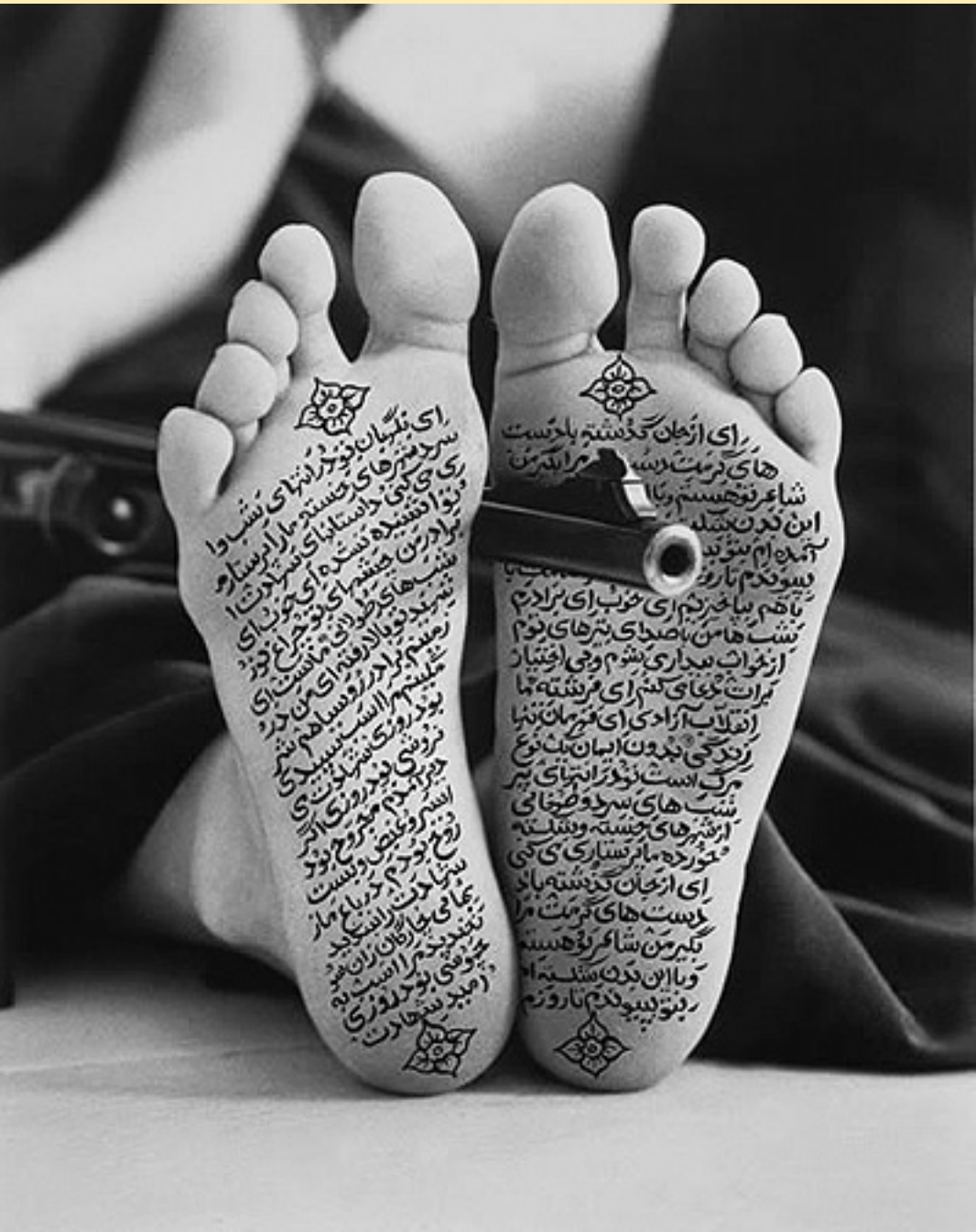




At a friend's birthday party. Parties are again prone to being broken up by the moral police and therefore more dangerous than before as you can be arrested for attending them. As part of the new campaign to save "Hijab and Chastity" the moral police is back on the streets enforcing their Taliban-esque Islamic codes. They are made up of three units: 1. Make-up Unit (fighting nail polish, lipstick, tan); 2. Relationship Unit (fighting premarital relationships. They can lock up your car for as long as two months and fine you as much as \$2000 if you're caught with your girlfriend!); 3. Hijab Unit (enforcing Islamic dress code on both men and women). Of course all this has nothing to do with Islam, and everything to do with oppression for the sake of reminding everyone who is in power. And rest assured that the youth continues to revolt and disobey!



A playground at a local park in Saadat Abad. Tehran’s mayor has been very active in recent months. You can’t help but to notice his many projects around Tehran who are designed to draw attention to themselves. Be it paintings and murals on the walls, new pavements, new parks and playgrounds and new shopping centers and museums. As the Iranian saying goes, he’s doing “khod shirini” - making himself appear sweet! So one might argue all this is not without reason. He could be setting himself up to be the next President of Iran. On a side note, the cable running down the photo above belongs to a neighbor’s satellite dish. You see these loose cables everywhere around Iran. According to a satellite-man, they serve as warrants for the government to get in your house (satellites being illegal)!



