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ISSUE 2

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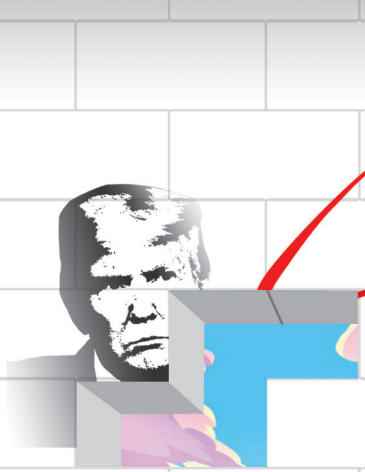

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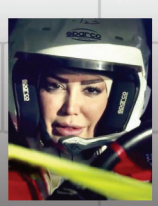

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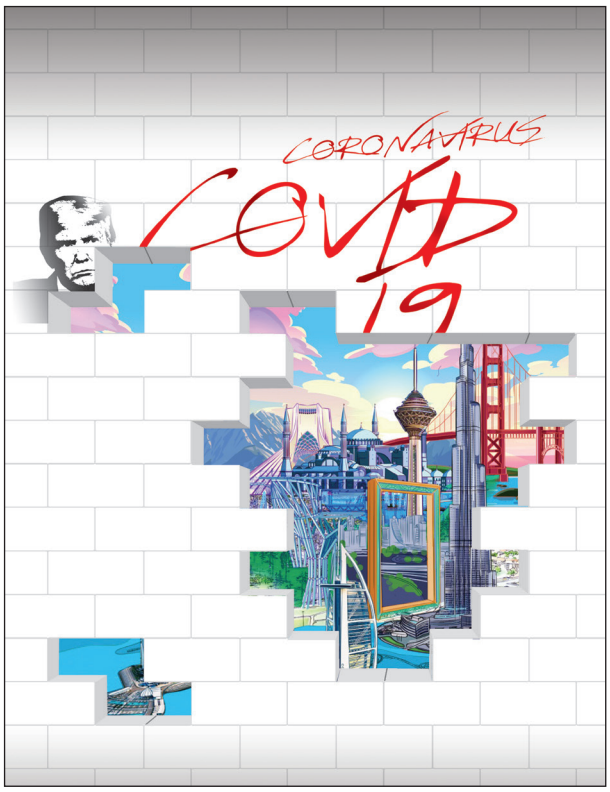

On the cover

The cover of our 2nd issue is inspired by the legendary Pink Floyd 11th studio album, The Wall, released 41 years ago (November, 1979) followed by the 1982 movie directed by the acclaimed British director, Alan Parker, who sadly passed away last year.
It depicts the better days ahead of us after the most notorious global health pandemic of the past century as well as the departure of the controversial US President, Donald Trump, from the White House.

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Trends

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MESSAGE

Let 2021 Begin!

We decided to slightly postpone the release of our 2nd issue in order to cover the result of the US Elections and its significant impact on key issues such as Iran's economy, the future of the nuclear deal and certainly the geopolitics in our region.

As the world comes out of the most widespread and deadly virus pandemic of the past 100 years, it is also coming out of a tumultuous four-year tenure of Donald Trump in the White House with massive consequences not only in the United States, but also with an undeniable impact on the world, and most certainly Iran! While it is too early to predict the ultimate fate of the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) and the prospect of a renewed dialogue between Iran and the West, it is clear that the psychological impact has almost been immediate, and manifested in a sizable revaluation of Rial *vis-à-vis* foreign currencies as well as renewed interest in Iran by foreign investors and traders. The business community in Iran is finally taking a deep sigh of relief as more positive economic prospects may emerge in 2021.

Iran and the US were razor-thin close to a full-blown military confrontation after the assassination of General Soleimani, and after the Trump administration imposed the most comprehensive new set of sanctions as part of its "maximum pressure" policy on Iran. In fact, the Trump administration is introducing new sanctions on a weekly basis during its remaining few weeks, to maximize the damage before January 20th and may even get help from the US Senate to make it harder for Joe Biden to reverse them. On a regional basis, escalation of tensions in the Middle East reached dangerous and unprecedented levels, something that may take a long time to be reversed. Nevertheless, there is a comforting reality that Donald Trump will soon be gone and remembered as one of the only five single-term US presidents, and despite his claim that he may run and win the presidency again in 2024, political pundits give that little chance.

President-elect Biden has promised to re-enter and revisit several important agreements from the Climate Accord to the JCPOA from the outset of his presidency. But perhaps the first thing he needs to do with regards to Iran, is actually to do nothing! Meaning that as long as his administration does not aggressively pursue and enforce the sanctions imposed by his predecessor, or does not engage in harassing Iranian ships and tankers and penalizing foreign companies and investors for doing business with Iran, the Iranian economy can breathe and perhaps rebound in 2021. Optimism can replace the dooms-day scenario that was expected under a 2nd Trump term, and trade and investment can resume after several years of stagnation.

The road back to the JCPOA may be long and bumpy, with both sides expecting modifications to it: Iran will need banking sanctions to be terminated once and for all, as well as assurances that the next US administration will not unilaterally and without breach of terms of the deal by other parties be able to pull out of the agreement. The West, on the other hand, may be asking for further concessions, including the extension of sunset clause of the nuclear accord as well as new negotiations on Iran's missile program, something that Iran is reluctant to do. Nevertheless, the mentioned first step, which doesn't even need an Executive Order from President-elect Biden, can be a crucial first step, come January 21st, to regaining the trust of the Iranian leadership and providing the much needed relief to the people and business community in Iran.

One of the main themes of our 2nd issue is the world in a post-COVID-19 era, with a special focus on real estate and retail industries, both seriously hurt by the pandemic. We will also be covering the political and economic significance of Iran's inward and eastward focus as well as its relations and trade prospects with several key countries, including Austria, China, Kazakhstan and Sweden.

All in all, with a COVID-19 vaccine on the imminent worldwide horizon and a totally different US administration taking the helm of the world's largest economy, expectations for 2021 are soaring. In Iran, while expectations are not as high as the rest of the world, hope is definitely on the up!

Let 2021 begin!

Amir Cyrus Razzaghi
Editor- in-Chief

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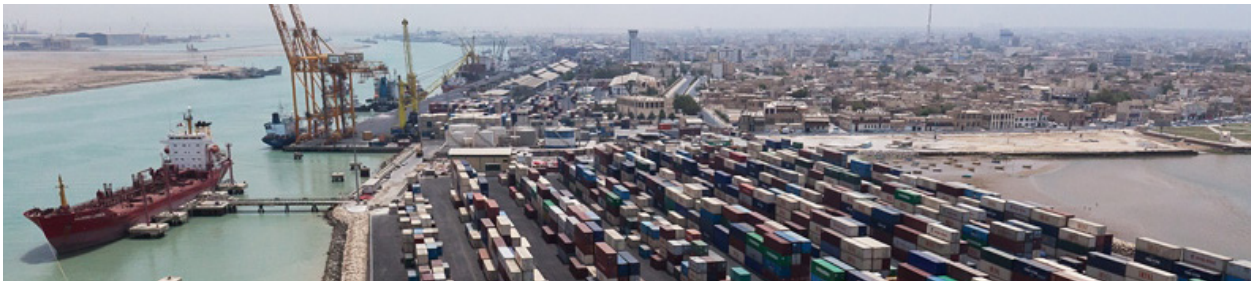
Iran's Economic Outlook

By: Farid Atighehchi



For the better part of 2020, the Iranian economy was shaped by the coronavirus pandemic and the US sanctions. All other, mostly non-structural, causes were simply dwarfed.

To describe the period of Q2-Q4 as "turbulent" would have been a huge understatement, if it were not for the tight control and close coordination between state powerhouses. The Central Bank of Iran, CBI, the government, the judiciary and other agencies managed to partly cover budget deficits, export crude oil, trade internationally and somewhat try to alleviate the hardships of an overstretched economy. The CBI governor, Hemmati, kept insisting that Iran will do better than analysts' expectations… and it did to an extent. By October, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had revised its previous projections for 2020 GDP growth and current account balance from -6 to -5, and from -4.1 to -0.5, respectively. With a COVID-19 vaccine in sight and a Biden victory in the US, Iran seems to have made it through the worst period of its recent history. There are still regional tensions and chronic internal issues though, that will kick in to slow down growth and recovery, they have become part of normal life, Tehran is once again poised to open its arms to international businesses, be it more reluctantly to the West.

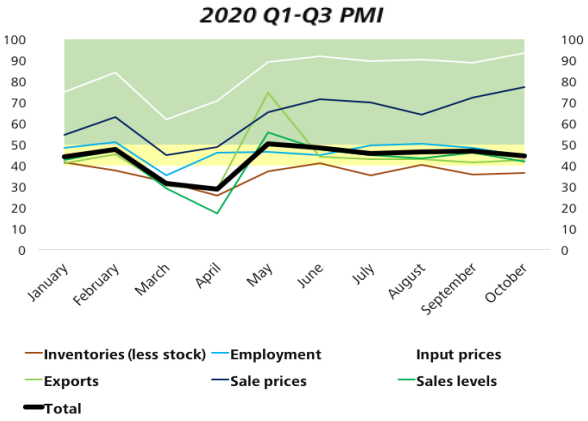
Firstly, because it would think twice before trusting that any agreement with Washington would hold. Secondly, because it has already made much progress in working with the Chinese and others to the east, namely on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and with Russia and the Eurasian Union. There is not much turning back from this path at this point, and it is up to the West, especially the EU countries, to try to catch up with such developments and perhaps secure their economic interests in what has been dubbed for many years as the largest remaining frontier market.

Key Economic Indicators	***2020f***	***2021f***	
Real GDP growth	-5.0	+3.2	Revised IMF projections for 2020 and 2021.
Inflation	30.5	30.0	IMF projections for Q1-Q4.
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (billion USD)	There are still no reliable data on realised FDI. There are agreements that the government hopes to amount to $6 billion in the next 6 months, but the figures of actual flows have not been published yet. Next year a significant increase in interest from investors is expected, and the amounts of agreements would definitely go up. However, the extent to which actual trade flows from existing or forthcoming agreements realised next year would be limited disproportionately.		
Country Risk	D4: high risk for enterprise	n/a	Euler Hermes rating.
Trade flows, imports plus exports (billion USD)	70	80	Extrapolated from the latest data, a sum trade flow of close to $70 billion by April (beginning of the Iranian new year) is expected. It is hard to imagine how next year it could return to 2019 levels given the ongoing pandemic and unclear policies on sanctions. Any détente over the JCPOA would help increase imports, but given the current value of IRR, the increase in volume may be less than the change in value terms, like it was in 2020.
Trade balance	-0.5	+0.3	IMF projections for Q1-Q4.
Crude oil exports (thousand bpd)	500	700	Adjustment of data from various sources, including Iranian government's budget for the next year.
Steel production capacity (million tonne)	33	40	Iran has long been emphatic about increasing steel production capacity as part of its "resistance economy" or self-sufficiency doctrine.
Petrochemical production (million tonne)	66	100	Iran has been moving away from selling crude oil and closer to creating value in processing, where petrochemicals is a key focus.
Automotive production (thousand units)	900	1,350	At its peak Iran produced more than 1.5 million vehicles per year. The timeline of production usually follows sanctions very closely, with any change to external restrictions on trade having a quick and visible impact. The government is expecting 1.35 million units to be manufactured next year.

Compared periods are 2020/Q2-2021/Q1 against 2021/Q2-2022/Q1, unless mentioned otherwise to match the Iranian calendar. Estimations are direct quotes from Iranian authorities, some we adjusted to normalise and extrapolate from the latest actual data, unless mentioned otherwise.

Turbulent Supply Chains

While agricultural production has been steadfast, despite everything, industrial activities and services have had compound problems. Fairly put, agriculture was relatively spared from job insecurities and market contraction. It, however, shared several huge problems with industrial manufacturing and services. The almost constant impediment throughout Q2-Q4 has been imports of inputs, such as fertilisers or pesticides. A wide range of supply chains were disrupted by restrictions on imports, as CBI introduced firm quotas on foreign currencies and the US sanctioned all trade to the point of stopping ships physically. Consequently, IRR exchange rates fell to the point that government had to intervene in various points across value chains to help with supply or to put a cap on prices ,while raising taxes. Some industries even found the cost difference between imported supply and their end prices so high that it made much more sense for them to sell their purchased intermediate products instead of processing them into finished goods. And, naturally, chronic issues such as corruption and preferential treatments became more conspicuous, and more painful.



Purchasing Managers' Index, 2020/Q1-Q3, Iran Chamber of Commerce

A close look at the Purchasing Managers' Index reveals the frustration in the market and how sales prices trailed input costs. However, despite all the hardships, the index has moved in a rather healthy band between 40 and 50. This could partly explain a lower GDP contraction than previously projected by the IMF. Still, CBI's governor hopes for a better performance by April, something that is hard to achieve at this point.

The problems began to appear around February and March, as the pandemic started to feel real. It exacerbated a budget deficit made by dropping oil exports, itself a result of US sanctions, and currency devaluation and imports issues, also inflicted by the sanctions. The CBI and government together introduced quotas on foreign exchange and while they could not resolve chronic problems altogether, they did try and support alternative possibilities, such as local production.

As we enter 2021, the state is easing restrictions on imports, albeit only minimally. Its prioritised budgeting also targets key developments. While there will be nuances in how the next administration coming in spring of 2021 will manage, the long-term policies, including a focus on manufacturing cars, petrochemical and steel will remain strong, and these industries can be expected to grow and see continued capitalisation. But the prospect for other industries may be less than bright, and their profitability may fall below historic averages.

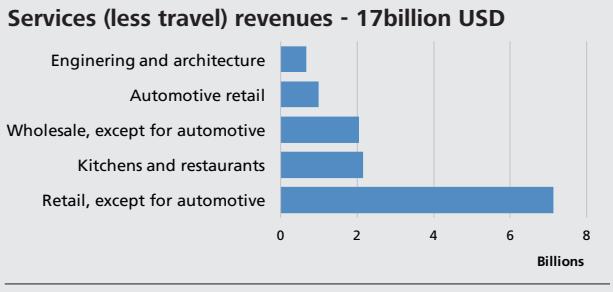
How Much the Coronavirus Hurt Iran

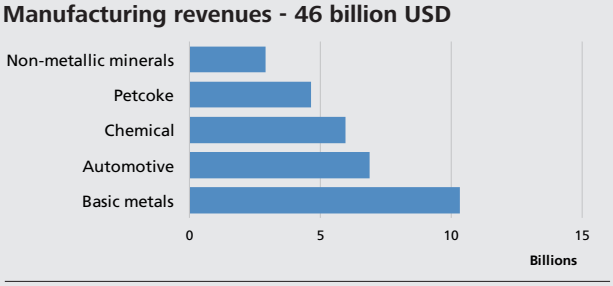
Iran expects the public roll-out of the coronavirus vaccine sometime between spring and summer of 2021. Everyone hopes to return to full normalcy once the vaccinations are in full swing, but Iran is already adapting itself to working around the limitations caused by the health crisis. The state seems to have performed well on par with the global average.

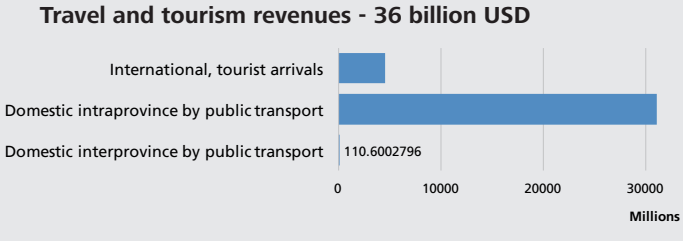
At Ara Enterprise, we started calculating the economic impact of the pandemic since July 2020. Our estimations cover the entire period since the onset of the pandemic in February.

By early November 2020, the total economic impact of the pandemic caused by disruptions in supply chains and employment was 99 billion USD. That is equivalent to about 21% of Iran's 2019 GDP. It is a major blow to all businesses, small and large. Individuals in the lower strata have especially felt the brunt of the impact. The World Bank estimates a varying degree of poverty increasing across the country. Most notably people in Qom, Semnan, Qazvin, Markazi and Ilam provinces were to experience 15 to 35 percentage point increases in their current poverty levels. The state, of course, has provided relief for these households.

The fact that recent GDP forecasts by the IMF show only a 5% contraction in 2020 goes to indicate the resilience of the Iranian economy. It may be that a tough discipline for efficiency and prioritised resource allocation has paid off.







The estimates cover the period February 1 to October 29, 2020. The charts depict the top five most heavily hit industries within each sector.

Nevertheless, the recovery will be rather difficult. That is because the tremendous economic pressure from the sanctions highly limits the possibility of introducing direct stimulus packages. So far, the government has not been able to do more than provide direct relief to households and small businesses. Without a stimulus, the onus of recovery is on fiscal and monetary policies and businesses trying to survive and innovate.

People Spend Less, Find New Sources of Income

The pandemic had its toll on business activities as cities large and small went through on and off lockdowns. To stay open, businesses have been grouped based on their prominence or importance to everyday life of residents, and different rules, schedules and curfews have been applied to each. The Ara research team could not independently verify the exact toll on employment and official statistics are yet to clarify the impact. The changes in spending were easier to follow, with consumer prices rising because of the sanctions.

2020, Q1-Q3 inflation	
CPI main	30%
Durable goods	120%
FMCG	35%
Services	20%
Residential rent	20%
Transport	70%

Consumer price index from January to October 2020, Statistical Center of Iran

As goods started to compete in price hikes and businesses were interrupted by the pandemic, many people moved to other or additional sources of income. Those who did not have enough savings to invest, tried instead to hang on to their jobs and even take on alternative jobs when possible. For its part, the government raised the minimum wage, trailing the inflation, from about 19 million IRR the previous year to around 35 million IRR in this calendar year. It also distributed its small available funds among the unemployed and extended furloughs for its own employees. Furthermore, in lieu of a full-fledged stimulus package, it bolstered and expanded the existing programmes to save bankrupt businesses, and hence jobs, through the support and collaboration of the banking and judicial systems. Most of the loans disbursed to small and large companies stipulated the condition that they commit to keeping their employees.

Despite these government interventions, the labour market has shrunk. Both the unemployment rate as well as the economically active population numbers have decreased by 0.8 and 1.2 percentage points, respectively. While we cannot pinpoint the exact dynamics and situation here, job creation seems to have matched job losses, and statistically speaking, job positions have remained intact. What has decreased here is the number of unemployed people actively seeking jobs. We could say that there has been a churn of those looking for employment away from the labour market. For whatever reason, they have stopped looking, they may be making a living by renting out their real estate, working in the grey market or speculating in the capital market.

In 2021, the job market is expected to continue its current trend of a larger number of employees moving around jobs, trying to adjust their livelihood. Furthermore, the current administration's success in keeping the job numbers stable despite the pandemic may well continue into next year. However, this could easily change if the next administration does not have the discipline or the will to follow on this path. It is possible that the coming government will prefer a superficial, populist approach in dealing with economic production and might choose subsidising people instead of businesses. That would ultimately create unrest among the general population for it can, as history attests, cause many ordinary people to fall through the cracks.

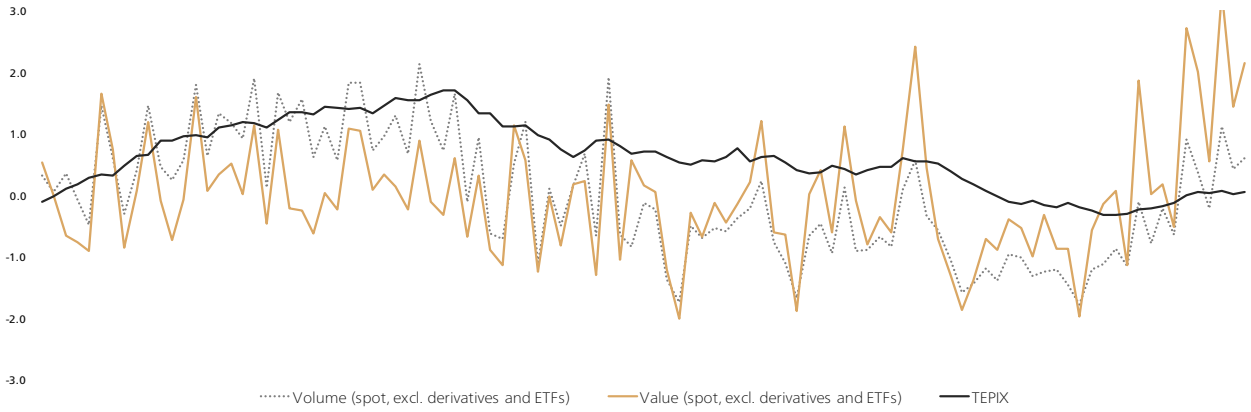
Unemployment rate decreased throughout 2020 in what seems both a smaller labour market and substitute means of income, Iran Statistics Center

Capital Markets, the Panacea for Budget Deficit

As cash became tight in 2020, the government inflated the Tehran Stock Exchange, TSE, with the aggressive introduction of ETFs and by inviting first-time retail investments. Then came more bloating, combined with crisis management.

In July, when the main index, TEPIX, had already passed the 2,000,000 mark, or a worrisome 300% above its 2020/Q1 start, the government allowed a massive and widespread revaluation of assets of companies listed on TSE to prevent a market crash. By early August, the Judiciary and the Parliament objected to additional government ETFs and the exchange eventually started its inevitable nosedive. In reality, it had become especially complicated when the government decided to put major automotive players in its public ETF. That fund never materialised, and soon after, the cabinet lost its Industry Minister to an impeachment, arguably launched by major car manufacturers and upstream steel players. The Minister was one of the many people and initiatives lost to the intense negotiations between the heads of state.

Soon after, the raft of new interventions and regulations for TSE unfolded daily, including very restrictive rules for short positions, the ability to sell stocks you bought on the market, while investors instead witnessed the introduction of new option contracts. In September, the online platform of brokers crashed trying to handle the queues, where about 80% of the market activity was by retail investors.
The new measures implemented by the government helped curb the downward rush of the market. By November, the market seemed relatively stable from outside, but between October and November TEPIX was in fact quite volatile.



Tehran Stock Exchange's volatile ride between late June and December 2020, with TEPIX moving near or above two standard deviations of its course since April. Based on data published by TSE.

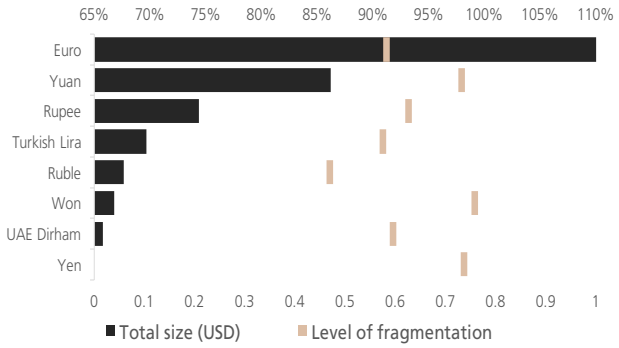
Trade: Europe Stays, China Rises

By early 2020, the US had pushed to stop any trade flows in and out of Iran and put extreme force to wall in the entire economy, almost literally. New sanction designations came in every month and, by the time of the US elections, every week. The US also stopped extending exemptions for buyers of Iranian oil, most notably India, and made it hard to bring in the money for the few remaining exemptions, such as electricity exports to Iraq, an energy lifeline that is a matter of security for Iraqi and coalition forces inside Iraq. Additionally, the US or the British confiscated Iranian tankers to the point that Iran sent its ships to the Mediterranean allegedly escorted by the Russian navy. Next, the main pipeline for Iranian gas exports to Turkey was sabotaged in an explosion, and the resulting shutdown is said to have cost Iran about two billion USD. Lately, the UAE, a major hub for Iranian trade has stopped issuing visas to Iranians as it started embracing a wave of Israeli businessmen. And Israel could be seen in an advance from Iran's northern flank in Karabakh as well. The idea that Iran would turn into another North Korea was never picked up, as its geopolitical location makes such a scenario almost impossible, but Iran has been boxed in tightly and confrontations at its borders have been barely short of an outright war.

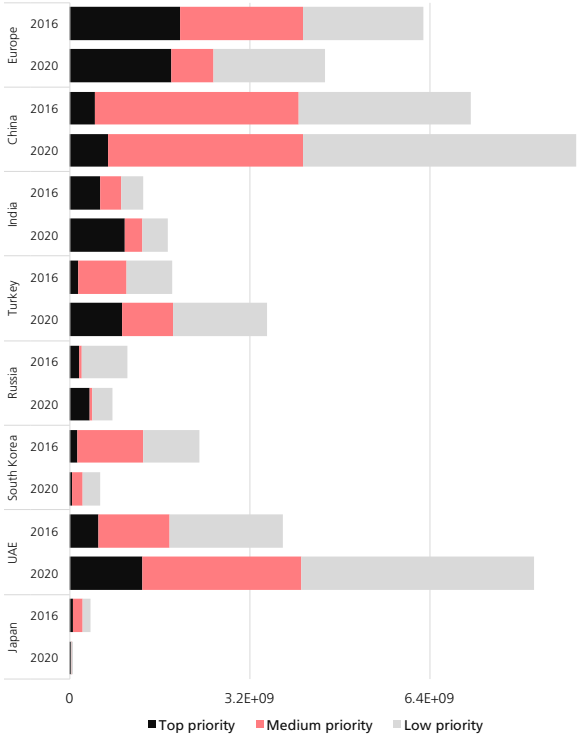
Iran's Q2-Q4 trade flows in 2020 are distinctively lower compared to the previous year but are far from a disaster. In that 9-month period, Iran imported about 23 billion USD in goods and in return, exported 21 billion USD in goods and services. If this trend continues for the next four months, the figure would be about 18% shy of last year's, give or take.

The state stepped in to ensure each transaction of goods and cash is properly accounted for. On numerous occasions, it revised its tier system of priorities which allow cash outflows for imports. It tried to navigate the complex streams of interconnected business groups and their claims for regulatory freedom and resources. It also continued to rein in the traditional money transfer businesses who use the trust-based Havala system. A short list of products was designated by the state as top priority and was allocated a preferential exchange rate as low as 13% of the open market rate. The list consists of all intermediate goods for various industries, mostly chemicals, agricultural inputs, metal scraps, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment components and some complex machinery parts.

Ara research team thoroughly analysed trade flows in 2020 and 2016 and a review of the imports of priority goods between the two periods reveals Iran's more reliable international



Major currencies by value of imports in top-priority, intermediate goods, based on data from past two and a half years. Level of fragmentation is a composite index of the number of companies and their order sizes, indicating to what extent trade was concentrated within few players or dispersed among a larger number of importers; the lower the index the higher the concentration.



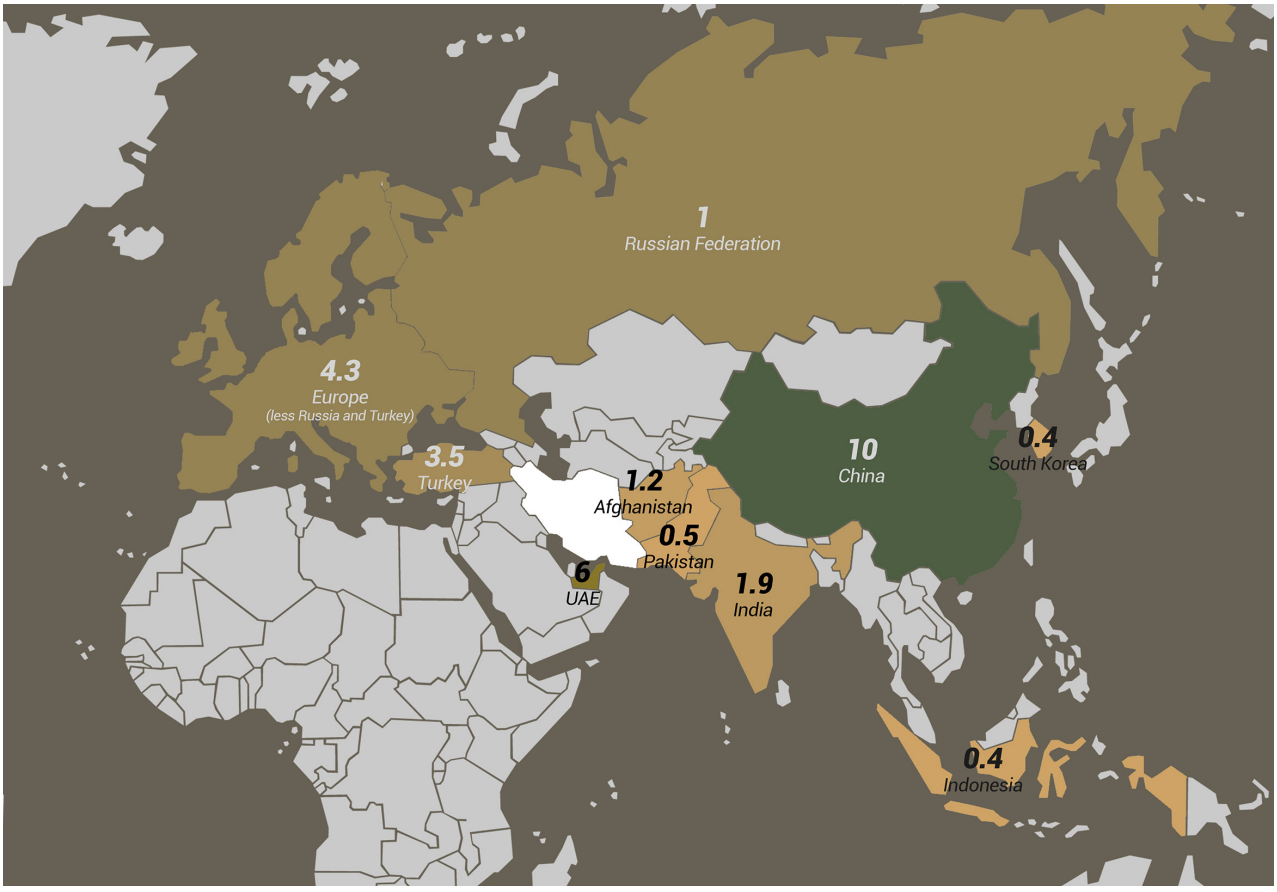
Imports of priority goods from select major partners of Iran, 2016/Q2-Q4 versus estimated 2020/Q2-Q4 in USD.

trade partners. On the world stage, Europe is increasingly showing an opportunistic tendency for renegotiating the JCPOA which is exemplified in Germany's comments at the United Nations Security Council in late June and its more explicit "nuclear plus" suggestion in December.

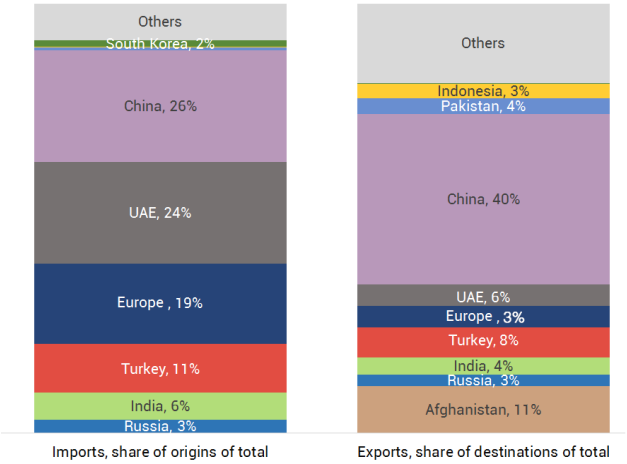
Nevertheless, the level of Iran-Europe trade of high-priority goods stayed the same between the two periods. The Europeans failed to unilaterally deliver their JCPOA commitments but did not follow the US withdrawal from the deal either. We do not see new models of European cars or consumer goods on the streets, nor are there any new direct investments in oil, gas and petrochemical industries of Iran. Most consumer goods or low-tech materials have not been imported because European companies stopped their sales, fearing secondary sanctions. And, either way, the Iranian government does not allow imports of almost any consumer goods or practically any other product which can reasonably be manufactured inside Iran. What came from Europe was then mostly parts that contributed to sustaining the current Iranian manufacturing ecosystem.

China, on the other hand, along with Turkey, were the countries which were filling the gaps. For that reason, Iran tends to see its relationship with China even more favourably than before. Adding to this shifting climate is the fact that transactions through the UAE, which had less to do with the UAE's political stance and more with its role as the regional hub, may soon decline as it is warming up to Israelis by pushing Iranians out.

> *While total trade has contracted by an estimated 18% in value from last year, Europe did not follow the US in the U-turn on the JCPOA and is still a significant source of high-tech or otherwise top-priority components to the Iranian agriculture, health and manufacturing. China, on the other hand, helped fill the gap in supply of key products and became the major market for Iranian goods, along with Iraq.*



Iran's major partners in 2020/Q2-Q4 by sum of imports and exports, in billion USD. Note: details of trade with Iraq are not publicly available, but the total is estimated at about 10 billion USD, almost entirely exports from Iran, making Iraq one of the major, or the single largest, market for Iran.



Share of major geographies of total Iranian trade value, 2020/Q2-Q4. Exports to Iraq, at about 10 billion USD and of mineral fuels, such as crude oil, are excluded.

China, on the other hand, has kept the door to its market open so that close to half of all the money Iran is earning is coming from China. It should be noted at this point that the detail of about 10 billion dollars' worth of mineral fuels, including crude oil, are not published by the Iranian government. Yet, it is safe to assume that the better part of it went to China. In practice, the People's Republic has been arguably the most outspoken state to side with Iran in the international arena, along with Russia and Turkey.

To facilitate its eastward trade flows, Iran has been working diligently with its partners. Notably, there was the signalling news of upgrading Iran-China relations to a "comprehensive strategic partnership." At the same time, Iran has been involved in developing ports and facilities in the Gulf of Oman in coordination with Pakistan, has inaugurated Afghanistan's first commercial railway that connects with Iran, and has developed roll-on/roll-off ports to the north of Iran with streamlined and incentivised processes for trade on that route. Meanwhile Iran is looking to utilise a 32-offloading-terminal, $1.6 billion port in the Russian town of Lagan on the Russian Caspian coast which is allegedly being developed by Chinese contractors.

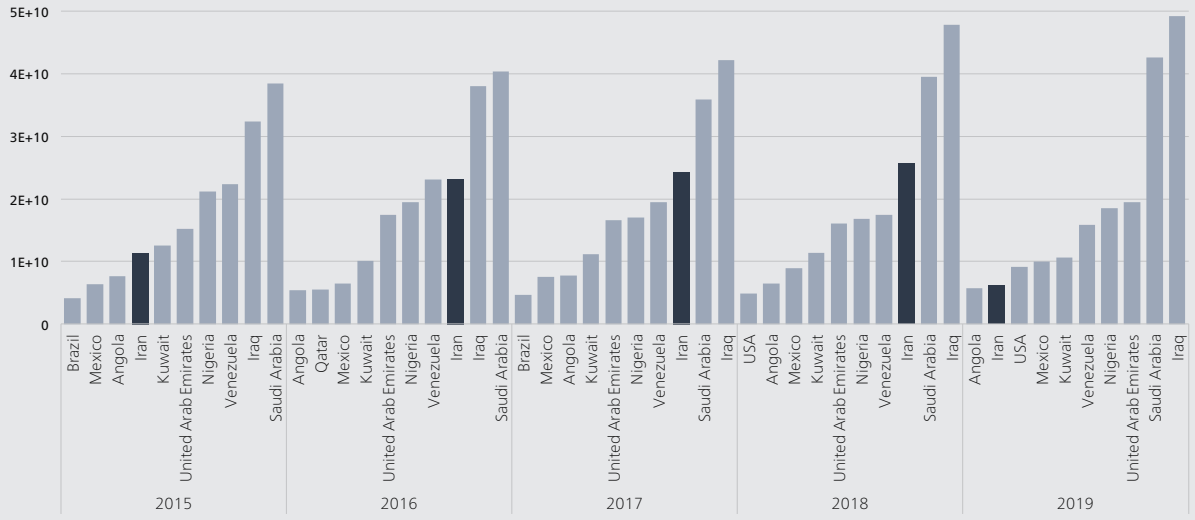
The Iranian government stopped publishing data about its exports of oil and gas this year, but market players took turns guessing at the number. Sending tanker fleets to Venezuela especially drew a lot of attention. Iran sent petroleum and petrochemicals to Venezuela and has allegedly recently started to even bring back Venezuelan oil to sell elsewhere.

By August 2020, Iran announced plans to intensify crude oil extraction in a project probably with the Chinese Sinopec and China National Petroleum Corporation. As it had lost a few tankers to US forces overseas, it also changed tactics. Satellite imageries from September seem to show Russian navy ships escorting an Iranian oil tanker in the Mediterranean. At the same time, estimates of daily oil exports by Iran saw an increase, which seem to point to more than half a million barrels per day. It is telling that those developments came soon after IRGC's construction arm, which is developing fields abandoned by the Europeans, suggesting it would barter its fees from the government in barrels of oil. Additionally, the government has signalled it plans to sell an estimated 700,000 barrels a day next year.

There are no data as to who the buyers of the crude oil exports in Q2-Q4 were, but after Biden's win in the US elections became clear, India also expressed its will to get back to buying Iranian oil.

India's Take from the Iranian Crude Oil

India stopped oil imports from Iran in mid-2019 after the Trump administration did not renew its exemptions. By that time, India had imported about 2.8 to 3.5 billion USD from Iran. The country imports about 10% of all crude oil exports globally, at about 220 million tonnes a year. Iran was the top supplier to India, along with Saudi Arabia and Iraq before the 2012 sanctions.



Crude oil imports by India from its top suppliers (kg), UN Trade Statistics

Inaugurated in December, the 225-kilometre railroad connects Khaf in Iran to Harat in Afghanistan. The first cargo train across Afghanistan is planned to ship 3 million tonnes each year and will connect China to the Persian Gulf and Europe through Iran's railway network.

Outlook

There are the complications in the transfer of money. Iran expressed commitment to coordinated anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing activities back in 2016. It established FATF-compliant cash declaration regimens and introduced draft amendments to its relevant laws in 2017.

However, as Trump started to push for confrontation, Iran put its imminent ratification of the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions on hold. Since then, Iranians have used small fin-techs, traditional money businesses and are leaning towards yuan-based trade documents, while they contemplate the cost-benefits of returning to cooperation with that international body.

However, designating the entirety of the Iranian banking system, including the meticulously sanctions-compliant Middle East Bank of Iran, under the US Treasury's counter-proliferation authority was one of the blows below the belt that Trump threw as late as October. The JCPOA signatories should show a clear gesture of good faith, and as a matter of simply giving economic weight to any talks within that framework, start off with re-establishing the SWIFT connection.

There is also the issue of sanctions and how fast and how thoroughly they can be reversed. Even though the US has sent nuclear bombers just outside Iranian airspace to make threats, the likelihood of an all-out war, is slim to nil. However, there is unanimous agreement among analysts that the US sanctions against Iran are not going to go away soon, and it is not a matter of politics.

Even if Biden were to re-join the JCPOA on his inauguration day, it would take a painstakingly long and complicated process to re-negotiate each sanction and designation one by one. European businesses would be wary of hasty re-entry into the Iranian market before they see more stability and a lower overall country risk.

Still, in 2021 international trade activity of Iran should be poised to gradually return to normal and the country can get back on track to become a global trade player. The return of a healthy level of trade would mostly come from initiations by Iranian importers and exporters, rather than direct entries from other nations.

Chinese investments in Iran during the Trump administration may not have been considerable, especially relative to their trade with the US, but they have been fundamental. China seems to have created a permanent footprint in Iran that is hard for any other country to replicate, at least in the short to mid-run. Iran is also developing its infrastructure to work with the Eurasian Union but its current potential value seems still relatively small compared to, say, Europe.

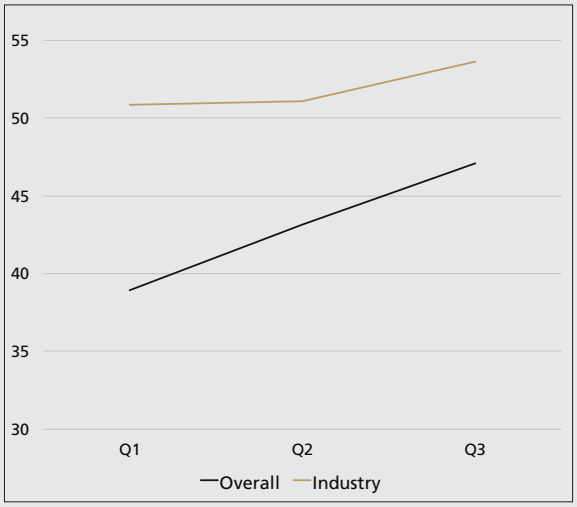
Iran's location does not permit a closed economy, and its size and weight can only be contained for so long. Foreign aggression cannot change Iran's state and people's choices, and would not succeed in Iranian subjugation.

Iran has shared borders with the West and the East for eons. It has only been the flow of goods, and with it the flow of people and thoughts that have shaped its mind-set and eventually its relationships. One thing is clear, though, Iran seems to have survived the Trump presidency, putting the harshest economic period of its modern history behind.

Iranian Industry Looks Positive

As an indication of what to expect, looking into 2021, Purchasing Managers' Index or PMI's healthy range and growth signals real GDP growth.

Industrial and fiscal policies are proving to lift the economy, while Iranians are being innovative with workarounds for supply of inputs and international money transfers issues.



2020 PMI adjusted, weighted average, own calculation based on data published by Iran Chamber of Commerce

> *JCPOA signatories should show a clear gesture of good faith, and as a matter of simply giving economic weight to any talks within that framework, start off with re-establishing the SWIFT connection*

Tehran Stock Exchange Overview

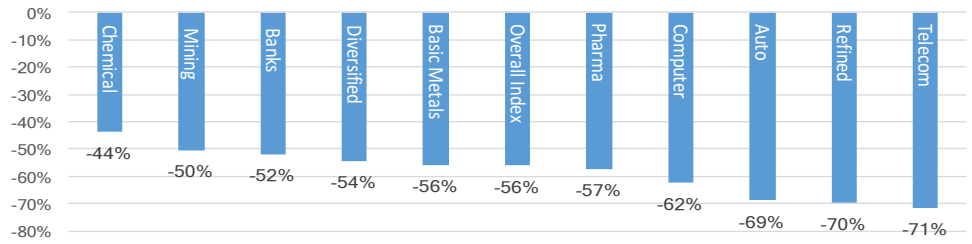
The Iranian stock market continued its positive momentum in the first seven months of 2020, registering a growth of 191 percent in hard currency terms. The IRR exchange rate increased by 76 percent during this period versus USD. Following this, the Iranian stock market had its worst two month decline ever as the overall index fell by more than 38 percent in August and September in hard currency terms. The daily market volume also halved in the last week of September compared to the same period in June.

Amongst the many reasons for the dramatic recent market pullback was the irrational exuberance on the TSE earlier this year. As a result of the weaker currency and a stampede of unsophisticated investors to the market, valuation metrics went through the roof and formed a classic bubble.

Below you can see the graph of the trailing price-earnings (P/E) ratio of the Tehran Stock Exchange, TSE, in 2020:

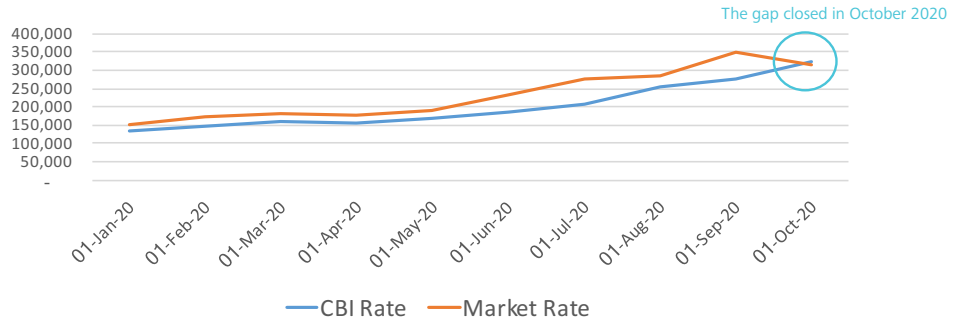
The Iranian stock market continued its sharp decline in October, extending its unprecedented losses from the July peak to more than 50 percent in EUR terms. This is the most severe fall that the TSE has ever experienced over its 32-year recorded history since the Iranian revolution in 1979. More than 70 percent of this contraction is due to significant share price declines in IRR terms and 30 percent can be attributed to the weakening currency over the course of the past three months. The plunge in the market over this period has been broad-based and across different sectors in the stock market; there have been no safe havens.

Top Ten Largest Industries Three Month Performance in EURO



The Iranian currency had its worst month versus the Euro in October 2020, according to the official CBI market rate as the IRR fell by 18 percent against the EUR during the month. The gap between the CBI market rate and the free-market rate is now minimal. Therefore, there is no more confusion as to what rate foreign investors should use in order to calculate the real value of their investment.

EUR Rate

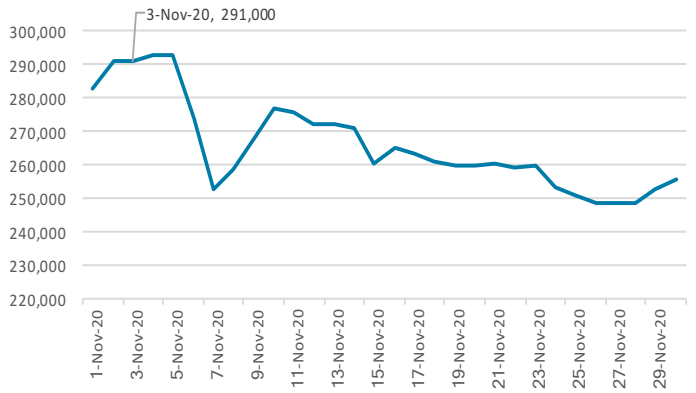


We believe that the US-election will mark a turning point in the Iranian equity market. With the former Vice President Joe Biden coming into office, expectations are that the JCPOA nuclear agreement will be revived and the Iranian economy will substantially benefit.
Sanctions imposed by President Donald Trump in 2018 have cut off more than two million barrels per day of Iranian oil exports. A potential return of Iranian crude to global markets, should Biden succeed in restoring the JCPOA, would act as a huge relief to both the Iranian economy and also the currency in the foreseeable future.
Since the economic situation resembles 2012 in many aspects, the behavior below of the economy, currency and the equity market post-JCPOA could potentially give us a sense as to what could be ahead of us under a Biden presidency.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Economic growth	-7.7 %	-0.3 %	3.2 %	-1.6 %	12.5 %
Inflation	31 %	35 %	16 %	12 %	9 %
IRR/USD Y/Y percent Chg.	106 %	-8 %	17 %	5 %	7 %
Equity market percent Chg. in USD term	-26 %	150 %	-33 %	-14 %	20 %

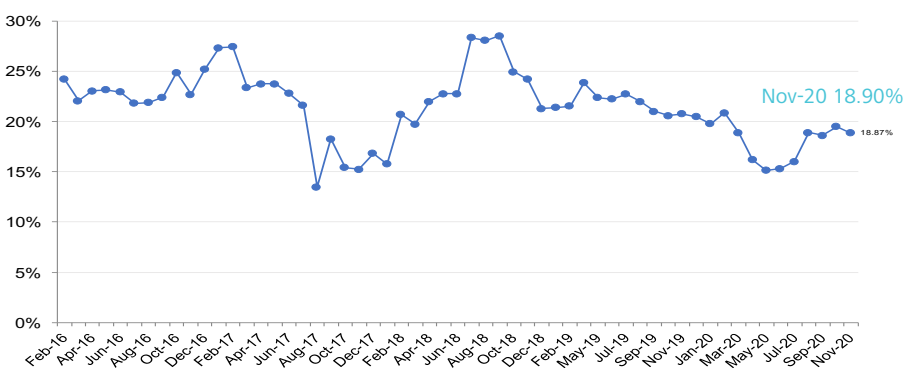
The Iranian equity market had a strong recovery in November with the main index rising by 20 percent in Euro terms. Our fund also recorded a strong performance as a result of a strategy shift that was executed over the past couple of months to increase the equity exposure of the fund mainly to both value names and also blue-chip companies.
There are three main reasons which can describe the recent turnaround of the market after the steep decline.
First is the optimism in regard to political developments that emerged as a result of the US election, namely President Trump losing the race to his Democratic rival, Joe Biden. The immediate economic outcome of this event has been an uptick in the value of the Iranian currency and curbing the price volatility across both different asset classes and also consumer goods.
You can see how the IRR reacted to the US election developments in November: Given all of the above, we have started to increase our equity exposure so that we can benefit from the potential significant upside of the equity market in 2021.

USD/IRR



The second tailwind for the Iranian stock market in November was the rapid increase in global commodity prices. Almost two-thirds of the market cap weighting of the TSE is connected to commodities one way or another. Turquoise has created a customized commodity index applicable to the TSE, which balances the weighting of different commodities against the market cap of different sectors listed on the market. As we have seen, global commodity prices have taken off recently, boosting short term profitability prospects for a significant section of the Iranian listed universe.
The third factor was monetary policy. The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) took a more accommodative approach toward the economy by injecting funds to the interbank market in November. The magnitude of the intervention was estimated to be around 2 billion EUR (approximately two percent of the total monetary base of the country) which was a significant amount. ***As a result, government bond yields across different maturities fell in November as is illustrated below:***

YTM of T-Bills



We remain cautiously optimistic about the prospects of the equity market as we anticipate the current positive momentum will persist in the short to medium term.

