

Real people instead of terrorists portrayed

The Kite Runner" is a different kind of film about Muslims and the Middle East because it shows the people as human beings rather than terrorists. As such, American Muslims may want to guide their acquaintances to the film for its educational value. But film reviewers also generally rate it as a great flick. "The Kite Runner" has already garnered a Golden Globe nomination and is being mentioned by many for Oscar nominations. The film, which debuted last month, is based on Khaled Hosseini's best-selling novel. It takes place in a fragmented Afghanistan on the brink of war and is about a privileged 12-year-old boy named Amir, who tragically betrays his childhood friend, Hassan. When Amir and his father, Baba, played by Iranian Homayoun Ershadi, escape to California, Hassan is left in Afghanistan. Nearly two decades later, Amir returns to his war-torn homeland to redeem himself by saving the son of his childhood friend. The release of the film was delayed several weeks because of fears the Afghan child actors would be in danger because of a rape scene. The film was released once the actors moved to the United Arab Emirates. Newsweek's Lorraine Ali, who interviewed author Khaled Hosseini, director Marc Forster and actor Khalid Abdalla, said, "This is truly a global film—the director is Swiss-American, the novelist Afghan-American, the lead actor Egyptian-British, and it was shot in China." The film has been lauded by numerous critics for being unique in several ways. One unique aspect of the film is that many of the actors were chosen not based on previous acting experience, but on being true to the Afghan cul-

ture. When Ali asked Abdalla if it was frustrating dealing with real Afghan children who were chosen largely based on their heritage and not solely based on their acting skills, Abdalla said, "To me, they have Afghanistan in their bones. To find kids somewhere else and have them do those things would be an impossibility—the way Hassan squats to sit, the way they eat a pomegranate—there's stuff like that you could



not find anywhere else." Jack Shaheen, an expert on Muslim and Arab images in film and author of Reel Bad Arabs, said, "This film is unique in that it doesn't portray Muslims as villains or terrorists, but as real human beings. When it comes to Muslims or Middle Easterners in American films, 'Arabic or Muslim equals the evil cultural other, the terrorist, the oil sheik.'" Ali said Amir's character was the first Muslim lead she knew of who was not portrayed as a

terrorist. Hosseini agreed with Shaheen and Ali's view of the western film industry. "There's a billion Muslims in the world; that means five billion prayers a day. Out of that, how many times do they follow the prayer by blowing up a building? Yet, if you just knew Islam through film, seemingly quite a lot of the time prayers are followed by something exploding. In this film, Islam is simply the rhythm of life." Reviews of the film were generally positive, although a few reviewers were quite negative because they felt the film lacked the power of the book. Ershadi's performance, however, was frequently singled out for sweeping praise. Writing for the USA Today, Claudia Puig gave the film a positive review and said, "The Kite Runner" soars with emotion and sensitivity. Though the book delved more deeply into the culture and changing politics of Afghanistan than the film does, the movie still is powerful and sweeping." Puig went on to say, "Iranian actor Homayoun Ershadi, who plays Baba, Amir's father, also is excellent as a remote, but principled patriarch. A scene in which he stands up to a terrible bullying soldier, defending a woman's honor and risking his life, is one of the film's most dramatic." The Chicago Daily Tribune's Michael Phillips had a different assessment, saying a lot of the feeling and emotion of the book was lost on film. Phillips went on to say, "There is, however, a lovely performance from the Iranian actor Homayoun Ershadi. As Amir's proud father, he alone among the adult actors in this international ensemble digs beneath the surface of the plot to suggest a

real, complicated human being undergoing a world of change. "The way the actor uses his bearing and his voice to capture the imperious intellectual we see in the early part of 'The Kite Runner' contrasts remarkably with the man we see a few chronological years later, working in a gas station in Fremont [California], living through, and for, his son's education and happiness." Kelly Jane Torrance, of The Washington Times, gave the film a positive review. "The film teaches us far more than the tragic recent history of this country, as interesting as that is; it teaches us that though it sometimes takes courage, we cannot ignore our responsibilities to be human." Torrance quoted a line from Baba, in which Baba is trying to teach his son about courage and strength of character. "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who won't stand up for anything," he says in one of many solemn and striking pronouncements." Jack Mathews, writing for the New York Daily News, said, "The movie has two extraordinary characters and performances. Non-pro Ahmad Khan Mahmidzada breaks your heart as the innocent, wide-eyed child Hassan, and Homayoun Ershadi makes Amir's father a model of intuitive decency." Jay Stone of Canada's Edmonton Journal, said, "Homayoun Ershadi plays Baba, Amir's father, portrayed in the novel as a six-foot-five giant who can wrestle a bear, stare down a drunken Russian soldier and bring a sense of fierce honor to a society in chaos. Baba takes his son to America, where he starts a new life, although at a lower level. An aristocrat in Afghanistan, Baba works in a gas station and a flea market in San Francisco, yet he never loses his pride. It's a large role, and Ershadi dominates the screen."