Dog Sweat

Directed by Hussein Keshavarz and MaryamAzadi
Screen play by Maryam Azadi

In the opening scene, a few young boys are having a casual party, drinking and debating the quality of Johnny Walker Red vs. Black or Gold label while what they have access to is only a poor local vodka commonly referred to as dog sweat.

The boys’ party breaks up when one of them is called by his uncle to rush to the hospital to attend his mother who had been hit by a car on a bridge. He leaves the three other to weave the tapestry of Iranian youth and their problem for us.

The next scene is of their female counterparts. The girls, who will later each become connected to these boys, are preparing themselves for a party, putting make up on each other, having short chats about the boys, dropping remarks and even flirting with each other. And then we met all the characters of the film in a loud mixed party just for a second or so which ends quickly with a sombre, slower life.

The complex of the youths’ relationships with each other, with their preceding generation, with society’s normal and abnormal is portrayed and narrated freely by the youths themselves. Simple friendship, the cornerstone of Iranian society and culture, developed into incongruous phenomena. Sexuality emerged even more confusing without proper rules of conducts. Giving in to the expectations or following one’s will and ideas leads to indecision. Finally, fitting into society and letting one’s identity be shaped by it or changing it to one’s desires, or simply letting go of both and submitting to whatever goes glues all these confusions together in a thematic series short episodes.

The setting is the streets or parks of Tehran, dotted with only few scenes inside which we meet a pair of the opposite sex. Though the film gives us a chance to visit Tehran with all its noise and contradictions, it seems that the outdoor life has also been selected quite purposefully for this film, where the private and inner side of youth are closed to us as well as to themselves.

Not long into the film, I felt that I had an urge to scream, “Say something for God’s sake!” when immediately the facial expression of an actress shuts me up, saying, “What is there to say. Don’t you see?”

No, I don’t see if there is no talk, no laughter, no crying, no discussions, no debates, no complaints, no questions, no answers, not a single complex sentence. But why?

“We are in strange land my dears, where language has gone through a massive transformation. Language as the medium for communication has lost its function where communication has lost its place in the society and culture, where the efforts are made to hide rather than reveal, where one must divert rather than to direct, where one has to misguide rather than to guide; then words are better forgotten if one has to lie,” I’m whispering to myself.

Lips do not kiss, hands do not touch, gazes are afraid to connect. It is not restraint but hiding. There is no need for censorship since there is not even any desire for of any sort expression. There is still an outcry for an “empty nest,” an empty room, a dangling



key to an empty apartment. It seems that finding “that key” is the ultimate goal, though I’m not so sure that there is anything but darkness behind the closed door. Even passion is absent ...

But little by little, I learn to hear them. I learn their language. It is very simple, their facial expressions, sweet faces with bitter and sad expressions, tell us of boredom, aimlessness, hopelessness, very gently and good-naturedly. But beneath those bitter expressions on those faces, those cold faces, those deadly silences, one can see the residue of some drive, of some hope and some faint and colorless shadow of something that might once have been a dream or fantasy.

They narrate their own story, as if the film were a documentary and had been made spontaneously, with actors and actresses, without script, on stage thriving to tell their stories. It seems they have something to say only if they find someone to listen, if they feel safe, if they find privacy, if they know how.

The story is also about a lonely generation which has to live an unexamined life, a life without serious challenge, without tough critics, without interaction and even without a given, the clash between two generations. A tale of living in two worlds with no connection in between, the worlds of young and old, public and private, openness and dead tradition. The story of a generation which is even deprived of the unity that should exist naturally within the family. It seems that this dual existence has crept under the skin of life permanently and has given each a double self.

Sexuality is confusing, as is expected, though there are not only heterosexual relations but gay and lesbian ones. It seems it is the main preoccupation of our young generation, torn between tradition, the mainstream, avant-garde fads or even sometimes biological needs. Gay couples that do not even dare to admit it to themselves, naively thinking that they can have it both ways, a heterosexual marriage and a supplement of homosexual relationships in the guise of a regular one. Confused, wondering why it fails...

Tradition and modernism clash with each other quite often and the youngsters, as well as parents and older generation, learned to get around it or pass by it without being affected by it or even without trying to get their point across. No, we do not hear the cliché of my generation, “You don’t understand me.” They simply assume the barrier is impassable. They are resigned to it.

And yes, resignation! It comes in all forms and shapes. A gay couple finds no other way but to give in to their parents’ demand for a conventional marriage. To make her mother happy, a girl consents to marry a gay man and give up her dream to become a



pop singer, only to find out shortly after that she had made a mistake; her mother’s real happiness lies in the tomb of a martyred imam in Najaf.

Disillusions, failures, and disappointments all come one by one as one may expect. Kathy, our lost soul, separates from a lover, her cousin’s husband, and does not know what to do with the proposal of an admirer who appeals as a last resort to attract her “an apartment in Dubai and a car there waiting to make her happy.” This is tempting enough to drag her out bed to move out of the house let herself be picked up by the third or fourth car that stops by, “Hey! Let’s have a little fun!” Her smirk betrays her. She does not believe in having fun either, but she sits in the back seat impassively. In a car behind her, the boy is watching her wondering if she didn’t care for the “apartment in Dubai and a car waiting” or she didn’t believe it.

And, yes, parents, the generation that in their youth witnessed all their values and learning turned into nothingness over night, are not even prepared to face the kind of problem their children may face, leave alone know how to deal with it:

A mother notices his son is gay and suffering in his new role as a married man and she cries!!