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The Significance Of Iran's Inward and Eastward Focus

INTERVIEW

Kayhan Barzegar *Ph.D. is a professor of international relations at the SR Branch of Azad University and Chair of the Department of Political Science and International Relations. He is also the director of the Center for Middle East Strategic Studies (CMESS) in Tehran. Dr. Barzegar was a research fellow at Harvard University from 2007 to 2011, a non-resident research associate at MIT from 2011 to 2014, and a postdoctoral research associate at the London School of Economics (LSE) from 2002 to 2003. His works on Iran's foreign and regional policy and Iranian nuclear politics have been published widely in English and in Persian, including in Foreign Affairs, the Washington Quarterly, Middle East Policy, World Policy Journal and numerous academic journals. His latest publications include, "The Hard Chess Puzzle: Trump's 'Maximum Pressure' versus Iran's 'Maximum Resistance'" Al Jazeera Centre for Studies (June 2020). His latest book is entitled, "Iran Regional Policy in Time" (August 2019).*

Thank you so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview despite your busy schedule. We are very grateful. Please introduce yourself and tell us more about your background, especially your academic work with regards to Iran and the Middle East.

I also thank you for inviting me to join you in the current issue of your interesting magazine to share some of my views as an Iranian academic and policy thinker. I especially work on Iranian foreign and regional policy and West Asia – the term I'd rather prefer to use instead of the term "Middle East" – issues. I finished my post-secondary education, including my doctorate, in Iran.

Afterwards, I felt that I still needed to learn and explore more to achieve my true level in the field of international relations and politics. Therefore, I decided to continue my education in a fine university abroad. From 2002 to 2003, I was admitted in a post-doctorate program at the London School of Economics (LSE). This was my first fruitful experience of facing the West. I believe, for an Iranian, London is a good place as a first landing site. The city with its way of life and system could well reset an Iranian that she or he could appreciate other places later on. This happened to me. My base and philosophy of thinking was built in London, but when I went to America later on I faced another world. Today, I try to combine good segments of both experiences as subsets of my Iranian identity.

After I returned to Iran, I started teaching as a faculty member. from 2006 to 2008, I was accepted as a guest scholar and professor at Harvard University and continued my affiliation until 2011. Honestly speaking, it was during my time at Harvard that I found my potential in thinking and writing.

Of course, Harvard as a university with all its attractive courses, professors, and educational system isn't necessarily the path to progress and success. It is rather its competitive environment and collected individuals with diverse views coming from all over the globe that teach you to be comparative and competent in thoughts, appreciating who you are and what you can be capable of. I found my true level in international relations and politics in Harvard. Then I was accepted as a non-resident scholar at the MIT International Security program until 2014. Before I went to America I had some sympathy toward the American way of life and politics, but upon my return I have become rather critical of American foreign policy, realizing that the world isn't merely America, they only push you to think in this way.

Since 2003, I have participated and made presentations in some 400 international conferences and specialized workshops and seminars in different leading universities and think-tanks abroad on Iran's foreign policy, Iran's relations with great powers especially with the US, Europe, Russia, and China on the nuclear standoff and other geostrategic matters.
I have written several books, scientific articles and hundreds of op-eds in English and Persian, defining the strategic logic behind Iran's foreign and regional policy, dealings with great powers in diverse settings. Most of my writing has been policy oriented, trying to demonstrate the main logic of Iran's behavior in the international and regional arenas in the context of history and given its geostrategic status surrounded by hostile rivals. Currently, I live and work in Tehran.

You mentioned an interesting point about the term Middle East and that you prefer to call it West Asia. Yet you are the Director of the Center for Middle East Strategic Studies in Tehran. What is your logic? In the meantime, can you tell us about the mandate at the Center? What do you do?

By calling the region as West Asia instead of the Middle East we attach ourselves with more developmental and economic prosperity approaches that our country needs at the moment. Instead, the term Middle East which is related to colonization era, will rather associate us with a more political-ideological approach, consistently related to regional problems and the existing blame games, power politics, sectarian rifts, extremism and terrorism, etc. Look to the north and to the east which are our civilization's sphere of influence and which have been rather absent in our foreign policy approach. Iran is

located at the hub of West Asia and can influence all the political security and economic matters in the broader region. The sub-regions between the four important seas namely the Mediterranean, Black Sea, the Caspian and the Persian Gulf have been the focus of global politics for several centuries.

We should balance our foreign relations in the context of regionalization and try to further integrate our issues economically and politically with the neighboring zone. We should value regional interdependence instead of global interdependence. Globalization in its conventional meaning in terms of bringing technology and wealth has been useless for us. The ideology and driving force of globalization, namely liberal- democracy, good or bad, is not compatible with our political system and way of thinking and life. For instance, we signed a nuclear deal (the JCPOA), but Western countries refused to fulfill their commitments and even imposed further economic sanctions on our country.

They involved economic issues with politics. I mean, Western globalization is critical and comes with political wills. Therefore, global interdependence damaged our economy, financial system, etc. All of this is taking place simultaneously with the ongoing conflicts and tensions in the so-called Middle East and the significance of it for great powers. Trump withdrew from the JCPOA under the excuse of changing Iran's regional behavior and limiting its missile program, because from the US and its regional allies' point of view, especially Israel, they are endangering the regional stability and security. The issue of Israel's security is the focus of Western Middle East policy.

The focus of the Middle East issue is the Arab-Israeli conflict. By excluding Israel from any regional discutions, such as collective security cooperation in the Persian Gulf, we can relieve our energy to other issues of national interests. What they call Iran's expansionist approach in the Middle East, is seen from our side as regional problems that have been costly for the nation of Iran. In all, I believe we should reconsider this term Middle East in our academic and policy literatures.
On the second part of your question, yes, I have been the director of the Center for Middle East Strategic Studies for almost 10 years. This Center was established some 30 years ago and the name of the center by the time I joined was well-established and used widely. I only talked about my intellectual understanding. Of course there is already a great movement inside Iran to change the term to West Asia.

As regards to our activities at the Center, we produce policy papers and scientific journals in three languages Persian, English and Arabic. We have a guest scholar program that I implemented for the first time in Iran. This program includes training for pre-doctoral and post-doctoral research fellows during the academic year. During this period, we hold seminars and workshops to train them to diagnose the current trends in the region in the context of Iran's national interests. We wanted to create a new and young generation of scholars and writers who can be competent at the regional and global levels. I personally believe that social time is key to the progress of individuals' thoughts. We have different studies groups such as Persian Gulf Studies, Turkish Studies, etc., all of which are related to strategic matters of the region.

As an insider into Iran's academia as well as politics, what do you think about Iran's place in the region and the world, both politically and economically?

It wouldn't be difficult to predict where Iran stands in ten years. A careful reading of Iranian history shows how the state of Iran survived foreign threats during past centuries. Iran is amongst the oldest nation-states in the world. During past centuries Iran became weak as a result of inaccessibility to advanced technology and dependency on foreign powers.

Right now, a new Iran is emerging to re-establish its past status. For instance, Iran is restoring its sea power in the Persian Gulf, not merely to tackle the threats of the US navy, rather for its rightful status that is the demand of the nation as a dominant power of the northern part of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Yet, we should solve a dilemma in our regional policy and that is that the two constants of Iran's foreign policy e.g. keeping its strong

deterrent power and expanding regional cooperation should be somehow balanced in the context of the country's national interests. So far as the American several bases are active across Iran's borders, acting against Iran's security interests, one should not expect Iran to bargain on its deterrent power as a priority and grantor of the survival of the state. In fact, no country would do so.
The nuclear deal with world powers was aimed to resolve this dilemma by diminishing Iran's sense of strategic insecurity toward the US, paving the way for constructive regional cooperation. Yet, the Trump administration's so-called "maximum pressure" policy ruined all the good will of the Iranians who truly wanted to end the prolonged standoff. Yet, as I explained briefly above, other elements of Iran national power such as geopolitical superiority, human assets, rich natural resources, national solidarity, etc., compensate Iran's current economic weakness. But I am sure Iran will pass this period of hardships and will find its way towards progress and advancement.

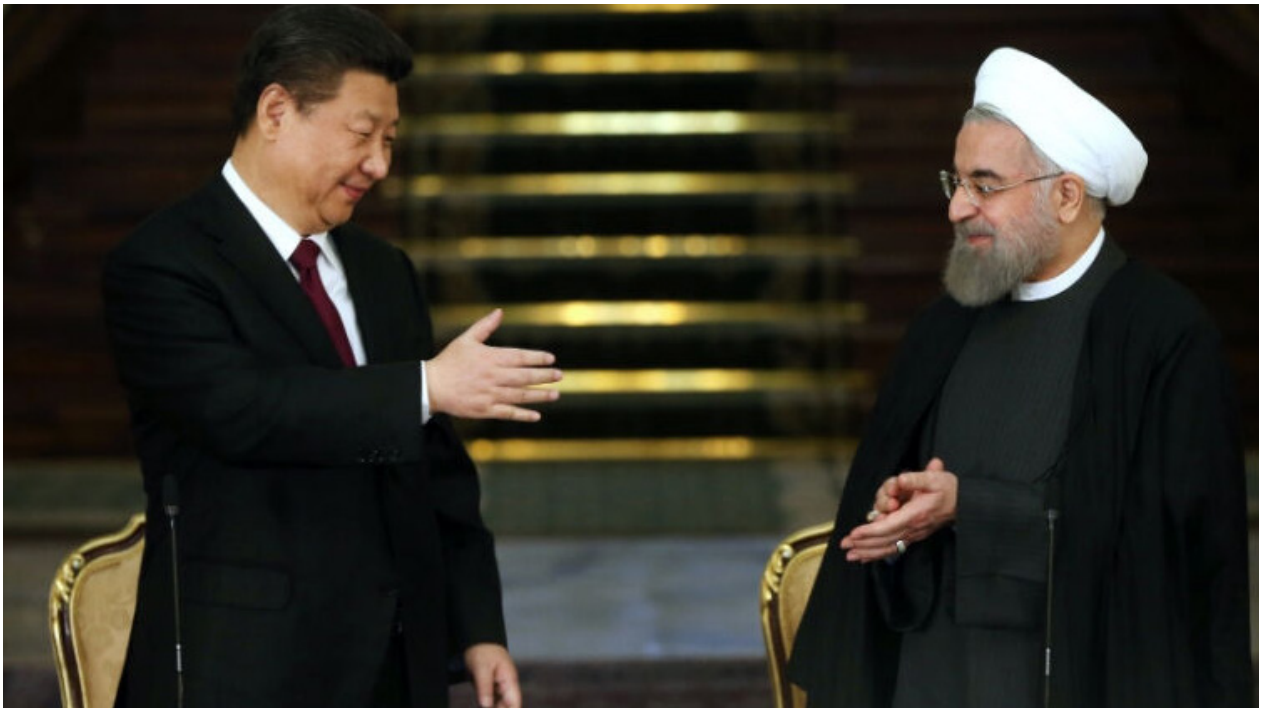
What about the geopolitical divide between Iran and its GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) neighbors? Many believe Iran's differences and colliding interests with its Arab neighbors are historical and deep-rooted (existing from long before the Islamic revolution). Is there merit to this? If so, is comprehensive and sustainable peace possible to achieve at all? What are the challenges and opportunities between Iran and its neighbors?

Such interpretation is rather inaccurate and against the field realities, especially considering the geographical and historical determination. Our region is full of historical constructs, inherited from the past, amongst the strongest is this so-called historical division between Iran and its Southern Arab neighbors. Such interpretation is often provoked by outsiders and the ruling elites of some of these conservative regimes for their own individual reasons. Some Western countries such as the US, the UK, and France have strong bilateral financial and trade interests with these oil rich countries.
They also sell expensive advanced weapons to them under the excuse of Iran's regional threats. Therefore, they always take the side of these regimes.

I think all the efforts made by major European countries to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia are only adding to their existing tensions as they are contradictory with their actual policy. On the other hand, by magnifying Iran's threat the ruling elites of these countries try to unify themselves and legitimize their reigns in their own domestic politics.

They try to institutionalize this construct in their domestic politics and that siding the West will provide their states a security guarantee. But in reality they want to guarantee the security of their regimes.
On Iran's side, the reality is that Iran is concerned about the American military bases stationed in these countries that could be used against the country under any possible military confrontation. They are too close to Iran. The drone that targeted and assassinated Commander Qasem Soleimani flew from one of these bases. There is also the threat of Israel using the air space of these countries to attack Iran's nuclear facilities. Recently UAE and Bahrain made peace with Israel that is against Iran's interests by bringing Israel closer to Iran's borders in the Persian Gulf. What the Western countries and their Arab allies call Iran's expansionist or interventionist policy in the region, is perceived by Iran as a defensive and preemptive approach to tackle imminent threats coming from the region, amongst them Sunni extremism in the form of ISIS. My point is that it is all related to constructed geopolitical rivalries and it has nothing to do with sustainable historical enmity between the two sides. Whenever there are more tensions and confrontations in the region this construct shows itself more.

In the meantime, the entirety of the GCC is under a real challenge at present. Some of these countries have good relations with Iran such as Qatar and Oman. Kuwait has a moderate view towards Iran. It is only Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain that are currently in rift with Iran and had hoped to take advantage of the Trump opportunity for reversing the regional balance of power in their own favor. The real issue with Iran, isn't the nuclear issue. Rather it is Iran's increased regional role, as they put, which could challenge the pillars of their regimes from inside. A sustainable economic and political security



cooperation between Iran and its GCC neighbors could only occur if the dominant power in this Council which is of Saudi Arabia changes its approach towards Iran. Iran's moderate government has been striving to restore relations with Saudi Arabia. Foreign Minister Zarif made a lot of efforts in this regard. But the problem is the other side. The Saudis think that this development will add to Iran's existing regional power and are therefore hoping that by Trump's so-called "maximum pressure" policy could change Iran's regional policy. Yet, they perhaps don't know that Iran cannot afford to retreat from the region so far as the threats of the US and Israel, mentioned above, exist.

What should Iran do to develop its economy and industry, given the never-ending regional and international hostilities?
Should Iran look permanently to the East as a viable alternative to the West in terms of investment and technology? Would there be the any economic shift for Iran in the future?

Iran has great economic potentials. Its superior geopolitics, situating at the hub of four important sub-regions i.e. the Levant, Persian Gulf, Central Asia and the Caucuses, and South Asia, which are also attached with Iran historically and culturally, gives the country a unique position to integrate its economy with the regional economy, thereby strengthening its national economy. Iran has advantages in fields such as energy, tourism, industry, and agriculture which could complete regional economy.

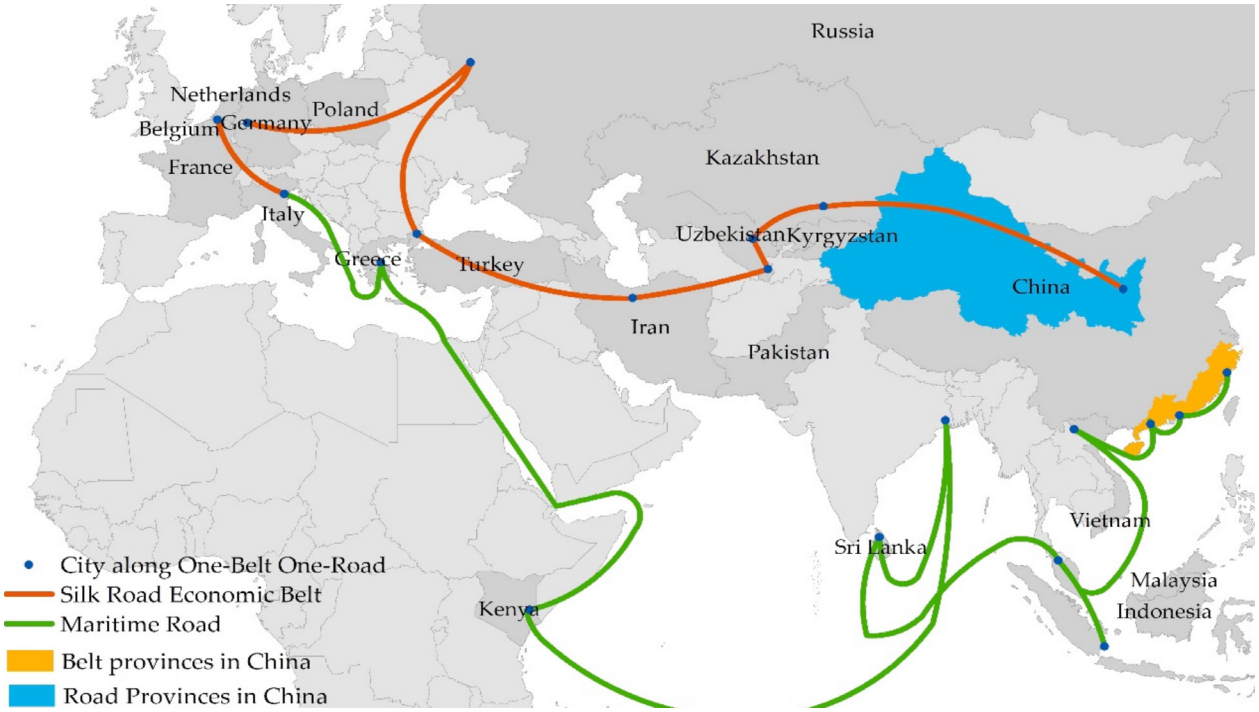
Yet, as a result of the current regional intra-state and inter-states tensions and foreign powers' wars, which has led to never-ending conflicts in the region, Iran's path to regional integration has somehow been blocked or ignored. In addition, years of dependency on oil incomes, bureaucratic mismanagement of the country's wealth and human assets, and dependency on foreign investments and technology as a result of believing in global interdependency and globalization, has weakened Iran's economy. Iran signed the nuclear deal with world powers to open the country's economic doors to world economy. Yet, imposing intensive sanctions by the US and incapability of European countries to fulfill their commitments under the JCPOA terms vastly disappointed the Iranians from the West, giving Iran no choice than to stand on its own feet and try to diversify its economy and taking advantage of its regional situation. In this context, looking to the East and increased economic relations with Asia becomes significant for Iran's economy. At present, Iran is increasingly becoming "inward looking."

The idea of looking to the West or to the East is rather a political intellectual matter mostly for domestic consumption. The fact of the matter is that while Iran is benefiting from both the Western and the Eastern economic potentials, it should build its own economic trend compatible with its national characteristics, and that is to strengthen itself from inside first, then attach itself with the regional economy, and then try to integrate its economy with global economy, not vice versa. Iran should value regionalism and regionalization in its political and economic orientation.

There has been a lot of talks about the 25-year plan between Iran and China. What are your thoughts on that? Will the agreement, if reached, deprive Iran from industrial and trade opportunities with the West, Japan etc.?
How can Iran balance its act *vis-à-vis* all camps?

This exactly relates to my above argument of the reason behind the increased value of regionalization for Iran's economy. The Iran-China comprehensive cooperation would benefit both countries. For Iran, China has access to transferable technology and financial resources. For China, Iran has energy resources and a point of stability in the West Asia region, a real a powerful nation-state that could survive for centuries. China needs such a state in the region to achieve its economic-political plans in the broader region. The Chinese BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) could help Iran to integrate its economy with the regional economy.

This coalition of a regional power (Iran) with a global power (China) could benefit the regional stability as well. It could politically and strategically equate the traditional



role of the US and West in the broader region in the long-term. Yet, such an agreement won't necessarily deprive Iran from the Western economic, as the Western camp itself is looking toward China and Asia. Of course, except the US that perceives China as potential rival for its current global hegemony. A strengthened Iran in the region, capable of influencing the regional political security and economic trends, would be more attractive for both camps. Therefore, my thought is that Iran shouldn't tilt towards one camp or another. Rather it should empower its national and regional status and try to integrate itself in its own region. Then both camps approach Iran as a pillar of stability.

How do you see Iran-India relations evolving, given the strategic partnership of Iran (and Pakistan) with China?

Any increased Iran-China shouldn't and wouldn't concern Iran-India relations. As the two countries learned from the past and historical experiences to not act against one another for the benefit of a third party, either it is China or Pakistan. A good thought about Iran and India, beyond the long rooted historical and cultural relations, is that both nations have common strategic, political and economic experiences.

Strategically for instance, the Indians have accepted the reality of China in the Indian Ocean and therefore have been trying to adjust themselves with it in the context of their national and geopolitical interests. The Iranians also have accepted the reality of the presence of the West in the Persian Gulf and have been trying to adjust themselves with it from a position of power. Politically, both countries have tried to balance between their available resource and their strategic constraints on several matters such as fighting with terrorism and foreign interventions.
Economically, both nations have been under sanctions for some time and learned how to become inward looking and count on their own resources. The ports of Chabahar in Iran and Gwadar in Pakistan are better off to be connected for both India and China.

The JCPOA has many supporters and critics alike. Was the deal worth the hassle for Iran in your opinion?
Can INSTEX or any other initiatives by the EU and/or other players save it?

The nuclear deal was meant for Iranians to accommodate their issues with the West, especially lifting sanctions. It was a fair deal in my view considering Iran's position in the world. Iran wouldn't weaponize its nuclear program in return for sanctions lift and ending hostilities with some Western countries. Today we are in a limbo. Yet, one experience can be gleaned from this deal and that is that Iran and the West were not ready to reach to this level of relations, as both sides have still a lot of issues to discuss and resolve. They have different interpretation about the regional developments and their directions.
They have different understandings about fighting terrorism and sectarian rifts. In this respect, perhaps Europe think differently of that of the US about Iran, and accepts that Iran is a regional power and should participate and include in any regional settings unlike what the Americans are thinking about Iran. Yet, Europe is incapable of battling economically with the US in favor of Iran. Europe doesn't have the political will, as well as economic potentials to do so. Therefore, financial mechanism such as INSTEX are unviable to fulfill Iran's demands.

The upcoming US elections may make things better or worse for Iran, depending on who's in the White House in 2021! What are your thoughts on this? Any predictions on the outcome?

The dominant wish in Iran is that Joe Biden wins the elections. Because it psychologically would be a relief and the afterwards positive political and economic developments is good for Iran's current hardships, etc.

Biden said he would return to the JCPOA that could a point of restoring trust for initiating other matters of common interests.

By withdrawing from the nuclear deal and assassinating Iranian national commander, visa limitations on Iranians, coercive sanctions, etc., President Trump disappointed Iranians not only on his administration, but on America as a whole.

Trump rather institutionalized the sense of enmity towards the US inside Iran. I believe this latter one was the worst development that is happening between the two nations. As to predict who would win the US elections, as experience shows the presidential debates matter most and we should wait and see who is faster to make his points and sell it to American people

As for the interests of Iranians, I hope the US changes the current track of dealing with Iran either with Trump or with Biden.

A Biden presidency will surely open economic doors to Iran at least in the short to mid-term, but will it really change the US long term strategy *vis-à-vis* Iran? In fact, many in Iran believe that reaching a comprehensive deal with Trump is more viable than with any conventional Republican or Democratic President! What are your thoughts on this?

This might be true that a Biden election will positively impact Iran's economy, not just in the context of Iran-US relations, rather by the effects it will have on other countries to open up with Iran, without fearing the US economic revenge. Yet, I am sure any meaningful strategic change wouldn't occur in the US approach towards Iran. Even president Obama who made a historical moment by signing the nuclear deal with Iran, hoped that by such a deal the US could manage to change Iran's regional behavior and limits its missiles program.

In fact, he wanted to manage the so-called Iran's issue by his own soft way. Indeed, the mainstream political structure of the US were unhappy of such a deal and we saw that with a presidential replacement everything returned to its first place. This leads me to think that the US for several reasons has a problem with a strong Iran in the region and will try its best to check Iran's power and its muscles across the broader region and Biden isn't an exception. Yet, this is not what Iran can afford to accept for its own strategic reasons that I mentioned earlier in this interview.

What's next for you, in terms of research, writing, academic work and travel as well as business endeavors?

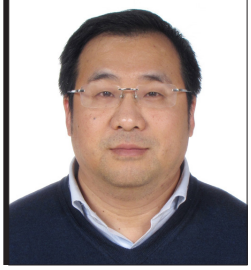
Honestly, I took advantage of the COVID-19 lockdown and published a few scientific and policy oriented articles and translated of a good English book for Persian readers. I was rather exhausted from too much traveling lately. In last summer, I published my latest book entitled "Iran's Regional Policy in Time," in which I discuss why despite all the ups and downs in Iran's domestic politics, its regional policy has never been the subject of change. There two dominant trends regarding Iran's regional policy.

First, is a strong Iran in the region (the dominant trend), and second is Iran is a strong region (President Rouhani's trend). I tried to synthesize them and create a third trend and that is a strong Iran from inside.
I published a piece in English on this regard for Al Jazeera Center for Studies. I wish to develop this idea and connect it to policy circle.

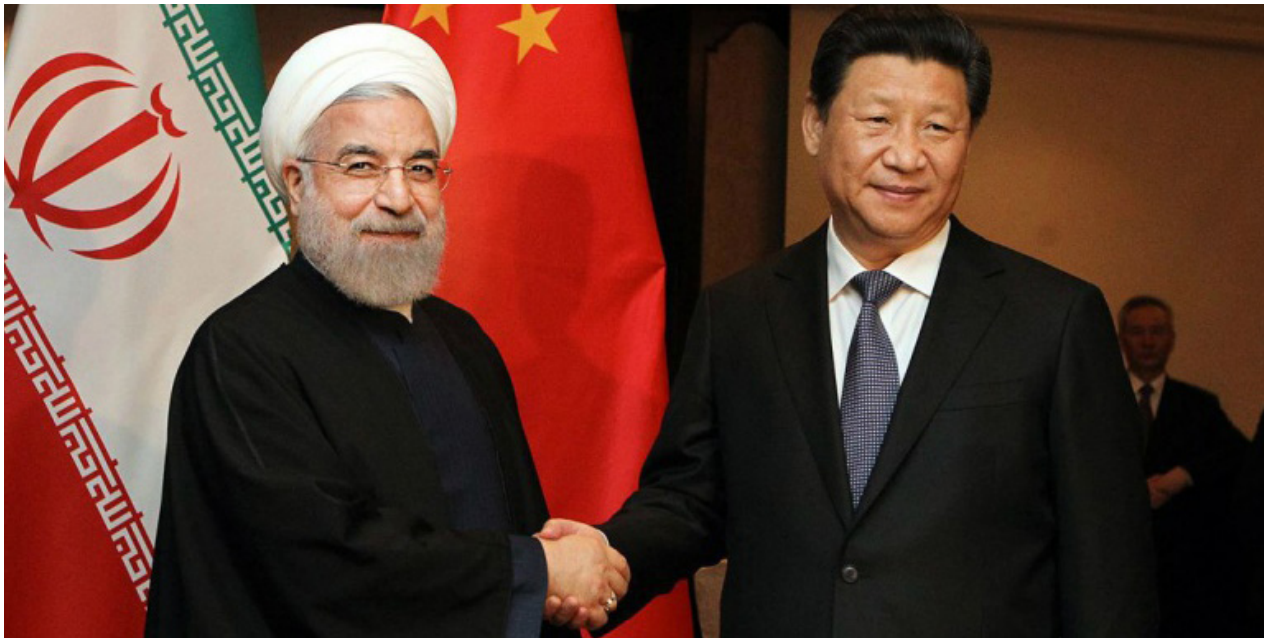
I have always believed that only a strong Iran will have the tendency to talk with the US, because it feels more secure.

The Future of Iran-China Relations
25-Year Deal & Belt and Road Initiative

INTERVIEW



Wu Bingbing *is an associate professor and deputy director of the Department of Arabic Language and Culture at Peking University and a director of Institute of Arab-Islamic Culture. He received his doctorate in 2003 and started his research on Shiite Islam. He has published a book which is the first academic publication by a Chinese scholar with a focus on Shiite Islam. His research focuses on relations between China and the Middle East, politics of the region and foreign policy.*



Dr. Wu, you are the author of the first academic publication by a Chinese scholar about Shiite Islam. Why did you choose the Middle East, particularly Iran and Shiite Islam, as one of your main academic and research interests?

I was in Kuwait nearly 20 years ago, where I met many Iranian friends, and became interested in Iran. That's how I chose Iran as the main topic of my doctoral thesis.

As an outsider with a great insight into Iran's history and culture, religion and society, what do you think about Iran's place in the region and the world politically, geo-politically and economically given all the tension surrounding this region?

I think the Chinese foreign policy toward Iran has clearly shown that we believe Iran is a major power in the region, enjoys global influence, and has a good influence on Middle Eastern politics. Furthermore, I believe that China and Iran's partnership and cooperation is very important for both countries. This is a comprehensive partnership with a long history that has been further strengthened since 2016, when President Xi's visited Iran. I think China and Iran's recognition of one another is not only based on the current economic and political circumstances but also based on their background and history.

If you were to summarize the state of affairs in the Middle East, geo-politically and economically, how would you describe it?
How would you describe the Middle East today and what are the current and future opportunities and challenges in this region?

The first challenge in this case is economic development. Considering the young population of this whole area, each reginal state needs to put its focus on social and economic development and to create adequate number of jobs for the younger generation and keep them hopeful toward the future. I imagine this to be a basic necessity for every country in the region. Unfortunately, there is a lot of geo-political competition in this region, therefore social development has not been the main focus.

Iran needs to concentrate not only on social development but also on having sustainable projects and an agenda for achievable economic development. The balance between economic growth and social development based on a strong economy should be the solution to many issues.

China believes that there needs to be more regional cooperation to reduce the tensions and enable the region to focus more on social development.

Are you optimistic about a resolution to all this animosity such the Iranian-Arab, Shiite-Sunni, etc., historic competitions?
Are you overall optimistic that perhaps one day a real peace and understanding will happen in the Middle East to foster the kind of development that you mentioned?

I'm optimistic because if we go back in history, all of these differences were there, but people handled them and coexisted with each other, not only peacefully, but also productively through mutual cooperation. We see many trade routes between these countries, for instance, the **Silk Road**, and also the intercultural exchange between countries; there are many Farsi words that were loaned by the Arabic language and vice versa, and the same applies to the Turkish language. You cannot change your location and pick your neighbors; you have to live with them. I think the people in this region have the wisdom, experience and motive to handle these issues but it takes time and vision.

How do you see the importance of each country for the other? Are China and Iran truly forming a long-term sustainable strategic partnership?
What are your thoughts on the much talked about 25-year plan?

I think as two ancient civilizations, we should refer back to our shared history. For example, in China we can see statues of lions in front of many ancient buildings, which were introduced from Iran to China; based on official history books, the Chinese word for lion, "Shizi" is very similar to the word "Shir."

The ancient Silk Road has also been another main connection between the two countries over the ages. But in current times, we also share a powerful connection with one another As I previously mentioned, China's view on Iran has always been a strategically grounded view. Our long-term relations are not only based on trade or economic issues or energy supplies, it is a much more profound connection as we both belong to the same continent, sharing an ancient history. Therefore, the 25-year plan between the countries will be a symbol of a long-lasting partnership based on a strategically planned program.

Do you know much about the details or the real scope of the 25-year plan?
The media states that this will be a long-term plan with the potential of 400 billion dollars of investment or financing projects from China in exchange for preferential pricing for energy products, etc. Do you have any thoughts on this matter?

For me principles are more important than details in this matter. To be clear, the outcome of this 25-year deal is to achieve trust between both Iran and China in the long-term. We are facing big challenges as we desire not only a regional but a global outcome.

Since the late '70s and early '80s China has been focusing on different ways of development which we would now like to share with allies, as every country is unique, we don't want to impose anything or set limitations.

Iran can benefit from the experiences China has been going through for the last four decades but in its own unique way. In time, we will have a better knowledge of each other, and even learn and benefit from one another. The vision and spirit between the countries are more important than the details.

Despite increasing close relations between Iran and China, real investments by Chinese companies in Iran have not been that substantial and not on par with expectations. Why is that? Besides US sanctions are there some other obstacles on the way of Chinese companies and investors coming to Iran?
Is it the lack of information or maybe unfavorable rules and regulations in Iran? What are some other obstacles beside sanctions that are preventing investment by Chinese companies in Iran?

Based on my experience I have to explain that as I mentioned in the late '70s and early '80s China started a reforming process on how to develop the economy and started from the main zones including Shenzhen and Xiamen which are both considered to be very important industrial cities, then extended the development plan to thirteen coastal cities.
Now we are focusing on the central region and starting on the western part. Gradually we hope to achieve a more balanced development in the country. This means that there must be a clear plan not only for the next one, two or even five years, but maybe a plan for the next 20 to 30 years.

This long-term plan will make people decide whether or not to invest, which parts they should invest in and in what magnitude. I haven't seen a clear development plan for Iran yet regarding this matter; it is not clear whether Bandar Abbas, Jask, Chabahar or Tehran will be the first, second or third to be structurally developed.
Based on my understanding there is not yet a solid plan, but maybe I am mistaken and Chinese businessmen have a clear and structured plan. We still have a lack of knowledge about one another. Iran has attracted many Chinese tourists recently due to its good policies such as granting visa on arrival and arranging more flights between the countries.

COVID-19 has slowed down and stopped our social connections but in the very near future there should be more developments in tourism.

The development of this sector should involve Asian people's habits and lifestyle and how the locals can collaborate to create a suitable environment for the visitors. China will do the same for Iranians.
We should take the steps gradually but strongly towards a steady foundation and cooperation.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is considered to be one of the largest investment and development projects that the world has ever seen. Can you demystify for us what the key components are?
How will it link different countries and regions on its route and facilitate trade? Who are the key countries in this initiative?

During the past four decades China has achieved a high standard of industrial and infrastructure development, from designing highways, airports, ports, railways and industrial zones to developing a new banking system. The main elements of BRI are infrastructure construction, industrialization, finance, and energy. You cannot just pick one of them, you have to have all four. They need to be the main fields and then gradually more elements and more fields can be added such as space science, nuclear technology, high-tech fields, etc. All these factors could and should be added but the fundamental elements are the four fields that I mentioned. Iran has a very important and strategic location in regards to connectivity.
The BRI is an inclusive and not an exclusive initiative. BRI is open to all, it will accept all countries that want to join. In fact the BRI is not unilateral, it's not even bilateral, it's more multilateral.

In terms of numbers what is the overall projected investment in the Belt and Road Initiative? Do we know how many countries will be connected? What is the total estimated amount of investment in the initiative?

People think that there are a fixed number of countries, but as I said it is an inclusive initiative. We have seen Asian, African, European, Latin American and Pacific countries join the BRI, and we have signed many bilateral and multilateral contracts and agreements with different countries. It is a network of partnerships and projects. If the project is infrastructural, industrial or energy-based, one can evaluate each one to see how much the investment will be. Like in the region of the Suez Canal industrial park, each separate project can amount to at least a billion USD worth of investments. The total final initiative estimate will be based on different projects, so numbers may vary at the end based on how many projects take place.

Besides physical infrastructures such as roads, railroads, ports, and airports, digital infrastructure seems to play an important role in the Belt and Road Initiative, especially the roll out of 5G technology. What are your thoughts on this since it seems to be the biggest point of contention between China and the US? What is all the fuss about 5G and how do you think the world will go about it, given the divide it is creating between the East and West?

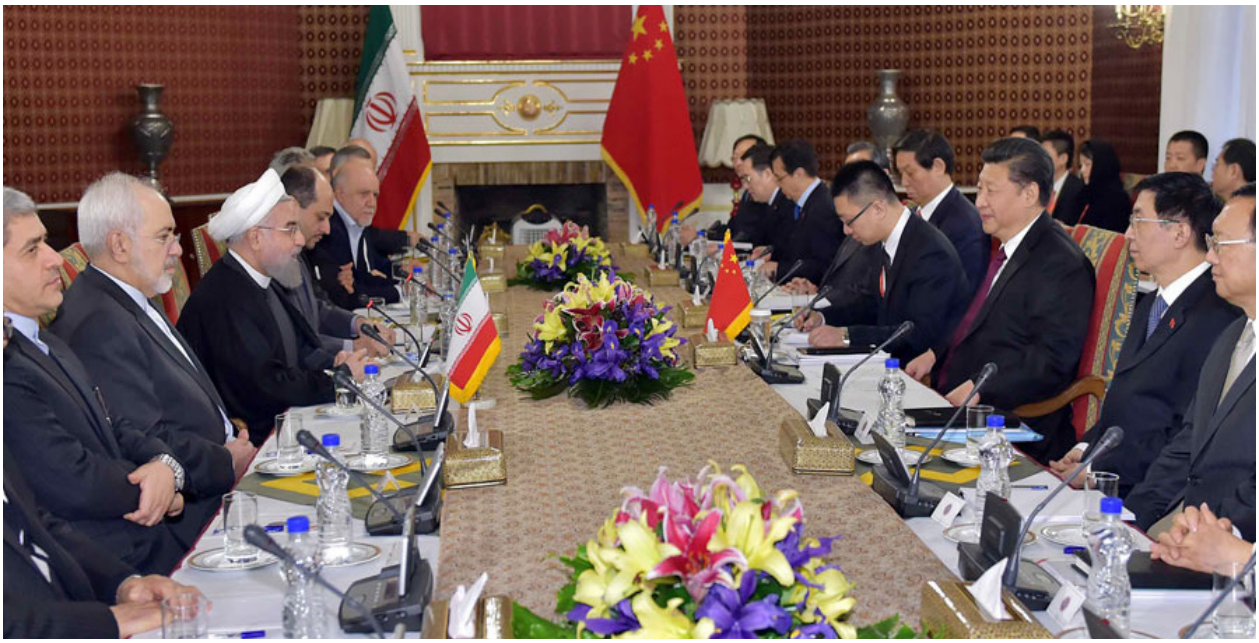
I think especially after the pandemic people will know that Internet services are very important and the Internet is key to real equality between people.
Access to stable and fast internet will be a basic demand and that's the reason 5G or other advanced technologies are playing such a pivotal role in connecting people and countries to one another. More importantly we should be focused on developing smart cities, digital societies, AI and many more new technologies.

Huawei is one of the leading companies in this subject matter. They have signed numerous contracts with many countries based on commercial precepts. Blocking this company from different markets is not based on the principles of free trade but on the hegemonic ideas of some countries. I don't think that this is going to work because these countries need 5G, and who else can offer cheap and stable services? If you want to block a 5G contract, you need to provide an alternative, which I believe will be very challenging as the alternatives are either too expensive or not mature enough. Based on current market demands of the countries in this domain everyone needs the services offered by Huawei. I think without an alternative we are just going to slow down the progress of the digital society and block the access of people to a better internet service.

It is quite obvious to everyone that the US is being unfair to Huawei because of competitive reasons. Do you believe that the West needs to be more equitable in terms of free trade principles? Will this attitude change or do you foresee more of a division between the East and the West?

I believe due to the basic social and economic demands of world markets unless a better alternative is offered this stance cannot continue in this direction. Whatever happens in the coming years, countries around the globe will all soon need to have access to 5G Internet; where are they going to find service suppliers and infrastructure developers? That is the real challenge.

China's phenomenal growth in the past few decades has awed economists and sociologists, and placed it among the top economies in the world. Achievements in military and political influence by China has also agitated politicians worldwide. In regard to the



possible emergence of a new superpower, many accuse China of colonial aspirations in places like Africa. Are there any merits to this?
How do you address such concerns? Is it inevitable for any superpower to eventually and perhaps unintentionally become a colonial power?

I have to point to President Xi's 2016 speech delivered in Cairo during which he said that there is no vacuum that China needs to fill, because every place has its own local government and economy. It is in everyone's best interest not to cause a situation where if let's say the US withdraws from a region there will be a power vacuum. It is very clear that in the current world we live in, trade and investment should create mutual benefit and a win-win situation for parties involved. In other words, you should not take away the resources from the local people and dominate them. It is not like 200 years ago, and therefore that mentality will not work. We buy from Iran, Iran buys from China, we buy from African countries and African countries buy from us. During this process countries develop their own sectors, especially manufacturing, create more jobs, and increase the minimum wage, which enables people to afford to purchase more consumer goods.

I think we now live in a world where it's a basic rule that you cannot become wealthy by making others poor. For example, in Iran you have your energy sector, you need investment and need workers for it, but you cannot permit a foreign state to come and take everything. But in the same environment if you don't have enough foreign investment, can you continue to trade with the outside world? You cannot. That's why in the BRI, we develop airports, railways, highways, and ports in other countries. If those countries have better infrastructure their economy will benefit first and later China can benefit as well through mutual trade.

What are your thoughts on the 2020 US Presidential election?

I think it is very difficult for an administration to establish fundamental changes in their foreign policies towards China. It is not only based on an administration and a group of people; it is based on many Americans who believe China's developments could create more challenges for the US.

What is next for you in terms of research writing, academic work and traveling to this part of the world again. Any kind of business endeavors in the pipelines? What is next for Dr. Wu?

Personally, I still want to have a better understanding of the regional countries. They are experiencing fast growing changes every month. There are big events happening, so we must follow the changes and have a clear understanding of them.

China should develop a stronger partnership with the countries in the region including Iran. Considering how we could make this partnership more comprehensive and strategically feasible in the long-term is always a topic for scholars, intellectuals, and people in business to pay attention to.

The Potential of Iran-Sweden Cooporation

INTERVIEW

Mattias Lentz *took up post as the Swedish ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran in September 2019. He joined the Swedish foreign service in 1992, and served twice in Beijing, Jakarta and New Delhi. During his postings in Stockholm, he worked with UN Security Council matters, and in 2018 he was in charge of formulating the Swedish-China strategy.*

He also served in the European External Action Service, with postings at the EU-delegations in Beijing and Manila. With a degree in political science and east asian studies, he was first trained to be a chef and worked in some high-end restaurants in Sweden. Before joining the Swedish foreign service, he also co-owned an advertising agency, working as its art director.

Thank you so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview despite your busy schedule. We are very grateful.
If you were to summarize the state of affairs between Iran and Sweden, in terms of political relations as well as trade activities and cultural exchanges, how would you describe it?

We have a long history of interaction: The first Swede to be recorded as having visited Iran came to Isfahan, in 1616. We signed a Treaty of Friendship in 1929, and Embassies were established at the same time. However Swedish travelers, explorers and businesses were present here long before that.
Sven Hedin, a famous explorer and traveler, who at one time was the biggest selling author in the world, wrote his first book about his visit to Iran in 1886. Our relation today is broad and deep and, I would say, built on three pillars. There is a strong, historic, Swedish business interest in Iran as a market and business partner.There is also a strong Swedish political interest to promote security, stability and peace in the region, where Iran is a major player. We have around 120,000 Swedish citizens of Iranian descent, a group which, through family and friends in Iran, promotes strong ties, and a mutual interest in our respective cultures. Today, I think Sweden has a good reputation in Iran. We have frequent high-level exchanges between our governments. Our relationship is well established, which allows us not only to have frank and open discussions on how to best develop our relations and move forward, but also to raise issues where we disagree or have differing values.

Sweden is home to some of the most iconic global brands such as IKEA, Volvo, Ericsson, etc. and is also a role model when it comes to social equality. How did a small country (in terms of population) become an economic and social success story and one of the world's leaders in innovation as well as social welfare?

It is true that we take pride in having a number of Swedish companies which have turned into global brands. As you mentioned, Ericsson, Volvo and Ikea are among our global brands, but also the truck and bus manufacturer Scania, companies like ABB, Alfa Laval and Tetra Pak, are present in Iran. And to these older companies (Ericsson was founded in 1876 and Scania in 1891) we can now

add "modern" ones like Spotify and Skype. And how many people know that the game "Candy Crush Saga" was developed by a Swedish company? I think one of the reasons that these companies became global is that Sweden is a small country as you say in your question. For a company like Ericsson, the Swedish market was not big enough and they had to expand outwardly. An illustration of this is that only ten years after its establishment, Ericsson sold telephone switch boards in Shanghai, catering to the Chinese market which is quite remarkable given that it took place in the 1880's.

But underlying factors to why these companies succeeded had social underpinnings. In 1842 Sweden introduced compulsory schooling for 7- to 13-year-olds. This dramatically raised the overall level of education among the people and paved the way for more students, men as well as women, pursuing a higher education. Today, nearly half of the Swedish population has a post-secondary education, and more than three percent of our annual GDP is invested in research and development, which all contribute to Sweden consistently ranking among the top nations in innovation. Sweden is also a welfare state, and the social safety net offers entrepreneurs the possibility to experiment and take risks. Sweden has a small population but is geographically large. This has caused a well-functioning infrastructure such as railways, telecommunications and broadband, to be vital for our development The need to improve infrastructure and communication has also led to innovation.

Today, much of Sweden's innovation scene and new businesses relate to the challenges of environmental sustainability. It is inspiring to see the many innovative solutions presented by entrepreneurs. While most of Sweden's large global brands today have active and impressive work to increase sustainability, I think our next Swedish brand to grow globally is quite likely to have environmental friendliness as a key component. But then of course some say the main reason that Sweden is a leader in innovation comes down to the cold weather and dark winters which encourage entrepreneurs and innovators to stay home and develop their ideas!

What is the trade volume between Iran and Sweden today? What products and services are still being exchanged, if any?

Do you see any major emerging trends/patterns, for example, expansion of trade beyond activities in traditional sectors such automotive and telecom?

As with most other countries, the trade volume between Sweden and Iran has gone down since the USA's decision to leave the JCPOA in May 2018.

Swedish exports to Iran dropped by about 60 percent from 2019 to 2020. However, we saw a 10 percent increase in imports from Iran over the same period. Iran has historically been one of the most important Swedish markets outside of Europe, and a large number of Swedish companies have a long tradition in the country.

These companies maintain an interest in Iran itself as a market and business partner, as well as in Iran as a gateway to the region. Therefore, they will keep their presence here; as the potential they see for trade and economic relations with Iran is intact. A key challenge at the moment is of course to maintain normal business interactions despite current circumstances, especially in the financial sector.
Sweden has recently become a shareholder in INSTEX, and with that I am hoping new avenues for Swedish companies can open up. Traditionally, as you mentioned, we have seen a large Swedish presence in the automotive and telecom sectors, but there is also considerable interest in the health sector, as well as consumer goods and packaging, and other areas.

What do you see as the biggest hurdles in the way of doing business between the two countries - such as US sanctions, lack of information among traders on both sides, etc.?

The sanctions, which also include the risk of secondary US sanctions, have created an uncertainty, and sometimes a lack of understanding about which transactions and business deals can still be made.
At the same time there are goods that are being exempted from the sanctions, especially humanitarian goods. Adding to this mix-up is a great reluctance among financial institutions to handle transactions connected to Iranian interests. As mentioned, those Swedish companies who have an interest in Iran, in many cases have a long experience of doing business here.

Are there any business delegations visiting either side any time soon? If so, in what sector(s) and when? Are there any major cultural/artistic or sports activities between the two countries planned for 2020 and 2021?

Well, for the moment COVID-19 has put a stop to physical exchanges and visits. We do have a number of events to be scheduled, including a meeting of the Joint Commission between Iran and Sweden. The purpose of the Commission is to discuss economic cooperation, and other issues related to our trade relations.
We are looking at arranging the meeting as soon as the pandemic allows. Our cultural exchange has also been hampered by the situation, but we are looking at taking part in a Swedish film in the upcoming yearly European Film Week, which this year will be online.
We are also exploring more ways to continue our cultural exchanges online. There is much to be done in the cultural field, as there is a large interest in Sweden about Iranian culture, especially in poetry, film and history. Here in Iran, we are met with an encouraging interest in Swedish culture, film, design art and last but not least children's literature.

Could you introduce us to your everyday work as Ambassador of Sweden to Iran?

In normal times, it is a busy schedule which includes meeting with many representatives of the Iranian government, business and other sectors of society and traveling to different parts of the country. I am also overseeing the Embassy's active work in all our sections, political, cultural activities, economic and trade promotion, as well as consular services to Swedish citizens and visa and migrations operations for Iranian, Afghan and Iraqi citizens. Since COVID-19 reached Iran, our daily work schedule has been very different.

The Embassy's operations are restricted to avoid the spread of the virus, to protect visitors and staff and to follow regulations and instructions by the Swedish government, which includes a temporary travel ban for non-EU citizens. This is especially noticeable for our visa and migration operations, which in normal times receive a large number of visitors and applications every day. However, it is also affecting our work for trade promotion and cultural activities, and we have to think about new ways of interaction, for example to develop online-based means for cooperation. At the Embassy, we have divided staff into different groups to avoid potential transmission of the virus; many of the staff have not met in-person since February. It remains challenging and I look forward to the day we can operate as normal again. For the time being, we need to keep those precautions in place.

> *... the main reason that Sweden is a leader in innovation comes down to the cold weather and dark winters which encourage entrepreneurs and innovators to stay home and develop their ideas!*

How do you see the upcoming US elections impacting relations between Iran and the West?
Can a major change of guard at the White House revive the JCPOA and make Iran a possible trade and investment destination for Swedish companies again?

Sweden supports the JCPOA, and continues to encourage all parties to the agreement to uphold and implement its conditions. It was with deep regret we saw the US leave it, and we encourage the US to rejoin the JCPOA.