Regime says those boots not made for walking

IranTimes: The latest crackdown on women's fashion—specifically boots—has now triggered criticism from conservative members of the Majlis. Several clerics, who are also Majlis deputies, have criticized Tehran police chief Ahmad-Reza Radan for acting with excessive zeal when

he ordered a crackdown on women's high boots. Radan said women wearing high boots over their pants would be targeted by the morals police, along with those who wore hats in place of the traditional hejab and short, tight winter coats. Radan described these fashion styles as an example of "tabarroj," an Islamic term for revealing one's beauty and bodily contours to unrelated men. April saw the launch of one of the most severe crackdowns in years, as police handed out warnings to thousands of women deemed improperly dressed. Winter has usually meant a relaxation of hejab enforcement. But not this year. "Wearing boots over trousers, according to Sharia [Islamic law] is tabarroj and an example of bad dressing, which will be confronted," Radan said. Majlis Deputy Seyed Hadi

Tabatabai, a cleric, told the reformist daily Etemad, "No officials have the right to mix religion with emotions and issue decrees and implement them on behalf of clerics. Such behavior tarnishes Islam." Deputy Mohammad Taghi-Rahbar said, "A Muslim woman wearing high boots with a coat and other coverings does not contradict Islam. The clerics should define tabarroj and Commander Radan's comments are not within police responsibilities. Cultural bodies should make decisions in this regard." Eshrat Shaegh, a hardline deputy, said, "I am sorry that you are concerned about the boots of a few rich women. I am worried about women who do not have meat on their tables and no clothes on their children." Etemad-e Melli had this to say about the recent crackdown on women's fashion. "Although one should not ignore the spiritual and moral heritage of society, nevertheless, how much importance should one attach to whether women wear boots or not, in comparison to many other social priorities? How important is this compared to social problems and moral threats such as the use of narcotics, prostitution, unemployment and scores of other social problems?"

compliance with FIFA's rules. Last Saturday, eight days beyond the deadline, a spokesman for the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) told the Fars news agency the AFC had received no response from Iran. Ahmadi-nejad announced the next day that he had called off Aliabadi. In November, FIFA threatened to sanction Iran if it did not hold elections by year's end. The likely sanction is a ban on Iran participating in any international matches. In February, Iran is due to start its quest for a slot in the 2010 World Cup. The dispute with FIFA has prevented the federation from being able to sign a new coach for the national team.

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Prez caves...

de Football Association) met and thrashed out the problem. FIFA has a rule banning government involvement in soccer. But Iran's vice president for sports, Aliabadi, had announced plans to run for election as president of the federation. FIFA said it would allow officers of the PEO to serve on the federation board, but not as president.

Iran then canceled the scheduled elections for the board and president and said it would tell FIFA on December 6 how it would come into

Maradona longs to meet his idol Ahmadi-nejad

Retired Argentine soccer star Diego Maradona says he wants to meet President Ahmadi-nejad, Argentine media reported last month. Maradona, an outspoken critic of the President Bush, gave a signed soccer shirt to an Iranian diplomat. Maradona signed the shirt, "With all my love to the Iranian people." Maradona, 47, is an admirer of Cuban President Fidel Castro and he said he wanted a tattoo of Hugo Chavez, the fiery presi-



dent of Venezuela and an ally of Iran. "I've already met Fidel and Chavez.... Now I need to meet your president. I'd like to meet Ahmadi-nejad," he told Iran's top diplomat in Argentina, Chargé D'Affaires Mohsen Bazargan, in a video shown by Buenos Aires television stations last

month. "I'm there with the people of Iran, really with all my heart," he said. Maradona led Argentina to its 1986 World Cup victory. He is revered in his home country and is among the most respected soccer players in the world—but also one of the more controversial. Maradona was suspended for 15 months in 1991 after a failed doping test for cocaine in Italy, and then again for ephedrine during the 1994 World Cup



in USA. After retirement from soccer in 1997, he suffered ill health and weight gain, along with ongoing cocaine abuse. However, a stomach-stapling operation helped control his weight gain. Since overcoming his cocaine addiction, he has become a TV host in Argentina.

24 Internet cafes shut



IranTimes: A police crackdown on "immoral behavior" in Tehran has resulted in the shutdown of 24 Internet cafes and the detention of 23 people, official media said. The action in Tehran was part of the latest crackdown targeting un-Islamic fashion and other practices deemed incompatible with Islam. Colonel Noader Sarkari said, "Using immoral computer games, storing obscene photos and the presence of women wearing improper hejab were among the reasons they have been closed down." Sarkari told the state news agency that police inspected 435 coffee shops and that 170 of them had been

warned. "Twenty-three people were detained," Sarkari said, 11 of whom were women. The owner of one of the closed Internet cafes, who gave his name as Hessam, told Radio Farda police started questioning him when they found some family photos, including a female member of the family, on a computer. "We had a few family photos in our system. They asked, 'Who is this girl that is sitting so close to you?' Just because of the private photos, they closed this place for three or four days. The police pressure has reached that level! It has become a headache, a problem for everybody. We don't know what to do."

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Quran: Sura 2, Verse 136

Say, "We believe in GOD, and in what was sent down to us, and in what was sent down to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Patriarchs; and in what was given to Moses and Jesus, and all the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them. To Him alone we are submitters."

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