Another finds a condom in her daughters room, slaps her on the face and locks her in.

A religious mother does not know what to do with her daughter who sings underground and pushes her to marry the first suitor who comes along.

And where are the fathers? All absent. One is making money somewhere. The rest are dead, or martyred.

Even death seems incapable of bridging the gaps between these two worlds. Upon the mother’s death in the hospital, our young character, torn between the mother’s siblings, pushes him for revenge and the guilty driver and his wife beg his forgiveness. He turns away to free himself from the burden of executing this justice. “What is my right? Who has any rights in this country?” In pain and agony, in need of love and support, he is offered only the opportunity to revenge. He submits to it, thought, avenging himself. He gets into arguments with three Basijis in an isolated place in the middle of a dark night and gets killed.

Yes the movie moves quickly from one episode to another just to hastily depict the scenes of loneliness, despair, resignation, and hopelessness. It is indeed gloomy and dark, the life of generation of victims whose name we never learn.

But all through they all remain good-natured kids who simply want to live, just simple living, the only thing they do not have a right to.

Mariam Azadi and Hussein Keshavarz did marvels in this film. They both took us into the heart of young Iranian society. I assume their personality, their passion for their profession, and their dedication has contributed to the actors and actresses in this film offering their best. Not only have they provided a safe and private place for them to narrate their story, but they carried it safe and sound to us in this part of the world to listen to their outcry. Indeed, their story came right across and sat in our heart. So many thanks to them both for the wonderful job they did. You can see the Dog Sweat Trailer at this link: <http://www.dogsweatthefilm.com/>





My grandmother's 50 year old havan! Havans (above) are used to press saffron in. You basically put saffron inside, add some hot water and beat it with the stick so as to bring out all its flavor and coloring. You then pour it on white rice or other dishes deserving of the touch of saffron. There's also a Persian saying that says such and such is like "pressing water in a havan." Pressing water without any saffron with that stick is pointless -- so doing such and such would be as pointless. (ab dar havan koobidan.)



These days you can't go to a neighborhood where there are no banks in each of its blocks! Branches of various public and private banks (below) have opened up and spread faster than branches of Subway and Starbucks in the US. To their credit the banking services have improved immensely over the past few years. You can now pay all your bills online. You can also transfer money online. Debit cards have also come out in loads and you can now shop with them at your local restaurant, cafe, meat and poultry shop or jewelry store. I never understood much about how economies function, but for some reason I have a hunch that all these banks with such high interest rates (that are still lower than the inflation rate) are not exactly a sign of a good economy. But I could be wrong.





Set Coffee (above left) somewhere in central Tehran. Decades (close to a century) before Starbucks, Set Coffee was serving Tehranis with its mix of the best local and import coffee beans. I signed up at a new gym that has opened up nearby (above right). Everything is similar to the public gyms you find in the US, except that it's not mixed. Women go in the daytime while men attend at night time. At this particular gym all the equipment is imported from the US (probably via Dubai) and you see stickers of an American flag on each piece with a line that reads "designed and engineered in the US." The trainer plays a wide range of songs from local pop singers to Lady Gaga, Justin Timberlake, 50 Cents and his favorite: Michael Jackson.



A friend's apartment. Not much different then my friends apartments in New York City and Los Angeles.



An angle on the new Mahestan apartments in Shahrak-e-Gharb in west Tehran. Looks just like San Francisco.





Almost three years in Iran and I still don't smoke cigarettes or drink tea. An achievement of sorts considering how many times I've been offered both! The cell phone conversations are down to an all time low, because they're either not working, or when they are you feel like some dude somewhere is listening in and just waiting to misunderstand something you said and use it against you. Still, that's no reason to attack Iran. We have the very same problems here in the USA.



The majestic Alborz Mountains as seen from Sayyad Shirazi freeway.



An angle on my room. Wishing you all a happy new decade... May the following year and the subsequent decade be one full with defining moments in your lives...



Ajil is an assortment of mixed nuts and dried fruits that is put in front of guests. It includes -- but it's not limited to -- walnuts, hazelnuts, pistachios, raisins, dried mulberries and cashew nuts. In recent years it is becoming less and less affordable and therefore only readily available for special guests!



An Iranian public phone. As in the US, you rarely see people using them. This is due to availability of cell phones. I'm told 19 million cell phones are roaming the network of the Persian plateau.



Safety is often a second thought in Iran. This is under the asphalt. Hope there are no fires in this block!





I went to Azadi Stadium to watch a soccer match between Iran's Persepolis and Saudi Arabia's Al Shabab. The stadium was only third full. It's the only stadium in Iran that has a 100,000 seats. It was built before the revolution alongside an olympic village for an Asian olympics in the mid 1970s. The soccer match itself was as boring as watching paint dry.



Yogurt Stew is a specialty of Esfahan that cannot be found in Tehran or elsewhere in Iran. It's basically a thick yogurt dish that has chicken and saffron mixed in. It can be served cold as dessert or hot as a stew that goes well with rice.