With the elections now having been won by Joseph Biden, who has said he wants the US to rejoin the JCPOA, I think prospects certainly look better, and that we might see a possible opportunity for talks between Iran and the US and perhaps other parties to the JCPOA.

With that said, we strongly encourage Iran to equally uphold and implement all parts of the agreement, and to retract steps taken, that are not in compliance with the treaty. This is also something I understand Joseph Biden says would be a condition for the US to return to the negotiating table.
We should be realistic and understand that things will take time. But we, from the Swedish side, saw in 2016 and 2017 what the JCPOA meant for the development of economic ties, with a number of Swedish business delegations, one led by our Prime Minister who came here to explore the potential of Iran as a market and business partner. I have now had meetings with representatives of Swedish companies based in Iran and sense a growing hope among them that things will turn around.

I would for that reason and also because I see the JCPOA as a way to attain stability, security and therefore development in Iran and the region, welcome a return of the full implementation of the JCPOA.

> *... companies maintain an interest in Iran itself as a market and business partner, as well as in Iran as a gateway to the region. Therefore, they will keep their presence here; as the potential they see for trade and economic relations with Iran is intact. A key challenge at the moment is of course to maintain normal business interactions despite current circumstances, especially in the financial sector.*

Trends Quotations

QUOTES

H.E. Ambassador Norvanto, Finland

Finland is a reliable supplier of high-tech for machinery, mining, energy, telecommunication, environment and agriculture. Together we can pave the way for companies by taking care of the business climate in both of our countries. When the conditions are right, I'm sure the private sector, entrepreneurship and start-up scene as a whole will be vital to overcome economic challenges caused by COVID-19.

H.E. Ambassador de Azeredo Santos, Brazil

If the right domestic and external political conditions are there, no doubt Iran will finally fulfill the expectations of being one of the largest untapped markets in the world. Energy, capital goods, agriculture, retail and transportation products and services will be amongst the top growing sectors and Brazil will be ready to take part in such a dynamic market.

Dr. Manmohan S. Sawhney

I am very optimistic about Iran's future. This country is full of natural resources with highly educated and cultured people, and soon, with the new US administration, relations between Iran and India will be more positive. India, one of Iran's traditional business partners, has already begun to welcome Iranian trade and business once again.

H.E. Ambassador Lazarchik, Belarus

If sanctions cease to be one of the restrictions, mutual trade turnover can quickly grow to several hundred million dollars, and this would be gladly welcomed in both Minsk and Tehran.

Iran-Kazakhstan Relations

INTERVIEW

Ambassador Orazbay *is a Kazakh career diplomat. After joining the Foreign Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 1992, he advanced to top diplomatic posts including Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization, ECO, from 2004 to 2006, Kazakhstan's national representative to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization from 2006 to 2008, Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Turkmenistan from 2008 to 2012, Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Indonesia from 2012 to 2019, and ambassador of Kazakhstan to the Philippines from 2015 to 2019. He currently serves as the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Iran and is the permanent representative of Kazakhstan to the Economic Cooperation Organization.*

Orazbay also served as the political affairs officer of the UN Special Mission for Afghanistan, director of the department for Asia, Middle East and Africa of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Ambassador-at-large of the Kazakh Foreign Office. As a specialist in and with a background in oriental studies, Ambassador Orazbay is fluent in Farsi, English, Russian and Turkish. He holds the highest diplomatic rank – Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and is decorated with many state awards from the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Thank you so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview despite your busy schedule, we are very grateful.
If you were to summarize the state of affairs between Iran and Kazakhstan, in terms of political relations as well as trade activities and cultural exchanges, how would you describe it?

Thank you very much for this opportunity to enlighten the readers of such a well-respected magazine, Trends, on the development of Kazakh-Iranian relations. Historically, Iran has always been a very important partner and neighbor to Kazakhstan. I can characterize the current state of our bilateral affairs as well-developing and quite promising in all fields of our bilateral cooperation.

In terms of political relations, since the visit of our first President, President Nursultan Nazarbayev to Iran in November 1992, our countries have never had any troubles or turbulences and have only shown mutual support and a strong political will to strengthen our ties. Both countries have been reciprocating by supporting each other.

We appreciate Iran's invaluable support of our bid to the UN Security Council, in our hosting of the Expo 2017 and in signing a Statute of Islamic Food Security Organization headquartered in Nur-Sultan, our capital.

Just to demonstrate the great dynamics of political contacts at the highest level, I can mention that in 2019

we had meetings between our Presidents, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Hassan Rouhani, and our Prime Minister Askar Mamin and Iranian Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri. Also last year, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, and the First Deputy Speaker of Iranian Parliament, Masoud Pezeshkian, visited our capital and we also had political consultations between our Foreign Ministries in Tehran.

Despite COVID-19, our leaders are in regular contact with each other. In May of this year, our Presidents had a phone call to discuss the state and prospects of development of Kazakh-Iranian relations, including issues of increasing trade and economic cooperation, as well as measures to tackle the Coronavirus.

Before that, our Foreign Ministers also held a phone conversation. Just a few months ago, our Ministers in charge of infrastructure also discussed the development of our transit-transport links by phone. Our countries also successfully cooperate in the framework of regional and international structures including, the UN, OIC, CICA, SCO, ECO and Special Working Group on the Caspian Sea. We witness similar trends in cultural exchanges. For example, Iranian handicraft artisans took part in the Artisans Fair of the Silk Road Countries held within the framework of the Investment and Tourism Forum's "Turkistan: One Road – One History" hosted in the city of Turkistan on November 4th and 5th last year.

As for our trade cooperation, unfortunately, it does not match the real potential of our countries due to the current circumstances. But the most important thing is that our business circles have a strong mutual interest in establishing trade ties and expanding them further. Last year our capital hosted the 16th meeting of the Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation where all issues related to the field were thoroughly discussed by both sides. We are quite confident that our trade will come back to the pre-sanction level in the near future because Kazakhstan and Iran have a huge untapped potential that will let us expand our cooperation in all areas despite the existing challenges. We hope that our President's visit to Iran which is planned for next year will open up a new era in the Kazakh-Iranian relations.

Please tell us about Kazakhstan, its history, business, cultural, and tourist attractions, as well as about major events held this year in Kazakhstan?

Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world with a vast territory comprising 2.7 million square kilometers. It is a Eurasian country situated in the heart of Eurasia with 90 percent of its territory lying in Asia, while 10 percent lies in Europe. Our people therefore share both Eastern and Western values. This factor has hugely influenced our people to become very cosmopolitan and tolerant.

Although Kazakhstan's population is not too big, with just over 18 million people, it is home to over 130 ethnic groups and 18 religions and spiritual traditions. Being a predominantly Muslim country with more than 70 percent of the population identifying as Muslim, Kazakhstan has successfully ensured inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony.

Kazakhstan began its statehood as far back as 1465, when our first forefathers – Janibek Khan and Kerei Khan – founded the Kazakh Khanate on a territory of modern Kazakhstan which existed up until the mid-19th century. In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan regained its independence.

Since then, our country has managed to implement massive economic reforms and huge privatization of state assets which turned our economy from a planned to a free market economy. Throughout the period of independence, Kazakhstan has ensured political stability and managed to resolve all territorial disputes with its neighboring countries by setting down boundary delimitations, including with Russia and China. Now, we enjoy friendly and reliable relations with all of our neighbors. Over the many years of its independence, Kazakhstan has made a huge breakthrough in its socio-

economic development and now is among the fastest growing economies with a high GDP growth.

Today, Kazakhstan is the largest economy in Central Asia with a GDP of 160 billion USD. In fact, Kazakhstan has a higher GDP than all of the other Central Asian states combined.

In regards to the business, cultural and tourist attractions of our country, I would suggest visiting our capital, Nur-Sultan, previously known as Astana. The city was built in record-breaking time from scratch despite all the difficulties of the transitional period.
In less than 10 years, we have managed to build an absolutely new and modern capital. It was designed by prominent foreign architects including the Japanese architect, Kisho Kurokawa, known for designing the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, Kuala-Lumpur International Airport and National Ethnological Museum in Osaka, as well as the British architect, Norman Foster, known as a master of high-tech architecture, with works including the Millennium Bridge in London, the world's biggest airport in Beijing and the restructured Bundestag in Berlin. So, anyone can easily find many attractions catered to their tastes in Nur-Sultan. Another must-see destination in Kazakhstan is the city of Almaty.
The natural diversity of Almaty is amazing – from scenic canyons to lush valleys, snow-capped mountains, beautiful glaciers and turquoise lakes. Almaty is also a surprisingly modern city. It's the scientific, cultural, historical, industrial and financial center of the country. So, besides its natural scenery, there is a plethora of attractions anyone can visit and enjoy.

Of course, Kazakhstan can provide many other various attractions for different types of visitors, even for the most indulged ones. To mention a few, there is the ancient city of Turkistan with its famous landmarks like Khoja Ahmed Yassawi, Aisha Bibi and Arystan Bab Mausoleums. There is also one of the oldest cities of Taraz, national reserves of Eastern Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea in the west.
This year marks the 1150th anniversary of the outstanding thinker, translator and composer of the East Abu Nasr Al-Farabi and the 175th anniversary of a Kazakh poet, a great scientist, encyclopedist, composer and philosopher Abai Qunanbaiuly. Their works embody eternity, wisdom, love and faithfulness. Although they lived in different centuries, the deep philosophical treaties and poetic works of Al-Farabi and Qunanbaiuly played a huge role in the writing of the history of oriental civilization and in particular the Kazakh one. Both of these great personalities have close links to Iran. It is believed that Al-Farabi after having left a city of Otyrar in south Kazakhstan traveled to Iranian cities of Nishapur, Rey and Hamedan while Abai's poems glorify Iranian poets and call them his teachers.

Please tell us about the history of trade between the two countries. Also, what is the trade volume between Iran and Kazakhstan today?
What products and services are being exchanged?
When it comes to trade, do you see any major emerging trends or patterns, for example,
the expansion of trade beyond activities in traditional sectors such agricultural commodities?

As I mentioned earlier, the current trade level between our countries does not match their potential. From 2006 to 2007, the trade turnover between Kazakhstan and Iran used to be around 2 billion USD, while in 2009 to 2010 it decreased to 1 billion USD. In 2018, this level declined to 516 million USD, whereas last year our trade shrunk to 380.3 million USD.
The reason for that is the restrictions imposed on Iran.
In the first quarter of 2020, the trade volume between Kazakhstan and Iran exceeded 100 million USD. Traditionally, we export barley, vegetables, lamb and goat meat, animal feed and wheat to Iran, whereas we import from your country fruits and vegetables, dates and nuts, cement, various plastic goods and much more.
It is worthy to note that besides our traditional

commodities, such as barley and wheat, there is a growing trend of export of metal and aluminum scraps from Kazakhstan as well as export of fruits and vegetables along with different types of dates from Iran.

We assume that this positive trend is taking place thanks to the temporary agreement on establishment of the Free Trade Zone between Iran and Eurasian Economic Union. So, we hope that this good start will expand to the other commodities of our countries.

Is the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) expected to boost trade between the two countries? What would be the potential if the sanctions are lifted?

Of course, the main purpose of signing the temporary agreement on the formation of a free trade zone between EEU and Iran was exactly boosting trade between your country and EEU member-states through the reduction in import duties and establishment of a transparent trade environment. The agreement, operational since October 27, 2019, has provided Iran with special customs privileges from the Eurasian Economic Union and the Union's member-states from Iran. These privileges include 502 items in the field of food, chemicals, construction products, export of technical and engineering services, industrial products and agricultural products by the Eurasian Union, and 360 items in the same categories by Iran, which amount to a total of 862 items covered by the agreement.

The benefits of Iran joining the Eurasian Economic Union include the creation of a bridge linking the market with more than 180 million people and a potential market to boost exports. Although there are currently only five countries as members of the union, four countries including Iran, Vietnam, Singapore and Serbia have signed Agreements on Establishment of the Free Trade Zones.
Besides that, more than 40 countries and international organizations such as China, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, India, Hungary, Pakistan, Egypt and even some Latin American countries are ready to work within the union.

> *from my perspective, a big challenge for Iran, is going to be achieving an agreement with the US and European countries regarding the Iranian nuclear deal.*

The agreement is expected to lead to a major jump in Iran's exports and can play an important role in Iran's crossing of economic bottlenecks. So, according to mass media, Iran's trade with EEU has already surpassed 2.4 billion USD. Certainly, we are also quite optimistic about the trade between Iran and Kazakhstan in light of that trade agreement.
As to the potential in case of lifting the sanctions, we expect a significant jump in trade which should at least reach the level we had before sanctions. As it was said above, in 2006 to 2007 the trade turnover between Kazakhstan and Iran was around 2 billion USD, but this is not the limit of our potential.

What do you see as the biggest hurdles in the way of doing business between the two countries?

Of course, the biggest challenge for business between our countries is the current situation with Iran's sanctions. It entails many restrictions and risks that discourage businesses from any activities. The main one is the absence of bank transactions after Iran was cut from the international SWIFT system.
But despite that, there are many entrepreneurs interested in establishing or expanding Kazakh-Iranian business links. The lack of information among our business people serves as another hurdle in developing our trade/economic ties.
In order to overcome it, our embassy and I participate in various business events, round tables, fairs and conferences as well as hold meetings with Iranian business people.

For instance, last year on the premises of our embassy we held over 50 meetings, I visited more than 10 Iranian provinces where meetings with regional authorities and business circles were held. We held two round tables together with Iranian Chamber of Commerce and one round table with Iranian Chamber of Cooperatives, a Kazakh-Iranian Investment Forum with Golestan Province. In December 2019 in conjunction with the Iranian Chamber of Commerce we held the "Day of Kazakhstan's Economy" event. The prime focus of these events was providing information about Kazakhstan's trade/economic and investment opportunities.
This year, despite COVID-19, we try to provide all necessary information to Iranian businesses during our online and virtual meetings. As you see we do indeed a lot to increase awareness and knowledge of Iranian businesses and I believe the Iranian embassy in Kazakhstan also works hard in that direction. **Besides mining and agriculture, what other sectors is Kazakhstan strong in? What sectors can foreign (including Iranian) investors invest in? What is the process for any such investments?**

Of course, mining and agriculture are two of the main sectors of Kazakhstan. But from the outset of our independence, the government has been always working hard to diversify our economy. Our National Investment Strategy for 2018-2022 clearly identifies priority sectors for foreign investments. These industries can be divided into two groups. Firstly, there are "industries with the active potential" - the food industry, deep processing of oil, gas and minerals (metallurgy, chemistry and petrochemistry), as well as engineering. The second group is "promising sectors" such as ICT, tourism and finance.

The first group implies such industries in which it is possible to promote foreign direct investments aimed at improving efficiency in the short or medium term. The second group consists of industries in which investors may be interested in the long term. Therefore, our Iranian friends can invest in any of those fields. For these purposes, we have 13 special economic zones and 24 industrial zones with different sectoral orientation and different preferences. They offer investors a zero percent rate for corporate income tax, land tax, property tax, as well as exemptions from customs duties.

Kazakhstan carries out a campaign on privatizing the largest state-owned mining and metallurgical companies, oil and gas, energy, transport and communications, and infrastructure enterprises. Kazakhstan also has a large number of projects in exploitation and development of production of copper, gold, rare and rare-earth metals, including lithium and vanadium, phosphate raw materials and much more. Likewise, we are interested in investing in geological exploration, new technologies for enrichment and processing of raw materials.
We have begun a large-scale modernization of the agro-industrial complex. Structural reform and diversification of the agricultural sector is underway. The scientific, technical and technological re-equipment of the entire

industry has begun. All this provides great opportunities for investments in the food industry. As it has been mentioned above a new direction for our economy is the development of tourism. For this purpose, a specialized company "Kazakh Tourism" has been created which provides special conditions for companies interested in the development of tourism infrastructure.
The process for any such investments is very easy. Any investor can reach our embassy in Tehran. We will connect them with our "Kazakh Invest" National Company which was established to build effective interaction with investors on the principle of a "one-stop shop." Kazakh Invest representatives, who are experts in all key sectors, can go through each of these sectors and projects with investors in detail. As a single point of contact and one-stop shop, Kazakh Invest offers investors all the support they need to conduct business in Kazakhstan – from the idea stage all the way through to the implementation. We connect investors with relevant organizations, so that they can easily identify high-quality opportunities for investment and offer necessary administrative support.

What do you see as the opportunities and challenges for Iran in 2020 and beyond?

This year is indeed a very difficult year for all of us. The coronavirus has severely struck our economies. Therefore, the biggest challenge not only for Iran but for all of us is going to be the post-pandemic recovery. But given the strength of the Iranian people and Iran's economic potential, I firmly believe that Iran can overcome this crisis. Another big challenge for Iran, from my perspective, is going to be achieving an agreement with the US and European countries regarding the Iranian nuclear deal. If it happens, the sanctions could be eased which will positively affect our trade. However, other external and internal challenges would hinder Iran's development.

Are there any business delegations visiting either side these days? If so, in what sector(s) and when? Are there any major cultural, artistic or sports activities between the two countries planned for 2020 and 2021?

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, unfortunately, we had to cancel or postpone most of our business activities. For example, four Iranian companies had planned to visit Kazakhstan in the first quarter of 2020 to discuss particular investment projects with our counterparts in infrastructure, agriculture, logistics and other fields.
We were also planning to organize a trade mission led by the Vice Minister of Trade and Integration of the Republic of Kazakhstan and accompanied by Kazakh exporters and importers.

We managed to arrange a visit with the leadership of "Aktau SeaPort" Free Economic Zone on February 18, 2020. That visit was very successful and productive because the delegates met the leadership of Qazvin Chamber of Commerce and agreed to implement a joint project in Aktau inbuilding an Industrial-Commercial Complex on the territory of the Special Economic Zone "Sea Port Aktau" with a total amount of investment of about 15 million EUR which will facilitate exporting Iranian goods to Kazakhstan and Central Asia and vice-versa.

The complex will be located on a five hectares area on the Kazakh part of the Caspian Sea. So, we do hope that COVID-19 will be over very soon and we can resume our exchanges with business delegations.
As I have mentioned earlier, during a phone conversation of our presidents this year, Hassan Rouhani, Iran's President invited our President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to visit Tehran. That is why, we hope that our President could visit Iran's capital sometime next year if the situation with COVID-19 normalizes. And generally, plenty of cultural or artistic and business events are held on the sidelines of such high rank visits.

Can we expect further improvement of relations between Iran and Kazakhstan in the foreseeable future, given the challenges including the political climate in the US, sanctions, etc.?

Kazakhstan and Iran have been historically enjoying very friendly and mutually beneficial relations. For sure, things like sanctions and geopolitics always negatively affect the dynamics of bilateral cooperation. In the case of Kazakh-Iranian relations, the impact is very much felt especially in our trade. We should always see the future with full optimism. We therefore believe that the current situation and sanctions will not last forever. So, one day our trade/economic cooperation will return back to normal and will become a starting point for increasing our bilateral trade. In the meantime, we have many fields excluded from those listed in sanctions that we will explore and develop during these not-so-easy times.

Iran-Austria State of Affairs

INTERVIEW

Christoph Grabmayr born in 1962, studied law in Austria, France and Canada, finishing with a degree from the University of Innsbruck.
Since joining the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, he has held posts at Austrian embassies and representative offices in Tunisia, Taiwan, Finland, Canada, France and since 2017, in Iran, with stints at headquarters in Vienna in between.

Thank you so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview despite your busy schedule. We are very grateful. If you were to summarize the state of affairs between Iran and Austria, in terms of political relations and more importantly business and trade activities, how would you describe it?

The state of affairs is actually unsatisfactory as the potential is so much higher! Iran and Austria have a long and common history that goes back centuries and is characterized by mutual sympathy and respect, but at the moment that potential is unfortunately not being materialized. It could be much better and bigger.

Obviously, Austria being the host to many international agencies including those related to the UN which are permanently housed in Vienna, during the crucial JCPOA talks between Iran and world powers, proudly hosted several rounds of negotiations. The sentiment in Austria is that although we were not a negotiating or signatory party to the JCPOA, we are also part of this treaty due to our direct involvement in hosting it.

While the initial results of the nuclear agreement were very promising and there were big expectations in Austria, those hopes were dampened by external forces and the unilateral withdrawal of only one party. We haven't lost hope on the JCPOA though and look forward to a possible revival of it at some point and that's when the potential between Iran and Austria could hopefully materialize.

Austria has been one of Iran's traditional industrial and trade partners, and in fact some of our best engineers have been educated in Austria from almost a century ago.Please tell us about the history of business and industrial cooperation between the two countries.
Also, what is the trade volume between Iran and Austria today? What products and services are still being exchanged?
Do you see any major emerging trends/patterns (for example, expansion of trade beyond activities in traditional sectors such machinery, transportation, energy, etc.)?

Historically, Iran and Austria have had close relations and Austria has always been a good place for Iranian traders and industrialists to conduct business, not only being a great central place to do business with Western Europe but also, in the Soviet era, a connecting point to the Eastern Europe and Communist Block, where people could meet on mutual ground. Austria has always

viewed Iran as an interesting place to do business, also not only for Iran itself but also for the region. Right now, trade and business activities between the two countries have diminished significantly due to external reasons and circumstances and not much is going on. Austria still mainly exports medical devices and pharmaceutical products, and sometimes even machinery and electrical components and manufactured products in different sectors to Iran, and imports agricultural products from Iran.

Today the total official trade between the two countries stand at only around 45 million Euros with Austria's exports to Iran standing at just over 41 million Euros (close to 30% less than 2019) and Austria's imports from Iran standing at around only 4 million Euros (more than 56% drop from last year). This is obviously a fraction of the potential exchange we could have between the two countries.

Iran is shifting from oil exports to local manufacturing and non-oil exports. Iran also has access to some of the biggest regional markets including Iraq. Would Austrian companies consider Iran as a potential manufacturing hub in our region?

One could say that sanctions had this unpredictable by-product and a blessing at the end of the day, as they have pushed Iran from a raw materials seller to value-added manufacturing economy.
Iranian products have made great improvement and now have good quality and design, partially due to a traditional craftmanship that existed here for centuries. They can now compete in international markets, starting with regional ones and then Europe through Turkey.
Iranian companies were not challenged to export before but that is changing due to higher capacity and better quality of their products.

Iran is also a perfect country for new technology such as Solar energy for which Austria could be a great partner.

In other areas from tile production to manufacturing of medical devices, Austrian companies could consider Iran as a manufacturing partner, given the right conditions (post-sanctions).

What do you see as the biggest hurdles on the way of doing business between the two countries (US sanctions, lack of information among investors and traders, Iran's business environment, commercial rules and regulations, etc.)?
What do you see as post-sanctions opportunities and challenges between the two countries in terms of industrial cooperation and trade?

There are indeed as many challenges as opportunities when it comes to industrial cooperation and trade.
Some like the pandemic that is negatively impacting travel and trade are fully circumstantial and temporary.
Others like sanctions are more complicated and need more time but we are optimistic about a revival of the JCPOA.

There are however, many Iran-specific challenges that have nothing to do with the outside world.
They include transparency which is very important to Austrian companies (and to other European partners and investor).
Another is changing laws and regulations including list of allowed imports and tariffs that for some strange reason is held in secret and not easily accessible!
Access to foreign exchange and difficulties in repatriation of money constitute another set of tough issues that make trade risky and sometimes simply impossible.
Our advice to Austrian companies is that they consider all these challenges before rushing to Iran even if the JCPOA is revived.
That being said we had more than 1 billion Euros in trade with Iran back in 2017 (we have half a billion with the UAE and 1.5 billion with Turkey) which means opportunities with Iran are also great for Austrian companies.

Austria is a small country but very efficient and successful when it comes to industry and business with iconic brands from Doppelmayr to Swarovski and Red Bull.
What do you contribute the success to?

Hard work, reliability and stability (of the entire economic system but also at individual company level), specialization (such as in Doppelmayr's case), perfectionism (in design and craftmanship), persistence (which is manifested in even newer companies such as Red Bull with the production and marketing strategies) and luck! Yes luck; during the fall of the Iron Curtain we were perfectly positioned to benefit from new industrial and trade opportunities that suddenly and unexpectedly emerged! With regards to specialization, let me give you another example; except for Porsche which originated in Austria, we are not a big auto manufacturing country, but there are hardly any cars in the world running without some Austrian components in them. In other words, we specialized in the component side of an industry without being involved in the production of the end product!

Please tell us about Advantage Austria, when did the initiative start, what's the mission? In what areas are you active in?

ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA WKO

ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA:
OUR WORLDWIDE NETWORK,
OUR ADVANTAGE

ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA is the official Austrian Foreign Trade Promotion Organization as a department of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the largest provider of services in the area of foreign trade.
ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA offices are the gateway to Austria for international companies looking for world-class suppliers. We act as a central contact partner playing a strategic role for companies wishing to move to Austria

and, therefore, are looking for top-quality partners for their business dealings. Regardless of whether foreign businesses are looking for Austrian buyers, a suitable location for a company branch or import/export office or an overview of Austria's internationally respected products and services, all roads meet at ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA. With a network of more than 100 offices in 70 countries ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA is uniquely positioned to consult and guide Austrian enterprises worldwide.

ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA Trade Commissioners help Austrian companies find new contacts and strengthen existing business connections. We put sellers in contact with potential agents, importers and prospective partners. We also obtain e.g. credit ratings and assist with trade names and patent registration.

ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA publishes foreign trade newsletters, brochures etc. to promote export opportunities for Austrian companies. We organize trade missions and official participations in international trade fairs and provide advice and assistance for in-bound buying missions etc.

ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA unites a high degree of openness and international orientation with an extensive network of local Austrian contacts. These advantages ensure rapid, competent answers to any inquiries and solutions to any problems you might have.

Are there any business delegations visiting either side any time soon (physical or virtual)? If so, in what sector(s) and when? Are there any major cultural/artistic or sports activities between the two countries planned for 2021?

During the pandemic, what we've lost in terms of traditional delegation visits, we're making up with virtual events, in mainly the form of Webinars, including an interesting recent one called "Austria as a Market for Iranian Exporters" which was designed to educate Iranian producers on EU's import regime and how to export to the EU, including Austria as well as marketing strategies to sell to the European market. We are planning for several upcoming events for the rest of the year and in 2021 (physical ones or again webinars depending on the situation with the pandemic) including on environmental protection, energy efficiency, and green energies to name a few.

> *Austria still mainly exports medical devices and pharmaceutical products, and sometimes even machinery and electrical components and manufactured products in different sectors to Iran, and imports agricultural products from Iran.*

Austria has had one of lowest death rates from the COVID-19 outbreak. To what would you contribute this to? Is there currently any cooperation between the two countries in that front? How can we leverage each other's experiences and face future pandemics?

I would say while the death rate has been low, relatively and compared to other countries, this may change during the future waves of the pandemic. In the case of countries such as Italy and Spain it was really bad luck as in these countries close social distance is a part of their culture and they were caught off-guard not initially knowing how the virus spread. In our case, the personal distance is farther and people really did observe some of the COVID-related rules such as wearing masks and observing maximum personal distance. As for sharing experiences related to the pandemic, we are hoping this could happen in near future with sharing scientific research as well as prevention methods for the next virus!

Can we expect further improvement of relations between Iran and Austria in the foreseeable future, given the challenges including political climate in in the US, sanctions, etc.?

Austria relies heavily (to the tune of 60% of the GDP) on interaction with other countries in the form of global trade and industrial cooperation. With Iran, I would say that relations are very good but results could be much better! As I mentioned earlier, the potential is massive and we need to significantly improve relations on all fronts. Circumstances may not be perfect now, but we shouldn't give up. After all, when you stop aiming for better, you stop doing good!

The Future of Connectivity & 5G Rollout in Iran

INTERVIEW

Yaser Rezakhah is the CEO and vice chairman of the Board of Directors of the 3rd Telecom Network in Iran, a division of RighTel Communications Iran. He completed his bachelor's degree in telecommunications engineering at Amirkabir Technical University and obtained his master's degree from Khajeh Nasir Toosi University, both located in Tehran. He has more than a decade of experience in the field of telecommunications in companies such as MCI, Ericsson and Siemens.

By:Reza Taeb

Please tell us about RighTel, its history, brand identity and market positioning, as well as current status as the 3rd mobile network operator (MNO) in Iran.

RighTel is a leading ICT (Information and Communications Technology) company in Iran, established in May 2007. In 2009, RighTel was awarded a license by the Iranian authorities which included an exclusivity period for 3G networks, and a permit to operate as the third MNO in Iran. RighTel started its operation as the first 3G service provider in 2011. After an initial commercial launch of the service, residential customers also began to sign up for 3G services in March 2012.

Iran's Telecom sector, especially the mobile sector, has been among the most strategic, fast-growing and most profitable industries in our country. How would you describe the state of affairs in mobile communications in Iran and what are the current and future opportunities and challenges?

Nowadays, 3G and 4G mobile internet networks dominate the mobile industry in Iran with around 73 million individual subscribers, accounting for 82 percent of total mobile customers. We expect our latest broadband network services to continue to grow for the foreseeable future. In addition, 5G is growing rapidly worldwide is offered by 101 different MNOs, and is currently used in 44 markets around the globe. Today, numerous 5G smartphones have hit the stores and 5G awareness and desire to upgrade among consumers are on the rise. Iranian mobile operators will launch 5G commercially in the coming years and IoT (Internet of Things) will be an integral part of the 5G market here. We hope to be a leading force in this enterprise.

Opportunities and challenges that the 5G market will face can be listed in the following way:

Opportunities:

- New digital services will raise the average revenue per user (ARPU) and at the same time attract more customers to 5G service providers like RighTel;
- Changing consumer needs and behaviors will lead to diversification of new products and services;
- The introduction of 5G and related services will attract additional customers and will positively affect ARPU;
- The ownership of market share of emerging technologies such as IoT, cloud storage and computing, and big data, considered an untapped market in Iran, will be dominated by the first major player to enter those fields;
- There will be an increase in demand for LTE and IP based services;
- Investment opportunities in broadband products and services for bringing 5G to the market will be more available;
- 5G technologies will lead to introduction and offer of more innovative data plans by MNOs.

Challenges:

- The cost of investment in new technologies will increase, affecting the profit margins;
- Increased competition among IMOs in the mobile market will affect service rates in the national market.
- Lower service rates from so many players in the market will also in turn impact profit margins;
- Any failure in providing good service to customers will influence their decision to shift their business to better providers through mobile number portability (MNP);
- The mobile market will be over saturated; mobile active subscribers will reach 109 percent of total population with some subscribers owning more than one mobile phone line;
- There will be competition even in the low ARPU market.

What impact has the outbreak of COVID-19 had on the industry? How would you assess the overall and long-term impact of the pandemic on mobile communications?

Considering the wide-reaching levels of high-speed fixed broadband in Iran for so many businesses and residences, with the onset of COVID-19 we witnessed a 30 percent increase in average usage per user (AUPU) of data, as well as an upsurge in voice calls and messaging. During the pandemic lockdowns, internet service played a major role Iran's economy and people's lifestyles, and we believe it will continue to do so in the long-term.

From what we have gathered these past several months, it looks like the mobile sector will continue to show resilience to market fluctuations, but adverse impacts on roaming revenues will be felt more severely by more exposed players.
On the other hand, new consumption patterns will generate positive commercial opportunities.

Under such circumstances, competitors will find it more difficult to contend with enduring low churn rates. So for now, it's best if players focus on preventing disruptions in their strategic agendas in the medium term as the 5G rollout is postponed.

As one of the three main operators in Iran, RighTel has a strong data presence in the market and a high satisfaction rate in Tehran itself, but still lags in terms of number of SIM card subscribers and in providing service outside Tehran. Why is that? What would it take for you to catch up with MCI and MTN Irancell?

At this time, it looks like mobile network operators in Iran are competing for market share by continuously evolving. But as the mobile market matures, we will witness more effort in finding ways to increase ARPU and at the same time reducing customer turnover. These days, RighTel is competing with other operators for market share in a rather saturated mobile business sector.

Mobile market penetration (active subscribers) is more than 109 percent in Iran as mentioned above, therefore it will be more challenging to increase market share. To achieve this, RighTel is planning to invest in introduction of a more user-friendly billing system and a simpler product portfolio. We're also putting a lot of effort in adapting our service levels to different market segments by meeting their requirements where necessary. To achieve its goal, RighTel is currently also investing heavily in network coverage as well as building a vast retail network together with competitive prices and a sizable direct sales force.

The topic of the day in mobile communications seems to be 5G. What is all the fuss about 5G and how do you think it will change the world, and specifically Iran?

5G is an effective technology with a potential to transform the entire spectrum of industries while helping new businesses flourish, which in turn will lead to GDP growth in the long term. But the reality is that digital infrastructural transformation, which is a rather long process, is the bedrock of 5G technology.

Developing countries including Iran have to further expand their digital infrastructure and encourage a competitive environment before new technology mega-trends are able to emerge. Concurrently market players and leading MNOs will need to go through a digital transformation and build entirely new eco-systems to encompass both large and small businesses.

We are expecting 5G to be widely available in Iran in the coming years. It seems that demand for the new technology will grow exponentially. Evidently "gigabit broadband," "future corporate networks," "emergence of smart cities" and "digital industrial ecosystems" are the biggest drivers for accelerated 5G deployment. Some Middle Eastern regional operators have already launched 5G, so Iran must be more attentive to this effort.

What are the 5G strategy and plans of RighTel, both in terms of physical infrastructure (BTSs) and core network as well as services that you will be providing to your customers (homes and businesses)?
With your access to subsidiaries and holdings of The Social Security Investment Company (SHASTA), will you be focusing on corporate clients more than other segments of your customer base?

5G is becoming a strategic priority for telecom operators. RighTel is trying to follow the latest global trends and experiences. Meanwhile, the company intends to pilot 5G technology, both in the technical and business end.
RighTel is planning to engage with other market players in new ventures with "Business Partnerships" to build a new ecosystem and create new value chains.

The company is considering collaborating with other industries such as vehicle manufacturers, city administrative authorities, sports authorities, and governing bodies to announce plans for "smart mobility" and "smart cities." To utilize in-house business potentials, and in turn to provide new services to other SHASTA subsidiaries, dedicated teams for each subsidiary are required to study each of those industries and businesses and design appropriate solutions accordingly.

The strategy of RighTel will be different in terms of provided services, and scale and infrastructure development for various target segments such as gigabit broadband, next generation mobile user experience, future corporate networks, digital industrial ecosystems, smart cities, and the next generation infrastructure.

China seems to be way ahead of the rest of the world when it comes to 5G, is that correct? With sanctions on Tier 1 companies such as Huawei, however, it seems to be hard to work with China on 5G, unless you work with smaller players.
How can Iran adopt Tier 1 5G technologies without access to that upper segment? Are Tier 2 technology providers good enough for the rollout of 5G in Iran?

After the case of Huawei, the risk management for future deals should be a priority, especially given the current sanctions imposed on Iran by international bodies.
Meanwhile, the Chinese government is pushing to give a bigger part of the 5G market share to Tier 2 operators, and to establish up a 20 percent presence for them in the next five years.
Increase in market share for Tier 2 vendors will reshape the market completely, and will force more collaboration among Tier 2 vendors, giving them the potential to come up with better solutions. Meanwhile, most of the work that was previously done by Tier 1 vendors as far as technical elements of a program, as well as quality control, business, and demand tracking will be the responsibility of operators like RighTel.
Currently, the technical aspects of a 5G rollout cannot not be handled by Iranian mobile operators and their specialist teams alone. And this is another area where we must invest our efforts to be able to come up to speed for a successful introduction and implementation of 5G in Iran. To recap, going to Tier 2 vendors will be inevitable for Iran, and it will have its pros and cons.

Is Iran working on its own mobile communications technologies? How far have we come? What does it take for us to become self-sufficient? What are the pros and cons of working with foreign brands who may or may not be able to provide future services and support?

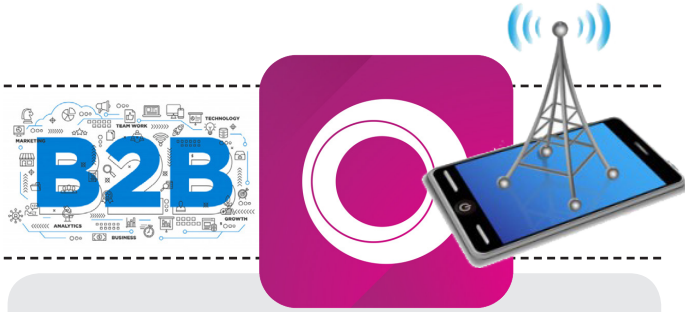
Mobile communications technologies are standardized, and it could be difficult to build whole new ones at this time. But there is a need to build new ecosystems that cover various industries. So, for instance, it is possible to supply some parts of the mobile network locally.
It is extremely difficult to work with foreign brands who may not be able to provide services and support going forward either because of any international sanctions or due to a company closing down. So, we need to be extra careful in choosing our foreign partners to ensure a long-term relation that can benefit both RighTel as well as our customer base.

What do you see as challenges and opportunities for Iran's Telecom sector given the outcome of the 2020 US presidential elections?

It is difficult to know what kind of negotiation opportunities the new administration will provide for us. But if the US returns to the JCPOA, it will be a relief for Iran as sanctions will be reduced and Iran's financial resources, which are currently blocked, will be released.

What's next for RighTel in terms of immediate plans, such as the introduction of Over-the-Top (OTT), Business-to-Business (B2B) services, 5G testing, etc.?

Next step for RighTel is to focus on digital services like OTT media service, new B2B products and services, emerging technologies such as IoT, cloud computing and storage, big data, increased LTE coverage and testing of 5G technologies. Digital services will raise the ARPU and attract more customers to RighTel services.



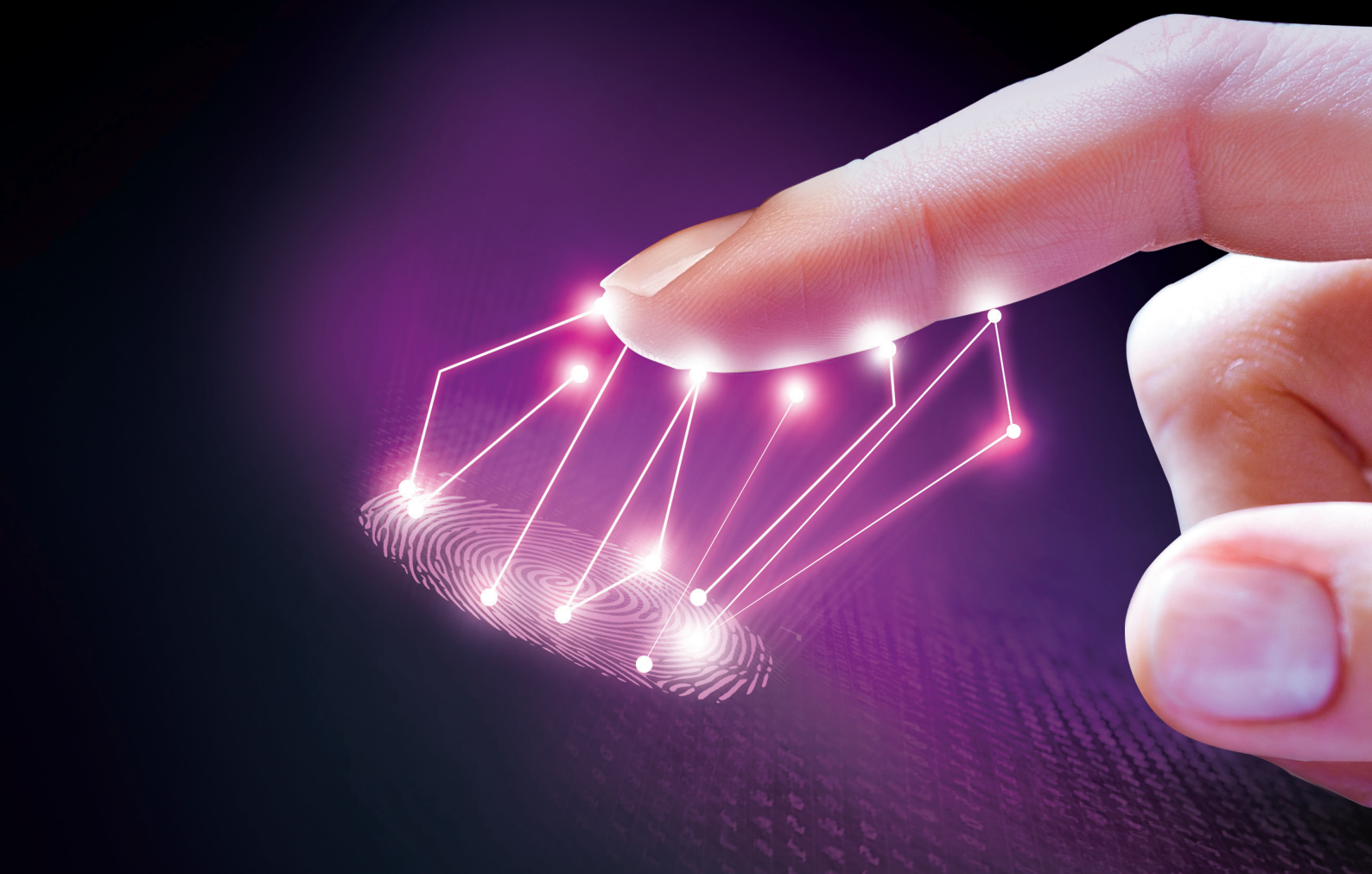
We hope launching new B2B products and services will enable RighTel to capture most of the B2B market share which will be transformative for RighTel.

Emerging technologies such as IoT, cloud computing and storage and big data will create new revenue streams for the company. Increase of LTE coverage could improve user experience, which could then lead to additional revenue for RighTel.

With advances in infrastructure and technical know-how, 5G is a strategic priority for RighTel and we will be collaborating with other industries to build the next generation (5G) market in the near future.

A Bright Future

with smart communication



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RighTel

www.rightel.ir

Bitcoin Demystified

INTERVIEW

Kevin Wen graduated from Tianjin University in 2001, then worked for Huawei and Harbour Networks in telecommunication system software programming, and holds several telecommunication patents. He then transferred to work in the marketing department, and became one of the pioneers to develop overseas telecom markets and manage strategic cooperation with European companies. After 2008, Wen started his own business Silk-road LinkedNet Technologies Limited, which delivers end-to-end VoIP solutions, WiFi commercial operation solutions, Instant Messenger and Social Networking platforms.

Please tell us, in plain language, what blockchain technology is all about and what current and future applications it may have in various sectors, from banking and finance to industry.

Blockchain is about information technology maintenance, a process to support the operational life cycle of business dealings. Blockchain keeps a ledger of all transaction records openly, consistently, and autonomously for all users. Current banking systems maintain transaction records, but the traditional system is complicated and not autonomous. The design of the conventional banking system is based on a hierarchical organization and can possibly be manipulated. Blockchain, however, introduces peer-to-peer technologies and autonomous mechanisms which run without intervention and manipulation.

What about cryptocurrency?
How are cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, mined and used? Who uses them (individuals, companies, etc.) and why? Why is Bitcoin by far the most utilized form of cryptocurrency?

Cryptocurrency is the one of the greatest utilizations of blockchain technologies. The unit value for each transaction is recorded inside a virtual "block" and is formulated by cryptography mathematics. This is the reason it is called cryptocurrency. Bitcoin is one of the first applications of blockchain. There are currently a total of 21 million Bitcoins available by a pre-defined rule, and the creation of Bitcoin is based on successfully carrying out operations of a node.

This node is basically a device such as a computer that contains a copy of the transaction history of the blockchain, and facilitates waiting transactions, organizing them into block format and linking them in a chain. The created Bitcoins are rewarded to the node that completes these tasks. A new block is created and linked into a chain every 10 minutes, meaning Bitcoins increase over time, until all 21 million Bitcoins are rewarded, and no more new Bitcoins can be created.
The operation of each node is called "Bitcoin Mining," and because Bitcoin has a defined value, more and more nodes join in. At any moment, there is only one node to link the block into a chain, so there's a mechanism for Bitcoin blockchain that enables each node to compete to win the permission to link the block into that chain.

This competition mechanism is based on Hash calculation: the higher the speed of calculation, the more chance to win permission. When more and more users accept the value of Bitcoin blockchain to transfer assets, and exchange Bitcoin into fiat currencies, Bitcoin assumes a real price. Benefits include its fast peer-to-peer, no-manipulation payment capacity and the fact that the value increases as the user base broadens. The size of nodes and the number of users who use blockchain technologies are key to blockchain's success. Bitcoin is the first blockchain in the world, and has the largest user base, making it the most significant application of blockchain.

How are cryptocurrencies priced? What are the risks of trading such currencies when prices fluctuate so much? What is the guarantee that the prices won't fall so much as to render a currency worthless?

The price of cryptocurrencies is established by the user's willingness to buy and sell. It is openly negotiated between buyers and sellers and is ultimately determined by the market. Since cryptocurrency is the capitalization of blockchain technologies, the price relies on the blockchain value. When taking cryptocurrency as an asset into consideration, fluctuation of prices by manipulation of individuals looking to make a short-term profit is unavoidable. In general, if a cryptocurrency player is

not familiar with the process of pricing and value of the currency, they should either familiarize themselves with the workings of cryptocurrency and take extra care when investing, or invest via professional asset management companies. This is very similar to stock and foreign currencies markets.

China is said to be announcing its own digital currency soon. Will it be adopted inside and outside of China in the way Bitcoin has been? What is it backed by and what are the differences between national digital currencies and global cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin?

Yes, this Chinese digital currency will be offered and used both inside and outside of the country. National digital currency is a new type of currency that mainly uses blockchain technologies as a new way to create and distribute currency. These blockchain transactions are even more secure, faster, and more cost-efficient because they are backed by the central bank making the capitalization different from that of Bitcoin which is fully autonomous.

Does 5G technology and its adoption have anything to do with blockchain and cryptocurrency?

These technologies are not interconnected. However, the 5G operation's business model can perhaps learn from blockchain and cryptocurrency.

Cryptocurrency mining has caused much commotion globally due to its high electricity consumption. You have been among the pioneers in Bitcoin mining; how do you see its future? What are the challenges and opportunities of Bitcoin mining?

Because of the increasing total value of cryptocurrencies globally, more entities have begun mining. The increase in price causes a surge in competition and the number of transactions which in turn raises the demand for electricity. The reason behind the rapid growth of the exchange rate of cryptocurrencies is the fast growth of transactions. The replacement of traditional transactions with blockchain-based transactions is an unstoppable trend. It is best to utilize this technology and reap its benefits before the market becomes oversaturated.

How can a country benefit from blockchain technology and mining without harming its other industries? Can mining be used for financing industrial projects and operations?

With regard to blockchain technology, all countries around the world have acknowledged the fact that using this technology in transactions will improve their industries by eliminating a need for middlemen and facilitating faster and more secure transactions. Mining is only one of the applications of blockchain that uses proof of work, or PoW, consensus mechanism, in which one party proves to others that a certain amount of computational effort has been expended for some purpose, and that the value of which is universally agreed upon, like gold value or fiat currency. If cryptocurrency is accepted as digital gold, it can certainly be used for financing industrial projects.

What are the key factors to consider when establishing a cryptocurrency mining farm?

Cryptocurrency mining costs include computer equipment, electricity, internet broadband, costs associated with a business facility, and human resources. But the main costs are computer equipment and electricity. The miner market is mature worldwide, with most of the production of miners taking place in China. After ordering from a reliable supplier, the other main factor to consider is the electricity cost. Since a mining farm is a data center and a heavy asset investment project, legal permission from the respective government is another key factor.
In order to provide a reliable supply of machines, maintenance, and operation training, a trusted platform has been organized. This measure has been taken to simplify the process and to allow investors to more easily join the mining farm business.

The Ins and Outs of the Motorcycle Industry

INTERVIEW

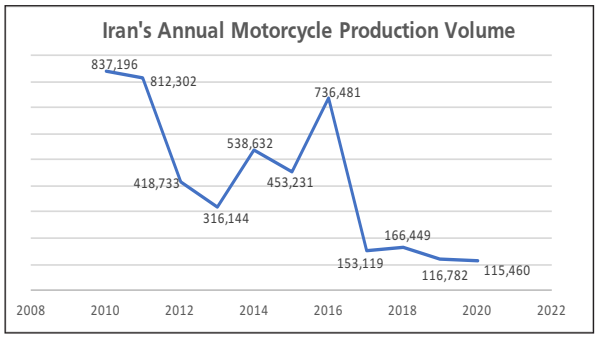
Majid Rezaei was born in 1977, Tehran, Iran. He had always been interested in developing and establishing his own business, therefore with great passion he continued his studies and acquired a doctoral degree in business. He has been actively working since 1993.
He joined Kavir Motor as their chief strategy and marketing officer, where he has made a huge impact on the motorcycle industry of Iran.

KAVIR
Distinction in Action

Use of motorcycles in Iran is a long-established tradition, with a large portion of the middle-class using motorcycles to commute to work as well as for short distance travel. Lately however, there seems to be a new client profile emerging, mainly those from the more affluent families who use motorbikes like the Vespa to avoid traffic for short trips inside the city.
What other segments of the population do you see emerging as users of this mode of commute?

In the past, motorcycles were considered a vehicle used primarily by courier and delivery services, or as you mentioned, as a means of commute for some.
Interestingly, over the past few years we have seen a new group of riders entering the market, majority of whom had not used motorcycles previously. This new customer base became interested in motorcycles due to city traffic issues, scarcity of car parking spaces, gas usage and the price surge in cars, and subsequently price increase in auto parts that could sometimes cost as much as a motorcycle! One certain outcome of this diversification in demand is the increase in the number of motorcycle dealerships around Tehran.

At the same time, another benefit of this new trend has been a decrease in city automobile traffic, overall fuel consumption, as well as a drop in air pollution as more businesses use motorcycles as their main means of transport of good and services when possible.



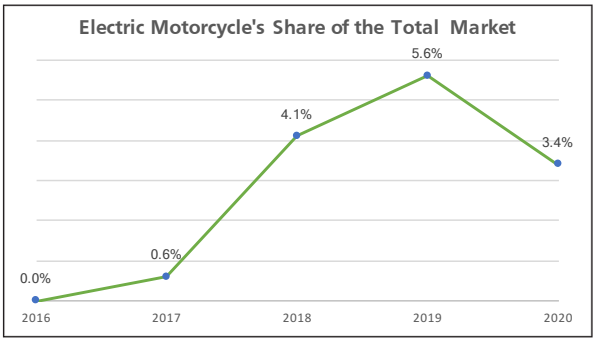
Could you share some statistics about the volume of demand in the motorcycle industry from the emerging trends in the sector?

In 2016, motorcycles sales accounted for only two percent of the market share for motor vehicles, which increased to three percent the following year, soon shooting up to 11 percent, and today stands at 25 percent. The lion's share of this growth can be attributed to the new emerging segment of casual "scooter" users, as those who use bikes

for their occupation need a more powerful motorcycle to satisfy their transport needs.

At Kavir Motor, our focus has been and remains on our corporate slogan, "Distinction in Action," which means we act differently from our competitors in this field. Our vision, "Changing the society's vision of motorcycles," also keeps our focus on community rather than profitability.

As per our social responsibility, we offer top-of-the-line safety equipment that are mostly imported from European countries such as Italy. The variety in our products allows customers to begin learning about motorcycles and safety early on. We offer various scooters and motorcycles from electric motorbikes to the 50-cc models, all the way up to professional and long-haul rides.



Kavir Motor has invested in producing zero-emission electric vehicles. Tell us about the "smart" motorcycles you carry, and whether they are manufactured in Iran or imported. What are the pros and cons of using them in Iran? What's the typical profile of a buyer of electric or smart motorcycle?

The main issue we had in the process of production was finding a new technique to increase the battery life in the most efficient way. At the time, the technology did not exist in Iran, but with the help of our Chinese counterparts, we established a factory in Iran to produce electric-motorcycle batteries, which has led to Kavir Motor capturing 62 percent of the e-motorcycle market share. But in general, motorcycles have been produced and assembled domestically for decades.

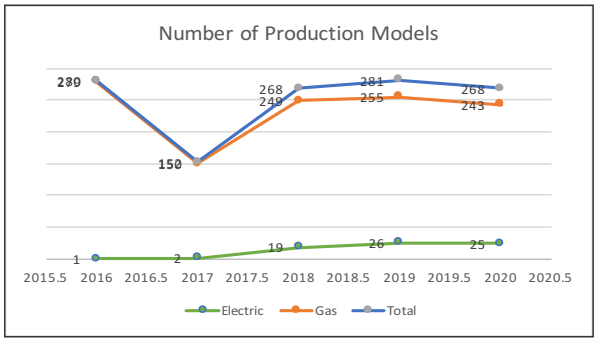
It is safe to say that the main public segment attracted to e-motorcycles are those who have no prior motorcycle experience and have been car owners.

They can be divided into three demographics: women, the elderly and adolescents whose families have always deemed motorcycles to be too dangerous.

Electric-motorcycles are safer and easier to handle for several reasons: their moderate speed, lack of noise pollution associated with regular motorcycles, a smoother ride for beginners, and finally the fact that they do not need as much maintenance as non-electric bikes.

However, there are some downsides to e-motorcycles which could include the difficult accessibility to electricity and charging stations, short battery life, and the low speed and driving range and as I have mentioned above.

As a side note, the average e-motorcycle has a top speed of 45 km/h and a battery life range of 45 km, although there are some exceptions. Also, electric motorcycles can be divided into two categories based on their battery types: those using acid-lead batteries and those using lithium-ion batteries.



With the large portfolio of foreign brands, have you had any issues with ongoing crises such as sanctions and currency crisis?

We currently work with over 30 companies in different continents. These companies are located in Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, India, China, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, France, Slovakia and Canada to name a few. We have over 240 motorcycle models, and 60 different bicycles as well as their accessories. Sanctions have been an issue, but during these difficult times, we have tried to maintain our contact with our international partners.

How has the pandemic affected your business? With people using public transportations less frequently, can one expect more demand for alternatives such as motorcycles? On the other hand, remote working dampens demand for all forms of transportation. What are your thoughts on this?

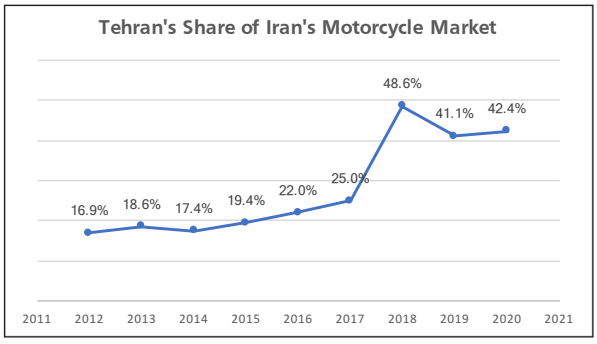
COVID-19 has had an adverse impact on the economy and it will continue affecting all industries. As for the motorcycle industry, we have fortunately seen a surge in the purchase of e-motorcycles and scooters as people try to avoid using public transportations. There is that new customer base too, as we mentioned above, who finds riding motorcycles as a fun outdoor activity!

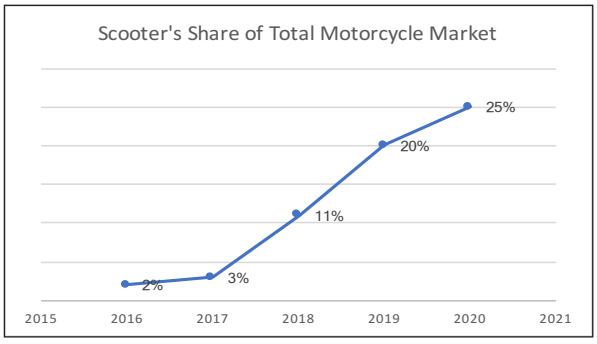
Motorcyclists are considered among the most dangerous drivers in Iran for not wearing helmets, not respecting driving rules and regulations and even having too many passengers on board.
How do you think one can change the riding culture in Iran and where does Kavir Motor stand in all this?

For the motorcycle culture in Iran, the joining in of a specific segment of the population, namely casual scooter drivers, can play an important role in the promotion of safety.

The increase in scooter ridership has highlighted some interesting facts for us:
We have noticed, for instance, that those using these vehicles tend to obey the traffic and pedestrian laws more strictly, cause fewer issues with respect to overall traffic, and use helmets not only because it is mandatory but also for their own safety.
In addition, these scooters are technically not equipped to perform some of the dangerous maneuvers that other motorcycles are capable of.

Therefore, we at Kavir Motor, think that the introduction of scooters will have a positive impact specifically on Iran's motorcycle culture, and consequently on city traffic in general.





Trade Investment Opportunities
for Investors in Economically and Politically Challenging Times

By : Andreas Schweitzer ***Arjan Capital Ltd., London***

Arjan Capital is a London-based FCA-regulated corporate- and trade-finance firm, specialising in cross-border M&A advisory, with a particular focus on central Asia and the Middle East, where our success streches back over 10 years.

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ARJAN CAPITAL

The Asian Development Bank has cited the annual trade finance gap, or the non-financed trade volume, to be 1.5 trillion USD globally or eight to ten percent of global trade.
For centuries, banks have facilitated cross-border trade finance, covering the risk of non-payment and have made a fortune doing so.
Post-2008 regulatory requirements affected trade and trade finance in the most detrimental way.
The World Trade Organization (WTO) cites over-regulation and macroeconomic mismanagement as the most significant barriers to trade finance.
Trade finance is crucial to the health of local and global economies. Importers need the guarantee that they will receive the goods and manufacturers require to be paid on time.
With over-regulation, over-compliance and Basel III regulations, banks are increasingly unwilling and uninterested to finance SME (small- and medium-sized enterprises) trade. Equity requirements and lack of leverage render trade finance expensive, hence often unattractive for banking institutions.
This is surprising since trade finance is a safe investment with less than one percent of transactions defaulting. Global Trade Investment, as we call it, is an underrated asset class. Many banks have faced severe losses due to fraudulent activities.
The size of the transactions makes it difficult for the banks to control the process, and scrutinize the markets and counterparties.
Various sanction regimes and the restrictive environment of many countries in Asia only deter them.
This has led to the massive trade finance gap. The World Economic Forum has estimated that the trade finance gap could reach even 2.5 trillion USD by 2025 as manufacturing shifts from China to smaller countries in Asia and Africa.

Effects of COVID-19 on the Trade Finance Market

Big banks have been pulling out of the commodity trade financing market since before the start of this pandemic. COVID-19 has intensified the pressure that banks are under, including lack of funding and increased capital adequacy requirements from international regulatory bodies. When big banks such as ABN Amro, ING and BNP Paribas are only willing to support larger companies, it could signal the demise of SMEs.
John Denton, the Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), commented in his letter to the Financial Times on September 18th, 2020 that the lack of SME funding is a G-20, hence global problem.
SMEs represent a significant portion of the global food chain; however, they might soon find themselves unable to receive adequate financing for shipping or manufacturing. Consequences can include price hikes and food insecurity.

Solutions

Companies having difficulties finding working capital and debt financing, calls for a stronger balance sheet by adding investor equity, which often leads to dilution of the existing shareholder base.
We see an opportunity for both buyers and investors to finance short term trades with what we coined "short-term equity" or STE.
STE is not a contradiction; it does exactly what its terms suggest, providing the buyers with the financial means to complete a purchase that their balance sheet could not afford, while providing the investors with a relatively high-yielding short-term asset-backed investment.
As with all equity, STE is remunerated with a share of the profit of the transaction, not with interests.

How we make trade financing work when banks will not:

- Banks' regulations in 2020 increasingly prohibit rather than enable businesses;
- Their sheer size often makes it difficult to scrutinize far away vendors economically;
- Smaller private sector entities are less bound by such stringed regulations.

Our Preferred Trade Investment Strategy

1. Repeated trade investment should be a critical feature in any trade investment strategy.
2. We prefer business continuity over spot transactions.
3. Any funding should not exceed 80 percent of the transaction percent of the required funding which also serves as first loss protection.
4. We prefer to own the underlying asset for the duration of the financing period.
5. We mitigate risk with Letters of Credit, export-credit insurance, where available, and partial prepayment.
6. Utilize short trade cycles of 30 and 120 days.
7. Focus on process and execution more than sectors or geography.

The Outcome of Solar Power Plant Projects in Iran

By Khosrow Salour, Sayeh Gostar Pars Managers Ltd.

Since the 5th Five Year Economic Development Plan (5YEDP) of 2010 to 2015, the government of Iran has introduced energy savings stimulus models in the form of reduction of electricity payments and feed-in tariffs as incentives in the form of long-term and above market value contracts offered to renewable energy producers for the purchase of electricity.

The government plan included the construction of renewable energy power plants and strategies to engender a decrease in residential and industrial energy usage. After the 5YEDP, and between 2015 and 2018, the Ministry of Energy entered a number of contracts with foreign and local investors.

The government's energy savings and development of renewable energies programs continued until 2018, at which point the contracts became unprofitable for most due to unforeseeable circumstances.
The Ministry of Energy is the main policy maker in terms of electricity generated from renewable energies and execution of energy savings projects. A subsidiary of the Ministry of Energy in charge of planning the production of green electricity is the Iran Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA).

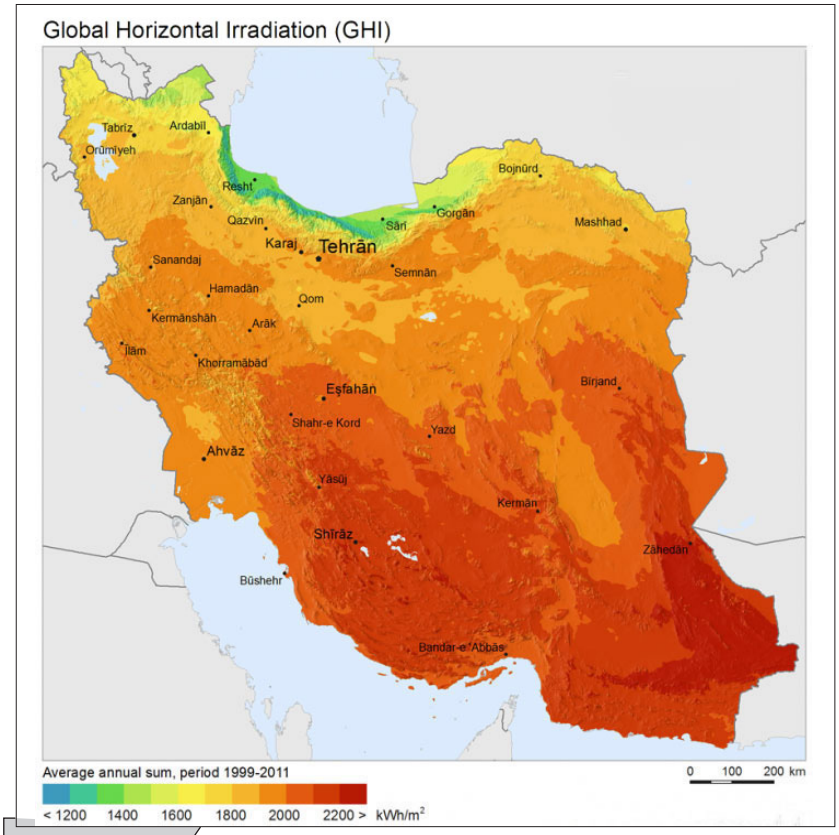
SATBA was established in 2017 with the merger of two of its subsidiaries, Iran Renewable Energy Organization (SUNA) and the Energy Efficiency Organization of Iran (SABA).

Iran has a huge solar energy potential with over 300 sunny days per year.

In fact, SATBA has determined that electricity production from solar energy alone has a potential of 60,000 MW, which is equivalent to over 72 percent of the country's current electricity consumption.

According to the Ministry of Energy, the highest solar irradiation areas are: Fars, Yazd and Kerman provinces– standing at 5.3 kilowatt-hour per square meter (kWh/m^2) in total.

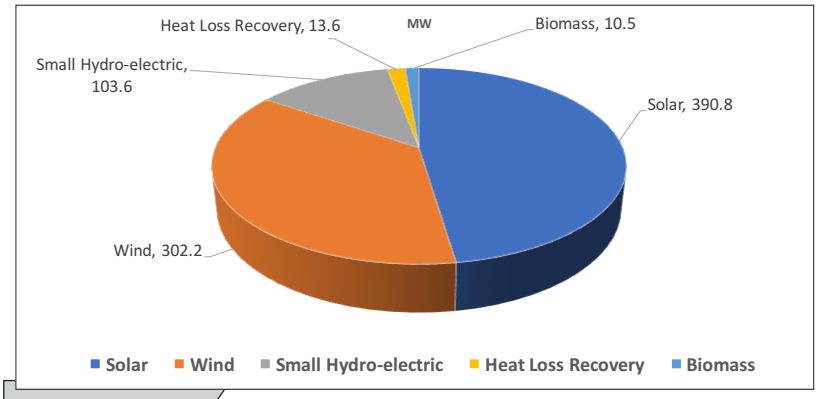
Other high potential areas include: Tehran, Semnan, Tabriz, Central Khorasan, Khuzestan, Hormozgan and Sistan and Baluchistan provinces.



Iran's Solar Map / Source: SATBA

According to the 6th 5YEDP (2016-2021), two percent of total electricity production should be from renewable sources. At present, this figure stands at one percent, with solar energy accounting for roughly half of this production.

According to the Ministry of Energy, the breakdown of renewable energy generation during the March 2019 to 2020 timeframe is as follows:



Renewable Energy Generation by Source March 2019-2020 (MW) SATBA
Source: Ministry of Energy Report for 1398 (March 2019-2020)

As annual electricity generation increases in response to the high demand, renewable energy production must more than double within the coming year in order to meet the aims of the 6th 5YEDP. However, since the reinstatement of the US sanctions in May 2018 and the devaluation of the IRR against USD and EUR, investment in renewable energies in Iran is no longer economical.

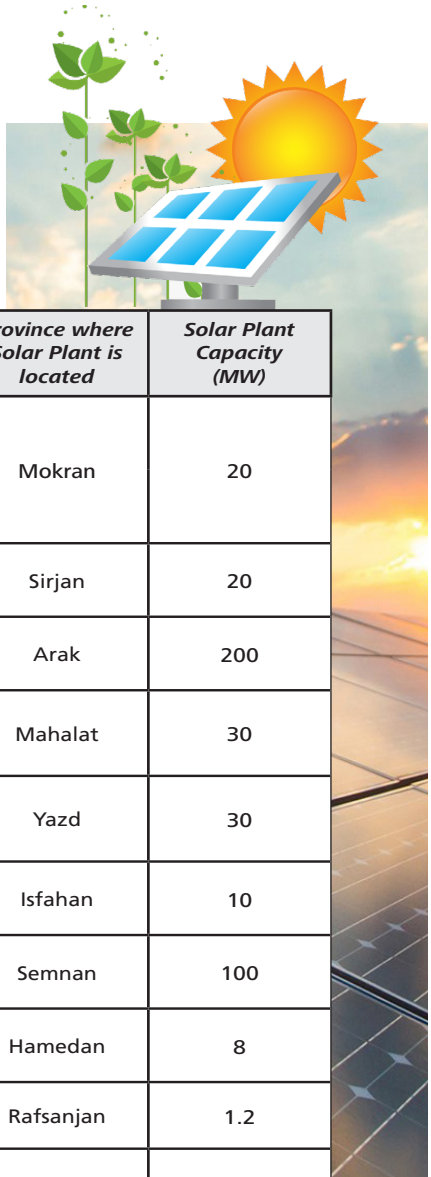
In terms of attracting foreign investment to the renewable energy sector, SATBA's performance during 2013 to 2019 was significant. According to reports issued by the Ministry of Energy, 2.5 billion USD had been invested in Iran's renewable energy sector from 2013 to 2019. Of that total amount of investment, 70 percent, or 1.75 billion USD, came from foreign companies, while the remaining 30 percent – equal to 750 million USD – was domestically funded. More specifically, foreign investment in solar power plants during the three years period amounted to 875 million USD.

However, foreign and domestic investments are no longer flowing into the programs, especially in the solar power sector. Obstacles precipitating dwindling foreign investment in the solar energy development projects are mostly related to US sanctions which have made transfer of funds a difficult process. Also due to the gradual devaluation of the IRR, the feed-in tariff incentives and SATBA's power purchase agreement (PPA) payments, both of which are calculated in IRR denomination, no longer serve as viable stimuli for international investors who have lately begun to experience a severe decrease in profits.

These exchange- and sanctions-related complications have led to the departure of many foreign companies from Iran, with a few even trying to liquidate their share of investment here.

Given that the Iranian government is keen on reaching the goals set for the 6th 5YEDP in renewable energy generation, drastic changes must be made – and very soon – to contract terms in order to attract foreign investors to the country. Also, in regard to solar power generation, there are many critical areas in which changes need to be applied.

This includes changes to the PPAs as well as introduction of more applicable incentives. Aside from the heavy sanctions imposed on Iran, the current coronavirus pandemic has also drastically dampened Iran's economy. As such, foreign enterprises interested in investing in Iran's solar power industry will need to anticipate a genuine lucrative business opportunity before venturing into Iran's renewable energy market.



Name of Foreign Company	*Originating Country*	*Province where Solar Plant is located*	*Solar Plant Capacity (MW)*
Durion Energy AG	Switzerland	Mokran	20
Adore GmbH	Germany		
Sub Solar	The Netherlands	Sirjan	20
Saga	Norway	Arak	200
Dutch Global Renewal Investment	The Netherlands	Mahalat	30
MTH Power Services Company	Austria	Yazd	30
Metka	Greece	Isfahan	10
Carlo Maresca SPA	Italy	Semnan	100
Athos	Germany	Hamedan	8
KPV Solar	Austria	Rafsanjan	1.2
Benefit & Solar Company	Austria	Fars	30

List of Foreign Companies Reducing Shares or Leaving Iran's Solar Programs

Source: SGPM

In early 2020 Carlo Maresca SPA partially withdrew from the project for a 100 MW solar power plant in the city of Garmsar, in Semnan province. The Italian solar development company had invested eight million EUR in the plant and had signed a PPA with SATBA in 2018. However, by April 2020 Carlo Maresca SPA had liquidated its shares in the Garmsar Solar Power Plant down to only 5 percent. This year, Durion of Switzerland also sold its shares in Jajeram-Mokran 20 MW Solar Power Plant, in Sistan Baluchistan Province, to the local investment company Gostaresh Melal Energy Company. It should be noted that Durion is also developing the 5 MW Kahnouj, Kerman Province Solar Power Plant, and is currently active in the project, as are a few other foreign investors in Iran's solar power plant operations.

The inability of the Ministry of Energy to arrange an acceptable feed-in tariff procedure in foreign currency has discouraged investment in Iran's power plant programs. The Ministry has a flexible calculation based on the inflation and devaluation of IRR. However, this cannot cover the financing costs and provide an adequate internal rate of return on foreign investments in the Iranian renewable energy projects. Whereas in 2016 the solar power plant project's break-even point was reached after four years, in 2020 this break-even point is estimated to be achievable in eight years, or double that time.

All in all, over the years the focus of the Iranian government has moved away from promotion and use of renewable energy resources toward efficiency in equipment and usage of modern technology. The Ministry of Energy provides incentives to power plants that invest in upgrading of generators, turbines, automation systems, as well as increased efficiency in electricity generation together with CO_2 reduction.

As the concept of energy savings has moved away from solar and wind power generation due to imposed sanctions and its financial burdens, the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Petroleum have both turned instead to waste-to-energy projects, Combined Heat and Power (CHP) and biofuel energy programs.
But conceivable future easing of the political climate, the resulting ability of Iran to export crude oil in large quantities and also any stability in the foreign exchange markets could no doubt once again make development of solar and wind power plants economical in Iran, especially with the country's vast potential for such infinite sources of energy.

> *Iran is planning to add at least 1,000 megawatts (MW), or 1 GW, to total power-generating capacity each year through 2022*

FACTS

4,870,000

doses of the coronavirus vaccine

have been administered worldwide as of December 29th 2020. Currently the most well received vaccine for the coronavirus remains the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech, with a success rate of more than 90 percent.

1,010,000,000

5G connections

that are estimated to exist by 2023. That would mean a 217.2% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) over the five-year period spanning 2019 through 2023.
That number was approximately 10 million in 2019.

17,600,000

Bitcoins currently in circulation.

The most prominent cryptocurrency in today's market has a cap of 21 million, which means no more than 21 million Bitcoins can ever exist at the same time. Bitcoin, like other cryptocurrencies that have gained much popularity over the past decade, uses blockchain technologies to facilitate transfer and creation of more Bitcoins. Bitcoins are awarded as devices carry out operations to facilitate trade, in a process referred to as Bitcoin mining.

300 Days

per year, 90% of the area in Iran has the potential to harvest solar energy.

Iran's geography and climate are highly suitable for the various forms of renewable energy technology. Iran currently is only producing 0.2% of its energy from renewable sources. The renewable energy sector mainly consists of wind (53.88 MW), biomass (13.56 MW), solar (0.51 MW) and hydropower (0.44 MW).

Retail & Real Estate After COVID-19

Iran,Turkey & Dubai Landmarks
Illustration by: Sam Sadr
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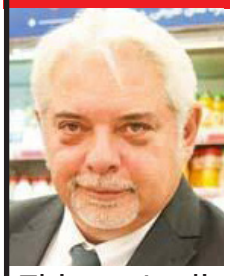
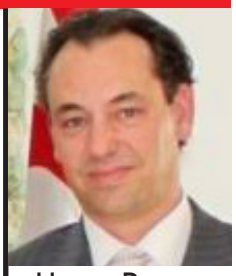
The Impact of COVID-19 On The Retail Sector

RETAIL

INTERVIEW



Thierry Joulin



Hans Roux

Hyperstar is an Iranian retailer with a fast-growing presence throughout the country.
*Inspired by large global retailers and led by world class managers with vast experience in international markets, it has revolutionized the Iranian retail industry, from supply chain management to launching its own private label. In this interview, **Thierry Joulin**, the managing director, and **Hans Roux**, the business development manager, discuss the retail landscape in Iran as well as the impact of COVID-19 on the sector.*

Thank you both so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview despite your busy schedule. We are very grateful. If you were to summarize the state of affairs of the hypermarket sector in Iran, especially during current economic conditions, as well as the pandemic, how would you describe it? Where does Hyperstar stand in this scenario?

Thierry Joulin: We do not have access to precise data for that entire industry group, but let's assume that presently major larger hyperstores, combining a department store and a grocery supermarket cover 12 to 14 percent of the market share or total capacity in that sector. But long-term room for growth especially in state-of-the-art retail is huge and we are aiming to reach 25 to 30 percent of the market share within the next five years.

In terms of the current crises, when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic times, the smaller grocery and convenience stores are in a better position compared to the larger establishments as people prefer to travel less and go to less crowded places. Even with the safety measures taken, at least at Hyperstar, which are remarkably high, we've noticed a decrease of foot traffic in our stores and we believe this has benefited the minimarket sector. At the same time, during the pandemic, although people are visiting our stores less often, they are buying in larger volume than before. We can say that we have had around a 20 percent decrease in foot traffic, which is quite high, but we have an increased basket size of 40 to 50 percent.

The trend in Iran's grocery retail seems to be transitioning from traditional grocery/convenience stores (what we call "baghghali" in Persian) **to modern super and hypermarkets. Is this the beginning of the end for small corner stores? In many other markets we have seen that such stores managed to co-exist with larger outlets. Will that be the case for Iran too?**

Thierry Joulin: During the pandemic, baghghalis will not be impacted by hypermarkets. But overall, the supermarket has definitely had an adverse impact on the baghghalis, and now these corner stores have to recreate themselves if they are to survive. Similarly, there were a lot of old-fashioned corner shops in Europe until 25 to 30 years ago. They had to improve their services and offer better quality products and become more specialized. If the baghghalis do not realize this, then they will certainly continue to be pummeled by the larger general grocery stores.

A question that may come up is whether the retail model in Iran is based on the minimarket. The answer is no. I think hypermarkets fulfill a specific need for large families, offering non-food and food products at a better price compared to that of the minimarket. For middle class families with children, it really fulfills their general needs and financial requirements, while the minimarkets respond to their need for proximity. The fact is that a higher variety of products will always be offered at the hypermarket. To give you an example, currently a minimarket carries around 1,500 SKUs (stock-keeping units) but a hypermarket carries around 11,000 SKUs and all at a higher volume too. Also, minimarkets do not carry a variety of fresh items, but in hypermarkets you have the traditional bakery, the delicatessen, the butchery, etc. Iran will keep with the worldwide trend; people will still go to hypermarkets to do their large shopping and in between their visits to the hypermarket, they will go to the minimarket for quick shopping.

The advantage of the hypermarket format in Iran compared to Europe is that in Europe we always speak of the end of the hypermarket model because in Europe over the past 15 to 20 years, this model has been severely hit by category killers like Decathlon, a sports superstore. You don't have this phenomenon in Iran, with strong category killers in the non-food industry, so hypermarkets can keep growing. This is why there is a bright future for hypermarkets in Iran.

In recent years in Iran there has been a mushrooming of multi-purpose complexes, such as larger shopping malls. Is it safe to assume that this trend is good for hypermarkets like Hyperstar?
Can you see yourself having a more widespread presence in quality locations through these shopping malls with better logistics and facilities? If so, how do you feel about the saturation of the market by so many new shopping malls that are almost half-empty, in some cases?

Hans Roux: First, on the fact that we have a higher number of shopping malls here, we need to understand that the development of commercial real estate in Iran has had a late start and in a non-standardized format. So yes, we

have seen many malls open but not all of them conform to usual shopping mall standards. We have a lot of what used to be called "passage" (as in the word's French sense) in Iran, which are the 1970s type of shopping malls. So, when you see those kinds of commercial developments with smaller retail footprints inside them, it is very difficult to position a hypermarket or a supermarket there.

But there is another issue we face here, and that is the pace of development of such projects. Unfortunately shopping malls take way too long to be built in Iran – sometimes 8 to 9 years - and they are seldom built up to code. As such, developers rarely deliver on schedule on the project due to financial difficulties borne out these same delays, which makes doing business with such developers a challenge and frankly quite unreliable. There are not enough developments in this country for us to be able to sustain a healthy growth and this is why we are moving forward with building our own structures. This is what we have done in Malard not too long ago with our first Hyperbox, and now we are going to move to lighter structures, similar to structures such as Walmart and Costco which are light-structured buildings with an open-air parking lot. This is the model that we plan to, and must develop, for the coming years because there is not enough economic development in this country when considering the size and population of the country. We are way below the international standard.

The standards of building a shopping mall are very different in Iran in comparison to the rest of the world. Some larger malls may have certain necessary resources and systems in place, like in Iran Mall, which has loading and docking facilities, etc., but some are not built like that. When it comes to the standards of building and operating shopping malls, what do you think are the main challenges and problems in Iran?

Hans Roux: You mention the main problems at the beginning of your question. The issue is that most of these malls are designed without taking into consideration the operational needs. We are obliged to enter each project at the very early stage. Oftentimes, we have to enter projects when they are in the design phase, not even during construction, in order to make the modifications required for us to be able to enter the site. Once the site is built, it gets very complicated, and this is usually the reason why we have to reject projects because mall owners do not hire specialists. They hire local architects who, naturally, don't have the experience of standard large-format retails.

If you were to say what percentage of shopping malls are built based on international standards, what would that be?

Hans Roux: Let's talk about two percent, maybe three. You cannot imagine the layouts we receive and the modifications that happen in the projects. Even with Iran Mall that has been designed abroad we had to work at a very, very early stage on the designs. We worked on the designs for seven months with the architects in Dubai.

With regard to Hyperstar's presence in Iran, when did you start, how many stores do you currently have, how many SKUs, and what are the key milestones and future plans?

Thierry Roulin: Hyperstar is registered as an Iranian company with 21 locations around the country. We just opened one last month in Orumiyeh (Urmia). We also have eight health and beauty stores called "Myli." We recently entered the health and beauty market and we plan to expand the Myli brand. Two of them have pharmacies and four of them have fast food restaurants!
The opening of the first Hyperstar in Iran was in 2009. We now carry around 30,000 SKUs and between the "direct staff" in charge of various products and "support staff," including the security staff, the cleaning crew, etc., we have created around 4,000 jobs so far. This year we plan to create 800 new jobs. We haven't had much growth due to some geographical difficulties; we're not dealing with 200 square meter stores where you can find a location very easily, but we do have a steady growth. I would say, we have presence in all the major shopping malls in Iran. Very few major shopping malls do not have a Hyperstar, with Palladium being the biggest exception.

How many suppliers do you have and do you produce some of your own products under your own private label, or is it all produced by suppliers?

Thierry Joulin: We have 600 suppliers and I think around 400 SKUs from private labels. They are produced under our quality control guidelines. With specific suppliers

with private labels, we have agreements for acquiring the relevant production process and those suppliers do regular inspections to verify the production process is adhered to. At the same time, we continue to develop our private label for other products. It's really not our job to compete with suppliers.

In 10 to 11 years, a brand of your magnitude could have opened hundreds of stores in another country. In your case, you have 21 stores. What are the reasons for the relatively slow growth, in terms of number of locations?

Thierry Joulin: You know, I must say that the growth of Hyperstar in Iran is quite similar to that of comparable businesses in other countries in Asia and cities where the population is extremely condensed and it's difficult to find large lots. As a result, the hypermarket will need to be outside urban areas. Due to the difficulty in finding those lots, we have a stable and balanced growth which is well-controlled. What's important for us is not the number of stores, it's the performance of each store we open. It's about quality, not quantity.

Hans Roux: The other matter you have to take into consideration for expansion in countries such as Iran, is the ever-increasing property values which is at the root of market stagnation. So, when huge entities such as Hyperstar enters the game in a project, we become pacesetters and, in a way, we set the standard for anchor retails in mall settings and the way they should function in Iran. But then, we have to deal with the steep rent charged by owners of these malls, which is often supposedly calculated by the face value of their property and seldom matches the real rental value.
So, this also slows down our expansion plans. But, as Thierry mentioned, we are looking more for quality than quantity.

Thierry Joulin: What we're looking at also is the performance of our sales per square meter.

Compared to other countries, do you believe that this sale per square meter is still high considering the currency devaluation and shrinking purchasing power of people?

Hans Roux: It used to be high.

Thierry Joulin: At this stage, you can only think in terms of Rial. The sales per square meter has to be adapted to the local currency because you don't have the same costs that you do abroad. It costs much less to build a store in Iran than it does to build a store in the UAE or France, so everything is relative. Staffing expenses in Iran, for example, are much lower than in Europe.

How do you see inflation compensating for the currency devaluation, with prices rising by 50 to 60 percent each year?

Thierry Joulin: No, firstly they don't compensate. And secondly, it's not because of inflation. It is not because of 50 percent inflation that you have 50 percent sales increase. It doesn't work that way.

Due to changes in purchasing power, you can have a change of habits in consumption. People are losing purchasing power and need to re-adjust their budget. So, I think a good example is when you have inflation of ten units, you may only gain six units in sales, maybe even five, which is a distractor because your costs in that case start to increase faster than your sales growth, which jeopardizes your profitability.
This is where you need to have a change in management of supplies and goods and reorganize in order to optimize your costs. Now, the advantage is that our biggest stores, like hypermarkets or big supermarkets, have a higher possibility to adjust costs than a minimarket because in a minimarket you have very little room to maneuver.

If you were to quickly take us through the process of developing a new location for Hyperstar from finding the right site, to the concept design and working with the owner of the shopping mall, what would that be like and how different is it compared to other countries? I assume you always have a long-term lease as opposed to purchasing land or renting, correct?

Hans Roux: Yes, that's correct. The projects are extremely long-term partnerships. Other than that, our processes are quite standard. Like anywhere else in the world, we have to scout the location as well as check the entrances and accesses and the building itself. Ideally, we enter the project at a very early phase so that the modifications we require are still feasible. At that point we can explore various aspects of the target location. These include site accessibility, floor plans, parking area size and access of parking levels from outside and from mall floors, and even flow of information between retail units within the mall, as well as ease of communication with management. Then we have our internal feasibility studies and authorization processes. It's not very different in other countries. The only difference is that it takes longer – not at our level but at a project development level.

Usually the projects take a long time and have many stops during construction. We have projects that have been under construction for the last 15 years.

Culturally speaking, each country has its own culture and has different levels of maturity with respect to modern retail practices. In Iran, we're not yet a mature country in those terms but we have a very good relationship with our landlords and they understand our terms, conditions and standards better and better over time so we have fewer issues as time goes by. The first projects were a little bit complicated, but now, we function in a very standardized way, which is quite transparent, and people know of the processes beforehand, so we don't have any major issues.

Thierry Joulin: As Hans mentioned, the biggest difference is the time it takes to finish a project. Here in Iran it takes six to eight years, whereas in Europe or Asia it takes approximately three years.

Hans Roux: I have an example to confirm what Thierry said. The Mall of Emirates in Dubai finished in 18 months, from ground-breaking to opening with all the shops up and running.

Thierry Joulin: We also have to take into consideration the country's prices and currency fluctuations, so the landlord has to frequently re-assess the feasibility of his project, find new cash, etc. It gets complicated. And also, do not forget that the banking system here in Iran does not allow the landlord to have long-term loans, whereas in Europe and UAE you can have long-term loans on properties. This is one of the major complaints here.

Hans Roux: The other impact is that, in the past, landlords would find time working in their favor. So even though they could manage to get more cash and resolve the new issues, a project taking a long time to yield returns is not a concern because with time the property price would increase. Today we're in a different situation because of the crises we are currently facing. The accumulation of all these events, including the pandemic, US imposed sanctions, and currency devaluation have made it so that the property price for commercial real estate is actually going down. Because projects don't finish on time, tenants are non-existent and the rental income that the landlords could count on in the past are no longer there. It makes the future of those projects even more complicated.

Iran is a country of shocks, risks and surprises. How does a company like Hyperstar respond and adapt to these constant shocks in the economy, from currency exchange to geopolitical tensions to sanctions? How do you survive and adapt to these changing conditions that are an exception to the rest of the world?

Thierry Joulin: You have to use two words in management: resilience and agility. If you can't be resilient or agile, you will disappear. This is how we operate.

Is it possible to say that, since you are part of the Iranian economy and not a foreign company, you don't face these shocks at the same level and stress that foreign companies do? Also, could it be that your line of business is almost, let's say, recession-proof or sanction-proof because people need to buy groceries and they want fair prices?

Thierry Joulin: We are severely impacted, but less than other industries. I think it's about the management style of the company. You know, you don't manage going through a crisis the same way you manage a company or country going through recession. You have to be resilient and agile and break the rules. In terms of crises, if you only follow the rules, you disappear. You have to re-think your model and be on a constant search for improvement. Then, especially during a crisis or recession, you have to offer the best prices possible in the country. It's our mission to protect the purchasing power of the Iranian customers. We will not desist at the expense of the supplier. We will do well by reorganizing internally to bring the lowest cost possible so the customer can afford the best prices possible.

With regards to the pandemic, what has been its impact in terms of consumer behavior? Are there certain categories of products that are doing better during a pandemic or economic crisis?

Thierry Joulin: At the start of the lockdown around

March, which was unfortunately at the same time as Nowruz, most of the purchases went towards food and hygienic products used to sanitize, clean, etc. At that time, the sale of top selling food items was severely impacted. In May and June, we had better sales in non-food items than food items. Why? Because for many months, families didn't spend on non-food items like textiles, homeware or appliances. After those few months of steady confinement, people are now allocating their budget to compensate for their lack of spending on non-food items. I would say that, probably in the last two months, our growth in hypermarkets is better than in the small stores because people started to re-adjust and spend on non-consumption categories. You also have the effect of devaluation, which is due to COVID-19. Traditionally, when the devaluation is high, like it is today, we have a very immediate impact on appliance sales, for example.

How has the pandemic affected suppliers and your relations with them?

Thierry Joulin: At the beginning, we had some supply chain issues, but they quite quickly got resolved. We didn't have a big issue of shortage, except in appliances, but this was not linked to COVID-19. It was linked to sanctions and currency devaluation. We're trying to fix it now, and all local suppliers are now asking the authorities to allow for a price increase because with the currency rates nowadays they cannot sustain their own prices. If they cannot obtain the price increase required, then after some time they will stop delivering because it's not sustainable for them. One week we are dealing with the shortage of pasta and in another ten days we're dealing with a shortage of Nutella, and we have to pay for that. But no, this is not linked to COVID-19. This is linked to devaluation.

So COVID-19 has had no impact on your relations with suppliers or the business model?

Thierry Joulin: Why should it?

I would have expected that some suppliers, because of the pandemic and the ongoing crisis, had to shut down or they couldn't be price competitive.

Thierry Joulin: That was the case after Nowruz, some supermarkets opened after one, two or three weeks. While we were impacted after Nowruz, business started to readjust in May.

Okay, so you expect things to go back to normal regardless of the currency problems and fluctuations. With regards to the pandemic, how has it affected the supply chain, consumer behavior, performance, etc.?
Do you expect a full recovery from COVID-19 or is there a permanent damage for people going to stores physically versus shopping online?

Thierry Joulin: With COVID-19 we have seen an impact on consumer behavior. We saw our e-commerce sales more than double in a few months. Some families have changed their purchasing habits and switched to online shopping, which is good. So, the e-commerce side of our business is quite okay. I think after COVID-19, people will go back to malls and hypermarkets again. People will need to entertain themselves as well; they won't only visit the hypermarket but also the restaurants, food courts, and shops to do some pleasure shopping. And this will add up. The biggest impact we face is devaluation. Because you know, in just a few weeks, the exchange rate went from 180 thousand IRR to 220 thousand IRR per USD. So, the prices are going to increase and there will be, again, a reduction of purchasing power.

In the absence of foreign brands in Iran, you must have had to work solely with local suppliers of consumer products, FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) such as packaged foods, beverages, toiletries, etc. How do you rate the quality and performance of local, consumer and FMCG products?
Do you see them having any chance of serious market expansion into other countries when it comes to competing with strong brands internationally?

Thierry Joulin: In the supplier network, you have the tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 suppliers.
The tier 1 suppliers are at the international level. You can take Kaleh, Sunich or Shirin Asal, for example, and in terms of the quality of products, packaging, etc. they are at a very high standard internationally. So, the tier 1 supplier definitely has a good chance to go and export abroad. When you go to the tier 2 or tier 3 suppliers, you hit some roadblocks.

Given Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 US presidential elections, and his willingness to rejoin the JCPOA, how do you assess the future of conducting business with Iran?

Hans Roux: I believe the impact on businesses will take three to five years to be felt! It's just purely mathematical. First you have the elections which we have put behind us. then the new president gets sworn in in late January, and finally he has to make the decision to go back to the JCPOA. But since this agreement doesn't exist anymore since the previous president withdrew from it, the new president needs to go through the legislative process of getting a new authorization from Congress to be able to enter into a new deal to be negotiated. So, this is three to five years, At best.

When there is a shock to the economy, such as a currency crisis, how do consumers behave? Do they stockpile products? Is there a rush to shop? Can we assume that the currency crisis may be impacting your business positively?

Thierry Joulin: We had a huge rush to our stores and people would make purchases that would last for one or two months, and were expensive items that they used on a daily or weekly basis. But because of the contraction of the purchasing power and the reduction of savings, such consumer behavior cannot be expected anymore, even when it comes to families. So, initially it had a positive impact. But aggregate sales are absolutely not the same as they used to be three, four, or even five years ago.

What advice would you give to either foreign companies who want to come to Iran or new suppliers who want to enter the retail market and provide you with products?

Thierry Joulin: If foreign companies decide to come to Iran, they have to structure themselves properly. And they can't use a stop-and-go policy every time there is a hiccup because of a special event in the country. So, either come here for the long-term or don't come at all. Secondly, with the current situation, if they don't want to produce locally, forget it, because you cannot build up, based on importation. And thirdly, their CEO has to be agile in response to crises. They have the option to select a person who has been working in Iran for a good 20 years or a person who hasn't.
If they select someone in the UAE where the business conditions are more normal, there is no way they can do the job in Iran. Consequently, the manager who is selected should have work experience in what we call "countries of practical economy," like those in South America or Asia.

For suppliers, I recommend investing in local production and developing the domestic market. We have a good example with Elite and Topa. When you see their growth in the food business, it is quite impressive. It's going at the micro-market with high profitability and it makes the market grow. So, if I were to give advice to a local supplier, I would say see what the trends of products are internationally, and choose segments where profitability is high.

What has been your personal experience as expats living in Iran?

Thierry Joulin:

First, for different reasons, to professionally bring a company from one store to 21 stores and from four hundred people to four thousand people, you can only enjoy this type of development in a business environment like Iran. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

And then privately, this is not my first expat experience. For me, living in other Asian countries was more complicated than living in Iran because the Asian society is very different from the society of the country I come from. And after 15 years of living in Asia, I had maybe two or three good Asian friends. This is because, honestly, we are from totally different cultures and backgrounds and don't have the same lifestyle.
In Iran, the thing is that you are aware that you are a foreigner.But overall, in both the business community, and also the private side, it has been a pleasure. There are many things you aren't able to do, but still there are other interesting and fun things to do and learn.
So usually I do not focus on the things I cannot do but rather on what I can do.

What about you Hans?

Hans Roux: Well my case is a little different. I've been in Iran for 29 years and have seen a lot of ups and downs. Sometimes I must admit that it gets to me. But all-in-all, I'm used to it and I'm having, you know, fun. Intellectually, it's very satisfying to live in a challenging atmosphere, as strange as it may sound!

FACTS

78%

Year-on-year decrease in foreign visitors to Turkey

In the first seven months of 2020, Turkey had only 5.4 million foreign visitors, a massive decrease from 24.7 million over the same period last year. This change is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1,000

USD Per Sqm.

Average price for a residential property in Tehran

In comparison, in Istanbul, the average price for a residential property is 1,500 USD per square meter while Dubai's real estate value has dropped to 3,800 USD per square meter for an apartment downtown from 4,824 USD per square meter in 2019, it is likely to drop further.

88,885,367

Number of international passengers passing through Dubai International Airport in 2018

While the number of passengers decreased to 86.4 million in 2019, the airport still retains the title of the world's busiest airport for international passengers for the sixth consecutive year. This airport spreads over an area of 7,200 acres of land. Terminal 3 is the second largest building in the world by floor space and is the largest airport terminal in the world. In 2017, 2.65 million tons of cargo and 409,493 aircraft movements made Dubai International Airport the sixth busiest cargo airport in the world.

1,825 Days to build one of the world's largest malls in the Middle East, Iran Mall

Located in the western part of Tehran, the first phase of Iran Mall was opened to the public in 2018 and has a total floor area of 1,700,000 square meters. Istinye Park in Istanbul, with a gross area of 242,000 square meters led by US architect, Tom Kelly, took a total of 3 years, or 1,095 days to be constructed. While Dubai Mall, with an area of 650,000 square meters after being postponed twice, was finally completed in 10 years' time.

50

Percent

Close to 50% of the population in Iranian metropolises are living in rented homes. The National Population and Housing Census in the year ending in March 2017 shows 31.7% of the country's homes and 43.5% of those in Tehran are rented.

$490,000,000

Losses in the Iran tourism industry

Only 74 foreign visitors visited Iran during the first quarter of the Iranian year (March 2020 – June 2020). Compared to the same period last year, 2.3 million foreign nationals had visited the country. In total, Iran welcomed 8.7 million foreign visitors in 2019. Prior to 2020, there had been a 40.7 percent increase year-on-year for foreigners visiting Iran. The plummeting tourism numbers this year is attributed to the coronavirus pandemic.

1,864

Number of properties purchased by Iranian nationals in the first quarter of 2020 in Turkey

Iranians led foreign buyers in the Turkish housing market during this period of this year, nearly doubling their property purchases in the country compared to last year's figures. In 2019, Iraqis were the biggest foreign buyers of homes in Turkey, with 7,596 home purchases.

43.1%

Increase in land prices

On a year-on-year basis in Iran during the fourth quarter of the last Iranian year.
Home and rent prices also increased by 43 and 48 percent respectively according to a recent real estate survey by the Statistical Center of Iran.

553 USD

Average amount spent per visitor per day in Dubai

International visitors in Dubai spend more there than any other city in the world in 2019. Paris ranks in second place with about 296 USD spent per person per day, and Singapore in third place at 272 USD per day. In total, about 30.82 billion USD was spent by travelers in Dubai in 2018.

11.46 Percent

Emirati population in the UAE

Emiratis account for less than 12% of the nation's residents. Conversely, expatriates and immigrants account for 88.54% of the United Emirates population.
In 2020, the total population in the UAE is about 9.8 million meaning only about 1.2 million people are Emirati citizens.

The Road to Building Iran Mall
Kayson Co.

INTERVIEW

Behzad Haji Shirmohammadi, was born in 1969. He has a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Iran University of Science and Technology.
Shirmohammadi started his career by working for Charman Company as a site supervisor. His subsequent posts were as site manager for the Iran Industrial Development Renovation Construction Co. and later at the Pars Civil Union Company. He finally joined the Kayson family in 2006 and started working on various projects as a project manager for several years. His assignment as the project manager of Iran Mall in 2014 at Kayson led to his promotion to CEO of the Omran Kayson Company where he has been serving since 2019.

Thank you so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview despite your busy schedule. We are very grateful. Please tell us about the founding of Kayson and its achievements to date.

Kayson Inc. was established in 1975 with the goal of construction in the residential, commercial, and urban infrastructure sectors. The company has more than four decades of successful experience in implementing large development projects such as oil industry complexes, gas and petrochemical plants, industrial factories, roads, highways, underpasses, tunnels, dams, airports, irrigation and drainage networks, subways and water and sewage transmission and treatment systems, and also in building residential and commercial complexes.