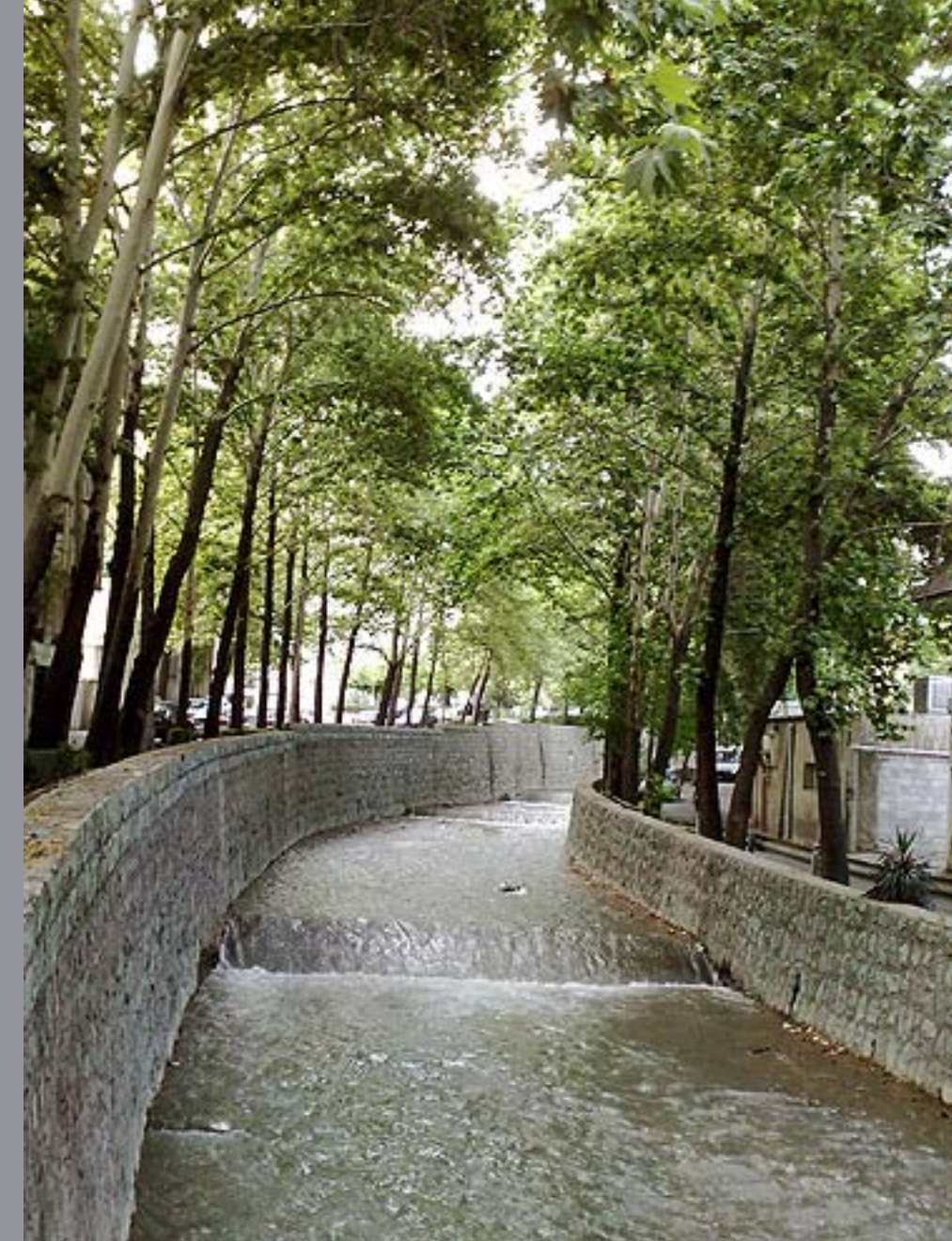
A back alley in Esfahan with three shops. Esfahan is a city drenched with historical sites and neighborhoods dating back to thousands of years ago. Though obviously this picture has nothing to do with any of that.



Esfahan is a more well-kept city than Tehran. The streets, the trees, parks, gardens and shopping centers are all in a better shape.



There has been considerable improvements in food packaging. I just don't understand why some companies insist on stealing foreign logos and or fonts. "Dairy" which is not to be confused with "Disney."



Somewhere smack in the center of Tehran a river runs through it all and no one seems to know its name.