Kayson is one of the leading private sector companies in the country in general contracting and engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC). In order to develop its supply chain within a holding company concept, Kayson created a network of companies early on and still carries out its projects under that umbrella. **Kayson seems to have been involved in the Iran Mall project from its inception and tender phase through its actual operation. Please give us a description of the whole process including project size, volume of work, types of contracts and your project oversight experience.**

In 2014, Ayandeh Bank chose Kayson as the main contractor of Iran Mall based on its domestic and international prestige and success. For this project, Kayson made every effort to optimize the initial designs, broaden local engineering knowledge of all aspects of commercial complexes, promote utilization of local materials, and improve domestic technical expertise.
This giant project with more than 2,000 sub-contractors, suppliers and consultants who were working under the supervision of Kayson as their contract manager, was executed in a methodical and efficient fashion and delivered on schedule to begin operation. I believe this goes to show the company's ability to carry out large projects with diverse dimensions expeditiously and on an international scale in our country. The project size is in

accordance with the table below:

Project land area: 312,360 square meters
Total area of infrastructure in the initial development: 1,096,091 square meters
Total area of infrastructure after final development: 1,700,000 square meters
Net commercial area in the original plan: 186,000 square meters
Net commercial area after changes: 305,000 square meters
Net area of the exhibition center: 40,000 square meters

Please provide a brief explanation of the contract acquisition, selection of sub-contractors, consultants, and suppliers for the Iran Mall project.

Once the contract was signed with Ayandeh Bank, we drafted a tender document detailing the required goods, works and services of suppliers and proposed list for selection of contractors from Kayson's vast network of vendors. The proposal was readily approved by the bank, and its technical team. Next phase consisted of numerous meetings with the bank as well as our technical consultants for the final selection of sub-contractors, agreements on pricing, and other aspects of the project in accordance with the approved proposal. Note that for selection of sub-contractors, the list of vendors evaluated and recommended by Kayson was what was being considered. For a project of this vast size and with this huge volume of requirements as the Iran Mall, the country's top-ranking construction and infrastructure contractors were assembled to build its basic physical and organizational structures and facilities. In addition, due to the breadth of the project in its other elements such as extra-low voltage electrical system, fire detection and alarm systems as well as unique spaces and features of the mall, contractors with specific expertise were selected.

The proficiency of these skilled contractors together with the seamless and professional management of Kayson as contract manager, resulted in a successful project and a world-class mall.

As general contractors of the project, Kayson was involved in the design and engineering process of the Mall. You also dealt with domestic and international consultants to bring the project to fruition
Please explain your experience working with such diverse array of people, and how you were able to integrate the original design with local architectural elements?

The initial design of the complex was done by the Canadian company, NORR. About 2,500 sheets of drawings provided by NORR were first reviewed by the Iran Central Core of Engineers upon the requests of the Ayandeh Bank, or the client, to adapt the architectural style of the proposed design to Iranian architecture. In tandem, Kayson prepared about 23,000 new plan blueprints with the help of its design and architecture consultants, both domestic and foreign, who numbered around 50 in total. For this work, a new unit called "field engineering" was created within Kayson in order to oversee the necessary coordination among outside consultants, company executives and the technical units. Due to the size of the project and construction conditions, finished initial design plans were re-submitted to the execution unit for on-site review. Finally, minor changes to the drawings were recommended and agreed upon by the parties and necessary modifications were made by the engineering unit. Our experience demonstrated that in large-scale projects, having in-house field engineering units is important and necessary for coordination and building of consensus among executive units, and for support of outside engineering teams. For an elaborate and intricate project like Iran Mall, relevant sub-contractors were typically given the project plans ahead of time to review and consider in case of any discrepancies with respect to on-site work. All unresolved questions and any changes regarding the designs or work to be done were passed on to appropriate technical teams to be addressed and dealt with. And once again, field engineering units approved the final plans in follow-up meetings, and new directives were then sent out to relevant sub-contractors.

Please give a brief explanation about the effects of Building Information Modeling (BIM) used before the start of the project, during implementation, and finally with respect to operation of the complex.

One of our successful experiences in this project has been the use of BIM. Considering the specs of the Iran Mall project, with its large-scale construction size and vast area, and also in terms of the number of individuals and companies active in the project, it was decided early on that it would be best to take advantage of BIM. As for its implementation, an Autodesk software program called Revit was selected as the main tool of the project. But the real challenge in implementing BIM remained its lack of utilization in similar projects until then. To accelerate the process, training in BIM for different levels was started first with the management of Kayson. The priority was to train for Revit software experts which in turn would accelerate the implementation of BIM. Before the start of the project, there were a handful of people proficient in BIM technology and Revit, but eventually about 300 architects, structural and installation engineers were trained in this system and mastered the Revit software.
Once initial architectural plans and design of facilities were finished, they were provided to relevant contractors. Next, digital drawings were modeled, and any discrepancies were sorted out and altered to comply with technical and executive requirements, and compatible with architectural details. Subsequently, each plan was reviewed with representatives of different departments of the Engineering and Execution group in a joint meeting and any incompatibility issues with respect to engineering standards were addressed. Then the forecast of maintenance conditions was re-examined, and issues resolved, and the project was confirmed for fulfillment.

Taking these measures significantly improved the prioritization process and reduced delays in implementation, accelerated conflict resolutions and favorably impacted the financial costs and efficiency of the project, compared to other similar enterprises. By consolidating the system files related to each area into one file, everyone working on the project was able to benefit from an integrated 3D model of all project spaces with the necessary details.

Due to the fact that Iran Mall is the largest commercial center project in Iran and new construction methods have been used, do you have a way to record these experiences for Kayson and those interested in this field?

Kayson, as one of the leading international general contractor companies in Iran, has considered management as a form of acquired knowledge and as one of the main pillars of its project management in all stages of development. Given the mission of "development at a global level," Kayson is committed to quality implementation of their projects, and this requires the transfer of experience and knowledge from one job to another in order to improve the caliber of every project.
The size and multitude of elements of the Iran Mall project, many of which have been implemented for the first time in the country, have turned this project into a valuable treasure trove of knowledge.
To organize accumulated implementation know-how, the knowledge management team has compiled all data regarding the project and examined it with leaders of relevant project units in accordance with the AAR (After Action Review) procedures. Ultimately, the vast amount of experiences and lessons learned in commercial project management related to Iran Mall were assembled under 57 titles as executive and management manuals some of which have already been published, with others soon going to print.

It is worth mentioning that in addition to the aforementioned books, a wide range of information related to the Iran Mall, from the initial project phase to the time of operation, including original plans, technical specifications, phase two maps, operational information, etc., have been gathered and put together in form of a single handbook which is an overview of the various stages of the project.

Please describe your method for completing and delivering the project to the project sponsor and operating management.

By developing and implementing Inspection and Test Plans (ITP), adhering to quality control guidelines and completing checklists at every phase of the process, and following operations permit protocols, Kayson inspected the performance of all project sub-contractors for maximum quality control to prevent any defects and problems at the time of delivery. In addition, according to the scope of activities as well as the project's unique spaces and operating conditions, the job was divided into different sections and disciplines so that each part could be delivered and operated separately according to its assignee.
To accomplish this, working groups were formed with representatives of the client, outside consultants, contract managers and sub-contractors, and even sometimes the corresponding vendors. At the time of delivery of each phase or space, applicable punch lists were reviewed and all and any issues addressed in such a way that said area/job would be delivered ready for operation.
It should be noted that as requested by the client, the final handbook of the project included collected information about the project in an integrated manner and with search ability in the form of an all-inclusive software. The location of all project equipment as well as all related data including purchase information, certificate of authenticity of goods, test results, technical specifications and relevant information sheets are included in this software, with links for installation and service instructions and a list of spare parts.

As one of the largest companies in the construction industry, what is your recruitment process?

In order to provide a workforce in line with Kayson's strategy of "securing an able pool of personnel," human resources management selects employees based on organizational competencies, and corporate principles and values. It is worth mentioning that a sense of responsibility, teamwork spirit and relevant training for job requirements are the priority of the recruitment process.
One of the principle goals of the company is to broaden the level of staff skills through approved training courses. All job applicants can refer to the Kayson HR recruitment website and after reviewing the list of our job opportunities, applicants can complete and submit an employment questionnaire. In addition, the company uses other channels of recruitment such as employment agencies and job advertisements in national newspapers.

Iran's Grand Bazaar: Iran Mall

In the heart of Iran, the land of priceless treasures and glories of Eastern history, a giant market with 1,700,000 square meters of retail space and 700 enormous commercial units, promises that this region of greater Tehran will have a golden future worthy of sophisticated Iranian people.

The attractions of this magnificent tourist destination include an international exhibition center, the Didar spiritual garden, the Eshragh Porch, a summer sports complex, an auto showroom, a luxurious multi-complex movie theater, the Jondishapour Library, the Garden of Nations restaurant with a menu from the four corners of the world, the Fairmont five star hotel, the Mahan Persian garden, an ice skating rink, the Diamond Porch and a 14,000-meter musical fountain.

In the configuration of Iran's grand mall, "garden" has a broad and basic definition. Mahan and Didar gardens have been a modernized redefinition of Persian gardens over the centuries, providing a pleasant atmosphere with a combination of flowing streams and trees among the gaze of visitors sitting on the porch and the lanai. In these gardens, where they have left behind the crowded city, visitors experience leisurely shopping and enjoy pleasant tea-time under a soft blue sky, with sound of water and aroma of rosewater surrounding them. Eshragh Porch not only mesmerizes visitors by its fascinating dancing lights, but also allows them to marvel at the sunset and sunrise by virtue of a masterpiece of modern engineering.
A twelve-cinema complex equipped with state-of-the-art and unique amenities in-line with top of the line movie theaters across the globe, creates an incredible experience of watching the brilliant "seventh art" of filmmaking with the highest quality surround sound systems.

Iran Mall Among the Best

Iran's new Grand Bazaar, called "Iran Mall," is one of the largest commercial, cultural and social projects in the world and is located between the two metropolises of Tehran and Karaj in the southern slopes of the Alborz mountains. This enormous complex is surrounded by three major airports of Mehrabad, Payam and Imam Khomeini and is located in northwest of the Greater Tehran metropolitan area. The Mall is adjacent to Chitgar Forest Park near the Chitgar Lake and at the end of Shahid Hemmat and Shahid Kharazi highways. The complex is built on a large piece of land with an area of more than 317,000 square meters.

This magnificent structure is the result of multiple factors, including Iranian vision, impetus, and technical-engineering ability in collaboration with local expertise and Iranian artisans' efforts with sponsorship of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is a modern national asset created for the current and future generations of Iranian people. The grand opening ceremony of the complex was held on the International Workers' Day in April of 2019, which also coincided with the birth of Hazrat Vali-e-Asr, the twelfth Shiite Imam. It was a glorious event for the VIP and was attended by the most famous and well-known luminaries in the fields of economics, culture, trade and media.

The original idea for the development of this project came from the well-known Iranian architect, business activist, entrepreneur and engineer Ali Ansari. Dr. Ansari accomplished this colossal undertaking in spite of all the general difficulties and roadblocks during Iran sanctions by the international community, and he made all Iranians proud.

Tourism Development

After extensive technical, economic, and financial feasibility studies, it was important to decide on a viable location for a complex of this size. It made sense to build the Mall near Iran's capital city of Tehran, and the fact that Karaj, another metropolis with a large population, was only 30 kilometers away, made pinpointing a location between these two metropolises a clear choice. The area, District 22

in the outskirts of Tehran on the map, additionally benefitted from accessibility to and from surrounding cities with the Tehran-Karaj Freeway and the Tehran-North Highway close by. This latter highway, which is still under construction, is slated to be the main traffic artery of the country connecting it from north to south and becoming a major route facilitating travel in Iran.

Over the years, District 22 located in the west side of greater Tehran has become a center of scientific research companies and labs. Due to its vicinity to Tehran and its better quality of air, the area has also attracted visitors and city dwellers in search for weekend leisure and picnic fun. But city planners from even other parts of the country, together with government agencies have seen more potential in the area. Urban planning and development for this significantly large district located in such prime area between two metropolises of Tehran and Karaj have been in the works since 2011. With homes for employees of companies and research labs, and even those seeking less polluted air for where they call home, and entertainment facilities for weekend visitors in search of natural surroundings and parks, it is estimated that District 22 can grow to a town of approximately 500,000 residents with an additional 450,000 holiday and weekend visitors by 2021.

City and urban planners have come together with architects these past several years to respond and better serve this surge of future new dwellers of District 22. Municipal agencies are also working with various organizations and authorities to ensure an integrated and well-coordinated brand-new township with a variety of needs and requirements. They understand that a new city is spawning around a dynamic scientific sector of the country, with an educated and skilled workforce as its new inhabitants. Outlining and implementing significant projects that meet the educational, medical, cultural, and other essential service needs of its residents is not the only challenge facing the urban planners and municipal authorities. They have also committed to provide other professional job opportunities as well as further developing leisure spaces for the holiday and weekend visitors with the aim of transforming District 22 into one of the prime areas of attraction and allure for people from all walks of life.

There has been no lack of interest from investors for District 22. In fact, both private investors and government agencies have shown great interest in partnering for financing of projects in the area. The fact that the district is in the proximity of major highways with easy access to not only metropolises of Tehran and Karaj, but also other major cities in Iran, has made it a desirable investment opportunity that will enhance its chances of becoming a new center of economic development.

Economic Development and Employment

In today's world and with the current economic recession in many countries, banks enter the market directly and without proxy as to reduce investment risks. Around the world there are entrepreneurs and businesspeople with knowledge and expertise to pursue an original idea. Most often their greatest challenge is attracting financial resources and meeting regulatory requirements and statutory regulations for larger projects, such as the Iran Mall.

Moreover, private investors as financial sources of funding can prove inadequate, and as such, entrepreneurs will turn to banks for financing of their projects. Ayandeh Bank was founded by merger of several institutions, corporations, and banks. Each of these financial institutions had existing investments in separate projects, and one such project was the Iran Mall deal. Once the merger finalized under the Ayandeh Bank umbrella, the bank became the main investor in that project. Most commercial complexes either focus on entertainment ventures or the retail aspects of business, but the Iran Mall project encompassed the entire array of the retail sector alongside the unexpected chance of enjoying peace and quiet of nature.

Ayandeh Bank, as one of the largest and most successful private banks with more than 17,000 shareholders, hires 3,900 skilled personnel and services over 3.5 million customers from general public to corporate entities. With a strategy for an effective as well as efficient presence in the commercial, institutional, micro, and private banking services, and benefiting from the latest information and communication technologies, Ayandeh Bank has 200 active branches across the country. Iran Mall project was funded and sponsored by Ayandeh Bank, but it is a nationalized enterprise. As such, all commercial and retail spaces remain under the ownership of the bank and are not transferrable as a whole or in part. Units and components of the Mall are either rented to private entrepreneurs, or the bank gets a share of the revenues from the commercial space. As a nationalized entity, Iran Mall belongs to the people of Iran who are the ultimate beneficiaries of this grand vision.

During the construction phase, the Iran Mall project provided full time employment for over 20,000 people for six years. Since its opening to the public, the Mall has provided 18,000 on-site fulltime employment opportunities and more than 100,000 ancillary jobs and services. With significant positive impact on addressing the problem of unemployment in Iran and by helping to create the requisite infrastructure for further investment, Iran Mall is poised to be at the forefront of a strong and dynamic economy. Furthermore, by averting the outflow of international currencies along with drawing tourists from all over the world, the Mall is guaranteed to be a promising economic magnet in the region.

Iran Mall was represented at the MAPIC (Le Marché International Professionnel de L'Implantation Commerciale et de La Distribution), the world's most prestigious shopping mall exhibition, which is held every year in Cannes, France. It has also been selected as the most significant commercial and multi-purpose complex in the Middle East for three consecutive years by World Retail and Leisure International (RLI). This magnificent complex was lauded to the international community in various magazines and brochures of MAPIC and RLI, and in 2017 became the recipient of the RLI award for the best mall in the world in terms of size, scope of services, and variety of cultural and entertainment venues.

What differentiates the Iran Mall from similar multipurpose complexes elsewhere in the world is that retail and shopping stores and concessions comprise only 30% of its area, leaving the majority of the Mall area for recreational activities, cultural venues, tourist attractions, religious observances, sports activities, leisure and of course parking.

The Cultural Heart Of Iran Mall

Jondishapour is a familiar name for history lovers and also a magnificent library with the beautiful interior wood work that mesmerizes any visitor.

The library has an area of more than 3,300 square meters and is considered the cultural heart of Iran Mall. This library offers tens of thousands of exquisite books, that help to promote Iranian culture.

Jondishapour in addition to acting as a traditional library, has the capability and plans to hold events such as unveiling of books, cultural meetings, art and philosophical gatherings and much more.

The library was inspired by the Oxford University Library,

located in the UK with the interior being constructed completely out of wood, utilizing the art of Iranian architecture.

Having this magnificent library in Iran Mall showcases the greatness of Iranian culture an art.

Turkey's Real Estate Market Post COVID-19

Burak Selvi *is the founder of Property Guide Turkey (PGT), specializing in real estate development and transactions. Selvi is also managing partner of ATA Kurumsal, a consultancy firm offering immigration and corporate services. After graduating with a degree in international relations in Turkey, Selvi continued his studies at Paris Dauphine University in France and received another degree in banking and finance. Upon return to his native country of Turkey, Selvi worked in several top real estate development companies in various management and executive positions such as chief sales officer, chief marketing officer, as well as chief business development officer. He then moved on to establishing his own company, PGT, soon attracting major clients, and providing consulting services to corporations like Emlak Konut Real Estate Investment Company, affiliated to the Housing Development Administration of Republic of Turkey (TOKI), as well as Izmir Chamber of Commerce and numerous other leading development companies and private equities and funds.*

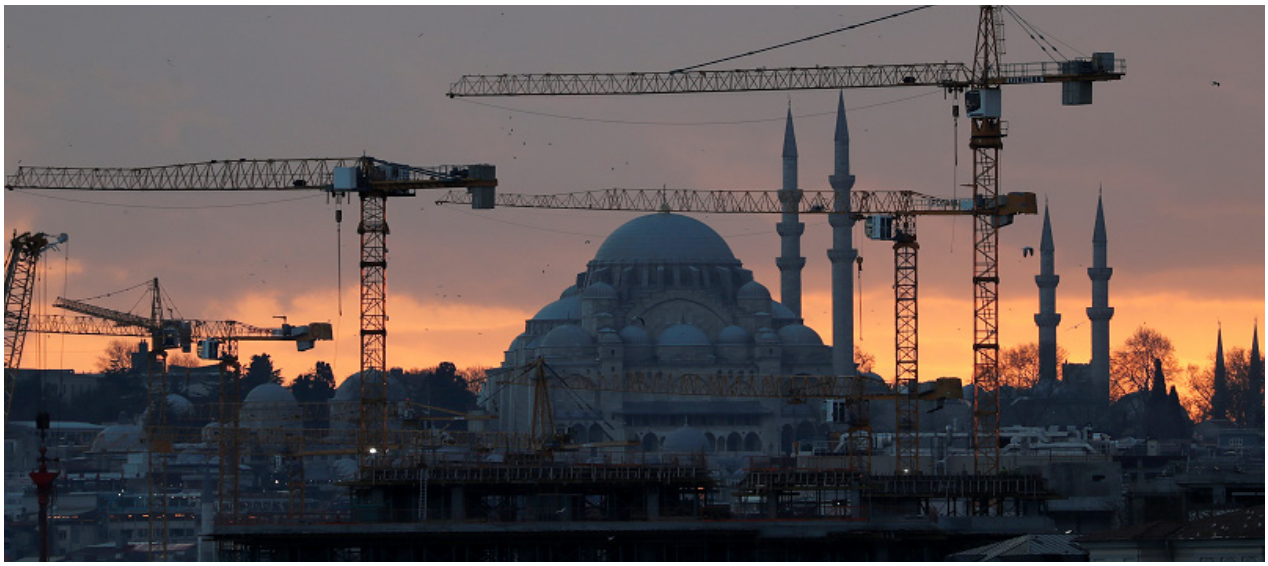
Turkish construction and real estate, both in residential and commercial sectors, have gone through an impressive growth in recent years. What are the main drivers of such growth?

It is true that both the Turkish real estate market and the domestic construction companies have thrived.
A decline in Turkish people's penchant for living abroad together with internal migration within the country have helped the housing sector to grow. But it is worth recognizing that the real reason is more compelling.
Some of the biggest cities of Turkey, like Istanbul and Izmir, are in earthquake zones which forces developers to continuously remain diligent in their construction practices. Istanbul, for instance, experienced severe casualties during a series of earthquakes in 1999. As an immediate response, Turkish officials declared a broad variety of support plans and subsidy programs favorable to real estate developers building safer housing structures. These policies have been further enhanced by AKP, the Justice and Development Party that has been in power since 2002, making the construction sector one of the most prioritized domains for the government.

At the same time, many Turkish investors with a traditional preference in real estate ventures turned to developers for investment, with an eye on taking advantage of long-term, low-rate mortgage loans. The rise of profitability in the real estate sector also attracted larger commercial groups and holding companies from other sectors which in turn gave birth to a golden era for real estate developments of any size. In addition, the construction market is anticipated to remain very active in the foreseeable future as government authorities have recently confirmed that more than two million buildings in earthquake zones are in urgent need of repair and rehabilitation before a strong earthquake hits.

Another important point to note is that prior to 2012, the Turkish real estate market appealed only to domestic investors. With the moratorium on reciprocity law in 2012, individual foreign investors from 129 countries and those looking for a second home in Turkey have also been able to invest in the country's real estate market. Gradually many international enterprises such as Morgan Stanley, Merrill Lynch, IFC, J.E. Robert Companies from the US and Viatrans from Switzerland also showed interest in the Turkish real estate market.

Still, other factors contributing to a booming housing market and popularity of real estate in Turkey are threefold: (1) the country's position as one of the most politically stable nations in the region; (2) Turkey's hubs of international airports with flights to many different cities around the globe; and (3) exported trendy TV shows closely watched by millions of viewers around the



world. The surge in individual investors was followed by private equities and funds starting to show interest. And this in turn was quickly followed by major international developers (The Trump Organization, Emaar Properties, Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Company, etc.) looking for opportunities to invest in Turkey.

I would like to add that the Turkish people have always considered property as one the safest investment instruments and this fact manifests itself even during the pandemic; according to TURKSTAT (Turkish Statistical Institute, operating under the Ministry of Treasury) a whopping 1,348,729 property transactions took place in Turkey throughout 2019. In comparison, although the country was going through a serious recession due to the COVID-19 pandemic in parallel with the rest of the world, this purchase and sales number for real estate in Turkey was equal to 1,280,825 by the end of October 2020.

It would be greatly unfair if this success were attributed solely to the Turkish housing and non-commercial real estate sector. According to Engineering News-Record's ENR,"2019 Top 250 International Contractors," Turkey comes in second with 44 commercial construction companies, behind China but ahead of the US. This can be atributed to Turkish companies' infrastructural projects conducted all around the world, mostly concentrated in Russia, Qatar, UAE, KSA, Algeria, Morocco, Iraq, Libya, and CIS countries. Furthermore, Turkish construction companies have become important exporters of know-how as well as labor, and have achieved a world-wide reputation as a result of delivering successful projects to all their clients.

Some believe that Turkey's real estate market has become saturated. Is that the case? How does the market compare to other regional markets?

Demand and appetite for real estate in Turkey has remained unchanged. However, depending on a combination of events and conditions, investors' preference for types of properties usually change from time to time. For instance, we previously saw an increased demand for A+ class of office buildings which led to developers building more of such products. This worked simply fine for developers for several years. But in recent years, investor appetite turned to more functional and utilitarian buildings, and with the emergence of long distance work habits, they turned away from glitz and glamour. As a result, there was a glut of A+ office buildings left on the hands of developers with no investors in the cards. The solution, of course, was shared office space which partly addressed the problem.
In a nutshell, Turkish real estate market is a seller's market where good products, in general, easily find their buyer and/or end-user. The number of Turkish property transactions in the last 10 years has never varied more than two percent, which is further proof of a consistent appetite for Turkish real estate and a steady market.

As for market comparison in the region, I do not consider it appropriate to compare the Turkish real estate market with others like Dubai, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the demography: Istanbul has a population of more than 18 million with Turks accounting for 85 percent; on the other hand, Dubai's population is around 3 million, only 15 percent of whom are Emirati nationals. So, the main residents of Turkish properties are domestic nationals. Secondly, Turkey has an historical presence in the unique gateway between East and West so social and business lives have organically evolved into a suigeneris lifestyle where modern and conservative styles of living exist side by side and in harmony, instead of being dictated from above. In addition, investment in real estate in Turkey comes with additional benefits for foreigners especially with the granting of immediate Turkish citizenship, permanent residency permits, or guaranteed entry visas, contrary for instance to Dubai or other countries in the region where the process is more complex and time-consuming.

How has the pandemic impacted Turkey's construction and real estate market as well as the residency and investment side of the real estate business?

The pandemic has been a total game changer in the real estate industry, especially in patterns and preferences of investors and end-users. The Government has been implementing severe restrictions to impede the growth of the pandemic with widespread lockdowns, having people work in separate shifts, and favoring working from home. In the June ton July 2020 timeframe, the Turkish government launched a campaign with the aim of giving longer term mortgages and even lower rates, which became a lifeline support for the real estate sector. Terms of this mortgage campaign were so compelling that the volume of acquisitions in these months were the highest of the last three years, despite the pandemic urging liquidity.
Developers did not stop construction and instead ongoing

real estate projects adopted some modifications to comply with the new criteria under the COVID-19 Pandemic. New social and work rules prompted property management companies to adapt themselves to new scenarios where regulated social distancing, more stringent sanitary regimens and cost efficiency in real estate management became the norm.

Furthermore, new routines and conventions precipitated by the pandemic also changed preference patterns of the end-users. For instance, those who used to favor smaller compact units in high rises with generous common social facilities in city centers now prefer larger and more all-inclusive units with at least one terrace or garden area. Another large number of end-users traded their big city lifestyle with homes in southern Turkey closer to nature and rural life, and with a milder four-season climate, working from home in light of risks of living within or commuting into a densely populated city.

Despite the pandemic and devaluation of the Turkish Lira, property prices still seem to be going up. Is that the case? If so, by how much in different categories and why?

The pandemic put many of the economic sectors in a stagnant situation except a few like e-commerce and digital technologies. Most investors are currently shying away from investing in new businesses or even expanding their own businesses, thus dodging "active" investment instruments. Active investing is forward-looking with the goal to outperform the market or produce superior risk-adjusted returns. We are going through a period during which capital prefers to defend wealth through passive investment instruments like foreign currency exchanges, easy-to-trade commodities like stocks and bonds, or real estate.

Buyers of Turkish properties have historically considered real estate as a safe harbor, but again we are talking about the right property type with profitability prospects for the near and mid future. Sellers of such properties have had the advantage of adjusting sales prices by implementing opportunity cost calculations grounded in other investment instruments. As such, commercial properties which are not currently a performing asset without a lucrative tenancy contract generating income, appear to have lost their allure. In contrast, for reasons mentioned above, single family residences located in major cities have gained value.

What are the best Turkish cities for investment in the real estate market? What are some of the best current projects?

When we examine property sales statistics of previous years including 2020 to date, we witness that greatest capital appreciation and fastest sales flows occur in cities with the highest internal migration, and those offering a rich variety of social and public amenities coupled with domestic and international business opportunities. According to this definition, İstanbul, Bursa, İzmir, Antalya and Muğla or Bodrum would be the best recommended cities for investment.

As for current projects for investment, the profitability may vary even according to the timing of reading this very article! Personally, I consider two areas of real estate investment to have potential for future profit: One is the multifamily residential sector with high end amenities, especially those located in centers of major cities where we have witnessed urban transformation, or properties near larger government infrastructure projects such as the İstanbul Airport, Galataport, Dardanelles Bridge, Canal İstanbul, new City Hospitals and metro lines; the other investment opportunity is the multifamily projects located in southern Turkey where investors in real estate have focused for decades due to the mild four-season climate of the region.

Iranians have become among the largest groups of real estate investors in Turkey. Do you know how many properties they have purchased, and how many have gotten a Turkish passport? What other nationalities are investing in Turkish properties these days and why?

A moratorium on reciprocity law adopted by the Turkish government in 2012 resulted in additional immigration markets and an expanded client base for the country's developers. Before this moratorium, only citizens of countries who allowed Turkish nationals to acquire property could purchase real estate in Turkey. Immediately after adopting the new law, applicable rules and regulations for purchase of real estate by foreigners were simplified as well. These government actions helped Turkish developers to adapt quickly to foreign sales.
Generally speaking, Iranian nationals have been among the top ten groups who purchase properties in Turkey alongside with Iraqi, Russian, Saudi, German, Azari, Jordanian, Norwegian, Kuwaiti and British investors. I believe that common history and a similar culture, high

frequency of daily flights between Turkish and Iranian cities, and a lack of visa requirement for Iranians to enter Turkey were the main reasons for their interest in investing in Turkish real estate.

However, among the list of nationalities who invested the most in Turkey, Iranians came in 2nd (after Iraqi nationals) in 2018 and 2019 having bought 3,652 and 5,423 units in those years, respectively. Interestingly, by the end of October 2020, Iranians led this list for the calendar year with 5,147 units purchased. I think that the main reason for this increase seen in Iranian clientele is the program for Turkish citizenship through property investment declared in September 2018. To date, a total of 7,312 applicants have been approved through property investment for Turkish passports. Iranians lead this list with 1,690 approved applications.

Turkish citizenship through property purchase has been a great motivation for foreigners to buy real estate in Turkey. Other than Iranians, Iraqis, Afghans, Yemenis, Russians, Pakistanis, Palestinians, Azaris and Lebanese nationals also showed great interest in the program by investing mostly in Istanbul, Bursa and Muğla. Most of them consider their property in Turkey as a second home, with some intending to move to their properties permanently in the short-term. We also see that German, British, and Norwegian nationals tend to show interest in the southern region of Turkey (Antalya and Muğla).

Please tell us about the real estate investment program(s) in Turkey. Is there only one or several of them? What are their key elements? Are they expected to continue under the same conditions for the foreseeable future?

The most popular real estate investment program has been Turkish citizenship through property investment. Non-Turkish citizens, who invest at least 250,000 USD in real estate in Turkey, become eligible for Turkish citizenship within a short period of time.

The investment can be in a single or in multiple properties, which can be either residential or commercial. Only those who purchase their properties after September 19, 2018 (date of adoption of the relevant law) can benefit from the latest amendments in Turkish citizenship law. According to the criteria of the program, those properties should be held onto for at least three years, but no other fee is being asked for this measure. Not only foreign investors but also their spouses and children under 18 years of age are eligible for Turkish citizenship based on there real estate investment. Evaluation of Turkish citizenship through investment application takes anywhere from 45 days to 4 months. This program has contributed significantly to the sale of properties in Turkey to foreign nationals. The degree to which the Turkish government is taking the program seriously, visibly increases the number of its applicants. Having a property already facilitates the granting of residency or work permits for the property's foreign owner and his or her family. These residency permits are routinely renewed by the Turkish government on an annual basis as long as the applicants own their property in Turkey.

Another program that was launched in 2017 is the Turquoise Card Program. A Turquoise Card is a card given to foreigners who contribute to various areas of Turkish economy like the sciences, technology, the manufacturing industries, and even to the arts, or who invest in the development of the country and create employment.

The first three years after the Turquoise Card is granted to an applicant are considered a transition period. Within this period, the applicant is expected to follow through with his or her expected contribution, otherwise their card will be cancelled.

Holders of a Turquoise Card who uphold all the requirements of their application can apply for, and will be granted, a non-expiring residency card within the last 6 months of the 3-year period. Foreigners who are awarded this card benefit from all rights granted to Turkish citizens. The spouses and children of holders of the Turquoise Card are also granted a document equivalent to an indefinite residency permit. Five years after receiving a Turquoise Card, the holder is eligible to apply for Turkish citizenship.

How do you see the future of Turkey's real estate market, given the ongoing pandemic?

The pandemic has given a new direction to real estate markets all around the world. A major drop in demand for commercial properties is expected globally, especially in brick-and-mortar retail shops of all kinds and old-fashioned offices with large open spaces. On the other hand, offices supported by modern logistical systems as well as affordable residential units with specific features meeting the needs arising from the pandemic will continue to perform well.

Turkish developers have already proven that they are flexible and adapt quickly by responding constructively and playing a meaningful role from both the real estate perspective and the demands of the market and the end users. As a rule of thumb, non-native real estate investors and developers are limited when operating in international markets due to pandemic restrictions. One reason is the difficulty of doing adequate due diligence on target properties in another country.

Cross-border investment has traditionally relied on international travel to view assets and manage investment logistics. But with the pandemic restrictions, investors are increasingly turning to domestic markets rather than looking overseas. I consider Turkey incredibly lucky in this perspective since a very great portion of the developers operating in Turkey and at least 96 percent of the buyers of real estate in the country are Turkish. This slowdown in foreign capital flow will therefore not have a negative impact on this market.

Another aspect of the Turkish real estate market that has helped maintain prices during the pandemic is the shortage of new units being built in recent years. According to TURKSTAT (Turkish Statistical Institute, operating under the Ministry of Treasury), construction permits granted by Turkish municipalities have been in dramatic decline since 2017 with construction of 230 million sqm, 109 million sqm, and 46 million sqm in 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively. So, we are talking about a supply and demand issue where appetite for real estate in Turkey has remained healthy, and perhaps even increased for reasons discussed above, while supply of housing units has in fact diminished in recent years.

Realistically speaking, the pandemic has caused some damage in the Turkish real estate industry as it has done in the rest of the world. Economies everywhere will surely find their ways to recover, but I strongly believe that the Turkish real estate sector will recover sharply in light of the above indicators and will even function in a more solid way when the recovery period begins.

Abstract Point of View on Architecture

By: Reza Taeb

INTERVIEW

Mitra Ghorbani is an architect who is well known for her works in District One and outside of Tehran. She has been working in this field for years and has managed to make a name for herself.
She is one of the only women present in the field of residential construction that handles a project from the construction phase to the finishing, and decoration. In addition to being a success in the male dominated field of construction, she is also an artist and philanthropist.

Thank you so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview. Please introduce yourself, and tell us a little about yourself. How did you become interested in architecture?

To be honest, I was interested in law, but I got accepted into university for architecture. I grew up in an artistic household, as my father was a fan of painting. With my background in art I decided to pursue architecture and became more interested as I furthered my studies. I began working right after graduation, and with a bit of luck I was immediately involved in big projects. At first, I wasn't used to field work and primarily spent my time designing, but that quickly changed as I became more involved with the projects. After a few years I established my own firm and began working independently. It seemed scary at first but after getting a few projects it didn't seem that bad.
My first project was designing and constructing a villa, in the Damavand region, and from there the projects started coming in.

What has your experience been like as a female in a male-dominated field?

It is hard to accept women in some occupations, especially in a male-dominated field such as construction. As a woman, especially a petite one, some of the colleagues can't fathom that I could have knowledge of field work; many of them would assume that I only designed and know nothing of the construction process. I always try to experience and learn all the different procedures that go into building a structure.
I have gone to remote regions to visit stone mines to get a feel for the materials being used. I tried to learn the details of construction from the craftsmen so later on they wouldn't question my practical knowledge. At first it was difficult to gain their trust, however as time went on things changed. They saw me as an equal and began respecting me. I'm very strict at work because I am a bit of a perfectionist.

Is there a difference between your work and everyday life personas?

I tend to have more of what we would call masculine traits in the work environment, but on the outside, I am more let's say feminine. The clash of these two personas causes me to act like I'm still at work even when I am not. Thanks to my friends I am sometimes reminded that work hours are over. The charity work and playing piano helps balance my feminine side, which is a nice contrast to my work. I have even tried acting and other art forms to keep my feminine side alive.

Has COVID-19 had an adverse effect on your line of work?

It might have had an effect on property sales but as far as construction goes it seems like the virus hasn't yet reached our field of work. Of course, more health and safety protocols are in place but overall, not much has changed. We only felt the effects of the virus when construction sites were forced to shut down for a month during Nowruz. Even then, we kept one of our construction sites for a charity open because providing shelter for the children was not something that could be put on hold.

How have the sanctions affected your field of work?

Before the sanctions, we had little to no restrictions, we would import all the materials, you would barely see any domestic products being used in district one. From ceramics, stones, to faucets and, etc. everything was imported. One of the things that set us apart was our relations with international brands and how well we could acquire the materials.
After the sanctions a huge shock was felt which led to us using Iranian products, which to our surprise were if not better at least comparable to their international counterparts. It also led to people going towards increasing domestic production to fulfill the absence of the imported goods. Even smart home systems are now being produced domestically. I was skeptical at first but after trying the domestic products I placed my faith in them.
I'm not sure if the quality necessarily increased drastically during the sanctions or whether they were high to begin with but they definitely didn't have the branding and marketing power of imported goods.

What are some other restrictions you face during a project?

There are limitations both in lack of technology and know-how. We have to design around those limitations. We can't execute the same projects here as with other places. For example, I have had projects abroad in Vienna. You have to take in the materials and the capabilities of the labor force when designing a project. Materials aren't the only limitations; the machineries are also a factor. In order to complete some projects, you need to import the machinery.

> *"I believe that it's the challenges that make work interesting, if you have everything that you need from the beginning where is the fun?"*

Another restriction is the over-involvement of the clients in the projects. They make decisions based on things that they have seen and often ask for replications. For instance, I like Iranian facades but what most clients enjoy is stone, which they consider to be luxurious.

It's a part of the culture of always comparing ourselves with others. This problem is more prevalent when it comes to facades and interior design.

How has the interior design industry changed over the past few years?

There has been a rise in demand for interior design especially in Tehran, but it is still not where it needs to be. People hire designers but end up with what they had seen somewhere else. There needs to be certain trust which hasn't seeped into the culture. People didn't used to believe in paying for a designer but with the ever-increasing property prices people have begun to spend money in this regard more freely.

People are still reluctant to pay but nevertheless there has been more demand. Besides in Tehran other smaller cities have also had a rise in demand for interior design but the price of these services doesn't match the property values as well as they do in Tehran.

Personal BRANDING

BUSINESS

Hossein Khatibi is a psychologist with a PhD in social communication sciences. He is a professor of communications, public relations and advertising at multiple universities. Born in 1970 in Iran, he is the founder of Noor Advertising Agency and has been working in the advertisement world for more than 20 years. Today, his agency works in marketing, advertising and communications with a focus on personal branding and has had many successful personal branding projects throughout the years.

Personal Branding: An Introduction

Dr. Khatibi believes the fundamentals of marketing and advertising didn't start from the West, but rather, in ancient bazaars.

There have been ongoing businesses in these bazaars for thousands of years and that's where the advertising first started. Later on, with the advancement of sciences and the beginning of the modern world, Western human relations professionals started researching the subject more precisely and studied these ancient bazaars to learn more about them.

After learning about ancient bazaars' public relations, these professionals synthesized data in a standardized format to be published in books.
A favored definition of branding states, "all the emotions, attributes and concepts that are associated with a name in fact are defining the brand to the audience."
Thus, when one comes across a brand name, they will have a certain emotion and will see some defined characteristics associated with it which also brings a concept to mind.

Between 1970 and 1980, a new theory called "personal branding" was introduced that said a brand name might be associated with a certain class of people. Similar to the definition of branding, personal branding is "the emotions and attributes that can be associated with a person."
In the near future, the most valuable asset one can have is their personal brand.

The factors that define success are changing; it used to be money and power that defined the success of a brand.

For example, if Mark Zuckerberg invests in a startup that is in a very early stage of its business, the stock prices for that startup will skyrocket overnight. This is the price of a person's brand and the trust and other attributes it brings with it.

When a company generates a great deal of profit overnight by just associating with a person's name, all the earned profits will be added to his or her personal brand.

To reiterate, personal branding was being practiced in ancient times in Iran's bazaars.
For instance, let's say there was a small shop in the Tabriz bazaar that was owned by a well-known businessman. Regardless of the size of this shop, the majority of customers would pour into his shop. They'd prefer to make a deal with him, even though ancient bazaars contained a group of shops close by that offered the same service or product.

Personal branding exists in almost all industries. In the world of art, people are drawn to a work of art partially because of the art itself, but mostly people are drawn to a piece of art just because of the name of the artist.

In other words, if we find an artwork from Picasso that might not even have the highest quality as far as color, format or composition, with an authenticated signature of Picasso, it will earn a high value in a matter of seconds. The value here comes from his personal brand. The same goes for sculptors and singers.

Forming a Personal Brand

The fundamentals of personal branding are first impression and appearance. When you see someone walking towards you from far away, you immediately form an opinion of them in your mind. This opinion about someone may be formed based on their body language and appearance. This is especially common in Iranian culture. To paraphrase Darwin, those who are smart and manage to adapt themselves to their environment will survive. What we learn from this is that in a fraction of a second, your subconscious mind decides if you like someone or not.

Similar to body language, personal branding is also something one can learn. How do you approach someone for the first time? Are you open to communication or more reserved? Do you trust people easily or do you keep your distance? A majority of the time, when people dislike someone, they don't have a specific reason for it. This is something that is determined in a fraction of a second and that's something that is inherited from one's ancestors, who had to play it safe to be able to survive.

One of the most common things that is said in seminars is that your fashion choices can make a difference. People are encouraged to dress a certain way and have expensive accessories in order to impress others. However, looks by themselves can't be used to measure success. To some extent, we can

say that how you present yourself and the way you dress could make a difference and will help you appear a certain way and from a certain social class, but that is not the definition of personal branding.

Some people encourage you to be more positive and smile while firmly shaking hands. However, in retrospect, we can never correlate the cause of people's failure to them not having firm enough handshakes or wearing the “right” wrist watch brand, for instance.

Personal branding contains multiple factors.In addition to appearance and personality, a third important factor in personal branding is communication. We know people are either introverts or extroverts. A company that is managed by an introvert will have an introverted culture. Likewise, when you walk into a company’s office that is run by an extrovert you feel a sense of transparency and openness; the offices are made of glass, doors are open, and information is openly communicated around the office.

To some extent, it is possible for people to manage how they represent themselves and how they dress, but when it comes to having a successful brand, you need to take advantage of a mentor that knows the business world and current trends.

A lot of the time, people in marketing also work in personal branding. The first generation of advertising agencies in Iran were founded by graphists. Later on, they were replaced by marketing professionals and TV producers. Film makers also played a role in making commercials. Personal branding, though, requires the expertise of psychologists.
Nowadays, your digital brand is far more important than your personal brand. A lot of celebrities are known by their social media personas; many people don’t even know the influencers’ real names.

Social media content plays a major role in personal branding, from the name of the profile to the influencer’s biography and the content that they offer. Sometimes the wrong content, even if it’s only one post, on social media can get a lot of negative reactions from the audience and can hurt your reputation. It’s very common to lose followers if the direction and content of a page changes from their initial content.

Effects of COVID-19

COVID-19 is a universal disaster, affecting the entire world. Regardless of how rich, poor or how well-prepared a country was, the coronavirus has affected the entire world. Furthermore, it affects all aspects of people’s lives; even basic physiological needs such as eating habits have changed. Everyone’s lifestyles, security needs, social needs, attire, habits, sleep schedule and relationships have been affected and changed. It seems that COVID-19 has made a paradigm shift because everything is changing in people’s lives and this is something that is also apparent in the advertising world.

For instance, Noor Advertising Agency’s office will never be the same as before. The agency had been working on a new study of what people’s lives will look like in 2050.

While it was common knowledge that remote workers and online companies existed before, it was hard to believe that it would become the norm in a matter of two months. At the beginning of the pandemic, most people never thought that everyone would be doing their work remotely.

Everything has changed.
Life won’t go back to what it used to be and that’s a good thing!

Personal branding contains multiple factors. In addition to appearance and personality, a third important factor in personal branding is communication.

Trends Directory

One-Stop Guide To Iranian Businesses

Restaurants

Cafe Shemshak – Fast Food
Location: Shemshak, Tehran
Tel: (+98) 919 626 1684
Instagram: @cafe_shemshak

Restaurant Kaiser – Fusion
Location: Niavaran, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 29 03 80
Email: m_gh30003@yahoo.com
Instagram: @kaiser_cafe_restaurant
Website: www.kaiser-restaurant.com

Avli Restaurant – Greek
Location: Andarzgoo, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 23 10 06
Instagram: @avli.tehran
Website: www.Avli.ir

Matador Lounge – Spanish
Location: Farmanieh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 80 08 22
Email: ar_khorsandi@yahoo.com
Instagram: @matador.restaurant

SushiAnt – Asian
Location: Zaferanieh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 80 69 31
Email: sushiant.restaurant@yahoo.com
Instagram: @sushiant.restaurant
Website: https://app.menoro.ir/26/

Mehre Mitra – Vegetarian
Location: Basti St, Lavasan
Tel: (021) 26 55 12 12
Email: info@mehremitra.ir
Instagram: @mehremitra.veg
Website: www.mehremitra.ir

Rocca Lounge – Fusion
Location: Farmanieh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 40 22 70 02
Instagram: @rocca_lounge
Website: www.roccalounge.com

Business

Ara Enterprise – Business Consultancy
Location: Saadat Abad, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 76 56 81
Email: info@araenterprise.com
Website: www.araenterprise.com

Frankfurter Company – Sweets & Beverage Importer and Distributor
Location: Kish Island
Tel: (076) 44 45 13 16
Email: Info@frankfurterkish.com
Instagram: frankfurter_iran

Cactus Graphic
Location: Saadat Abad, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 76 56 81
Mob: (+98) 912 108 9630

Malls

Atlas mall
Location: Niavaran, Tehran
Tel: (021) 23 52 15 21
Email: info@iranianatlas.ir
Instagram: @atlasmall_niavaran
Website: www.iranianatlas.ir

Ava Center
Location: Aghdasieh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 12 24 26 - (021) 26 12 26 28
Email: avacenteria@gmail.com
Instagram: @avacenteria
Website: www.ava-center.com

Queen Center
Location: Elahiyeh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 66 00 98
Email: queencenter.ir@gmail.com
Instagram: @queen.center

Melal Boutique Mall
Location: Elahiyeh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 65 32 65
Email: info@melal.me
Instagram: @melalmall
Website: www.Melal.me

Services

Hosein Ebrahimi – Building Instalations
Location: Bahar st, tehran
Mobile:(+98) 912 497 31 52
Email: Hosseinebrahimi90@yahoo.com

Washio – Online Laundry Services
Location: Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 93 40 01
Email: alirahnama34@gmail.com
Instagram: @washio.tehran

Fixio – Online Construction
Location: Zaferanieh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 35 58 89
Email: fixioapp@gmail.com
Instagram: @fixio_official
Website: www.fixio.ir

Tandis Dry Cleaning
Location: Saadat Abad, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 76 75 72
Mobile: (+98) 922 615 8530
Email: TandisDryCleaning@gmail.com
Instagram: @Tandis_Dry_Cleaning

RoxBox – Gift Boxes
Location: Tehran
Email: orderroxbox@gmail.com
Instagram: @roxyourbox

Hotels

Hanna Boutique Hotel
Location: Hafez, Tehran
Tel: (021) 66 75 7601
Email: info@hannaboutiquehotel.com
Instagram: @hanna_boutique_hotel
Website: www.hannaboutiquehotel.com

House of Elephant
Location: Karimkhan Zand, Shiraz
Tel: (071) 32 23 14 66
Email: houseofelephant57@gmail.com
Instagram: @house_of_elephant
Website: www.houseofelephant.com

Shemshak Boutique Hotel
Location: Shemshak , Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 52 79 41
Instagram: @shemshak_boutique_hotel
Website: www.shemshakboutiquehotel.com

Moshir Al Molk Historical House
Location: Hatef, Esfahan
Mobile: (+98) 913 110 9181
Email: islamic.h.museum@gmail.com
Instagram: @moshiralmolk
Website: www.moshir-almolk.ir

Joybar Boutique Hotel
Location: Neshat, Esfahan
Mobile: (+98) 913 404 9157
Email: Joybarboutiquehotel@gmail.com
Instagram: @joybarboutiquehotel
Website: www.Joybarboutiquehotel.com

Laft 17
Location: Bandar-E Qeshm, Hormozgan
Tel: (021) 930 472 1574
Email: m_rohsanpour@yahoo.com
Instagram: @laftseventeen

Beauty Salon

Niloufar Zand Beauty Salon
Location: Elahiyeh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 01 16 14
Email: nilou_zand@yahoo.com
Instagram: @beauty_by_niloufar
Website: www.niloufarzand.com

Nita Beauty
Location: Velanjak, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 40 44 55
Mobile: (+98) 912 040 9329
Instagram: @nita.beautyy
Website: nitabeautysalon.com

Zib Online
Location: Niavaran, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 82 97 63
Email: zibonlineofficial@gmail.com
Instagram: @zibonline
Website: www.zibonline.com

Hans Beauty Salon
Location: Zaferanieh and Fereshteh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 17 06 44 (Zaferanieh)
Tel: (021) 22 04 32 27 (Fereshteh)
Email: hansbeauty.secured@gmail.com
Instagram: @hans.beauty.salon

Glamour Beauty Salon
Location: Shahrak-e Gharb, Tehran
Tel: (021) 88 58 15 46 - (021) 88 07 97 50
Mobile: (+98) 922 643 1676
Instagram: @glamourbeauty_saloon

Clinics

Dr. Basati Dental Clinic
Location: Aghdasiyeh, Artesh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 80 08 30
Email: info@drbasati.com
Instagram: @dr.basati
Website: www.drbasati.com

Tehran Pet Hospital
Location: Kamraniyeh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 48 01 50 00
Email: pethospital.tehran@gmail.com
Instagram: @tehranpethospital
Website: www.tehranpet.com

Dr. Nejatian Pain Care Clinic
Location: Saadat Abad, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 76 58 10
Instagram: @drnejatian

Art Galleries

Rahele Studio – Handmade Tiles & ceramics
Location: Tehran
Mobile: (+98) 912 294 30 62
Email: kazempourraheleh3@gmail.com
Instagram: @raheleh.studio

ArtChive – Online Art platform
Location: Tehran
Mobile: (+98) 912 112 1329
Email: info@artchive.art
Instagram: @artchive.art
Website: www.artchive.art

Soo Contemporary Gallery
Location: Ferdowsi, Tehran
Tel: (021) 88 80 98 08
Email: info@soocontemporary.com
Instagram: @soocontemporary
Website: www.soocontemporary.com

Dastan Basement Gallery
Location: Elahiyeh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 22 02 31 14
Email: info@dastangallery.com
Instagram: @dastanbasement
Website: www.dastan.gallery.com

Apparel

Balach
Location: Shahrak-E Gharb, Tehran
Mobile: (+98) 922 575 8095
Email: balacjmenwear@gmail.com
Instagram: @balachmenwear

Monaie Fashion
Location: Tehran
Mobile: (+98) 991 939 4005
Email: contact@monaiefashion.com
Instagram: @monaiefashion
Website: www.monaiefashion.com

Koi Basics by aassttiinn
Location: Aghdasieh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 88 83 70 71
Mobile: (+98) 902 929 2796
Email: Hello@koibasics.store
Instagram: @koibasics
Website: www.aassttiinn.com/koi

Lobat Clothing Wear
Location: Aghdasieh, Tehran
Email: alobataccessories@gmail.com
Instagram: @lobataccessories
Website: www.aassttiinn.com/lobat

Mona soufi
Location: Saadat Abad, Tehran
Mobile: (+98) 921 536 22 02
Email: Soufimona1@gmail.com
Instagram: @mona_soufi

High-End Jewelry

Safaee Jewelry
Location: Aghdasieh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 15 19 17
Email: ma@safaee.co
Instagram: @safeejewelry
Website: www.safaee.co

Elli Ramezani
Location: Zaferanieh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 35 22 18
Email: Elhamramezani@hotmail.co.Uk
Instagram: @ellieramezanijewlery

Shanti Silver and Gold Gallery
Location: Tehran
Tel: (021) 88 64 57 63
Mobile: (+98) 991 231 0498
Email: mitraaliabadi22@gmail.com
Instagram: @shanti.silver.gallery
@shantigoldgallery

Gyms

Parisa Club
Location: Elahieh, Tehran
Mobile: (+98) 935 696 98 04
Instagram: @parisaclub

Power house – Women's Crossfit Gym
Location: Enghelab Sports Complex, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 21 63 90
Email: blockphilosophyir@gmail.com
Instagram: @block68ir
Website: www.blockphilosophy.ir

Raspina Wellness
Location: Niavaran, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 10 26 93
Email: raspinaclub@gmail.com
Instagram: @raspina_wellness
Website: www.raspina.com

Hypoxy Slim factory
Location: Saadat Abad, Niavaran & Jordan, Tehran
Tel: (021) 88 68 89 91
Email: marketing@hypoxy.ir
Instagram: @slimfactory_hypoxy
Website: www.hypoxiiran.com

Interior Design

Laleh Group – Interior Design
Location: Fereshteh, Tehran
Mobile: (+98) 912 234 6716
Email: lalehgroup@gmail.com
Instagram: @laleh_design

Lozee Home – Online Concept store
Location: Tehran
Mobile: (+98) 912 523 76 89
Email: lozee.info@gmail.com
Instagram: @lozeehome

Leila Kalali Home – Concept store
Location: ASP towers, Tehran
Tel: (021) 88 05 06 67
Instagram: @leilakalalihomeplus

Sarira Garden – Low Maintenance Houseplants
Location: Tehran
Tel: (021) 88 49 41 05
Mobile: (+98) 935 776 5564
Email: sariragarden@gmail.com
Instagram: @sariragarden

Hossein Rezvani – Rug store
Location: Farmanieh, Tehran
Tel: (021) 26 12 54 62
Email: nh@hosseinrezvani.com
Instagram: @hossein_rezvani_iran
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IRANIAN HOLIDAYS in 2021

GREGORIAN date | IRANIAN date

● EVENT

JANUARY

1	8	15	17	22	29
12 DEY	19 DEY	26 DEY	28 DEY	3 BAHMAN	10 BAHMAN
Friday	Friday	Friday	Martyrdom of Fatema-Zahra	Friday	Friday
NEW YEAR'S DAY 2021					

FEBRUARY

5	10	12	19	25	26
17 BAHMAN	22 BAHMAN	24 BAHMAN	1 ESFAND	7 ESFAND	8 ESFAND
Friday	Victory Day of Revolution in Iran	Friday	Friday	Birthday of Imam Ali (Father's Day)	Friday

MARCH

5	11	12	19	20-24	26	29
15 ESFAND	21 ESFAND	22 ESFAND	29 ESFAND	1-4 FARVARDIN	6 FARVARDIN	9 FARVARDIN
Friday	Mabaas Hazrat Rasoul Akram	Friday	Friday	Nowruz (Persian New Year)	Friday	Birthday of Hazrat Ghaem

APRIL

1	2	9	16	23	30
12 FARVARDIN	13 FARVARDIN	20 FARVARDIN	27 FARVARDIN	3 ORDIBEHESHT	10 ORDIBEHESHT
Day of Islamic Republic	Nature day (Sizdah bedar)	Friday	Friday	Friday	Friday

MAY

4	13	14	21	28
14 ORDIBEHESHT	17ORDIBEHESHT	23ORDIBEHESHT	24 ORDIBEHESHT	31 ORDIBEHESHT	7 KHORDAD
Martyrdom of Imam Ali	Friday	Fetr Eid	Friday	Friday	Friday

JUNE

4	5	6	11	18	25
14 KHORDAD	15 KHORDAD	16 KHORDAD	21 KHORDAD	28 KHORDAD	4 TIR
Friday	Anniversary of the Uprising Against the Shah	Martyrdom of Jafar Sadegh	Friday	Friday	Friday

JULY

2	9	16	21	23	29	30
11 TIR	18 TIR	25 TIR	30 TIR	1 MORDAD	7 MORDAD	8 MORDAD
Friday	Friday	Friday	Ghorban Eid	Friday	Ghadir Eid	Friday

AUGUST

6	13	18	19	20	27
15 MORDAD	22 MORDAD	27 MORDAD	28 MORDAD	29 MORDAD	5 SHAHRIVAR
Friday	Friday	Tasoa	Ashoura	Friday	Friday

SEPTEMBER

3	10	17	24	27
12 SHAHRIVAR	19 SHAHRIVAR	26 SHAHRIVAR	2 MEHR	5 MEHR
Friday	Friday	Friday	Friday	Arbaeen-E Hosseini

OCTOBER

1	5	7 8	15	22	24	29
9 MEHR	13 MEHR	15-16 MEHR	23 MEHR	30 MEHR	2 ABAN	7 ABAN
Friday	Anniversay of Rasoul Akram's Death/ Martyrdom of Imam Hassan Mojtaba	Martyrdom of Imam Reza Friday	Friday	Friday	Birthday of Hazrat Rasoul Akram	Friday

NOVEMBER

5	12	19	26
14 ABAN	21 ABAN	28 ABAN	5 AZAR
Friday	Friday	Friday	Friday

DECEMBER

3	10	17	31
12 AZAR	19 AZAR	26 AZAR	10 DEY
Friday	Friday	Friday	Friday

Trends calendar

IRANIAN EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS in 2021

The 21th Int'l Exhibition of Telecommunications, Information Technology & Solutions
January 2-5
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 20th Iran Int'l Electricity Exhibition
January 12-15
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 8th Special Exhibition of Iran Apparel
January 20-23
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

MIDEX 2021: Architecture, Modern House & Interior Design Trade Show
January 28-31
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 11th Int'l Exhibition of Architecture, Modern House & Interior Design
January 28-31
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

IRAN PROPERTY EXPO: 2021 Int'l Real Estate,-contruction and Property Expo
February 5-8
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 14th Int'l Exhibition of goods, services & equipment stores and chain stores
February 13-16
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 19th Int'l Exhibition Of Environment & Renewable Energy
February 22-25
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 4th Int'l Exhibition and Conference of the Exhibition Industry
March 2-5
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

Iran Green Trade Fair
April 12-14
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 28th Int'l Exhibition of DetergentsCleanser, Hygienic, Cellulose Products & Machinery
May 17-20
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 26th Intl Oil, Gas, Refining & Petrochemical Exhibition
May 27-30
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 24th Int'l Exhibition of Medical, Dental, Laboratory Equipment, Pharmaceutical Products
June 8-11
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

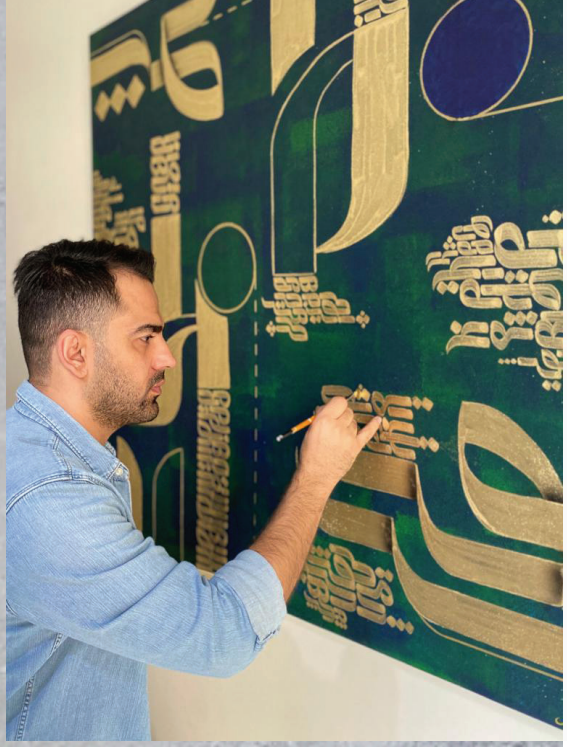
The 9th Int'l Exhibition of Rail Transportation, Related Industries & Equipment
June 8-11
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 16th Int'l Exhibition of Mine, Mining, Construction Machinery & Related Industry & Equipment
July 16-19
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

The 30th Persian Handmade Carpet Exhibition
August 19-25
Tehran International Exhibition Centre

Important Note:
Please note that there may be changes (postponements/cancellations) as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Caligraphy by: Fazel Shams



Trends

LIFESTYLE

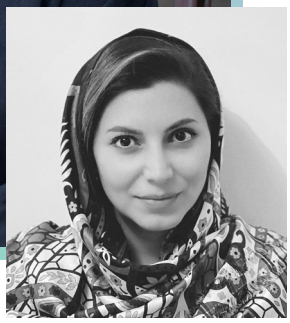
Trends Lifestyle covers a wide variety of interesting topics such as:
art, fashion, cinema, music, books, travel, sports, biographies and much more!

A big thanks to our knowledgeable contributors who wrote the articles or were interviewed on these subject areas.

We hope you enjoy!

Disclaimer:

The writing style of our content may differ from article to article and is based on subject matters as well as our contributors' diverse backgrounds and writing styles. Certain statements in our content may also be the personal opinions of our contributors and not necessarily those of Trends Magazine.



COVID-19 & The Fashion Industry's Existential Crisis

RANA NABATI
New York

Rana Nabati holds an engineering degree from the University of California, Berkeley and started off her tech career in San Francisco. However, her true passion was in the world of fashion, which led her to move to New York City. She studied fashion business management at the Fashion Institute of Technology followed by an MBA, specializing in Luxury Marketing from New York University, Stern School of Business. In the past 10 years, Rana has worked with global fashion and luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton and Dolce & Gabbana, as well as museums and art institutes, including the world-renowned Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has severely affected all industries around the world and some industries such as travel and tourism, hospitality, and fashion have been hit the hardest.
As most countries have gone through long periods of strict lockdowns, the fashion industry's supply chain has been severely compromised by factory shutdowns and delayed deliveries. Additionally, sales took a drastic hit due to store closures for the better part of 2020.

On the consumer side, as we struggle with rising death tolls, lockdowns, unemployment, and collapsing economies all over the world, fashion has consequently become the least of our concerns.
According to McKinsey & Company's latest report, "The State of Fashion 2021," the global fashion industry could lose a staggering 440 billion USD—approximately 20 percent of revenues—this year.
Most regions around the world are still struggling with the pandemic, which means that the industry decline will continue well into 2021. It is estimated that 20 to 30 percent of companies in the fashion sector are expected to go bankrupt or be acquired by larger companies.

Fashion executives are faced with devastating circumstances. Navigating through these unchartered territories is only possible by finding creative and effective solutions through channel strategy, digital transformation, merchandise strategy, and customer relationship management.

The COVID-19 crisis has had crippling effects on the fashion industry but as the saying goes, "every cloud has a silver lining."

Since the beginning of the pandemic, online sales have had an unprecedented growth, rising from 16 percent of total sales in January 2020 to 29 percent in August. In just eight months, online shopping has had the equivalent of six years growth. To capitalize on this trend, industry leaders have shifted their channel strategy focus to scale up their online capabilities, some companies have already reported double or even triple digit growth in e-commerce.

The importance of investing in a comprehensive digital transformation has never been more apparent for the retail industry and companies have been forced to act quickly and efficiently due to the crisis.

It is expected that e-commerce sales will decline after mandatory lockdowns are lifted and life goes back to normal, but many consumers who are now highly accustomed to online shopping and have discovered its convenience, will continue to shop online much more frequently

than they did before the pandemic. The fashion industry has infamously been lagging behind other sectors in terms of its agility and responsiveness to market changes as well as digital adaptation. This pandemic has made it clear that businesses need to face these problems head on and as quickly as possible.

These advancements will not only help fashion companies to survive the COVID-19 crisis but will also allow them to thrive and operate more intelligently and efficiently in the long run.

Anna Wintour, editor of Vogue and artistic director of Condé Nast, said in an interview with New York Times, "for an industry that is meant to be about change, sometimes we take a long time to do just that, because it's so big and there are so many moving parts. But now we were really forced into a moment when we had to reset and rethink." Since the beginning of the crisis back in late 2019, we have all been forced to modify our behaviors and adapt to a "new normal" and this new normal for the majority of us doesn't include wearing the latest fashion trends.

We have been confined in our homes, detached from the outside world with minimal social interactions and our wardrobe choices have been reduced to practical loungewear and comfortable slippers.
While total clothing sales fell 79 percent in the United States in the month of April 2020, sweatpants and sweatshirt sales increased 80 percent. To reflect this trend retailers that had agile and flexible supply chain and logistics capabilities acted quickly and shifted their merchandise strategy to expand their loungewear and athleisure collections.

Many formal and evening wear designers are also trying to pivot from party dresses to house dresses, on the premise that consumers are fed up with wearing sweatpants day in and day out and at some point, they would like to dress up even if they are sheltering in place and working from home.
Another consideration for many designers and brands has been to create seasonless collections with clothing and accessories that are more versatile and practical.
The gradual transition to a more casual and comfortable style that has been going on for some time across the industry for all categories including apparel, shoes and accessories, is now accelerating with great speed due to the pandemic and retailers must revise their product lines to comply with consumer needs.
This pandemic has threatened the very existence of many fashion businesses around the globe. As survival has become top priority, retailers have resorted to drastic measures by offering a wide range of promotions and massive price cuts of up to 90 percent to boost short-term sales.

Despite offering unusually high discounts to incentivize customers to make purchases, many retailers are still struggling with low sales volume. Under normal circumstances, markdowns and promotions translate into sales and quick cash, but in today's climate, uncertainty has changed consumer behavior.
In "A Theory of Human Motivation," by the renowned psychologist, Abraham Maslow, a theory of psychological health based on satisfying the human needs in order of importance ranging from basic to self-fulfilment needs is introduced. He developed the famous Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which is widely used in behavioral studies in the retail industry.

Consumer behavior studies show that every purchase decision is motivated by satisfying an unmet need, which are categorized in three levels based on Maslow's theory:
Basic Needs, Psychological Needs, and Self-fulfillment Needs.
The COVID-19 crisis has shifted our priorities back to the basics.

However, aside from the minimal clothing that we need to keep warm and stay protected, fashion is not considered a basic human need.
In times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, offering deals and discounts alone is not enough for fashion companies to stay relevant.

Retailers need to modify their marketing efforts to reflect the crisis and connect with their customer base on a deeper level by tapping into the consumers' psychological and self-fulfillment needs through brand messaging, community outreach, and exceptional customer service.

Behind the Scenes of Iran's Most Artist Supported Fashion and Art Festival

SOHEILA JABRI

Soheila Jabri, also known as "Chia" is a researcher of ethnic costumes, teacher, fashion designer, and founder of Chia Mod and the Cipal Festival, the first private clothing and fashion festival in Iran.

Tell us about Chia Mod and your goal in forming it?

Chia Mod is an art and design institution with 35 years of experience. It's in line with one of my most important goals, which is to create the groundwork for the promotion of Iranian fashion and its enhancement. My first collection was an adaptation of Iranian ethnic clothing with an underlying layer of modernity.

Can you tell us about the story behind your Shahrzad collection?

The Shahrzad collection shows the characteristics of ethnic clothing which include geographical inspiration and aesthetics, and utilizes the concept of clothing not as a covering, but as a cultural visual manifestation of ethnic groups. The collection is presented in the form of 32 different garments including tunics, caps, footwear and accessories. The clothes are designed according to social status, age and gender.

Shahrzad is the story of a princess. Each design has a name and a story. The collection's colors and designs illustrate fashion as an instrument to communicate different cultures and a language to express the nature of human beings and not just a covering for the unification of individuals.
So far, this collection has been exhibited at the Saadabad Museum, the Tbilisi National Museum, the Hilton Istanbul Hotel, the Korean Ambassador's residence in Iran and the Milad Tower.

Please tell us about some of your other collections, such as Tosan and Zemsan.

Continuing the path of Shahrzad collection, I created the Tosan collection. In this collection I narrated the life of a woman in one day in the form of 31 sets of clothing with an approach of real and everyday attire.

In the Zemson collection, I started combining evening dress fabrics with winter covers. In the Chehel-Jeans collection, I showed the combination of denim with Iranian 40-piece fabric, which was held at the Economic Cooperation Organization, or ECO, on Women's Day.
Mahour collection is another experience I had with a focus on sustainable fashion and environmental protection.

What is the Cipal Festival and what are its goals?

The Cipal Festival was established to fulfill the demand for research, development and laying the groundwork for up-and-coming fashion designers, supporting the domestic production in the form of SMEs (Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises) and creating an educational environment to meet world-class standards for exportation and the need to create an infrastructure.
Cipal, is the first private fashionand clothing festival in Iran with the main focus of e-commerce and cyberspace.
I personally have the responsibility of managing the festival along with the secretary of the festival, Khatoon Shahbazi.

This is the third year that Cipal is being held. Please tell us about the previous festival.

During the last two years of the Cipal festival, we have showcased 8,500 pieces. About 6,000 people have visited the festival and approximately 50,000 people followed the festival through social media. We had about 800 designers from all over Iran participating in the festival and 80 professors in different sections collaborating. Last year, we signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage,Tourism and Handicrafts which will include cultural support and cooperation between the parties. Chia Mod is the only mentor and developer of fashion business in Iran.

Cipal is preparing its third event with the goal of identifying and introducing creative people, creating a platform for synergy and business development and maintaining a healthy, competitive platform. Similar to our previous routine, the festival will be held with the sections of clothing, jewelry, shoes and bags, accessories, fashion styling and forecasting. We are also introducing the new section for technology and start-ups.

Did you have any sales at the Cipal Festival?

Following the successful experience of holding the Sales Festival, which was held in collaboration with ECO on Women's Day and ECO Day at the ECO headquarters, Cipal presented 3,000 clothes for sale at the festival.

In the Cipal exhibition section, there were two collections with the theme of peace, one of which was a combination of Iranian and other countries' clothing and the other one was Chehel-Jean designs that both were very well received by the audience and brought up a cultural subject of conversation of clothing.

What is the Cipal theme this year?

The theme of this year's festival is "Fashion and Architecture." During the exhibition, multiple live conferences will also be held with the presence of professors and experts. In each section, comprehensive content has been provided to the participants for introduction and adaptation. This year we have dedicated a section to teenagers to welcome them. There will be a dedication of a statue to the Iranian teenage designer that places first at the Cipal festival. In the fashion styling section, an effort is made to highlight the importance of this group in the fashion industry.

The Cipal family predicts a bright future for Iranian designers and the fashion and clothing industry in Iran, which certainly requires collective effort.

Revitalization of Materials:
Sustainable Fashion Takes The Lead

ATHENA AKHAVAN

Athena Akhavan was born in the summer of 1984. She graduated with a degree in industrial design from Tehran University. She was granted a scholarship for glassblowing in Murano, Italy, and later placed first at the Sixth Fajr Festival. In 2007, she held her first solo jewelry exhibition with a focus on recycling, and showcased over 100 pieces of recycled materials made from leather, wood and metals in Samin Gallery. Since 2011, she has been studying under the tutelage of Parviz Tanavoli and designing jewelry with the title of "Wearable Sculptures," which has led to ten national and international exhibitions.

Wearable Sculptures

Wearable Sculptures is a novel and groundbreaking movement in the field of jewelry design in a way that, aside from conventional usage, beauty and design are emphasized over comfort and usage. Miniaturized sculptures are hung from wrists and necks and will accompany the people that wear them everywhere. The creation of this visualization of affection in observers will slowly lead to them crossing the boundaries and changing their habits, and with its unconventional style, will lead to a yearning to wear these sculptures.

The other difference that Wearable Sculptures have with other jewelry is the use of recycled materials and the emphasis on the high value of the piece being due to its unique design rather than the materials used. This unique choice leads to a unique look, and will set the wearer aside in any crowd due to its brilliance and distinctiveness, and will show how the wearer's taste is aligned with that of the designer.
During a project in 2017 with focus on recycled materials, the first material that inspired Akhavan was paper. Due to her and her husband, Shahin Ghasemi's, continued presence in the printing house, they used recycled paper and cardboard on a large scale in her pieces, as they wanted to be "green" and environmentally friendly.

Her diligence and obsession in choosing precious materials, such as paper, and choosing the most precise cuts in order to use the thinnest margins of paper and cardboard guided her towards miniature sculptures and wearable structures which led to the initial steps of creation of these pieces. The effort was in not using glues or chemicals and replacing industrial materials in order to keep the designs "green."

The initial pieces were formed with recycling in mind, and along the way of downsizing voluminous pieces and sculptures, color, strings and fabrics were slowly introduced to her works and the designs moved towards being more improvisational.

Sustainable Fashion: A Closer Friendship Between Nature, Society and Economy

Sustainable art means loving the planet Earth and all of its living creatures, including people and animals and all the living parts of nature. It is a deep approach which not only protects the environment, but is also based on ethical and social rules and the shortcomings of today's economy, modern art and the current problematic fashion industry.

Maybe it could be said that "fast fashion" entered the fashion world through populism; there has been mass production without meaningful content, originality or concern over the environmental damages that are caused by using polyester, unrecyclable materials and low-quality chemical dyes, and the wastewater produced from the factories and the washing of these chemical dyes, which down the line, seeps into the water system. On the other hand, the exploitation of cheap labor forces which neglects human rights, labor rights and much more, cause irreparable damage to their surrounding environment.

This fashion industry, aside from the humanitarian and environmental damages, through propagation and promotion of daily and fast-moving trends, targets the souls and minds of individuals. Through advertisements, a great deal of people are dragged towards these superficial and empty aesthetics. The low price of imitation and fake products, the illegal copying of artists, and use of their reputation and cheap labor has caused people to not buy out of necessity. This will drag people into a cycle of unnecessary purchases; purchases without necessity are done only due to the temptation of fashion trends and low prices and the unjustified fear of being left behind and being a part of the conformity.

On the other hand, in sustainable fashion, people respect themselves and the planet and all of its living creatures, and enjoy experiencing wearing something that is specifically designed for them or for a unique taste. Sustainable fashion emphasizes that people are beautiful and deserve beauty. We see beauty and choose beauty; therefore, we do not have the need to entangle

ourselves in passing fashion trends. By emphasizing the foundations of art and design and the right choices, we can use an item of clothing for many years.

Respecting our Fellow Humans and the Professional Workforce

If instead of choosing ten repetitive, low quality and cheap clothing items, people wear part of the art, passion and artistry of an artist, they have respected themselves and the world surrounding them and haven't decorated themselves in items that companies have tailored and made for the masses. One can only decide what to adorn oneself with based on one's choices and taste.
The Golestan collection which was Akhavan's last project in the field of sustainable fashion debuted exclusively through AASSTTIINN in June of 2020. In this project, the effort was put in having the pieces meet standards of sustainable fashion both in terms of materials and meaning. These pieces were done, in limited numbers, limited editions and some were one-of-a-kind and designed in accordance to the orders of AASSTTIINN and the renowned contemporary artist Ferydoun Ava. The process was done completely manually and in a self-taught manner. After the preparation of the paste and recycled sheets, fabrics that had defects and counted as recycled were laminated onto the sheets using natural water-based adhesives.

Most important of all is the story behind each piece, and wearing something that is made for one and is infused with the soul of the artist behind the piece. For Akhavan, the Golestan collection is the same as the thousand thread count and thousand colored rugs in her grandmother's house that used surreal designs from hunting grounds, jungles and fields of flowers. Golestan to her is the gold embroidery on the edge of her grandmother's hanabandan (pre-wedding ceremony) dress.
The vintage cloth added to these pieces was a part of her grandmother's green hanabandan dress which was unfortunately used as a tablecloth for a while and had burn marks because of candles.

Maybe "Wearable Sculptures" is the best title for these creations, because these pieces with the stories that they hold within themselves and the time, passion and art that were put into their creation, instead of being seen as an appealing piece of art in one's house or place of work, is a part of one's clothing and adorns the body. Akhavan says "these pieces are a gift to the earth to keep it happy and a charm on the wearer to remain joyful."

The brand of Athena Akhavan by relying on themes of loving and preserving nature, began designing its jewelry using recycled and upcycled materials. The whole process is done by hand and is self-taught. The majority of the pieces are created in limited editions, using natural materials and adhesives with inspiration drawn from Iranian legends and lore, jewelry, designs and colors.

THE GLORY OF TURKMEN ETHNIC CLOTHING

AFSANEH SHOJAIE

Afsaneh Shojaie has traveled Iran to research native Iranian attire. Soon after, she acquired a studio to make and sell clothes which led to the opening of a few private galleries ranging from London to Dubai. She also has a small, private collection of antique clothes she collected out of passion – not to sell – all kept on display, similar to a small museum, in her house.

One of the characteristics of the vast, civilized and ancient country of Iran is its ethnic diversity. Iran consists of tribes such as Kurds, Lors, Baluchs, Turks, Turkmen, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Qashqai, Bakhtiari, etc., each of which have their own valuable and attractive customs and rituals that have enriched the national culture. Understanding the customs of Iranian ethnic groups is essential.

Clothing that was perhaps only used to protect the body from cold and heat permeated over time to reflect all aspects of life such as customs, beliefs, age, gender roles, occupation, social class and historical and geographical conditions.

Turkmen is the name of a Turkish speaking ethnic group that has lived in Northern Mongolia for thousands of years. Iranian writers in the fifth lunar century refer to a Turkic ethnic group living in Central Asia.

Large groups of Turkmens (türkmenler) are currently living in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Iran. The Turkmens of Iran are mostly located east of the Caspian Sea in the Turkmen Sahara region, the northern part of Golestan province. Small groups of them are scattered in North Khorasan.

Important Turkmen cities in Iran include Turkmen Port, Gonbad Kavous, Aq Qala, Gomishan, Maraveh Tappeh, Simin Dasht and Incheh Borun. Turkmens have long been engaged in producing silk, felt and carpet weaving; they are also very skilled in horse breeding. Turkmens play their own traditional music, with a unique instrument called Dutar.

Turkmen clothing is very unique and filled with beautiful symbols and different coverage levels, which makes them suitable for all ages and occupations.

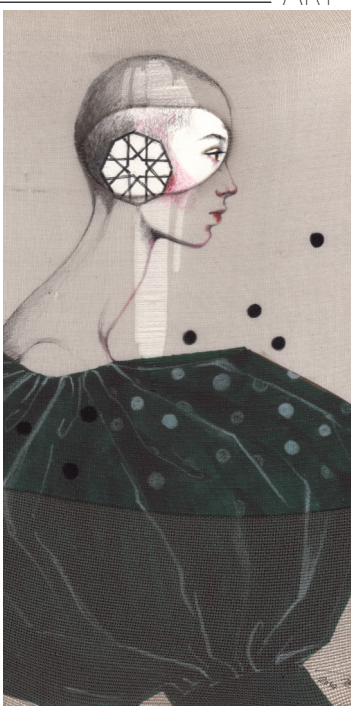
The raw materials of their clothing include animal skin, silk, linen and cotton. They are responsible for growing silkworms and preparing cocoons which provide the yarn and threads that they dye by using natural ingredients such as pomegranate seeds, pomegranate peels and desert plants.

Turkmen women wear Koynek, a shirt which is made of handmade silk fabric, it has several broad yellow stripes and narrow black lines. They also wear a type of coat called a Don which is adorned with special needlework of the region. It is worth mentioning that the needlework on women's coats is very impressive.

They also wear headbands and hats with hand-sewn details. The Turkmen shawl is also an essential part of the traditional Turkmen attire. Turkmen women use their own jewelry in the form of head decorations, necklaces and belts. On the other hand, Turkmen men wear traditional shirts, coats or Dons, pants, hats made of sheepskin and long boots. If the Don is red, it is called Gyrmyz Don, and if it is another color, it is called Garma Don.

Turkemen's impressive culture and aesthetics can be an inspiration for designers worldwide.

“Turkmen clothing is very unique and filled with beautiful symbols and different coverage levels, which makes them suitable for all ages and occupations.”



Internal Emotions & FEMININITY

MARYAM JANGRAVI

Maryam Jangravi was born in 1983 in the city of Khansar in Esfahan, Iran. She moved to Tehran at the age of 14 and after graduating from high school, she studied graphic design at Tehran University of Arts. She continued her studies by pursuing a master's degree in illustration from Tehran University of Fine Arts. In between her studies she took up fashion design, began working in fashion illustration professionally and was invited to teach at a few institutes during which time she had the chance to work alongside professionals such as Roya Mozaffari and Forouzan Shahkoopah. She currently works in the fields of illustration and graphic design.

Thank you so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview. How would you describe your creative process?

The creative process is not a clear or concise one for me. I have different experiences with every project I take on. In my work, I always try to be my truest self. Although I am an introvert, when I want to create something I try to experience myself as a whole.

Could you describe your artistic approach? How do you start a project and when do you know it is finished?

For me, the projects begin without any particular structure and the main points become clearer as the project progresses. If I have a specific topic in mind, I begin by writing and developing the ideas, then I collect as much visual material as possible and conduct related studies and research. I even research what other artists' thoughts are in regards to the project that I have in mind so I can look at the project from different perspectives.
In regards to the end process, it is completely based on my personal feelings. Sometimes I reach a point where I think the work has reached its end, but after looking at the piece again, I consider making some changes.

What is your favorite piece of work in your portfolio?

The answer to this question is not so simple. It's hard for me to choose, but a few pieces from the PARAZIAN collection are especially striking to me. This is due to their composition and the feeling that I get from the pieces, as I see myself in them.

What resources and techniques do you use?

In regards to the technique, I have extensive experience and have tried just about everything. However, currently, simple materials such as pencils

and markers, which are easily accessible to me, are my permanent companions. But I also do use digital techniques.

Describe the project that you presented in the MODAM concept store.

In the spring of 2019, the PARAZIAN collection which included about 30 artworks was exhibited at MODAM Concept Store. For me, this collection occurred at a certain point in my life when I was struggling with my internal emotions and femininity. In this collection, thin mesh socks, commonly referred to as "PARAZIAN socks" in Iran, were utilized as a medium to cover the entire piece and only partially show them through the spacing in the mesh and tears. In my statement of this collection, I explained that sometimes torn and frayed pieces and imperfections can be part of the formation process and completing a piece.

What styles and people have been the source of your inspiration?

I get inspiration from my internal feelings, personal experiences, my environment, and a wide range of different artistic areas. Even if I may not prefer certain styles, artists or pieces of art, they could still be a good source of inspiration.

How do you learn about new techniques and tools?

If I feel the need to experience a new material or technique, I'll seek it out and experience it. And if I can't achieve any results with the new material or technique on my own, I will research it, get advice from people who are experienced with it and will set time aside for it.

Can you tell us more about your upcoming projects?

I am currently working on a few different projects and hope to showcase them soon. One of these projects is the continuation of the PARAZIAN collection; it has taken shape and is almost ready to be showcased. Other projects include the "Lāk" collection, which is in its primary stages. This collection is very appealing to me and is a collaboration between myself and Sedigheh Motalebi, an illustrator.

> *"I always try to be myself. Although I am an introvert, when I want to create something I try to experience myself as a whole"*

AZADEH AIDEN

Azadeh Aiden, founder of fashion label Aiden, is a 34-year-old mother of two who studied business administration.

> Aiden is a customized accessories label which embraces change with each and every collection, and aims to improve and spread happiness through its customized, hand embroidered accessories.

It all began when fashion designer Huda Al Nuaimi's designs inspired Azadeh Aiden and she decided to fulfill her dream of entering the fashion industry.
She has been working on her handcrafted embroidery designs line since 2018.
Her inspiration comes from women, including, as she puts it, "myself, the woman I want to be and the women I encounter." She finds it fascinating that women can be powerful and sensitive at the same time.
She has a strong attachment to her employees and loves to provide an environment for other talented women to grow professionally.
Azadeh Aiden wants to continue to push the boundaries of her company and take it to the next level.

UP&COMING DESIGNERS

MARYAM YAZDANPANAH

Maryam Yazdanpanah is a post graduate from RMIT University in Australia with a master's degree in hematology.
She moved back to Tehran after living abroad for seven years to pursue a career in line with her passion for art.
In order to combine art and science she completed a fashion design course to be able to link her scientific vision with her passion for art and fashion.
Fashion design will be a way to give life to her ideas. She wants people to sense and experience her designs while wearing them.

> She is currently running a young and self-funded ever growing label called "SAAKU."

Each season, the very essence of SAAKU's designs draws from the fascinating beauty that is etched in every corner of the two worlds of nature and science such as; botany, the growth and the formation of fungi and the human body; the ordered disorders, mesmerizing normal and pathological tissue patterns, to name a few.

Whether it is touching on a genetic disorder, a socio-psychological issue, philosophical and emotional challenges or environmental concerns, SAAKU is always a bearer of an enlightening message and creator of an unforgettable experience. Every design carries a wearable message for its audiences. The collective voice of the collection is usually amplified and echoed through a conceptual sculptural piece.

NOGOL JALALI

Nogol Jalali is an Iranian designer who has made quite a name for herself when it comes to her handbag designs.
Nogol used to explore all kinds of materials to create her vision when she was very little. Her passion for art and design inspired her to attend a graduate program in accessories design at Domus Academy, founded by Gianfranco Ferrè in Milan, Italy.
After successfully completing her master's degree, she had the opportunity to work closely with Diego Dolcini, Moreschi, Daniela Puppa, Fabio Cammarata and Frankie Morello, through whom she learned the practical foundations of the fashion industry.
In 2007, Nogol established her own brand called NONO, which is best recognized for its glamorous, comfortable, spacious and lightweight bags, all handcrafted with special attention to detail. In 2015, she introduced her new line of Kilim Bags, rich in a variety of colors and designs, by integrating traditional Iranian weaving techniques and patterns into modern practical designs.
The brand proudly supports a network of artisanal weavers, almost all of whom are women who work tirelessly to not only craft beautiful Kilims, but also to support their entire families.

> NONO Kilim Line was inspired by the belief that supporting these enterprising women would improve their livelihoods while allowing centuries-old traditions to flourish in the modern age.

ZAHRA ZARINMEHR

Zahra Zarrinmehr, born June 1994, graduated with a master's degree in architecture. She has been working in the field of fashion since 2017 and is currently operating under her own brand, ZiZi.
Since architecture and clothing design are the reflection of a society's identity and culture, her brand has tried to show Iran's culture and civilization in its new collection, which is inspired by the traditional clothes and architecture of each region.
In Zarrinmehr's opinion, by designing these traditionally inspired clothes, we can create an outfit that is both in line with the interactions of today's society and that shows each province's local costume. Therefore, the purpose of this collection is to update and modernize local clothing and make them attractive to younger generations, who are more inclined to wear fashionable Western clothes.

> ZiZi's motto is:
> Iranian women's clothing is not only a covering
> It is also
> an artistic expression
> and representation of her
> in the
> modern world.

AMIN AJDARI

Amin Ajdari studied computer science in Tehran, however he always leaned towards the design aspect of the degree. With a general interest in design, sculpting, printmaking, photography and playing the violin, he decided to pursue a degree in fashion design in Milan, Italy. For his dissertation, Ajdari brought to life the traditional and one of a kind clothes shepherds would wear in Iran with influences from traditional architecture of his ancestral land. He called the project "Beyond the Borders." Soon after, he returned to Iran with the hope of bringing back what he had learned about design in Europe. By recruiting a group of designers who were open-minded and came from different backgrounds, Panje was created.

For the designers of Panje, it was very important to start off on the right foot. A lot of the inspiration for their first collection was drawn from the '60s European styles and Kurdish women's clothes. The collection was called "The Far and Ambiguous Place of Imagination'' and was showcased in Vatan concept store. Panje's second collection was inspired by the forms and lines of the painting "Lino Lago." The collection, which used denim for its pieces, was called "Shore of the Sky'' and was showcased in Comode concept store.

"For PANJE, an article of clothing explains the ways of the 21st century."

It is important that the people wearing their clothes like and believe in themselves. This is why Panje's motto is "wear your own style." While Panje is currently only designing clothes for women, they hope to design clothes for men someday. And yet, this is not the end of their work; they are not necessarily selling clothes, they are selling a way of life.

UP&COMING DESIGNERS

NEGAR TAIEBI

Negar Taiebi, born in 1995, has a bachelor's degree in architecture and is currently a student of French literature in the Science and Research Branch of Tehran Islamic Azad University.

"The environment that she grew up in is reflected in her work and brand, Negareh."

When she began experimenting with fashion design, Negar wanted to utilize her personal space and style which were inspired by music and the classical movies of the '50s and '60s while also being in sync with the world and nature, and most important of all, history.

Music is one of the pillars in her designs due to her affection towards music, and more specifically, the works of French composer, Erik Satie, who lived in the 19th and 20th centuries. Satie was a master of association of passing moments with foggy and cloudy spaces. In addition to music, classical movies have also inspired her with her biggest inspiration being Audrey Hepburn.

Hepburn believed that "Why change? Everyone has their own style. When you have found it, you should stick to it."

Negar believes that for a better life one must be in tune with the world and nature. In her designs for Negareh she has created a cloudy and mysterious environment with a focus on a selection of fabrics, color palettes, and her photography.

The end creation is a completely personal space that shows her world view. In this direction she utilizes white, bright, and see-through fabrics such as organza, netting, silk, etc. which symbolize reflections in water, clouds, sounds and fragrances that linger in the air during sunset.

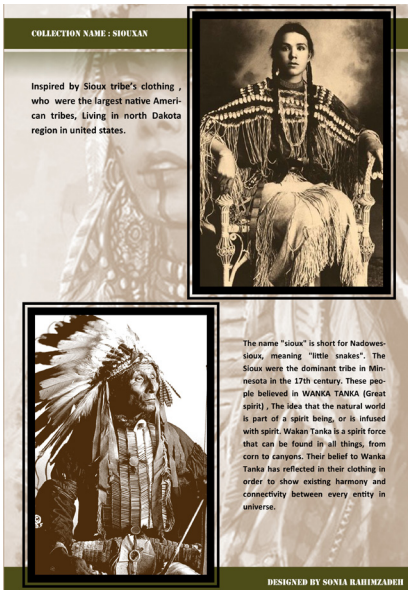
Her views of her work are not limited to the world of fashion. She thinks creating a piece of art should not be for and in accordance with fashion photography. In general, Negareh tries to compile the aforementioned arts and create a sense of nostalgia in its audience.

SONIA RAHIMZADEH

Born in December 1988, Rahimzadeh completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in industrial design.
In 2017, her personal interest in fashion, motivated her to gain knowledge and experience in this field.
In 2019, she entered the field of footwear design and illustration.

> Among all her successes in fashion is coming in first place in the shoe illustration section at the Cipal Festival in Iran.

She believes that the shoe industry in Iran has great potential.
She is currently working in the design and development sections of the footwear industry.



UP& COMING DESIGNERS

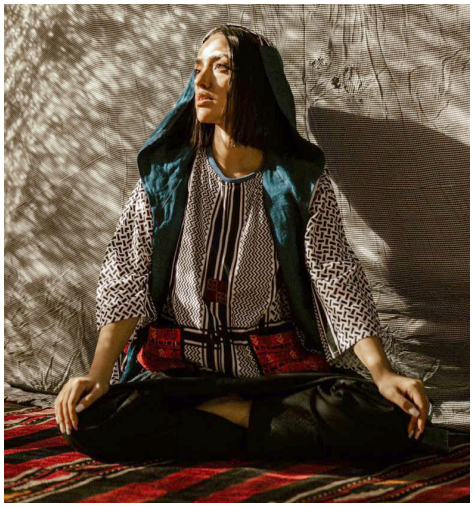
RAMAK ZARRINGHABA

Zarringhaba has a great enthusiasm in designing and unveiled her first collection at the age of 17.
Her goal is to make Iranians more recognizable with her designs.

> She is mostly inspired by the Sistan and Baluchistan needlework and hand-woven fabrics which are three meters wide, similar to certain types of carpets, and mostly made out of natural threads.

The materials that she uses make her designs eco-friendly. Her greatest goal in designing is to show Iranian civilization and design history which goes back to 7000 B.C. as evident by the discovery of the first spinning tool near Behshahr in Kamarband Cave.
Iranians in all periods such as the Medes, Achaemenids, etc. had their own ethnic costumes.
Recently, she added children's clothing line to her collection to create a richer culture for Iranian children and make them aware of Iranian art. With an entrepreneurial spirit, she tries to combine modern global fashion with Iranian handicrafts.
So far, she has been invited to showcase her collections in Italy, France, London and New York alongside the world-famous fashion brands such as Dolce Gabbana, Versace and Gucci.
She has also been invited to collaborate online at San Francisco Fashion Week.

Zarringhaba hopes that Iranian brands can have international representation and can showcase their designs and collections globally.



HESAM ZAMIRI

Hessam Zamiri was born in May 1991, Bandar Abbas, Iran. He has great interest in art, production, clothing and interior design.

His interests started with the Cipal 99 tournament, where his talent sparked and he made connections with a large circle of designers and experts.

With the cooperation and support of each other, bigger things happened. Among his many accomplishments are:
• Winner of the women's handbags design award at Cipal 2020 competition with Kif Kush brand;
• Collaboration with foreign and prominent domestic stores;
• Designer of the first floating recreational pier in Iran;
• Founder and designer of Zamiri Design in 2020.

“Zamiri’s brand trademark translates into creating a path between thoughts, emotions and materials. Which means tools and objects around us are not just to meet our needs, they all carry emotions and vibes that are reciprocated in humankind.”

UP&COMING DESIGNERS

GHAZAL PAKZAD

Fashion designer Ghazal Pakzad was born in November 1992 in Zahedan, Iran.

She has a bachelor’s degree in graphics with a certificate in pattern making and sewing from Zadari Fashion House.

In 2019, Pakzad was selected as the top entrepreneur in Iran and also in the same year she was given the best costume design award at Cipal festival.

“Currently, she is the manager of **PARIVAR** brand. Pakzad has great experiences such as working with the Cameron Zigzal brand, four years of sales, and clothing design using traditional needlework on modern fabrics.”

The purpose of launching this brand is to present a new way of utilizing the 8000-year-old needlework art of Baluchistan combined with modernity.

Parivar fashion house focuses more on the original motifs and patterns of Baluchistan, done in the form of handwork and computer stitching.

MAHSA KHEIRKHAH

Mahsa Kheirkhah graduated in Art Research and Analysis in 2012.
She is currently an art professor at Pars University of Art and Architecture in the fields of sculpture, painting and jewelry design.
Since 2010, she has had numerous exhibitions inside and outside of Iran both in groups and individually.

PEGAH KHOSRAVI

Khosravi is a graduate of theater directing and has acted in theater, television and cinema in Iran.
She has received various acting awards in international and domestic festivals.

Khosravi took a costume design course in the Netherlands where she started designing stage costumes.

> In 2011, She began her professional fashion career by launching Zima.
> In the beginning of her career, Khosravi only worked on red carpet outfits in foreign and domestic festivals. Afterwards, under the name of Zima Design Collection, she launched a Ready to Wear line for the public.

She rapidly excelled in the fashion industry and became one of the best fashion designers in Iran.
The unique style and signature of the Zima brand is quite clear and visible in their designs.

Khosravi's works have a special way of demonstrating ancient and folkloric attire. Her designs are completely personalized and combined with modern elements that makes them easy to wear.

Zima is a luxury brand that has a specific audience which includes Western customers.
Pegah Khosravi has fearlessly and consciously introduced special colors and textures into the world of Iranian fashion and continues to enhance her work.

FACTS

3200 BCE

The establishment of Shahr-e Sukhteh

Shahr-e Sukhteh, also spelled Shahr-i Sokhta, or The Burnt City, is one of the wonders in the ancient world and the largest and the most advanced urban establishments in the southeast of Iran. Founded along the direction of the Hirmand River to Hamun Lake, it is located at the junction of Bronze Age trade routes crossing the Iranian plateau. With more than 5000 years of history, the city was a scientific, industrial, social, cultural and artistic center, with traces of four phases of life up to 1800 BCE.

5,630 Square metres

Size of the world's largest hand-woven carpet

The carpet, manufactured in Iran by the Iran Carpet Company, was created for the Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed Mosque mosque in 2007. The carpet, weighing 35 tons, was created in 9 parts and assembled in the mosque. The carpet was originally made to have been around 6,000 square meters, however parts of it had to be taken away in order to fit it onto the floor in the mosque.

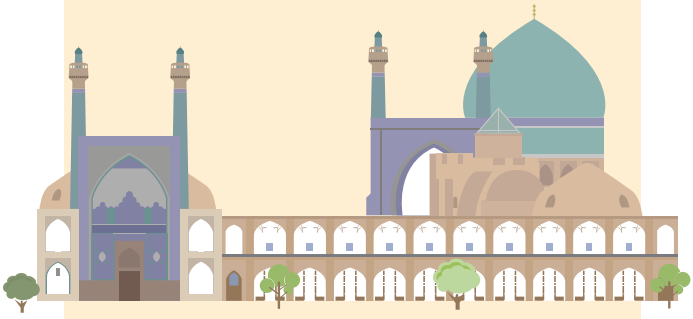
150,000

Number of annual rhinoplasty surgeries, or nose jobs, performed in Iran

Peer pressure and conforming to societal standards of beauty contributes to the high number of rhinoplasty surgeries performed in Iran. Additionally, due to the Islamic dress code in the country, enhancing an exposed profile like their nose is a significant method of self-expression for Iranian women. The number of rhinoplasty surgeries performed in Iran is 7 times more than in the US.

24 Number of Iran's UNESCO World Heritage Sites

The first two sites to be listed as part of UNESCO's World Heritage List, Persepolis and Meidan Emam, located northeast of Shiraz and Esfahan, respectively, were registered in 1979. In 2019, the latest site to be registered was the Hyrcanian Forests which stretch along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea.



1,500,000,000

Liters of water used by the fashion industry each year

The fashion industry, after the fuel industry, is the second most polluting and is also the second largest consumer of water worldwide. Around 20 percent of wastewater worldwide comes from fabric dyeing and treatment. To produce a single T-shirt out of conventional cotton, 2,700 liters of water is required.

Luckily, there are some companies that have invented ways to reduce the use of energy and water. ColorZen, a start up in North Carolina, ensures that the pretreatment of conventional cotton makes the dying process faster while using 90 percent less water, 75 percent less energy and 90 percent fewer auxiliary chemicals.

10%

of the global carbon emissions is produced by the apparel industry

This is more than all the international flights and maritime shipping combined. The rate increase of this statistic indicates that the fashion industry's greenhouse gas emission will increase more than 50 percent by 2030. For instance, a pair of jeans ends up using 3,781 liters of water; this is comparable to the emission of around 33.4 kilograms of carbon equivalent. In addition, producing 60 billion kilograms of fabrics worldwide requires 1 trillion kilowatt hours of electricity.

80,000,000,000

Garments produced each year

An average person today buys 60 percent more items per year compared to 20 years ago, but unfortunately the average lifespan of each piece of clothing is about 5.4 years, causing enormous amounts of waste. Out of all the recycled garments, only 1 percent is recycled into new pieces of clothing, and only 10 percent of clothes in thrift stores are actually sold. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation says that because of unworn clothing, excluding donated or recycled garments, about 500 billion USD is estimated to be lost in value in the fashion industry.