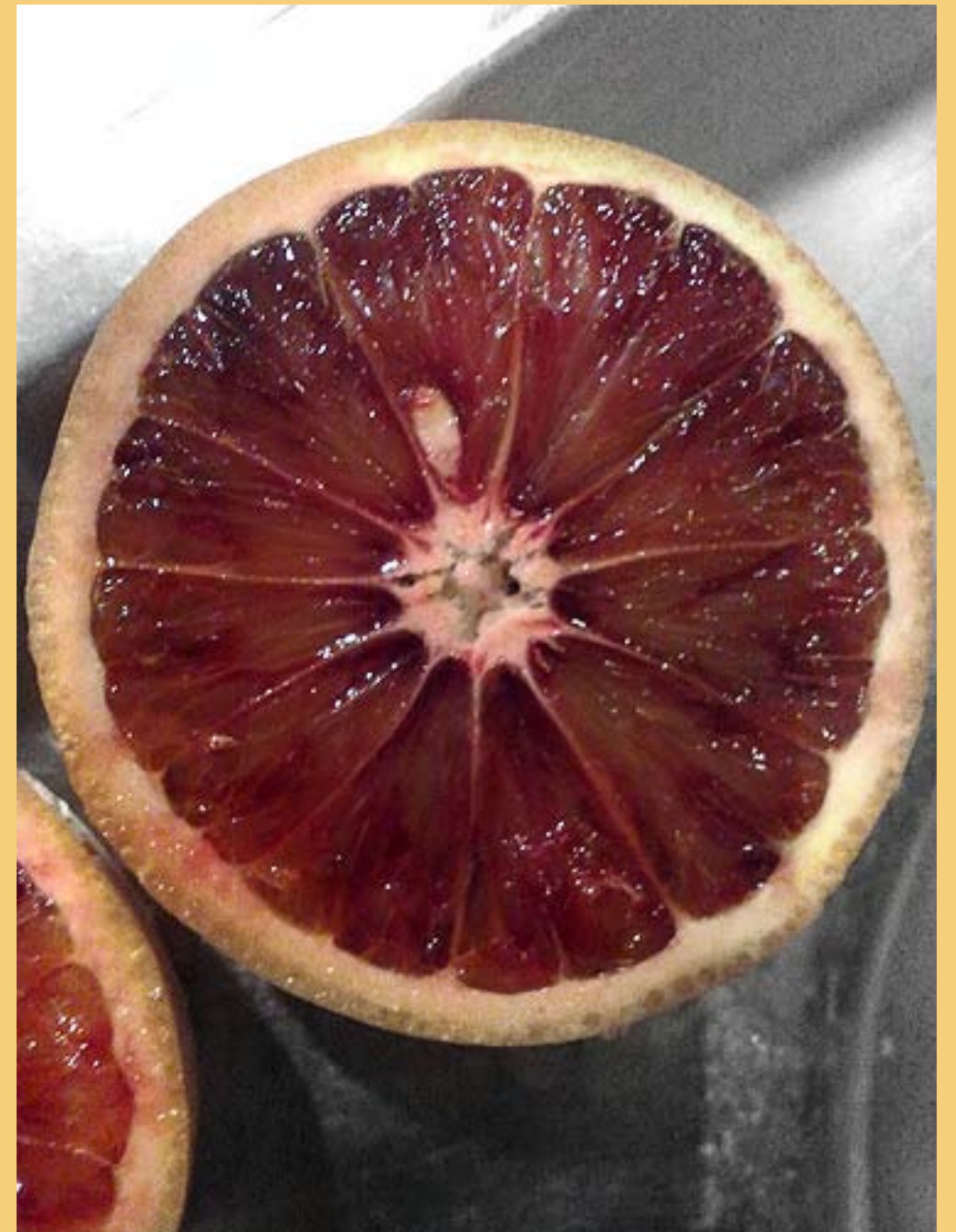




The grocery store!



A variety of sauces have found their way on the tables of Iranian restaurants. Including the HP steak sauce, and a hot sauce from Louisiana.



A tu-sorkh (crimson-inside) orange.



Palizi fruit juice bar on Sohrevardi street. Fresh melon juice is back in the market.



I've come to the realization that I am very much a flower-il-literate. I specially don't know the English names for many of the flowers that are readily available across Tehran. Including these Laleh flowers in the middle of Tajrish square.



An older apartment building in central Tehran that can be easily filed under So Ugly It's Beautiful.



Fortune-telling love birds on a street corner. They're all over Tehran. Faal-e-Hafez, which features select verses from poems by the famous Iranian poet Hafez, is the most popular form of having your fortune told in Iran. These birds are trained to pick you a Faal when you pay their keepers. Kind of cute.



A rainy day at Khaneye Darya in northern Iran.



American actress Annette Benning at the House of Cinema in Tehran. She came to Iran alongside a Hollywood envoy who were here as guests of the House of Cinema. The group had a fabulous time, but the Western media managed to misrepresent their trip by focusing on a few negative side stories that had nothing to do with the kind of positive experience they were having. That's to be expected of American media.



Walking in the mountains with friends.



“What is your idea about Iran?”

I was asked this question countless times during my month travelling through the Islamic Republic, and my answer was always the same: “I love it; it’s an amazing country full of beautiful, friendly and generous people.” But I was always more interested to know what Iranians’ ideas about Iran were, and I didn’t need to do much asking because their opinions were usually forthcoming.

“In Iran,” one young man said while giving me a lift on the back of his motorcycle, “we cannot do what we want to do. For example, if a man and a woman want to have sex but they are not married it is not allowed. We cannot even hold hands with our girlfriends.”

“It is my life,” said another man, “and if I want to drink whisky I should be able to drink whisky.” Chatting with two young women and a young man in a tea-house I was asked if I thought Iran was boring.

“No, not at all,” I answered. My interrogator flicked suggestively at her hijab. “Oh,” I said, realising what she meant, “I thought you meant boring for tourists.” “Iran is like a prison,” interjected the man, crossing his wrists as if in handcuffs.

Across the country, in both conservative and relatively liberal cities, I found the frustration of young Iranians palpable. As globalised media and the internet increasingly expose them to the freedoms of their counterparts in the West, the approximately 70 per cent of the population under 30 years old seems to have collectively decided that they want to do the same things we take for granted in countries like Australia. And they have the sympathy of some pre-revolution fellow citizens.

“Life for young Iranians is not good,” one middle-aged man told me, comparing the current state of the country to that of his own youth. “They have missed out on so much.”

“We could do anything we wanted [pre-revolution],” said another.”We could travel, drink, have girlfriends, live our lives. It’s different now.” I asked one older gent to reflect on life before and after the revolution, and he spoke of a role he sees for people like him in the Islamic Republic.

“There were four kinds of people during the revolution,” he told me. “Those who supported the Islamic Republic, those who were rich enough to get away, those who opposed and mostly ended up dead or in jail, and those - like me - who maybe did not fully support it but decided to do their best to help their country. Today I try my best to help the kids.”

While in the West some might associate Iran’s restrictions on freedom with the religion of Islam, it’s over-simplis-

tic to assume that this mass dissatisfaction with the state of the country necessarily signifies dissatisfaction with the state religion. While a surprising number of people I spoke to declared they had “no religion”, almost all of them qualified that statement by declaring that they believed in God.

“I am not a Muslim but I believe in one God and I think the Koran is a very good book,” the motorcycle man explained to me.”Islam is not a bad religion but this is a bad government and it makes Islam look bad.”

“Islam is a good religion but I do not think this is Islam,” said a young woman. But the Islamic faith of some young Iranians comes with conditions.

“In Iran the Koran is still made to mean that thieves must have their hands cut off and women who have sex with a man not their husband are stoned to death,” another man said. “The world changes with time and Islam must change with the world.”

While Iran’s religion and Iran’s government might have a lot in common, many Iranians urge that they should remain separate lest one pollute the other.

“In the West they see what the Iranian government does and thinks that this is Islam,” said one young woman, holding two cupped hands together and slowly pulling them apart, “but actually they are not the same.”

President Ahmenidajad is not a popular man - even with one staunch defender of the Islamic Republic with whom I spent an extremely pleasant hour chatting. “The government is not perfect,” he readily conceded, before qualifying that, “no government anywhere is perfect and we are learning.” Another man, a committed pragmatist, was always trying to find the positive in everything we spoke about, and looked for a positive in Ahmedinajad’s presidency.

“I know the West thinks Ahmenidajad is shit but he has not been all bad,” he said. “He has seen the change in what people want and is slowly allowing more liberty. Slow steps.” But the steps are too slow for another middle-aged man. “Life in Iran is like chasing a mirage - you are walking in the desert and think you see water but it turns out to be not. But we must stay positive, optimistic, because if you start losing optimism then there is no hope.”

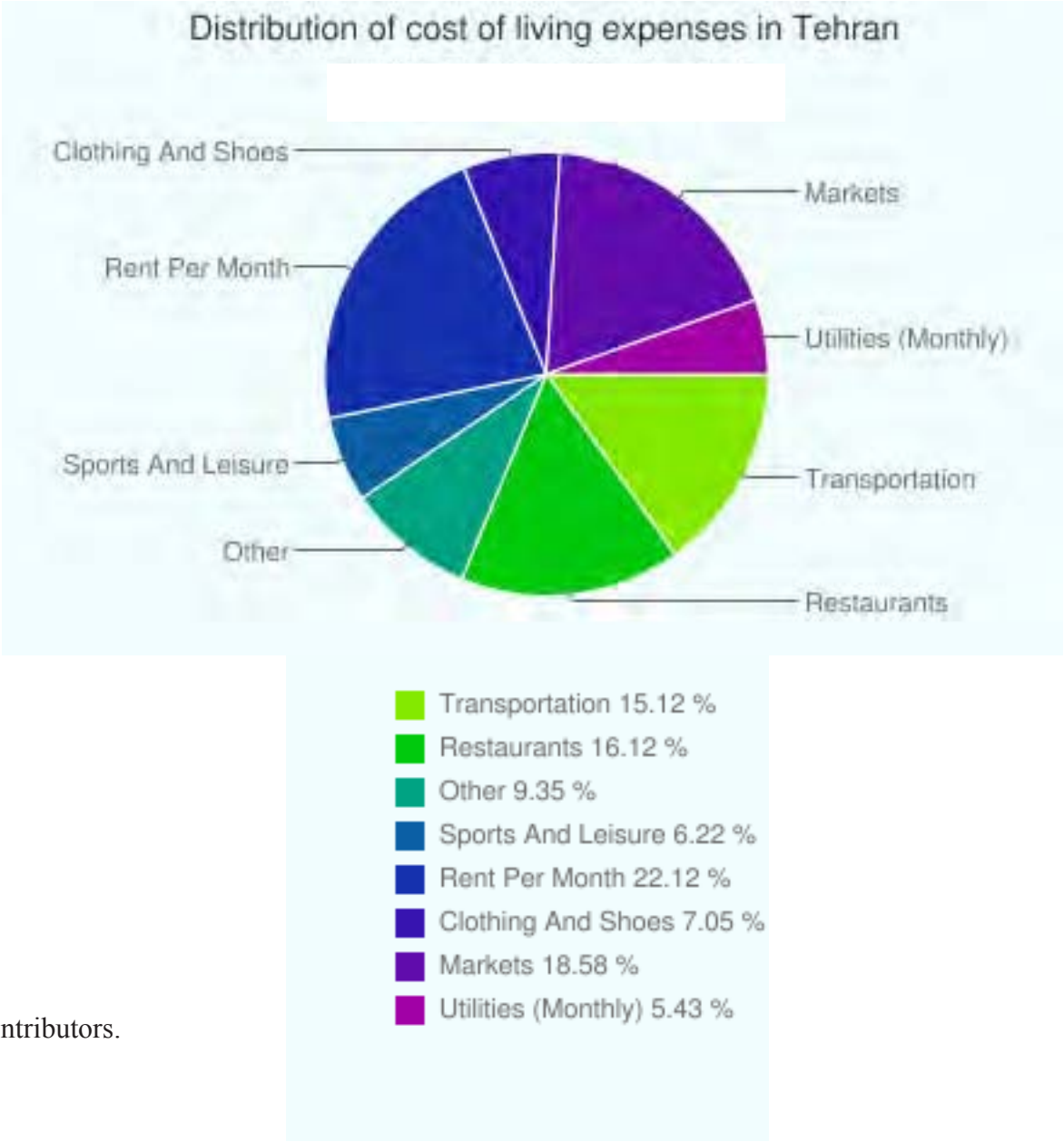
On my final day in Iran, speeding down the highway in a green Paykan taxi on the way to Tehran’s international airport, I passed the enormous shrine to Ayatollah (now Imam) Khomeini - the father of the revolution. This reminded me of a counterpoint to these words I’ve quoted of English-speaking Iranians with whom I - a non-Farsi-speaking Western tourist - interacted. It’s perhaps useful, I thought, to consider the thousands