Art in The Time Of COVID-19

HOSSEIN AGHAEIPOUR

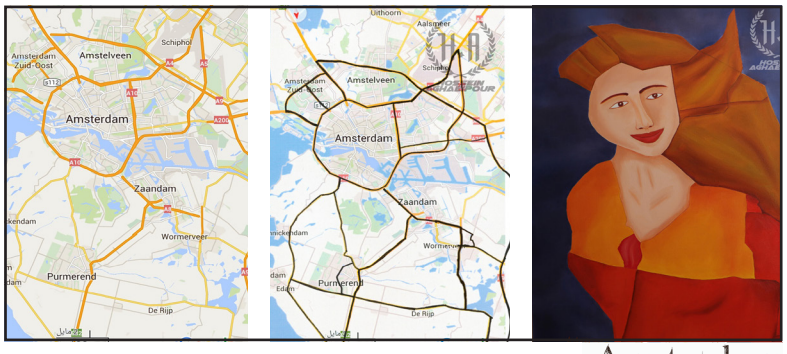
Hossein Aghaeipour is an Iranian painter and photographer born in 1981, in Rasht, Iran. He is an independent painter, who uses road map lines to show his audience different perspectives of cities; he wants people to imagine a portrait when they hear the names of those cities. Aghaeipour also uses this method to design jewelry. In his latest exhibition, which was held online due to the coronavirus pandemic, he displayed his jewelry pieces that were inspired by roadways and road maps of cities. Given that Wuhan was the origin of the virus, he painted a portrait of the city, and by the time his painting was finished, the city where he lived was also under lockdown. So far, he has held four solo exhibitions in different cities in Iran and has participated in a handful of group exhibitions with other Iranian artists around the world including in Paris, Rome, Istanbul, Vancouver, etc. Aghaeipour does not sell his paintings, but rather only presents them to the public to share his perspective of the world so that his audience pays more attention to the paintings than the conventional price tag found on others' pieces.

At the beginning of 2019, no one thought this year would be one of the most difficult times of our lives, a year in which panic spread throughout the world and the entire planet faced serious challenges. The coronavirus became a threat to global health and it affected all industries including manufacturing, art, health, tourism, etc.

Coronavirus is an uninvited guest that has spread more than initially anticipated and as time goes on, new dimensions of this catastrophe are discovered.

In the beginning, different opinions were published every few days about this unknown virus that led to confusion. People quarantined themselves in their homes, and sanitizing items quickly became scarce. In Iran, some people were skeptical of the published statistics about the number of cases. As the pandemic worsened, businesses were faced with crises causing some to permanently shut down.

Every day there are multiple reports on the progress of treatments, vaccines and other prevention methods. According to health officials, we are not even midway through fighting the coronavirus. The World Health Organization says this situation might continue for the next two years even with an effective vaccine. The economy has experienced much turmoil and a lot of damage has been done to art-related jobs. The



art community in general was one of the victims of coronavirus restrictions. Movie theaters, concert halls and art galleries suddenly became vacant. The queues for movies and concerts turned into queues for masks and disinfectants. Many were disappointed that they could not visit art galleries. Despite the effort of many art galleries and art institutions to stay open by obeying the health protocols, they could not overcome the fear of contracting and further spreading the coronavirus.

The government's order to shut down high-risk businesses quickly changed the direction of many art activities during the pandemic. The challenge of staying-at-home during this time was not just for artists and suppliers of art products but also athletes, restaurant owners and many other businesses.

Maybe in a few years these problems might sound distant, but for now the shadow of the coronavirus is still weighing heavily on people. People's creativity and imagination have flourished amidst the tragedies of this year. Many people began making short animated clips or home videos in cyberspace to cheer people up. From posting health tips, homemade face mask tutorials to online concerts, games, laughter and challenge videos, artists and creatives played a significant role in influencing society.

Heroic medical staff sacrificed themselves in the fight against coronavirus and in return, artists created beautiful masterpieces, and musicians played music and sang for medical staff near hospitals, in appreciation of their bravery. The impacts of these actions compelled people to feel the depth of this tragedy even more.

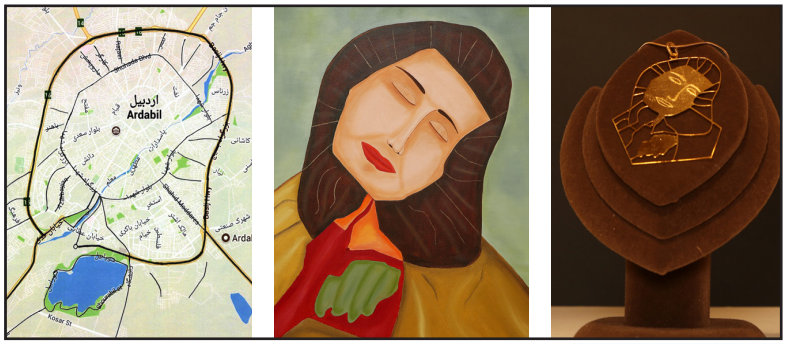
The influence of the coronavirus on the art world is quite evident. What is truly remarkable is the creativity that COVID-19 has brought to the arts.

Many painters have been using masks instead of canvases for their paintings, creating avant-garde and deconstructive pieces. Lack of materials to work with at home pushed people to become more creative. Everyone expressed themselves with the least available equipment possible. For example, there were even some musicians who sang from their balconies just to raise morale in their neighborhoods.

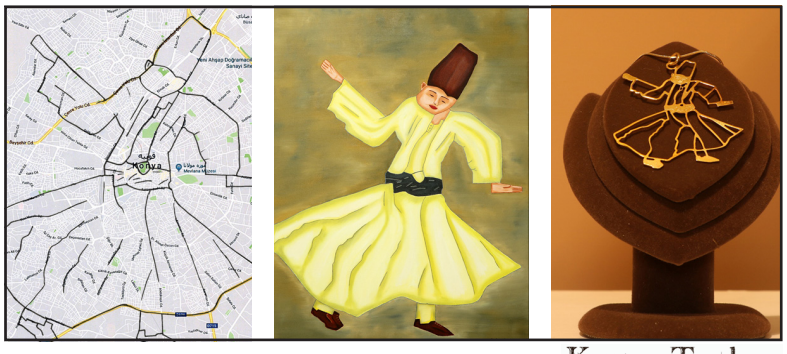
Many people tapped into their creative, artistic potential and used the extra leisure time they had to create short video clips and other artwork. The work they presented was based on their individual abilities. Some of them were widely noticed by people over social media. The impact on the art world is immeasurable. Since all the art institutions and galleries shut down, the main source of income to most artists has been jeopardized, and even people with large incomes are suddenly facing severe financial pressure.

Social media opened a new door to this issue by letting artists offer online classes to the public, most of which were free in the early stages of the pandemic, but as the quarantine period continued, they started charging fees in order to support themselves. Online auctions have also been booming. As we go forward, people are getting more familiar with this new way of life. It is unclear how long coronavirus will affect our world but art and creativity have played a significant role in surviving this pandemic by healing boredom and alleviating mental anguish during lockdowns. Art will always find the way to flourish and rise under any circumstances.

> *Art is a victim of the coronavirus pandemic but did not surrender to its dark crowns and is still fighting to survive and continue its bright life. Coronavirus was a lot of things but it was not the nail in the coffin of art. Art will remain to heal the boredom and mental anguish of humans in the continuation of the struggle against this virus and until it's defeated, like a phoenix, it will emerge from the ashes of its painful fire.*



Ardabil,Iran



Konya,Turkey

Tabriz,Iran

A cubist take on the Shahname's iconic "Div"

DEHGHAN MOHAMMADI

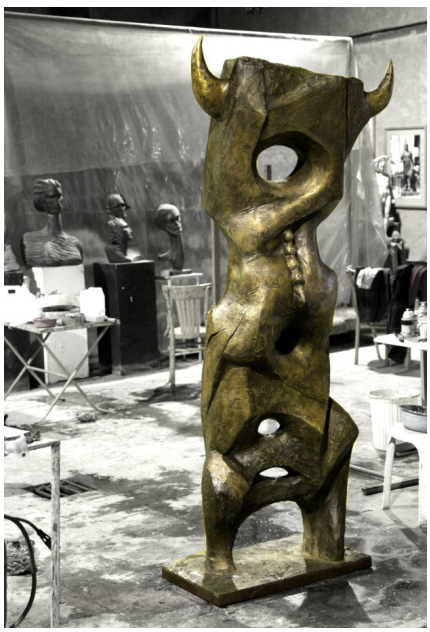
Dehghan Mohammadi is an Iranian artist and sculptor. In the course of his career as a sculptor, he has created numerous pieces, such as the statue of Div at Iranshahr Theater and the Token of the World Cup at Azadi Stadium. He has also worked as a set and costume designer for several successful TV shows. In this exclusive interview, he talks about his background and his journey in today's world of art in Iran.

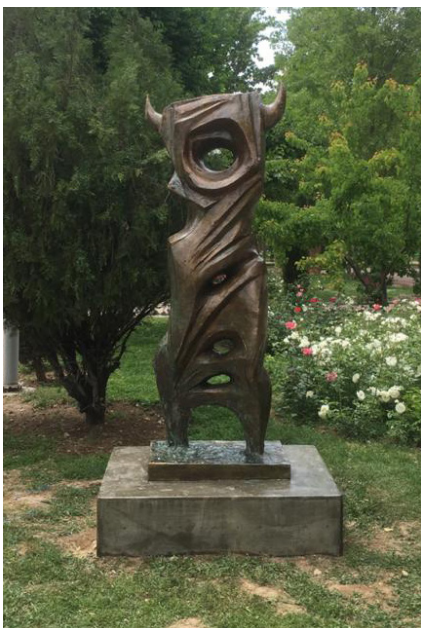
Thank you so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview. Please tell us a little about yourself.
My name is Dehghan Mohammadi. I come from an artistic family. My father, Iraj, is a sculptor, my mother, Sada, is a potter and set designer, and my sister, Maral, is a composer. For as long as I can remember, I was in my dad's studio among sculptures, the furnace, and art books. I grew up among some of the greatest Iranian artists who were my parents' friends. As a child, I used to daydream all the time. I had these strange dreams about being Michael Jackson's friend or being Rambo himself. This daydreaming has continued to this day, in a more controlled manner.

How and when did you first become seriously interested in art?
I started thinking more seriously about art when I went to a school of fine arts. It was everything I had imagined it would be. Everyone dreamt of becoming an artist. I studied painting and sculpting and I was at the top of my class. Towards the end of my studies, I found my way into television. First, I starred in a series, then I worked as a set and costume designer. Finally, I began directing, which I still do.
After art school, I entered a university of arts and architecture, which didn't have much to offer me personally since I had already begun my career.

When did you make your first sculpture?
My first work was molding a four-meter concrete statue. I think I must have been 16 years old. I got paid very well. No matter how much I spent, I didn't seem to run out. Then, when I was 18, I worked on a bronze statue of Ebrahim Ghanbari Mehr, the famous musical instruments maker. That was my first official work and it was installed in Kish Island.
It was around the same time when I entered a biennale of sculpting for the first time. Jazeh Tabatabai, an Iranian artist, was very supportive but since my father was on the jury, he refused to accept me in the competition. This hurt me deeply and I gave up sculpting. I took cinema more seriously and started making commercials and music videos. I fell in love with it and I completely forgot about sculpting which I had gone through a lot for.

How did you get back to sculpting?
I didn't go back to it for seven years, until I started rereading Shahnameh, which I had read as a teenager. It was around the time of the biennale so I started sculpting again and made my best work, which was the sculpture of the Div (legendary monster in Iranian literature and poetry) from Shahnameh.
It was planned to be made out of bronze but I hurt my hand badly and couldn't finish it on time for the biennale. I had to complete it using fiber which, of course, was not as good. This spring, after 15 years, I finally managed to finish the bronze version which was then installed in Khane Honarmandan at Iranshahr Theater, alongside works of great artists such as Parviz Tanavoli, Iraj





Mohammadi, Hassan Emad and many others.

What other projects have you completed?
I have installed more than 20 pieces in Iran, from portraits of Dr. Gharib, Rahi Moayerri, Master Ghanbari to the Token of the World cup at Azadi Stadium, and the sculpture of Zakaria Razi at the Razi institute. I have also completed the molding and casting of more than 60 statues. Sculpting has now become a passion of mine again. It's not merely a job to pay the bills anymore.

What artists or professionals have been your biggest influences?
The works of Antony Gormley, Anish Kapoor and the works of today's modernist artists. I'm very much interested in figurative works as well. I've traveled the world and visited several museums. I have tried to study the process of change, and through that my new works were created.
They were displayed at my exhibition in Los Angeles.

What is the name of your latest work and what does it represent?
My new piece is called Golrokh, which is a metaphor for the new generation of Iranian women. It was displayed next to a piece by a great internationally-known Iranian artist, Shirin Neshat.

What are you working on now?
My new collection was supposed to be exhibited in London, in a gallery I had previously worked with in 2017, but the plans changed because of the pandemic.

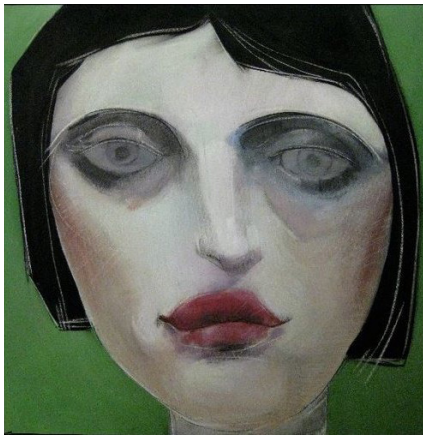
How has the pandemic affected you?

To be honest, I have enjoyed this period.
My heart goes out to all those who have lost their loved ones, but I'm personally grateful for this opportunity.
It taught me not to take myself too seriously and to be humble.

It taught me that I can be kinder to those around me and reminded me of my responsibility towards my parents.

It also reminded me that life is far too short and that somethings are not worth it.
I used to think we were the most important generation of modern history because we were born when computers didn't exist and witnessed the digital age.

But now, I think we are the COVID-19 generation.



A Self-Tought Artist's Profile: Revival of Ancient Mythical Creatures

ALIKHAN ABDOLLAHI

By:Ghazal Mostafa

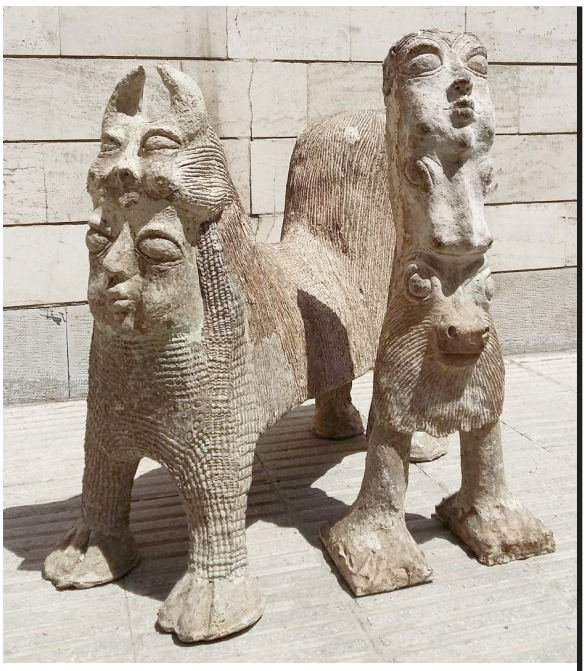
Self-taught artist, Alikhan Abdollahi was born in April 1963 in a small village in Afghanistan. He migrated to Iran in 1989 and has been living here ever since. At the time of his migration, his country was dealing with nationwide wars which led to him moving to Iran. After moving to Iran, he worked as a gatekeeper for a residential building in Tehran. He always had a passion for wood and stone and began his artistic career in 2001.

A small engine room in the building where he worked changed his life forever. "I have always wanted to demonstrate that the people of Afghanistan, despite all the regional wars, have a passion for art." His friendship with an old artist and painter, Hasssan Moshar, who used to sell his art on the side of the street became the foundation of his journey in sculpting. Moshar once told him "If you start something in your life, never give up and know that there's always a way to succeed." His words sparked a light in Abdollahi's mind and he began to pursue his dream of sculpting.

He explains, "One day in an area in Tehran called Karim Khan bridge, I gathered some pieces of wood, nails, some waste materials, and using the mixture of soil and water, I built my very first statue." He adds, "I used flour dough to create the sculpture's body and to add the details. When I finished the work and saw the first statue that I had created, I couldn't stop thinking about sculpting. Years passed and I yearned to find some new materials that I could use for sculpting until I came across egg cartons. Once I realized that the egg carton is vulnerable to humidity and deforms easily, I became very happy and mixed it with liquid glue to make my dough."

At the beginning of his journey, he would get his egg cartons from grocery stores, but luckily one of the residents of the building where he used to be a gatekeeper, provided him with large amounts of cartons from a factory where he worked. Abdollahi adds, "At first I used to build the statues just for fun and for myself to enjoy, until my friend Hassan sold one of my statues to a tall man for 50,000 Rials. It was such an exciting experience to make money from our art work. The statue that we sold was a human's upper body that was made out of paper and glue, a technique which is called paper-mâché."

As Abdollahi started focusing more on his sculpting, the tall man who had bought one of his artworks returned and bought the rest of his art pieces. His name was Kambiz Derambakhsh, a famous artist, who would change



Abdollahi's future by showcasing his works in galleries all around Tehran. Three years later his first exhibition was held in Tehran's Art Association Center.

Abdollahi says, "Sculpting calms my mind. When I first started, I didn't exactly know what I wanted to create and I would start with what came to my mind at that moment. The sculptures are my imagination that I manifest with joy and passion. I believe we all have imaginations that might one day come to the surface and manifest themselves. Many artists have said that my work is wild and demonic. If I build a sculpture that I don't love, I break it down with an ax and recycle the material to use on a different sculpture that I can create a connection with."

These days Abollahi works on custom orders. He says that owls, lions and goats are the most popular designs. Even though he never went back to his home country, he says "Your home country is like your mother and your mother will always be your mother. Even if your mother isn't present, she will always be there in spirit."

> *Iranian and Afghan people have very similar cultures; they both speak the same language and follow similar traditions.*

As Abdollahi describes, what kept him in Iran "was the kind and welcoming people of the country and most importantly the fact that Iranian people didn't treat us as immigrants or foreigners. Iran has been welcoming Afghan immigrants for more than 40 years.

Abdollahi has been working with paper-mâché for many years. He has created some extraordinary sculptures with incredible characteristics including "Disaster," "The Bride," "Old Woman," "The Bird" and "Strange Demons" which can be found in many art galleries across Tehran. His unique sculptures demonstrate his artistic side where he turns his imagination into an artwork, drawing from his culture, strange creatures, animals, and humans with multiple faces. His ultimate goal in life is to be proud and satisfied of his accomplishments and the works that he creates. However, he believes there is no such thing as to be fully satisfied in the world of art.

HANEH DESIGN:
The Art of Print & Production

AFROUZ RAJAEI

Afrouz Rajaei was born in 1987. She studied graphic design at Isfahan University of Art, located in Isfahan where she currently lives. Before starting her own company, Haneh Design, Rajaei used to work with screen printing on fabric. The process took place in a warehouse whereby illustrations were printed onto fabric, which would be turned into clothing. At the time, 10 to 12 years ago, this process was not widely used. After many years of working with fabrics, she was invited to an art exhibition in Turkey, which started her career of illustrating on different mediums such as pottery. Rajaei found that this new medium had more potential than screen printing. Rajaei is currently the manager of Haneh Design. Along with her husband, Navid, they come up with the main creative ideas and their team carries them out.

How did Haneh Design start and how long has it been active for?
My partner and I used to work in print and production. After a period of time, I began to work for an exhibition in Turkey and drew several illustrations on plates and clay spoons, which the customers really enjoyed. Notably, I have always preferred this type of work. After approximately one year, my husband Navid began encouraging me to showcase my work on Instagram. My expectation was for my work to eventually be showcased in exhibitions, not to be sold.
Soon after, someone from the Cinema Museum Gallery contacted me and wanted to buy some of my works. I was amazed and felt like I was entering a new world. This was the first time I realized that other people liked my work and wanted to buy them. From then on, my work took shape; I focused more on the colors and shapes of my art and took it more seriously and people started ordering my pieces for themselves or galleries.
As a new brand, Haneh Design took about one year to materialize. It has now been about three years that it has been professionally operational and successful.

What materials do you use in your work? What is your creative process? How do you choose the colors you use?
I started by working on clay and ceramics, but for about a year now I have been working on wood. We used to work on a scale ranging between 25 to 30 cm, which then turned into 35 cm and it currently goes up to even 1 meter. First, we choose a muse for our work and then we begin to brainstorm, by contemplating which colors to use etc. Our work is affected by many things, such as the mood we start the day with, movies we watch or conversations we have with each other.

When I first started working, I worked with my husband. I created the drawings and he focused on the rest of the business, such as packaging. The level of work I had eventually went up and we couldn't keep up with all the work we had to do during the day, so we began posting job listings and were surprised to receive so much interest. Some people who really enjoyed art began to work with us and I think that, since Navid and I believe that teamwork is important, we were able to efficiently work together as a team. Our belief in them and their hard work help improve our product. For example, when I want to make a product, they can offer new views and opinions, which has really helped my work. One of our team members, Mahdieh, is someone I always communicate with when choosing colors.

Why did you choose these mediums to show your work?
Since I already had a background in the field of illustration – I used to illustrate book covers – I was used to working on paper and always wondered if illustrations can be done on other platforms. Was it only possible to see illustrations in magazines and books? These thoughts led me to illustrate on plates. It might seem like an inconvenient thing to do, but at the time it was a strange thing to experiment with and I wanted to try it! Although Iranian culture has a history of artwork on plates, I hadn't seen anyone else do what I was doing.
For us and our team, it doesn't matter what mediums we've worked with. We've just about worked on every medium, from plates to ceramics to wood. Maybe next year we won't work with these materials and will move on to another medium. What is important to us is being able to share the positivity of our work from one medium to the next. We want our work to be put up in people's houses.

What are the meanings of the symbols and elements in your works? Could we say that you are inspired by symbolism in your work?
Yes, why not? I believe that people may unintentionally lean towards the use of symbols; sometimes it is present in our daily lives and could go unnoticed. Either way, it exists in our lives. I have personally seen lots of symbols in my life: fish, water, clouds, for example, could have a different meaning to each person. Sometimes we see symbols and sometimes we don't. Some symbols are harder to interpret, such as the

ocean or even some flowers which take on different shapes, and can be seen differently by each person, each woman.

What else inspires you? How much of your inspiration comes from yourself and/or others?
Firstly, I can say that I am inspired by films, books and topics I've heard in conversation with other people. I think the most influential are conversations amongst people. This goes back to what I said about symbols, and how sometimes they go unnoticed, but they still really do have an effect on us. One thing I've noticed is that people feel good when they're looking at our art. Navid and I continue encouraging positivity in others when they look at our work, whether it's because of our behavior, art or style.
Since, at the time being, I don't personally work on every piece of art and have a team that works on them with me, each piece of work takes on the feeling and personality of its artist. I've had customers tell me that something they purchased a few months ago looks different to what we sell now, and this is because two different artists worked on those pieces.
The difference is particularly visible in the faces of the women we draw, their emotions and expressions. I find it interesting that each artist unintentionally puts their own emotion into their art. It really is unintentional; an artist may intend to draw a happy figure but their own emotion can override that and affect the final result.

Your signature is the women you draw. What draws you to incorporate women in your artwork?
It is completely true that our style lies in drawing women. It might be because of my own womanhood affecting my work, which I connect with and make use of. Furthermore, I know myself and women better than I know men. I find it easier to use my own experiences and connect with my inner feelings. I feel familiar with womanhood, both inside and out.

What is the mission of Haneh Design?
We want to use our skills to make people feel better and give their homes a unique addition. We also want people to explore and expand their taste and know that they can use their imagination to picture what they could place in their houses.
For a long time, it was hard for people to choose art to put up in their homes. We feel honored that Haneh Design can be included in people's houses, bringing them joy and laughter. I believe that we are all links in a chain and each action has a ripple effect, so we hope ours is a positive one.

instagram: Haneh.design

(interview)

The Significance of Street Art in IRAN

MELIKA KHANSARI

Melika Khansari was born in September 1982 in Tehran and has a degree in business management from the University of Tehran. After graduating from university in Iran, she went to Paris and studied painting.

How did you become interested in street art and how many years have you been working in this field?

It was in the atelier of one of my colleagues active in the field of street art where I was introduced to the Tehran Municipality Beautification Organization's talent call for the Persian New Year and springtime, where I was first acquainted with the field of street art. I participated in the competition and my design was accepted by the jury. I was later able to apply my designs on walls with heights varying from 3 to 15 meters. I have now been working in this field for six years.

The reason I became interested in this art was because I knew street art has millions of audiences. I think creating a beautiful mural would impress anyone passing by the street either by foot or by car, especially in some deprived suburban areas of Tehran because those areas do not have beautiful visual spaces and therefore would be the most suitable areas for street art. After creating these murals, people were very appreciative of my work. Invoking these emotions is what makes me continue to do this work.

What is your work style and creative process like?

My preferred style involves using colorful designs which convey impactful social messages. So far, I have used sharp, large elements in my work, as well as figures, but they do not fit a specific classification. I work on cement walls since brick walls aren't the best for my work. If the wall needs better infrastructure, it will be destroyed and rebuilt so that the design will be ready to be executed.
Before I start my process, the permission for implementation by the building's owner is needed; the municipality is not really the decision-maker. After the permission is secured, I visit the area and photograph the wall that has been commissioned. Then, I create a design in Photoshop using that photograph, which will then be placed on the wall. Depending on the height of the wall, the implementation takes approximately one to three weeks. I like to work on walls with a height of 12 to 15 meters and a width of nine meters to paint three large figures with sharp colors. Lately, I've been afraid of heights, so I've been using a belt for walls higher than 7 meters. If the wall is very high or the figure or portrait is very large, like many portraits of martyrs that can be seen in the city, the design will be magnified on the wall with a projector and a team will help implement the design.
The durability of the painting is around four years; this depends on certain conditions such as sunlight. When the paint gets old, the colors fade and it becomes flaky, so the painting must be completely washed off, and then the design needs to be reimplemented.

Please tell us about the history of street art in Iran. Who are the artists that introduced murals to Iran?

The history of murals in Iran goes back to ancient times. Ancient rock carvings in Lorestan, the remnants of colored bricks of the Elamite period, colorful murals on government buildings, winged lions and soldiers of the Achaemenid period and murals of the Sassanid era in Susa all show that our ancestors believed in the visual arts. The imagination of artists of this land have a long history and these murals often conveyed a political message or a royal scene. After the introduction of Islam to Iran, mural painting lost its prosperity and was replaced by book decoration. In the contemporary period and after the Iranian revolution in 1979, street art started and expanded with the murals of martyrs and political figures and included revolutionary themes. Iraj Eskandari was one of the first artists in this field, and later on during the Iran-Iraq war, Nasser Palangi was one of the most famous street artists. Mehdi Qadianlou was also one of the founders of modern urban murals in Iran. Mural painting is one of the forms of visual art across the world that both beautifies the city and raises specific issues that can be conveyed to people.

Where are you currently working and what themes do you work on the most? What is the most enjoyable part of your work?

Currently, I am working in one of the impoverished suburbs of Tehran on demolished walls and blocks. These areas mostly have a very dark atmosphere full of poverty, deprivation and depression. In remote, traditional and religious parts of the city where the majority of the people are underprivileged, my hope is that this cheerful design will bring some happiness. Some themes that I use include nature, rural elements, spring, children and schools. Sometimes I get asked to make a modern or classic design with my own taste, depending on the audience of the area.
One of the most enjoyable parts of this job is seeing the joy of the local people and children who sit and watch me paint for hours and offer to help.

How is creating murals different in Iran in comparison to other countries? And how is it compared to different cities in Iran?

To create designs in Iran, street artists face many restrictions. For instance, portraits of women must be painted with hijab, and certain elements like dance and western instruments can not be used. In religious cities such as Qom and Mashhad, we have even more restrictions, but in Tehran the situation is easier, either way obeying the rules is a must.

Urban mural artists around the world find a wall and execute their design at their own expense and responsibility without restrictions, but in Iran this is not allowed without the permission of a special organization.
In terms of public feedback, I've never done this line of work outside of Iran, but in Iran, in some rare cases religious, revolutionary or political designs are opposed by some residents of the buildings.

Mehdi Mansouri was born in 1976 in Tehran, Iran. He is a member of the Iranian Society of Photographers and has been active in the field of conceptual photography.

He has been working in visual arts since 2005 with a contemporary arts certificate and has held dozens of exhibitions, both in Iran and abroad.
The main themes of his collections are birth and death, the ultimate realization of consciousness, and the challenges the contemporary human faces when searching for this consciousness shape. He takes photographs of layouts which are usually composed of elements such as mirrors and humans. Then, he creates collages with these photos. His works are finally presented as photo collages and are usually displayed within a layout alongside a performance in the gallery. Brilliant and industrial decorative colors, figures, everyday signs, and images that are more reflections rather than images, help the viewer see the characteristics of contemporary art in these works.

CONSCIOUSNESS:
The Challenge Of Contemporary Human

MEHDI MANSOURI

Birth - 70 x 70 cm

Memories of a Geisha - 30 x 40 cm

Solo and Group Exhibitions:

1. 78 Café, Tehran - 2009
2. Art Center, Tehran - 2009
3. Encyclopedia Iranica, Paris - 2009
4. Art Center, Tehran - 2009
5. Day Art Gallery, Tehran - 2010
6. Shirin Art Gallery, Tehran - 2010
7. Iranian Artists Forum, Tehran - 2010
8. Iranian Artists Forum, Tehran - 2012
9. Image of the Year Celebration, Iranian Artists Forum, Tehran - 2013
10. Ghasr Museum, Tehran - 2015
11. Art Gallery 6, Tehran - 2015
12. Mehrva Art Gallery, Tehran - 2015
13. Persian Art Gallery, Tehran - 2015
14. Golestan Gallery, Tehran - 2015
15. Golestan Gallery, Tehran - 2016
16. A Glance at Contemporary Iranian Artists, Mellat Art Gallery - 2016
17. Iranian Artists Forum, Tehran - 2016
18. Iranian Artists Forum, Tehran - 2017
19. Fereshteh Art Gallery, Tehran - 2017
20. Mehrva Art Gallery, Tehran - 2017
21. Mellat Art Gallery, Tehran - 2017
22. Tirana National Museum, Albania - 2017
23. Art Genova, Italy - 2018

Chevalier - 77 x 53 cm

24. Iranian Culture Center, Paris - 2018
25. Linda Farrell Art Gallery, Paris - 2018
26. Galerildil Istanbul, Turkey - 2018
27. 1art Gallery, Tbilisi, Georgia - 2018
28. Mojdeh Art Gallery, Tehran - 2018
29. 59 Gallery, Oslo, Norway - 2018
30. Matigan Art Gallery, Berlin, Germany - 2018
31. Tehran Milad Tower Art Gallery, Tehran - 2019
32. Mojdeh Art Gallery, Tehran - 2019
33. Fereshteh Art Gallery, Tehran - 2019
34. Art Chapel, Amsterdam - 2019
35. Golestan Gallery, Tehran - 2019 (Group Exhibitions)
36. Qasr Museum, Tehran – 2019 (Group Exhibition)
37. E1 Art Gallery, Tehran – 2019 (Group Exhibition)
38. E1 Art Gallery, Tehran – 2019 (Group Exhibition)
39. Idea Institute of Art and Culture, Tehran - 2019 (Group Exhibition)
40. E1 Art Gallery, In the Memory of Abbas Kiarostami (Third Annual), Tehran – 2019 (Group Exhibition)
41. E1 Art Gallery, Tehran – 2019 (Group Exhibition)

UP&COMING ARTISTS

MOHAMMAD AMIN HOSSEINI

Born on February 3, 2004 and growing up in an artistic family, Mohammad Amin Hosseini has been immensely interested in art since childhood.
He believes that this passion for art is not only because his father, Shahab Hosseini, is an accomplished actor, but also because he himself has been artistic for as long as he can remember. The range of his interests goes well beyond only cinema and acting.

He has made several rap beats and loves sketching. He is also interested in photography.
Under the influence of his favorite photographers, he mainly takes black and white photos because he believes that color adds meaning to pictures, while in the absence of color, the viewers need to think about the meaning and the story behind each photo.
Until now, photography seemed to be more of a hobby, but lately he has been considering developing it into something more serious.
Currently, he is thinking about exhibiting his photos in galleries both in Iran and abroad, since he has been offered a chance to do so.

Directing and writing movie scripts constitute another dream of his. He says he has ideas and stories which he hopes to turn into a screenplay one day.
Mentioning the superhero drama television series, Watchmen, as an inspiration, he sees himself making a serious superhero movie that addresses issues such as violence and drug abuse.
Mohammad Amin Hosseini wants to be seen as an artist who has a separate identity from that of his famous father. He knows there are teenage artists around the world like himself who have been successful despite their young age and independent of their famous parents, and he aspires to do the same.

instagram: Mohammadamin_hosseini_

"In the absence of color, the viewers need to think about the meaning and the story behind each photo."

(interview)

UP&COMING ARTISTS

ALIN JOHARCHI

Alin "Allin" Joharchi is a singer, songwriter and guitarist from Tehran, born on September 10, 1998. He began learning guitar at the age of 10 and released his first album in the indie folk genre called "For Your Own" in July 2017. Over time, as he released single tracks on SoundCloud, he shifted towards hip hop and R&B and eventually developed his unique sound in the Iranian hip hop scene. His songs "Bemoon Aroom," "Lost Myself," "Baghi" and "Drowning" are available on all major music streaming platforms. He also has a Youtube channel and uploads videos regularly. Currently, Alin studies cinema in Soore Art University and plans on making short music videos for his music.

What made you interested in music and pursuing it professionally?
Thanks for having me. I have been surrounded by good music since my childhood, reacting positively to King Crimson and Elvis Presley as a baby and a lot of Pink Floyd growing up. In 2005, I came across a game on my PlayStation 2 called "Guitar Hero" and I loved it. Later on, I got the Guitar Hero Xbox kit with drums, a guitar and a microphone controller which gave players the experience of being on stage and on tour. Playing that game, I knew this was what I wanted to do and I still plan on being in the Guitar Hero game someday. I primarily wanted to learn drums but I couldn't find a teacher as a kid, so I began learning electric guitar at age 10.

What platforms do you use to share your music?
I use Spotify and Youtube myself and I've gotten official releases on Spotify, Apple Music, iTunes, Amazon, etc. I also have some unofficial (because of poor sound quality and mixing) songs on my SoundCloud and Telegram channels.

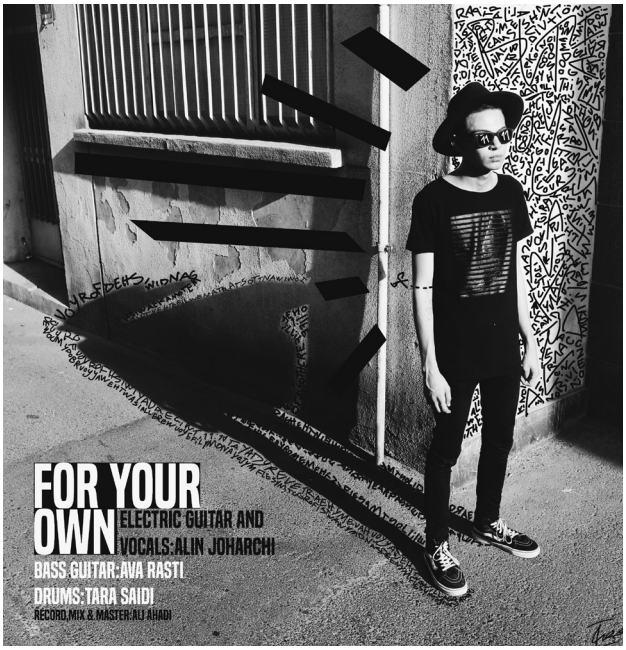
You have been very active on social media since the quarantine began, particularly on Instagram and YouTube. What effect has the quarantine had on your work?
I believe we cannot fight being constantly updated by what's around us; we have to adapt and I believe Youtube is the next generation of media, so I use all the free time that I have to make videos and find my style. At the same time, the main source of income for me and many people like myself are the live shows we play. However, with the pandemic, that is currently not a possibility! It's really tough, so the whole quarantine situation has shown me new ways to work, and I'm generally thankful for it.

You work on both Farsi and English songs. Is there one you prefer or find easier to work with?
Because of my background living outside Iran and attending international schools in Iran during my teenage years, I find it easier to express myself and write lyrics in English. I believe my writing in English is genuinely better. However, writing and singing in Farsi has a whole other feel to it; it feels purer for myself, and even though I'm not good at it, I really enjoy doing it. When I adapted my style to Farsi I found a new sound and vibe, which I've been told my English songs lacked. So I'm writing more in Farsi for now and hope to be able to write and release music in both languages.

Could you tell us about the inspiration behind your newest songs, "Bemoon Aroom" and "Lost Myself"?
Well, "Lost Myself" was a part of a five-track EP (extended play), with all English songs, but the EP was never finished so I moved on and solely focused on finishing the track "Lost Myself," which became a single in 2018 for Allin, my stage name. "Bemoon Aroom'' is my first Persian song and it is about how people have become so unaccepting of new ideas and how they are stuck in their old ways. I believe I could have done "Bemoon Aroom'' way better but I'm still really satisfied with it. I also had an awesome team; I made the song with Parsa Payandeh and wrote it with Behrad, another up-and-coming rapper, and we had Shervin Radfar mixing and mastering the song. Shervin also did a little bit of sound engineering. He is a great man and mentor who has helped me a lot; it was an honor working with him. I also had good friends helping me with the marketing and video-making and we had a friend's clothing brand, "AM" streetwear, sponsoring it. It has been the peak of my career so far!

You study cinema and your dad was a famous actor; do you see yourself pursuing a career in cinema? Would it affect your music?
I make short documentaries but I keep them to myself because they are more of a side project for me right now, but I definitely see myself making movies. I have the passion, the academics, the family background and knowledge to make films. I just need to settle into my music career first, and later I'll be mixing the two.

Who are your inspirations? What inspires you?
I believe that the band Camel has the most inspirational sound I have ever heard. Their songs satisfy my soul and clear my mind every time I



hear a guitar solo; it has a catharsis effect on me. Manifesting that feeling into a different genre is the main challenge for me. Sometimes this challenge inspires me – the struggle happens to find its way into any lyrics I write, the suffering, and how it's not real. I find myself writing a lot about ego and human relations recently. When the concept rhymes, I know I am on the right track, literally.

What advice would you have for aspiring musicians, particularly young musicians in Iran?
Meditate.
It's important no matter what you do. It gives you the ability of calming your mind, thinking clearly when needed, and reaching the answer of every question out there; it is all within yourself. That is mostly why I find meditation super important, but there are a ton of other reasons why you should do it.

What were some of your most memorable live performances? Are there any more coming up?
On September 2, 2017, I played my first album "For Your Own" (available on SoundCloud and Telegram) with my band at Mostaghel Theater in Tehran. It was my first time being under the spotlight at my own sold out show with my own original songs, so that was a real milestone in my life. I knew I would do it eventually but it happened so quickly and I knew there wasn't any place I would rather be or anything else I would rather do. It was the best live performance I've had so far. We haven't planned for a new show yet because of COVID-19, but as soon as we see fit, we'll be doing shows again.

Could you tell us about your upcoming project(s)?
I'm currently working on an album which basically sums up my life experiences so far.
I've got a lot of artists helping me with it: producers, singers, rappers, video makers, sound engineers, graphic designers and sponsors from all different genres. It's a real "1 train," meaning a lot of people are working on each track, and I'm hoping to pull it off because it is a really big project.

UP&COMING
ARTISTS

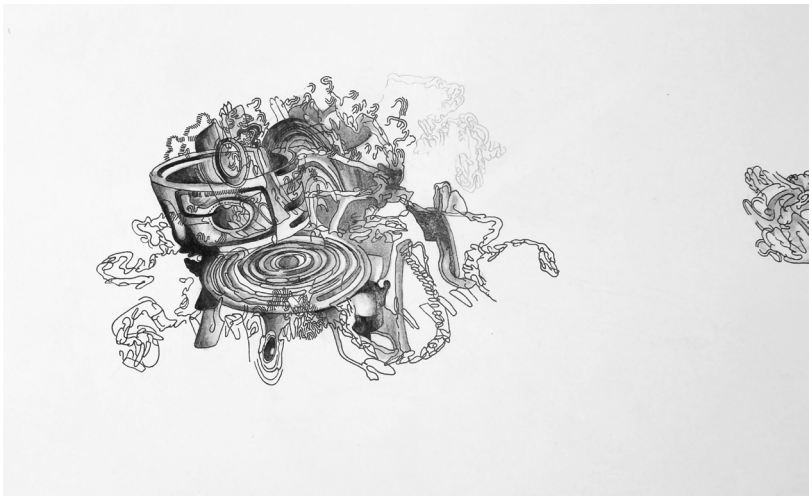
DANYAL BARZEGAR

Danyal Barzegar is a visual artist born in Tehran, Iran. He started painting at an early age and currently lives and works in Tehran where he is also studying at the College of Fine Arts in the University of Tehran. During the past couple of years, abstract art has been his sole focus, with the fine intricacies and details of the genre fascinating him. He has always been interested in the power of images and how they affect individuals. In 2014, he began creating collages that explore the deep realms of human nature. In this regard, he was immensely inspired by David Lynch; as he puts it, "The character and works of Lynch, the ways he cultivates imagination and illustrations, developing a masterpiece, etc., has greatly influenced me."

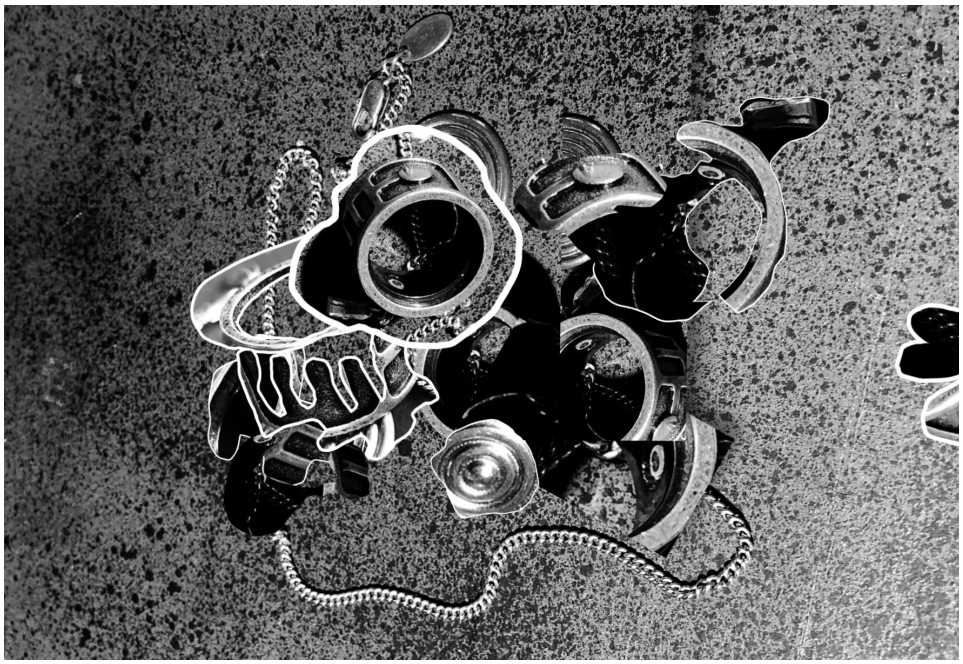
In his recent painting "untitled" (2019), a visage emerges from a knot of pale, rich lines, and abstract shapes that visualize an imaginary world and the relationship between a personal object and visionary thoughts. "The object appears differently; it seems to be relating a different aspect of the narrative. I created some collages, drawing from different patterns that often ended up as large paintings." Some areas of his canvas are left raw and are so depleted of paint despite areas of strong darkness. For him "darkness" represents the artistic vision of cosmic infinity. He applies numerous subsequent layers in painted form against a deep blue background, allowing the whole composition to carry the viewer through the picture. Furthermore, his intense interest in music has significantly influenced his works. He notes that "instrumental and everyday sounds and alternative music play a crucial role in my creative and imaginative process during artistic endeavors, and as such, I think music can be a truly powerful tool."

Travels abroad and field observations have also impacted his works. Barzegar has had the opportunity to accompany his father, a political columnist and professor of international relations and politics, on several trips abroad, including to London, Moscow, Beijing, Paris, Boston, Prague, Vienna, Rome, Barcelona, and Bucharest. "These trips were indeed beneficial in strengthening my field understanding of true Western and Oriental arts." By seeing the diversity of colors, imaginations and illustrations, he realized how much the history of nations and their ups and downs could shape, influence, and develop local artistic visions. "I met many artists and visited several museums abroad that changed my artistic philosophy and viewpoint. Ever since, my mind has been occupied with how to initiate my own Iranian style in the vast cosmos of the artistic world."

> "Instrumental & Everyday Sounds & Alternative Music Play a Crucial Role in My Creative & Imaginative Process"

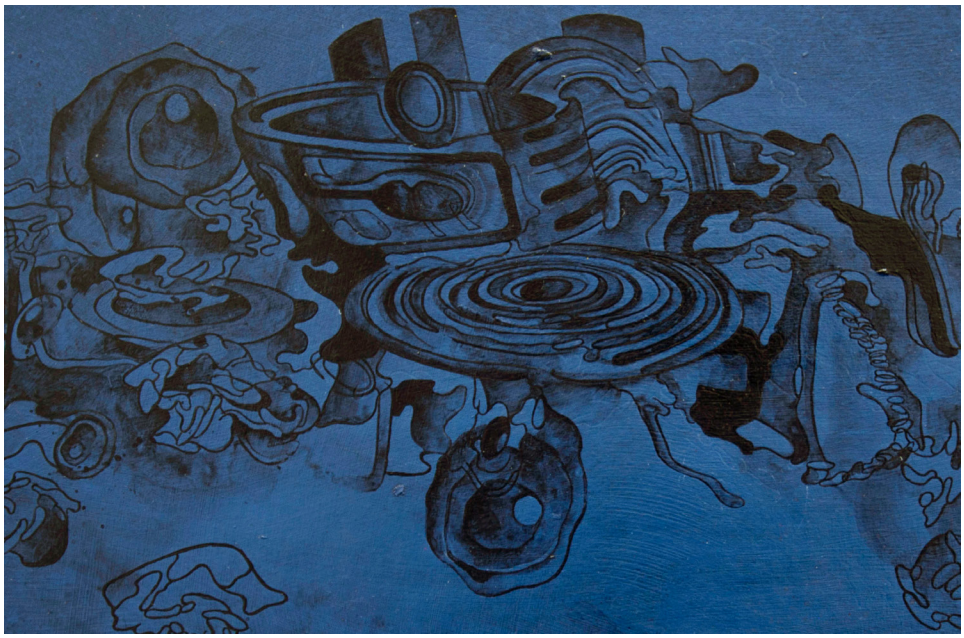


Untitled - Ink Graphic & Charcoal on Paper - 92 x 52 cm - 2019



Object Floating on My Desk - Photographic Collage - 40 x 25 cm -2019

Untitled - Acrylic on Paper - 92 x 52 cm - 2019



IRAN Venture Tracks

Iran Venture Tracks is a group with the aim of sustainable adventure tourism development that tries to utilize the vast historical, cultural and natural capacities of Iran.
Iran venture tracks consists of a team of trained and experienced personnel who are committed to preserving the environment and strive to protect the nature of this beautiful paradise.
It is very important for them that the participants learn about people, culture and local communities while camping, cycling, hiking, mountaineering, photographing and partaking in other adventure trips.

By holding these tours, they help tourists visit Iran's hidden treasures and learn more about the country. On their trips, they also encourage their companions to buy local handicrafts and organic products. They also stay in local houses and eco-lodges to improve the local economy.
It is very important for them that during their adventurous journeys, not only to preserve the environment, but to also make it better known.
They believe that traveling is not just about seeing the world, but about changing the way we look at it, and that adventure travel is a great way to explore and learn.

IRAN VENTURE TRACKS

instagram: ivtbike

DONUTTO It's all about donuts

The Donutto brand was founded in 2017 with the goal of establishing a distinguished café with a focus on professionally baking doughnuts of great quality and serving them in a unique atmosphere located in ASP residential complex.
International standards, modern technologies, high quality European ingredients and a professional design team, has enabled Donutto products to stand along side international brands.
Donutto currently operates four locations in Tehran and offers a menu with a complete assortment of hot and cold beverages alongside its unique products. The Donutto website, **www.Donutto.Cafe** offers online services for pickups and deliveries.

At Donutto everything is fresh everyday!

Christian Vit:
the Profile of an International Actor

Christian Vit was born in Venice, Italy. He had his first performance at age five. When he was 10 his parents sent him to London for a three-week course to study English. Vit has a master's degree in public relations, consumerism and publicity at the University Institute for Modern Languages in Milan. He is fluent in Italian, English, Spanish and French. His first film, "Sons and Daughters," was in Milan in 2001. After this role, his acting career continued with many theatrical productions, a number of Italian TV series and films. In 2014 he moved to London and two months later was offered a role on the hit TV show "Game of Thrones." This led to other projects including "Crossing Lines," "The Job Lot," "Holby City," the BBC sitcom "The First Team," and the upcoming films, "Marriage Material" and "Summer in Rome."