upon thousands of Iranian pilgrims who weekly descend on the shrine and the fact that they represent the many Iranians to whom the Islamic Republic, and everything it represents, remains central to the concept of Iran.



Cost Of Living In Tehran As Of February 2012

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant	7.41 \$	Taxi Start (Normal Tariff)	0.38 \$
Meal for 2, Mid-range Restaurant, Three-course	22.48 \$	Taxi 1km (Normal Tariff)	0.42 \$
		Taxi 1hour Waiting (Normal Tariff)	7.33 \$
Combo Meal at McDonalds or Similar	5.59 \$	Gasoline (1 liter)	0.59 \$
Domestic Beer (0.5 liter draught)	3.11 \$	Volkswagen Golf 1.4 90 KW Trendline (Or Equivalent New Car)	40,000.00 \$
Imported Beer (0.33 liter bottle)	4.13 \$	Basic (Electricity, Gas, Water, Garbage) for 85m2 Apartment	88.85 \$
Cappuccino (regular)	2.87 \$	1 min. of Prepaid Mobile Tariff Local (No Discounts or Plans)	0.09 \$
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 liter bottle)	0.53 \$	Internet (6 Mbps, Flat Rate, Cable/ADSL)	27.25 \$
Milk (regular), 1 liter	0.97 \$	Fitness Club, Monthly Fee for 1 Adult	45.56 \$
Loaf of Fresh White Bread (500g)	0.62 \$	Tennis Court Rent (1 Hour on Weekend)	12.75 \$
Eggs (12)	2.28 \$	Cinema, International Release, 1 Seat	3.58 \$
Fresh Cheese (1kg)	5.46 \$	1 Pair of Levis 501 (Or Equivalent)	90.00 \$
Chicken Breasts (Boneless, Skinless), (1kg)	4.79 \$	1 Summer Dress in a Chain Store (Zara, H&M, ...)	76.57 \$
Apples (1kg)	1.73 \$	1 Pair of Nike Shoes	120.00 \$
Oranges (1kg)	1.60 \$	1 Pair of Men Leather Shoes	79.00 \$
Potato (1kg)	0.64 \$	Apartment (1 bedroom) in City Centre	653.93 \$
Lettuce (1 head)	0.61 \$	Apartment (1 bedroom) Outside of Centre	520.00 \$
Water (1.5 liter bottle)	0.40 \$	Apartment (3 bedrooms) Outside of Centre	1,198.00 \$
Bottle of Wine (Mid-Range)	38.00 \$	Salaries And Financing	
Domestic Beer (0.5 liter bottle)	4.55 \$	Median Monthly Disposable Salary (After Tax)	820.00 \$
Imported Beer (0.33 liter bottle)	4.60 \$	Mortgage Interest Rate in Percentanges (%), Yearly	16.50
Pack of Cigarettes (Marlboro)	2.39 \$	These data are based on 845 entries in the past 18 months from 101 different contributors.	
One-way Ticket (local transport)	0.30 \$	Last update : February, 2012	
Monthly Pass	45.00 \$		





A view of the inside of a shopping mall is seen in Tehran (top left). A man checks an Apple iPad (right) as he stands next to a portrait of the late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs at a shop in Payetakht computer center in northern Tehran. A man leaves after shopping (bottom left) at a fruit store in Tehran on Jan. 6, 2012. A girl (bottom right) looks at Christmas tree as she and her mother walk past Christmas decorations in central Tehran. Doesn't this look like any city anywhere in the USA?