Thank you so much for giving Trends this exclusive interview despite your busy schedule, we are very grateful. Could you please introduce yourself? Tell us about what inspired you to become an actor.
My name is Christian Vit and I'm an Italian-born actor based in London. I started my professional career in Rome several years ago. I've played in movies, TV series and stage productions but, so far, the projects that have been giving me more exposure are TV roles.
When I was a kid, I bumped into a movie set in a city near Venice and I had a very strong feeling; I didn't know why and didn't really understand what was happening but that day I got back home extremely intrigued and so excited that my legs were shaking. That feeling stayed with me for days. It was a sort of a revelation, the first ring of a bell that started to call for my attention for years to come. When I decided to take that call, I realized that mine was the case where acting chose me, not the other way around.

What is your approach to acting? How do you get into character?
I've been trained as a method actor and also as a stage actor. My goal is always to deliver the most truthful and compelling performance so my work always starts with researching and understanding the previous, current and future circumstances related to my character. Then, I try to establish an emotional connection with the character, digging into what we have in common and what we don't have in terms of life experiences, attitudes, feelings, etc. Of course, the script analysis is very important as well and marks every single scene with what stage the character's journey is at and what the emotional "temperature" is at that point. It's a lot of work, both intellectually and emotionally, engaging and committing to such work. Then, for line memorization, in order to create the best performance and to feel free and confident you really must know the script by heart.

Due to your proficiency in multiple languages, are you interested in working on international projects?
Being able to speak different languages and to play a range of different nationalities has definitely been a great asset for my acting career especially since I moved to London. I have representation in several countries so my luggage is always ready when the right project is happening. The more international the project, the better.

What was your experience like on the set of "Game of Thrones"?
"Game of Thrones" was the first job I booked when I moved to the UK. I was very excited because it was the mark of a new beginning in my career in the country. Initially, I didn't have an exact idea of how big the show was worldwide.
I remember when I went for the fitting in Belfast for the first time, my costume was hanging in the middle of the room like a sacred object. It was simply magnificent and I admired all the artisanal work that had been put in it. There were two people helping me with putting it on and when I was ready, I felt in character right away. That was my first experience with the production. Then, I was sent for a "checkride" as all my scenes were meant to be on a horse and the production team wanted to be sure I could ride on horseback properly. The shooting began a few days later in Port Stewart, a location in Northern Ireland by the sea with beautiful sand dunes, and was a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Belfast.
The experience on set was just amazing. Everyone was so professional and every single detail was looked after so well. We were

GAME OF THRONES

also blessed with a few glorious sunny days in a row which made the whole shooting process finish quicker than expected. Despite the fact that my role was just for one episode, the whole experience was superb and I could tell I received what I've later on understood as "the full Game of Thrones treatment" including scenes on a horse, lines with the main characters and a cruel death.

What has been your most memorable experience as an actor?
Besides the Game of Thrones experience, which, of course, for me has been very memorable, I also have to mention my role in "Holby City" as Dr. Matteo Rossini. Holby City is a very popular BBC One Primetime TV medical drama which has been running for the past 20 years. It's considered the "English ER." My character arrived at his first shift at the hospital on horseback carrying a patient. That was a very memorable entrance considering that it was the first time a horse was brought on that set. Also, I was joining a regular and entirely British cast who had been working together for a while so I had the big challenge of modifying my accent nicely and smoothly with theirs. I worked a lot on my English to keep a hint of an accent in order to sound charming but also very clear and well-spoken. On top of that, working on that character for 44 episodes allowed me to empathize with him on a very deep level. The journey has been fantastic.

What are some of the difficulties and challenges you've faced as an actor?
Being an actor always presents difficulties and challenges. First of all, I had to understand how to deal with the rejection that actors constantly have to face, no matter what stage they are at in their career, and how to not take it personally. I'm still trying to understand how to do it some days. Jokes aside, I'm getting better and better with that. Then I had to understand where I could have the best opportunities according to my look, my accents and languages – that meant I had to take risks, go to other countries and be brave.
There are moments of ups and downs that put my patience and emotions to the test.
I had to learn to trust my intuition and keep going with the flow even when the moments are particularly tough.

How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your personal life and career?
I've been spending the whole lockdown alone in London. My parents and sister are in Italy, and thank God, they are all in good health. I've always been a sort of a lone wolf so I'm used to spending time by myself and it's something I enjoy. Of course, the whole situation is not ideal as I miss my busy social life too and spending time with the people I love, but at the same time, it is a great opportunity to re-group, step back and think of what is working and what is not, what is still serving me and what is not and preparing to make all the adjustments for when things will be ready for a new fresh start. I believe it is important to live in the moment but in situations like this, it is also nice to think and dream about the future, evaluating new perspectives and new ways to approach things that before might have not been working or going towards the direction I wanted.
Almost everything has stopped work-wise, but fortunately I was not filming or involved in a stage production that suddenly had to be interrupted or completely canceled because of the pandemic. I have quite a few colleagues that have been through that and of course it's something you never wish to happen. Things for creatives are uncertain and unstable on a regular basis, so imagine how it is now.
I think the pandemic will definitely set different rules in place within the movie industry, affecting almost every aspect of production. It will be very interesting to see how the whole thing will work as it is totally unprecedented. I believe the need for content creation to fulfill media platforms has increased with the lockdown, and the industry will have a lot to catch up with as soon as it reopens at full capacity. This whole situation, besides not being ideal of course, I'm pretty sure will also bring something positive at some point, in terms of new insights and experimentations.

What project(s) are you currently working on?
I'm currently involved in a project that is going to be filmed remotely. During this odd time of lockdowns, self-isolation and social distancing, one can be also very productive from a creative point-of-view, giving birth to experimental projects. This one will probably take the direction of becoming a web series and I found it very interesting to be asked to participate. So, besides reading scripts and self-taping for projects that hopefully will be happening when the pandemic is over, I can say I'm filming without being on a proper set and without being surrounded by a proper crew.

What do you do outside of acting?
Besides acting in front of the camera, I also act with my voice in different projects: audio books, radio commercials, audio guides, video games, podcasts, corporate speeches, etc. I support some charities and am often asked to speak at their events. I attend movie festivals and sometimes I'm part of the jury. I'm also a foodie and a professional sommelier, but only for my own enjoyment. I love cooking; I feel very creative when I'm doing it, and I'm always happy to talk about good food. Of course, I also exercise a lot to stay healthy and in shape as it is crucial for my work.

What's next for Christian Vit?
I'll be appearing in one episode of a new BBC sitcom called "The First Team," by the same creators of the popular show "The Inbetweeners." It will air between the end of May and the beginning of June. It's a very sharp British comedy. I had so much fun filming it. Despite people thinking I have a very "dramatic look" I really enjoy playing in comedies. Other than that, I'm attached to quite a few projects, particularly a movie that will be shot in Rome and will be a great acting experience for me. Let's see what happens when things will get back to normal.

Do you have any advice for aspiring actors?

I have three pieces of advice for aspiring actors. Ask yourself:
1) Are you sure you want to be an actor?
2) Are you REALLY sure you want to be an actor?
3) Are you REALLY REALLY sure you want to be an actor?
If the answer is YES to all the three questions, then prepare yourself for an amazing yet crazy journey. Expect no rules, don't compare yourself to others, surround yourself with people that love and support you and be professional, reliable, generous, humble, consistent and resilient. Ah…Don't forget to enjoy it and have fun!
Good luck.

(interview)

POL MEDIA:
Bridging the Gap Between Iran and International Cinema

Pol, which means "bridge" in Farsi, aims to "bridge the gap" between Iranian and international art, culture and cinema with that of the West.
Pol Media will distribute Iranian and other international films both within the US and abroad while also producing live events, including appearances from Iranian and international actors and filmmakers, as well as other artistic, cultural and cinematic programs.
Pol Media was founded by the world-renowned Iranian actor, Shahab Hosseini, director Koroush Ahari, and film producer Alex Bretow.

Thank you for giving Trends this exclusive interview despite your busy schedule. We are very grateful. Please tell us about the background, story and mission of Pol Media.

Pol Media was founded after I became acquainted with Koroush Ahari and Alex Bretow, the director and producer of "The Night," respectively. Soon after, our relationship turned into a friendship and we decided to further cooperate and establish a company together to juxtapose our ideas. We established Pol Media with the aim of producing dramatic works in terms of cinema, educational series, dialogue centered entertainment, documentaries, independent movies and much more.

What differentiates Pol Media from other media production and distribution companies?

The difference between Pol Media and other companies could be the accessibility to Iranian culture and literature, where many beautiful anecdotes are found. By concentrating on these stories and converting them into content that are universally understood, we can help other countries feel a connection to our history and literature. Because of Iran's long history, civilization and storytelling tradition, we are provided with a good opportunity to take a modern stance on these ancient tales and turn them into global productions. Our main goal at Pol Media is reviving and reforming ancient stories with a modern twist and producing them into Iranian and international movies.

The pandemic has had a huge negative impact on the entertainment industry. Do you think these impacts will permanently change the industry? What opportunities do you think may emerge as a result of this pandemic, especially for media companies like yours?

Coronavirus has not only affected cinema, but it has also affected all social gatherings. This is especially sorrowful for the movie industry since one of the joys of watching a movie is going to a movie theater with a group of people and watching a movie with amenities like surround sound and a large screen. Although everything has changed, productions are still in progress and I think some new guidelines are being developed. Our hope is that everything will return to how they were so we can once more enjoy watching movies together on the big screen.

Despite the massive loss to the entertainment industry, streaming services such as Netflix, have been thriving. How does this new platform compare to the traditional way of distribution? What about live entertainment such as theater and opera, where digital media simply cannot replace the physical presence?

Online distribution is a smart way of showing a production worldwide with widespread internet accessibility. Admittedly, online platforms do not provide the same excitement of watching a movie in a movie theater, but in these restrictive times, it is the only solution. In my opinion, I find these online platforms to be problematic as they hold a large number of movies but lack an efficient way to recommend movies, which could be confusing for audiences. I think these platforms can gather knowledgeable artists, filmmakers, and critics to recommend movies to different audiences; that is actually one of the projects that I am currently working on in Iran. On the other hand, the situation for performing arts such as opera and theatre is a different story.

However, by recording these performances, they can be accessible to people despite the restrictions of COVID-19. Coronavirus should not stop us from recording, developing thoughts and content because it's the only way of confronting such a situation. We must not be discouraged from continuing to express ourselves through art.

International movies (movies produced outside of the US) constitute a small fraction of the global movie industry, why is that? Is that changing with successful movies such as Parasite from South Korea?

We are living in a time when we all

have access to movies and events from around the world. The movie industry is no longer dominated by a few countries when good movies are being produced internationally. On the other hand, I think having an event like the World Cup for the movie industry with participation of directors from different countries will bring the global community closer together. This competition could be structured to allow each country to represent a movie and it can be impressive for introducing and expanding various geographic cinemas.

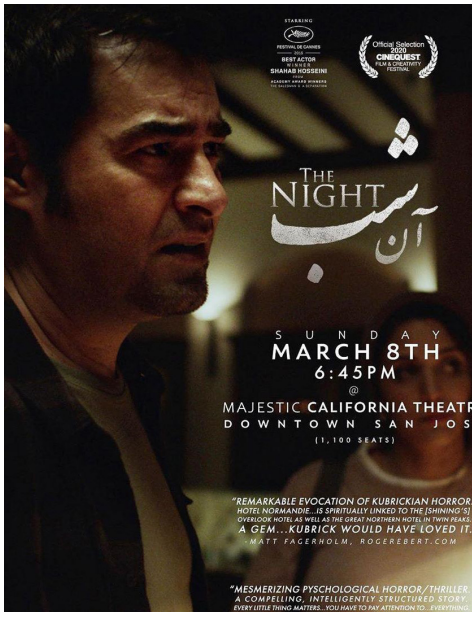
What makes Iranian movies attractive to foreign audiences? Is it just curiosity or is it also about the substance? Iranian movies, despite being among the most successful international movies when it comes to awards, have not yet seen huge commercial success. Is it because of the lack of advanced equipment, visual effects, marketing, etc.? How can we change this situation?

Iranian cinema is very distinguished and one can argue that it is attractive because of its narration style. Iranian movies are suitable for all family members because they do not include any obscenities. Iranian movies are centered around socialism, humanitarianism and capturing the everyday life of people.

Among many factors leading to Iranian cinema not succeeding financially in comparison to its foreign counterparts in the international market could be the lack of attention to creating global movies that are inspired by our rich culture and literature which could attract more international audiences.

However, there are some challenges that we need to face as an Islamic country such as mandatory Hijab for women, which could be hard to understand or relate to in some cultures. Therefore, we need to find solutions to these limitations that have been brought up by the Iranian movie industry. By finding a universal topic, we can go around limitations, and also leave the right impression on international audiences.

I suppose Iran's cinema can move in the direction of forming ideas, thoughts and suggestions for different lifestyles, world views, and mysticism. On the other hand,



Iranian cinema is not logistically at an international level and we do not own advanced facilities, therefore making a good quality movie within these limitations can be difficult.

Tell us about your latest production, ""The Night"." It seems to be a unique project from many aspects, including becoming the first US produced film to get the license for theatrical release in Iran.

There were certain intentions behind making "The Night" which caused its success. Even though this project was produced in the US, it has the legal rights to be shown in Iran; this may cause more cultural exchanges between two countries in the future.

Even though we have faced some difficulties in making this movie, such as the shortage of time and the coronavirus pandemic, I think we have produced a successful movie and I hope that it will bring satisfaction to its viewers. I believe we need to work hard and leave the rest to the hands of fate.

"The difference between Pol Media and other companies could be the accessibility to Iranian culture and literature, where many beautiful anecdotes are found. By concentrating on these stories and converting them into content that are universally understood, we can help other countries feel a connection to our history and literature."

What is next for Pol Media (projects in the pipelines, events etc.)?

The next step for Pol Media is to make more movies and series. Our main goal at Pol Media is to bring awareness and cultural recognition, dissolve any misunderstandings and to achieve permanent peace through this visual artform. In my opinion, the foundation of art will positively influence our society.

(interview)

HOT WHEELS & high heels

LALEH SEDIGH

Laleh Sedigh is a race car driver with a PhD in industrial production. She is currently the manager of an industrial production company and instructs race car drivers on the side.

Please tell us about your background in driving and racing and what national and international titles you hold.

I was 13 when I became interested in driving and my father began teaching me. I count my father as my first driving coach. I have more than 60 national titles in driving which include rallying, kart and drag racing, and five international titles. I have competed in international competitions in Bahrain, UAE and participated in the Middle East Rally which was hosted by Iran.

What type of cars do you race in? What are practices like?

For speed races, I drive a Honda CRX with a 2000cc engine, and a Pride with an upgraded engine of 1800cc which has around 210 horsepower. In order to train for competitions, we practice and improve our skills by testing the cars in practices held at the Azadi racing tracks. Recently a new track has been built in Zarandieh which will be used for practices in the future.

Is anyone one else in your family interested in sports? Do you have experience in any other sports?

Sports is one of the pillars of my family. One of my brothers is a horseback riding champion and the other is a boxing champion; my sister is also interested in sports but not professionally. Since high school I participated in track and field and during college I became interested in equestrian sports more specifically showjumping, and afterwards I became interested in driving professionally and did so while also attending a lightweight plane flight course.

What are people's reactions to you, as a professional female racecar driver?

Given that it is not common for women to be racecar drivers, there are a lot of different reactions. Some people encourage me and believe that this is a groundbreaking activity while others believe that it is exclusively for men. Within the sport, the majority of people are still biased and prefer to have a male opponent.

Has your professional driving affected your everyday driving? Has it ever put you in danger?

When you have a certain skill, you tend to use it when need be. Of course, I don't use driving maneuvers while driving in the city but when I'm on the road outside the city I tend to enjoy myself. I don't compare the race track to the road since each one has its own behavior suitable for its particular environment. When one takes these into account, there isn't really much danger.

What are some challenges that you have faced in this field as a female driver?

The main challenge in this profession is that it has not yet been established as a female sport. Recently in Europe, the support for women in this sport has increased and there are more sponsors. However, a few years back, all over the world, it seemed odd for women to be racecar drivers. Given the culture in Iran, the challenges are twice as much, especially for a woman in a male-dominated field.
During the first few years of this sport, there was a debate over the racing outfit. It was required that women wear a cover on top of their uniforms, but this was quickly dismissed once it was realized how much danger it posed to the driver, so now we race in the regulation uniforms. Regarding the mentality, there are challenges in other segments of racing, for example, in the qualifying rounds, due to a lack of equipment, the times are recorded by hand, so a person's connections and biases can have an effect on the recorded time. In addition, there is a need to have a close relationship with the team and pit crew, and to ensure that everything is being done in an orderly fashion, which can be more difficult for a woman among men.

Who are your role models and inspirations?

Naturally my first role model in driving was my father, who taught me. Along my journey, my father and my family have cheered me on and have been my main supporters both emotionally and financially, which has greatly helped me succeed.
My close group of friends supported me emotionally as well, and their presence with me during practices and races has been very influential.
People that were present along the way, such as my professional coaches have had a great role in my life as a racecar driver, be it through technical teachings or lessons in sportsmanship and morals.
All of them have been very inspirational to me. When I face challenges, an accident or problems caused by an unfair ruling, they try

to distance me from sadness and loss of hope and guide me back towards the right path.

What are the costs of receiving instructions in this field? Where are practices held? What institutions are active in this field?

In regards to instructing in this field, racecar driving is an expensive sport because it deals with the world's latest technology, and that is the case all over the world.
Preparing the car and the parts needed and all the items involved in this sport can be very costly, therefore it's very expensive to instruct people.
These costs affect the racers during practices and races.
The location of the race track for the past few years has been at Azadi racing track, but with new tracks being developed, we will soon be able to compete and practice on other tracks.
One of the most well-known tracks that is close to becoming operational is the Iranian Land track located in Zarandieh.

What has been your greatest memory or experience in this sport?

I have both good and bad memories from my career.
Of course, my most enjoyable moments are when I cross the finish line first, or when I'm brought up on the podium, which gives me the sensation of summiting a mountain.
Most of all, I enjoy interacting with fans especially after a victory,
I enjoy taking pictures with them and becoming a part of their lives.

The First Iranian Female Racecar Driver

The main challenge in this profession is that it has not yet been established as a female sport...

From the Streets of Tehran to the Coach of the National Football Team

VAHID HASHEMIAN

By: Reza Taeb

Vahid Hashemian was born in 1976 in Tehran, Iran and has been interested in football eversince childhood. He was raised in the south of Tehran where there were not many facilities available, therefore playing with just a ball and goalposts was one of his favorite activities. Growing up, there was a grass field near him, where summer football camps were held. After discovering the field and watching professional players there, his interest in football bloomed and eventually he began to play professionally for domestic and foreign clubs. He is currently the assistant coach of Iran's national football team.

Can you please tell us about how your professional football career started, and what achievements you are most proud of?

I have always been very interested in sports. I have tried martial arts such as taekwondo, karate and kung fu, but football has always felt different. Everything lined up smoothly for me to enter youth football with the Fath-Tehran team. I was invited to a tournament during the month of Ramadan through a friend of mine.

The teams consisted of only five to six people. Our team consisted of young players, including 16- to 18-year-old players, but the opposing team had many well-known players who had played in the national team games and Persepolis F.C. (Football Club), such as Reza Shahroudi who was also from my neighborhood along with Saeid Azizian, Nasser Abbasi and Najmuddin Bakhshi. As our heated match came to an end, a gentleman approached me and offered me a place in his club. He mentioned that if I played for two years on his team, I would be ready to play for the Iranian national team.
At first, I didn't recognize him, but after he introduced himself, I found out that he used to be the coach of Naft F.C.'s youth team, and that he was currently the coach of Fath F.C.'s youth team. His presence that day was very coincidental.

When I started playing for the Fath youth team, we were promoted from league two to league one and finished in third place that year. We then became the second runner-up among schools and clubs in Tehran. During my time at Pas Tehran F.C., we became the second runner-up of Iranian clubs. From there I went on to play in Germany for Hamburg SV for a while, during which we became one of the top-scoring teams.

Despite the difficulties I had in the first two years in Germany, nothing diminished my interest in playing in the Bundesliga. After playing for Hamburg, I joined the Bochum team, which was playing in the second league, and to me it felt like one of the greatest failures of my life. However, our team later moved up from the second league to the first league, and while playing in the German Bundesliga, we won playing against F.C. Bayern Munich. Later I realized it was the right choice playing for Bochum because our performance with a smaller team was more recognizable, and it led to me going to Bayern Munich.

After playing in Germany, I returned to Iran and won the National Cup with Persepolis F.C. in 2012. As a part of the Iranian national team, we became the West Asian champion in Jordan. In 2019, we became the champions of the Asian league in Bangkok. I also made it to the World Cup with the national team. I've always had a lot of discipline and perseverance.

How do you see the current situation of our football team and the coaching system of the national team?

The main reason I came back to Iran was to become the assistant coach of the Iranian national team, with the hope that I can have an impact on my country's national team. The head coach of the national team, Skocic, has been in Iran for six years. I know him as a hard-working coach; he has an exquisite experience in the Croatian Premier League, Al-Nasr Saudi Arabia and Slovenia. We, as the technical team, are working harder than previous years. We analyze all the players and try to fully see their potential.

At the moment we have divided the work due to the coronavirus and we are facing some limitations. Despite the difficult conditions caused by the pandemic, we're still trying to have proper and practical planning, a high spirit of cooperation and an exchange of views.

What effects has the coronavirus pandemic had on football?

The coronavirus pandemic is an unusual experience that has led to the closure of many leagues and even led some teams to the brink of bankruptcy. The first damage was the elimination of television broadcasts, advertisements and

spectators; most clubs' revenue comes from these sources. This pandemic has also led to teams playing in empty stadiums. If the coronavirus pandemic is not controlled soon, it will hit football even harder.

How can we improve Iranian football teams?

We should consider football as an income-generating industry. We need expert managers to train professional coaches. Without a well-experienced coach, we cannot have a strong team. In addition, it is very important for the players to have a professional mindset and not be too concerned with social media and the press. The reality is that what matters the most is what happens on the football field.

Discovering new, talented athletes and developing their skills is a must. In my opinion, Iranians can really make great progress if they work under an organized program. I believe that Iran's football teams have great potential. We must strengthen the academies so that the basic teams can build good players.

In your opinion, how different is the budget and facilities of our neighboring countries from ours?

In other countries, one of the main sources of income for football teams is the right to broadcast on television, which provides the clubs with more funds to purchase better players.

In my opinion, inviting experienced foreign coaches and players could help our teams improve their technique.

If that cannot take place, we should spend most of our budget to discover talented athletes and nurture young players. One of the biggest issues our football teams is facing is a lack of budget; clubs themselves must be able to generate revenue.

Why haven't we had a superstar in Iranian football for such a long time?

We have always had good players in Iran but we have not had a chance to be in the World Cup for many years. When Iran advanced to the World Cup in 1998, it was such an amazing and unforgettable experience for the Iranian people and it really made the players of that period famous and memorable. Back in the day, people used to watch more football, but nowadays, people have become busier in their daily lives. We do have many good players, but I think people are generally less interested in football.

What is the greatest obstacle in the success of Iranian football players abroad?

We have had a lot of successful and unsuccessful players who played or still play for foreign teams. Unfortunately, some of them were discovered too late. I think they would have been much more successful if they had gone to play for European teams as teenagers.

Compared to the past, the development of mass media and information exchange in cyberspace has also expedited the discovery of new players.

What are your favorite nternational teams?

As a child, in addition to the Iranian national team, I was a fan of Germany and Argentina.
I also loved the clubs of A.C. Milan and Bayern Munich.

What are the future plans for Iran's national team?

We have good players who have a lot of special characteristics and are great at working under pressure. Our players play with pride, so I think the future will be bright despite our difficult circumstances. The official matches of the Iranian national team will possibly be in April 2021. However, these games have not yet been officially scheduled due to the coronavirus. We will have four games and each game is going to be difficult and has to be taken seriously. I believe Iran will play well.

(interview)

5-Time Super League Champion

SAEIDEH ELLI

By: Dr. Kourosh Resalati

Saeideh Elli, has been playing basketball for about 20 years, 14 of which she spent playing for the Iran national team. She is currently the captain of the women's national 3x3 basketball team and before that she was the captain for the national team for seven years. She holds five women super league championships and several runner-up places. She has reached the super league finals nine times in the past ten years.

What challenges have you faced as a female athlete?
The lack of sponsorship and not being seen by fans are some of the major challenges that women face as athletes here in Iran.

How do you see your future in sports?
Because of the experiences I have gained in international games, I would like to enter the coaching field to be able to pass on my knowledge to the younger players.

Do you have any leisure time, if so, what is your preference in the types of books, films or even the style of music that you listen to?
I often educate myself in my related field such as physical education and nutrition, however I am also interested in philosophy and sociology. I mostly watch comedies and dramas. I like listening to music a lot, especially country and pop.

If one day you become the head of Iran's women national team, what are the plans you have for female athlete?
I will do anything in my power in order to reach equality between women and men in sports.

If you were to choose another field of study outside of sports, what would it be?
I am very interested in the field of pharmacy and nutrition.

How has the coronavirus affected sports in Iran, especially in the field of basketball?
COVID-19 has created special conditions for athletes, especially in the field of basketball, because of the physical contact that it requires. In the current situation, players should try harder to stay in shape, so they will lower the risk of later injuries.

What are your plans for after your retirement?
Once I retire from playing basketball, I would like to coach basketball and scout and develop talents.
I am genuinely interested in becoming a coach.

What do you think the future of sponsorship looks like, knowing the brilliant talents of female players?
Women play an important role in our society. Therefore, promoting and investing in women's sports not only attracts the audience but also gives us a healthy and vibrant society.

Being weak is a choice, just like being strong What is your choice?

- **Ventilation system with the highest possible oxygen level.**
- **Equipped with world-class sporting equipment, used for the first time in the Middle East.**
- **Unique facilities for various sports and amenities such as Daycare, Physician, Massage and SPA.**

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By: chaarbaan

MUESLI:
A Nutritious Replacement for Breakfast & Lunch

What is Muesli?

Muesli is a mixture of rolled oats, nuts and dried fruits that was first made by a Swiss doctor. Due to its high nutritional value and capability to satisfy hunger, this food counts as a popular breakfast and snack worldwide.

Muesli is both a meal and a snack. It can be enjoyed in different ways based on your creativity and preferences. The most common way of consumption is a combination of muesli with milk and fresh fruits for breakfast, a combination of muesli with yogurt and fruits as a snack and a combination of muesli with ice cream and smoothies as a dessert.

Dieting with Muesli

One of the popular diets across the world for weight loss is centered around high fiber intake. Many dietitians recommend muesli as a replacement for breakfast and lunch as a means of weight loss. Muesli, due to its fiber and low calories, provides the feeling of being full and makes dieting easy while providing great results.
Typical breakfasts, due to their high sugar volumes and high glucose levels, cause a spike in insulin levels shortly after consumption. This causes the blood sugar levels to drop which, in turn, causes one to feel lethargic. But the case is the opposite with muesli which, due to low levels of glucose, causes insulin to be produced slowly and the metabolization and the breaking down of sugars to occur slowly in the body. Therefore, the feeling of being full and feeling energized last for many hours.

Muesli Recipes

Walnut, Apple and Cinnamon Muesli

Benefits:
Controls blood pressure levels, improves metabolism, improves digestive system, strengthens the immune system, prevents type 2 diabetes, promotes a better night's sleep
Ingredients:
Rolled oats, walnuts, dried apple, cinnamon, dried grapes, pumpkin seed honey, butter and sesame oil
Nutritional value:
A rich source of antioxidants, fiber, vitamin C, A and K, iron, calcium and magnesium

Hazelnut and Belgian Chocolate Muesli

Benefits:
Skin rejuvenation, metabolism improvement, improvement of the digestive system, anti-osteoporosis, anti-anxiety and suitable for dieting
Ingredients:
Rolled oats, sugar, dark Belgian chocolate, honey, sesame oil
Nutritional value:
A rich source of antioxidants, fiber, vitamin C, iron and calcium

Cranberry and Almond Muesli

Benefits:
Lowers cholesterol, improves the immune system, refreshes skin, improves functionality of the digestive system, promotes a healthy heart
Ingredients:
Cranberries, almonds, rolled oats, sunflower seeds, cotton seeds, honey, sesame oil
Nutritional value:
A rich source of antioxidants, fiber, vitamin C, D, A and K, iron, calcium, and potassium

GRANOLA
STORY OF A HEALTHY FOOD

> Muesli, due to its fiber and low calories, provides the feeling of being full and makes dieting easy while providing great results

instagram: chaarbaan

House of Elephant
Boutique Hotel

House of Elephant Boutique Hotel is located in the heart of the city of love and poetry, Shiraz. This historic property with 260 years of magnificent history and splendid design is adorned by the most incredible details.
The house was built in the 19th century and has been tastefully restored to combine cultural authenticity and luxury. The traditional Iranian architecture offers a peaceful and comfortable experience and is the perfect place to spend a relaxing trip.
As soon as you step inside the hotel, you feel like you are in another world where everything is ideal.
There are ten beautifully furnished rooms on the property.
The rooms are not only stunning but also unique, with access to the courtyard, traditional windows and a view overlooking the garden and pool.
The rooftop restaurant offers a panoramic view of the city of Shiraz and Shahneshin cafe, which has dazzling Qajari paintings on its ceilings.
House of Elephant Boutique Hotel is located in the historic district of Shiraz on Zand Street, which is one of the oldest streets of the city and is only minutes away from the most vibrant tourist attractions of Shiraz such as Vakil bazaar, Vakil mosque, Shah Cheragh, Nasir al-Mulk mosque, Qavam House (also known as "Narenjestan e Qavam"), Eram Garden and Saraye Moshir.

No.57, Alley 11, Zand Street, Bazarche Fil, Shiraz, Iran
Instagram: house_of_elephant

SHEMSHAK Boutique Hotel

Hotel History

At the beginning of the first Pahlavi period, the town of Shemshak and the area around it was a coal mine and was used for fueling and moving trains. The Germans assisted in extraction activities, and a power generation center and several buildings were built for their residence in Shemshak. The power generation center was completed in 1926 and the dorm mansion was finished and opened to residents in 1933, but after a few years, with changes in technology and fuel production in Iran, the power generation and dormitory mansion were shut down.
In the second Pahlavi period, it was decided that a ski resort and hotel would be built in the town of Shemshak. In June 1965, the German company, Tonberg, came to the area for the construction of the hotel, acquired the building of the power generation station and built the hotel three floors above it. However, the hotel was shut down in the 1980s. In 2015, a privately-owned company invested in Shemshak Boutique Hotel and managed to rebuild the hotel in the span of two and a half years. The dormitory building was transformed into a restaurant complex, and in 2018, the complex was officially opened as the first boutique hotel in Iran. The walls, doors, windows, ceilings, lights and many of the hotel's furnishings have been refurbished with great care to their original styles.

Cheraghan Restaurant

Cheraghan restaurant belongs to and is located next to Shemshak Boutique Hotel. It serves a variety of Iranian and European cuisines and has been transformed into a beautiful and historic setting. The design and interior decoration of the restaurant is unique and distinctive in terms of architectural style in Iran.
The restaurant is 600 square meters and can cater to up to 100 guests. The restaurant's large terrace offers guests a glimpse of the scenery of the mountainous landscapes surrounding the complex.

Hotel Rooms

Shemshak Hotel Boutique has 12 double rooms and four triplex suites. All hotel rooms are different in terms of size, shape, interior design and landscape views depending on their location in the building. The bathrooms are designed in line with international standards and the bathroom accessories include some of the best European products.

Hotel Facilities and Nearby Tourist Attractions

In addition to Shemshak Boutique Hotel's Cheraghan restaurant, the hotel also boasts a coffee shop and spa. The hotel's facilities also include special rooms for seminars, specialized trainings and screenings with a capacity of 30 people each.
Due to the proximity of Shemshak Boutique Hotel to three international ski resorts, the hotel is the perfect setting for skiers and guests staying during the late fall, winter, and early spring months. Shemshak Boutique Hotel is located right next to Shemshak Ski Resort, is five minutes away from Darbandsar Ski Resort, ten minutes away from Dizin Ski Resort and five minutes away from Meygoon Ice Climbing School.
The mountains and beautiful scenery around the hotel offer perfect places for walking and hiking, attracting mountain hikers and nature enthusiasts during late spring, summer and early fall.

Health Tourism in Cuba

Cuba is widely known as one of the most medically-advanced countries in the world in terms of medical research, infant mortality rate and universal access to care.

Furthermore, Cuban medical practitioners are some of the most well-trained in the medical industry. SMC Salud, or Comercializadora de Servicios Médicos Cubanos, S.A., manages health services in Cuba and shares strategic alliances with the Cuban Ministries of Tourism, Higher Education, Public Health, BioCubaFarma, and the Sports Institute.

There are seven divisions within SMC Salud:

1. Medical tourism delivery
2. Academic education
3. Cuba's medical services abroad
4. Wellness and quality of life services
5. Medical services for foreign residents
6. Network of pharmacies and opticians
7. Health symposiums and events

SMC Salud offers academic programs ranging from undergraduate to postgraduate and residency opportunities. More than 35,000 foreign students have received free education in Cuba.

SMC Salud has a network of hospitals of excellence throughout Cuba, both general and specialized, equipped with the latest technology.

In these centers, novel techniques are applied for a rapid and effective diagnosis in more than 150 therapeutic procedures and more than 250 medical programs, including:

- Medical check-ups
- Dental checkups
- Physical rehabilitation
- Organ and tissue transplants
- Implants
- Surgery
- Cancer treatment

Cuba's medical personnel have served in over 160 countries in the past 55 years and welcome health tourists from all around the world. Currently, SMC Salud is present in 63 countries with 41,852 employees, of which 20,306 are physicians.

Nurses, technicians, engineers, technologists and other professionals also contribute in delivering holistic medical services to patients, partners and clients of SMC Salud. For international patients, 24/7 emergency medical services, consultation appointments in all specialties, technologies for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes, emergency evacuations and medical accompaniment are available.

The organization is committed to offering the highest quality medical and cosmetic procedures to foreign patients looking for safe, alternative care abroad.

Domus' Eyes on Iran

*There are extraordinary achievements accomplished by Italian and Iranian architectures throughout out the years, featured in "**Domus**," the acclaimed Italian magazine on architecture. Domus's Eye on Iran is a 10-part mini-series produced by the Italian Embassy in Iran that will take viewers on a journey through the past five decades, with each episode taking inspiration from an article published by Domus magazine. The initial purpose of this project was to underline Iran's significant role in history of modern architecture and design and its ongoing relation with Italian architecture and design scenery.*

*The first episode focused on the Villa for Older Brother designed by Iranian architecture Alireza Taghaboni in 2017 in the residential suburb of Lavasan. Future episodes are currently being shot on the featured articles of Domus Magazine. **Gaetano Pesce**, an Italian architecture who in 1977 participated on the competition for the construction of **Tehran National Library**, which unfortunately never came to life is the subject of the second episode. In his design, he used a box for the entrance to show the power and utilizing organic volumes to represent the minority, he believes that architecture has nothing to do with form and the content is what shapes the form. Although the project never saw the light, the National Library as imagined by Gaetano Pesce can be considered an important crossroad for contemporary architecture. Its non-rectilinear and fragmented composition which conveys a sense of chaos and unpredictability materialized as architectural trends in the '80s and '90s.*

*For the occasion of the screening of the second episode of Domus' Eyes on Iran video series, "**Gaetano Pesce and the Tehran National Library**," The Italian Ambassador in Tehran, H.E. Giuseppe Perrone, held an event on November 6th, 2020. Which is now on the Embassy's social media channels: YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter.*

Ambasciata d'Italia

DIGITAL SMILE DESIGN

DR. BASATI

By: Reza Taeb

Dr. Basati was born in 1984 Tehran, Iran. He has been working in the field of dentistry and smile beautification for nine years now.

In your opinion, why do foreign tourists choose Iran for professional medical and dentistry services? Which countries do they normally come from?

It is mostly for the low prices and high quality of our medical services compared to other countries. Our patients are mostly Iranian expats and our neighbors like people from Kuwait, Iraq and Oman which prefer Iran for its high-quality medical services.

For example, the cost of dental services compared to that of Europe and North America is almost 5 times less expensive.
In the near future, I am certain that we will see an increase of medical tourism from the Persian Gulf coast countries.

Is the value of foreign currency and its ups and downs and also sanctions affecting your profession?

Yes, it has affected the procurement of our primary materials and made it more difficult. Some brands are harder to find and we have been facing some issues regarding this matter.

As you know, the colors of materials from different brands are not the same so for people who are revisiting the practice it is sometimes impossible to match the colors which had previously been used for them.

Which countries do you procure medical materials from?

Most of our materials are from Germany and some others are coming from North America and Europe, however most of disposable products are made in China.

How has COVID-19 affected your area of expertise?

COVID-19 affected our industry to a great extent just as much as other industries. As you know our job involves working closely with the patient's mouth and teeth, therefore our occupation is considered to be high-risk. That's why there has been a decrease in visiting dental practices for non-essential operations.

Have you been working online since the outbreak of COVID-19?

Yes, I was doing my main consultations online. These consultations were all based on cases which provided X-rays, from which I could determine the early diagnoses.

With dentist's appearing on popular TV shows, do you think there has been an increase of general public knowledge in regards to dental hygiene?

It definitely had a massive impact. Public knowledge and usage of toothbrushes, mouthwash and dental floss has increased. Also, people are visiting the practice for normal check-ups on a more regular basis and taking panoramic dental x-rays photographs. Therefore, emergency visits to the practices are much less than before.

What distinguishes the technology that you use from that of your colleagues?

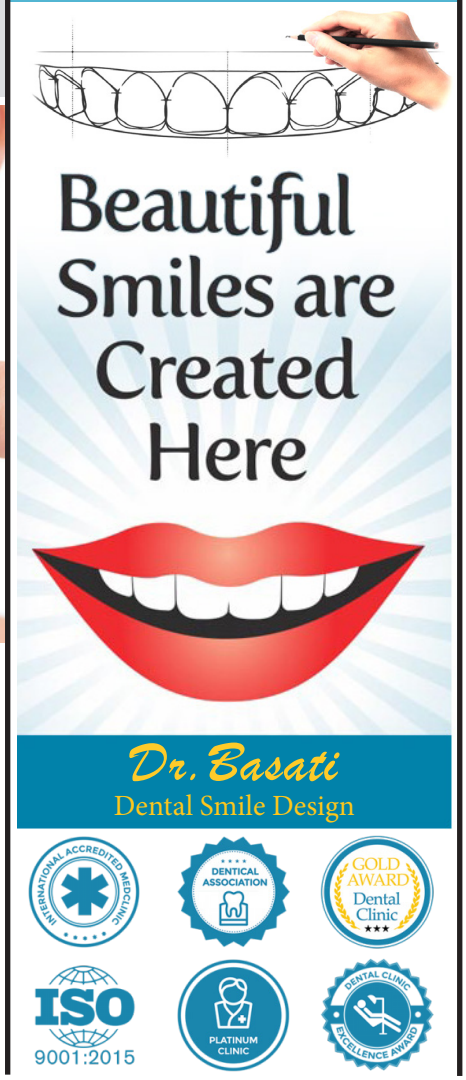
Some colleagues use laminate laboratories which include molding, cascading and delivering services that could possibly be erroneous due to the multiple steps involved. They also require certain care and temperature and professional delivery services.
But here with digital laminate we have limited the errors. The laminate with less thickness, a more natural look and less grinding of teeth top coat, is prepared in less than 8 hours.

Is the hygiene protocol for protection against COVID-19 any different for dentists compared to other medical professionals?

No, we recommend the same protocols, however we also put some emphasis on the use of mouthwash not only for keeping the gums healthy but also for preventing coronavirus spreading in the early stages.

Do you have any advice for our readers?

> Considering the experiences
> I have had during these years,
> I would say that in regards to dental beauty,
> the thickness and the color of lamination
> all need to be done carefully by
> considering the color of the skin,
> shape of the face and even
> the occupation of the patient to achieve
> the ultimate beauty.



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Niloufaraneh beauty salon managed by Niloufar Zand, offers 35 years of professional experience in hair, makeup, manicure and pedicure. Niloufar Zand has worked in the industry for many years and after some time she realized her passion was to open her own beauty salon, with the aim of delivering high quality services, a friendly environment and good customer service.

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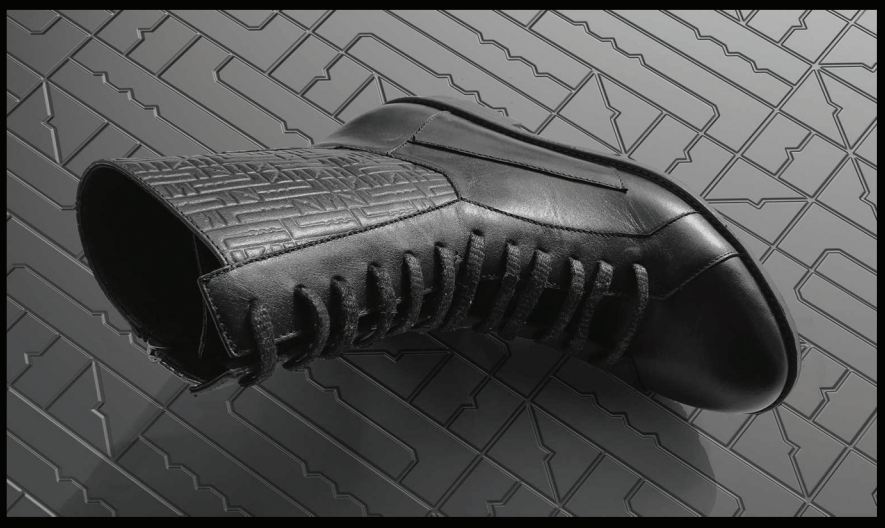

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Nita beauty salon was established in 2020 by Anita Houshmandan and Mahtab Moghadam in Tehran, Iran. Nita provides exclusive services with latest treatments and high quality products for manicure/pedicure, professional hair coloring using modern methods and spa with high standards to be compared with US luxury salons. Their services have its own new concept which stands out within Iran's beauty industry.
Nita beauty values their customers' satisfaction, therefore they will be looked after to be comfortable at all times and receive free coffee shop services. They can also enjoy indoor and outdoor sitting areas. Not to forget the VIP membership card which allows clients to get outstanding offers with great value.

In these difficult times with COVID-19 pandemic, Nita is following all the health protocols disinfecting all their equipment and the salon to be able to stay open and provide a great service for its exclusive customers.

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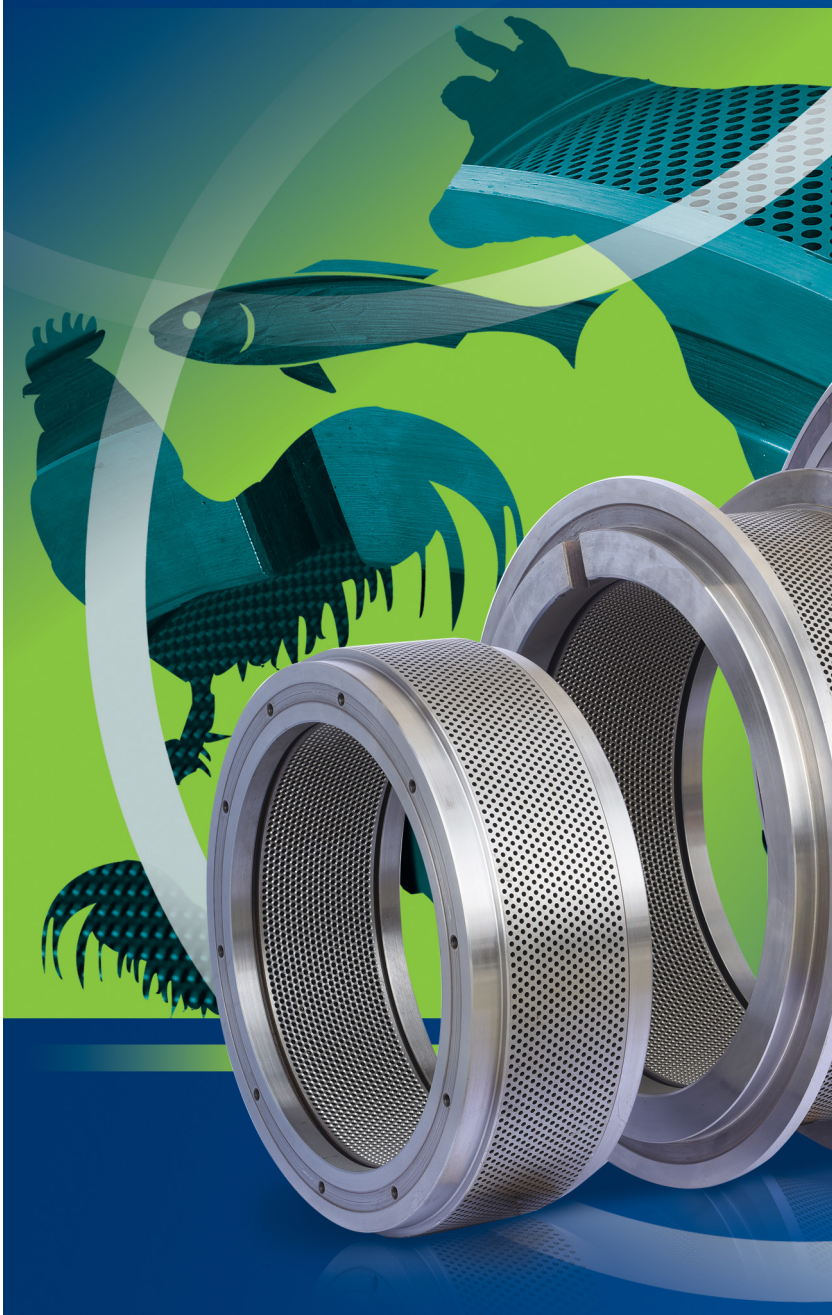

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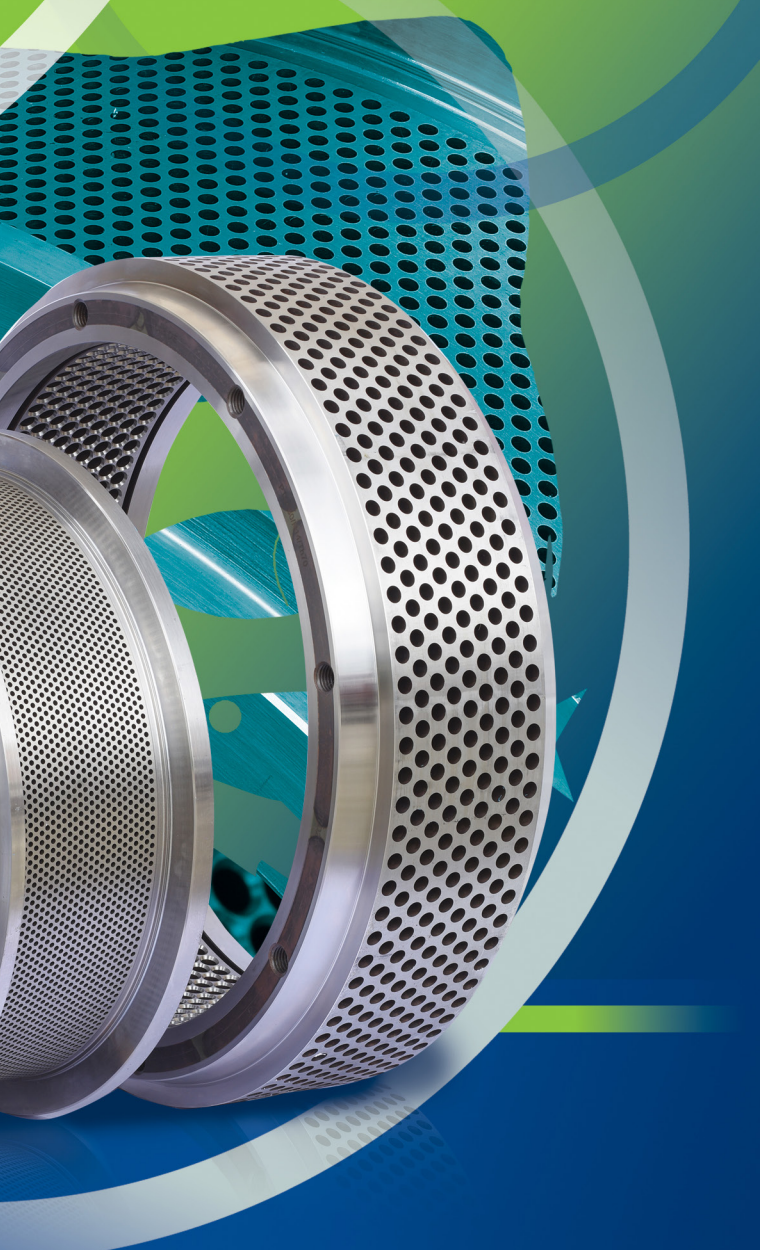

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