Fishing in Iran

Ten Things You Didn't Know About Iran

1. Art-house Iranian films by such directors as Abbas Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaf wow foreign audiences. But the domestic film industry also churns out hundreds of more popular pictures. Last year's big hit *The Lizard*, drew the clerics' wrath for depicting a convict escaping prison disguised as a mullah. This year's hit was *Girls' Dormitory*, about a psychotic killer terrorizing students.
2. In the form of Shia Islam practised in Iran, Muslims are allowed to enter into temporary marriages with each other, sometimes lasting only a few hours. Critics say this in effect legalizes prostitution, and women who enter into these *sigheh* contracts are often ostracized. But the practice is defended as a legal loophole to provide inheritance rights for children who would otherwise be born out of wedlock. *Sigheh* websites have been set up to offer advice to prospective brides and grooms.
3. More than 3,600 Iranians have been killed in the past 25 years fighting heroin smugglers, whose main trade route to the West passes through the Islamic republic. Iran itself has a major drug problem, with more than two million addicts. The government has permitted radical measures to tackle the problem, including methadone programmes and syringe hand-outs to prevent the spread of disease.
4. Transsexuals are permitted to have sex-change operations in Iran by the decree of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini himself. The founder of the Islamic republic passed a fatwa allowing one transsexual woman to have the operation because sexual ambiguity made it impossible for her to carry out her religious duties properly. Iran now has dozens of people who have had a sex change.
5. According to the UNHCR, Iran hosts more than one million foreign refugees - more than any other country on earth. Most of these are Afghans and Iraqi Kurds, who fled their countries during the 1980s and '90s. Iran has in the past spent millions providing them with social security but in return it has acquired a huge workforce prepared to do manual labour for rock-bottom wages.
6. While official dress codes are very strict, many young Iranians delight in pushing back the boundaries of what is acceptable. Teenage girls in Tehran wear the most vestigial of see-through headscarves and tight overcoats that barely cover the bottom. This season gypsy-style scarves are in, featuring traditional Turkmen floral designs. Cosmetic surgery is all the rage, with girls proudly displaying a plaster to show their nose has recently been "fixed".
7. Skiing is a major pastime in mountainous parts of Iran, with pistes that rival those in Alpine resorts. Every winter young Iranians flock to the main slopes near Tehran, where social mores are less tightly enforced. Iran also has cricket, baseball and women's rugby teams, but football remains the most popular sport.
8. Iran has one of the only condom factories in the Middle East, and actively encourages contraception as a means of family planning. Sex education for married couples and major advertising campaigns helped Iran to slow its booming population growth.
9. Satellite television is banned in Iran, but receiver dishes sit in plain view on top of many houses. The most popular channels are run by Iranians based in Los Angeles, who broadcast Iranian pop music and a steady stream of anti-regime propaganda - though many Iranians also scoff at the radical tone taken by the stations.
10. Iran is one of the world's biggest producers of luxury foods. The country has rights to fish more sturgeon - the source of caviar - than any other Caspian Sea nation because of its extensive restocking programmes. It is also the world's biggest producer of pistachios, as well as saffron.



A student learns how to play a musical instrument at Pishtaz School in Tehran on October 15, 2011. Pishtaz, the first computerised pre-school for gifted students in Iran, claims to have pioneered teaching techniques through the means of IT. Parents can watch their children's daily activities from home via CCTV cameras installed throughout the public areas in the school, which includes the classrooms, playgrounds and hallways.



University students cross a street during a snow storm in Tehran on November 8, 2010. A rare autumn snow blanketed much of northern Iran closing roads and schools in mountainous regions. Looks like Minneapolis to me.



Iranian women and a man weave carpet in a workshop in Qom, 78 miles south of the capital Tehran. Deep in Tehran's carpet bazaar, the merchants and laborers occupy chambers that have changed little over the centuries. But Iran's carpet industry now faces some modern pressures. The country's more than 1 million weavers producing an average of \$500 million in exports a year are fighting against competitors in major workshops in places such as Pakistan and China.



An Iranian-Christian woman looks at Christmas decorations while shopping in central Tehran on December 13, 2011.



Christmas In Tehran

The Jews In Iran



Iranian Jewish men pray during Hanukkah celebrations at the Yusefabad Synagogue, in Tehran, Iran on Dec. 27, 2011.



Iranian woman Mahnaz Mollaei, right, teaches rollerblading to a girl at the Pardis club, in the central city of Isfahan, 234 miles south of the capital Tehran, Iran on Jan. 1, 2012.



Shoe repairman, Aziz, 86, works in a street in downtown Tehran in November 2010. The most potent challenge to Iran's ruling system may not be international sanctions or the homegrown political opposition, but something as simple as a shopping list. Islamic leaders are starting to trim an estimated \$100 billion a year in government subsidies for fuel and food staples that many low-income Iranians consider a birthright.



A jockey competes during the summer races at the Norouzabad Equestrian center on the outskirts of Tehran on September 16, 2011.



Spectators cheer as the horses run during the summer races at the Norouzabad Equestrian center on the outskirts of Tehran on September 16, 2011. Under Islamic sharia law, gambling is generally seen as illegal. But thanks to certain religious rulings, many race-goers are permitted to put money on the horses legally as long as they are “predicting” through official channels.

IRAN

Iran is no different than the United States. The people are the same as you and me. They want the same things we want. They want peace, freedom and liberty and to be left alone to work with their government towards hope for the future of their children and change in the way their political system works. They don't want American troops or NATO troops trampling across their land. Most important, they don't want our bombs reigning terror on their homes and their families.

Bombing Iran would be no different than bombing Los Angeles or New York City.

Do not allow the NATO crime families to bomb Iran.

IRAN



This book was funded and published by Jews For Sanity In Iran with additional funding and support by subversive factions within the Israeli government. We Jews in Israel can't speak out in public but we understand the false rhetoric and lies being perpetrated by the Zionists and we urge every civilian on earth to distance themselves from the racist, Apartheid and genocidal Zionist regime and support the country of Iran.

Peace