

Iranian now V.P. of firm that made the Wild West

IranTimes: Wells Fargo is one of the few surviving American businesses from the days of the Wild West when it ran stage coaches and provided banking services for cowboys. The stagecoaches and cowboys are gone, but the banking system remains and one of the vice presidents of the modern firm is now an Iranian-American woman. Avid Modjtabei received her bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from California's Stanford University and her MBA from New York's Columbia University. After 14 years with Wells Fargo, she is now an executive vice president in charge of its information technology with a staff of 6,000. Few of them could drive a stage coach, but they do pretty well with a hard drive. When asked which of her accomplishments she was most proud of, she told Information Week, "All of my roles at Wells Fargo, from running Internet banking to being head of human resources, have meant a lot to me. I'm proud to manage such an integral function for the company. I've learned so much, and I inherited a great team—it's a privilege to work with them." When asked about her most important career influences, Modjtabei gave credit first to her parents. "My parents have been the greatest influence on my career. My father gave me the determination to demand the best from myself. From my mother, I learned compassion and tolerance. Wells Fargo chairman Dick Kovacevich and CEO John Stumpf took chances on me and gave me opportunities to grow professionally." But in the interview, Modjtabei admitted there were things she would re-do if she had the chance. "I once took a role in investment banking, and while I enjoyed the challenge and hard work, I also found it too individual-achievement oriented. I missed the power and fun of working with a great team." Modjtabei also acknowledged the current financial situation, which has spread internationally from the United States. She said the financial sector was dealing with some "tough times" and said she would have to make some "difficult decisions." But, she added, "When this time passes, customers will reward the financial institutions that maintained their values. Firms that didn't will likely lose business." Modjtabei told Information Week how



she measures the effectiveness of her information technology team. "We have the standard financial and technical measures, but also try to manage perception. We instituted an internal partner survey to get feedback, which is critical to help us drive alignment with the business we support." Modjtabei said, "Always focus on the customer's requirements—don't do technology for technology's sake. Tie programs to measurable business results. Never underestimate the importance of the team. Finally, be open to change—it's coming anyway, so you might as well be prepared." Aside from her career-related talk, Modjtabei shared that Marjane Satrapi's popular graphic novel "Persepolis" was her favorite book she has read recently. "It had a lot of significance to me, given my Iranian background," she said. In her spare time, Modjtabei said she enjoys "skiing with my 84-year-old father, who's always the first one on the lift in the morning and the last one off in the evening." Wells Fargo was founded in 1852 by Henry Wells and William Fargo under the name Wells, Fargo & Co. to serve the West, offering both banking (buying gold, and selling paper bank drafts as good as gold)—and express delivery. Wells Fargo opened for business in the gold rush port of San Francisco, California, and soon Wells Fargo branches spread nationwide and then internationally. Wells Fargo is now a diversified financial services company with operations internationally.

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Another Dual.....

moved back to Iran when she was a young child, and she earned an undergraduate degree in graphic design from Tehran's Azad University in 2002. Four years later, Momeni



moved to the United States where she began her studies at CSUN in 2006. David Blumenkrantz, a Northridge journalism professor who serves on Momeni's thesis committee, said "We remain deeply concerned for Esha's health and safety. To the best of my knowledge, she was actually supposed to have returned to the U.S. about three weeks before she was apprehended, but had decided to stay on a bit longer to spend time with her family. Her work on the thesis project required that she return here to put together her research for consideration by our committee. "As far as her actual involvement in any activist organization, I cannot really speak to that. My understanding was that she felt strongly about her thesis idea, to look into the way women are treated in Iran, and the way they are depicted to the outside world. All of this talk of her being involved deeply in activism seems odd to me and perhaps a bit overstated. All of us at CSUN who know and work with Esha are very concerned that she is not turned into

some kind of political pawn, to be used as some kind of symbol for anti-Iranian sentiment, or vice-versa. I would venture to add that she approached her thesis work with the kind of idealism and zealotry one often finds in an artist who is passionate about conveying some social message, but I do not believe she should be treated as a political prisoner by either side," he told the Iran Times. Amnesty International has categorized her as a political prisoner, but the U.S. government has not categorized her in any way. Professor Melissa Wall, the chair of Momeni's master's thesis committee at CSUN, said, "Esha is a wonderful young woman, very smart and very talented. I have learned a lot about Iranian culture from my discussions with her. She was concerned that Americans often misunderstand Iran and she wanted to help them see a fuller picture of her country. Her project is a video documentary about Iranian women." Wall said Momeni wanted America and Iran to better understand each other and that she hoped to help clear up misconceptions about Iranians and Iranian culture. Three days after Momeni's arrest, two security officers from the Gisha Police Station arrived at the home of Parastoo Alahyaari—another member of the One Million Signatures Campaign in Tehran—where they searched her home, seized property, and asked about her whereabouts. Upon receiving a phone call from her mother, Alahyaari—who was at work—returned home where she was presented with a summons to appear in court immediately. The security officials escorted Alahyaari to the Revolutionary Courts, where she was interrogated by a Mr. Sobhani, the investigative judge in charge of her case. Because Parastoo, whose home had reportedly been searched several times before, had a business trip planned that same day, authorities released her but she is expected to turn herself in to the courts upon her return to Iran. The Campaign for Equality, established in 2006, is an Iranian women's rights initiative composed of a network of women and men committed to ending discrimination against women in Iranian law. Dozens of activists and supporters have been arrested over the last two years for their activities with the Campaign for Equality. The campaign's website is at: <http://www.change4equality.org/english/>.

Woman drops her racism case against Calif. cop

IranTimes: An Iranian-born woman who filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against a California Highway Patrol (CHP) officer for allegedly making racist remarks has dropped all charges after the defense requested a mental health exam. Zahra Sedaghatpour had charged that Officer Jon Schatmeier berated her after she asked not to be cited for allegedly driving 79 mph in the city of Pleasanton on September 12, 2006. According to the lawsuit filed last year in U.S. District Court in San Francisco, Schatmeier asked her to sign the citation, and when Sedaghatpour asked to read it before she signed it, the officer yelled, "I don't have time for you foreigners to sit in your Mercedes. You think you own the road! You think you own the country." When Sedaghatpour asked a second time to review the citation, the suit said, the officer "dragged her out of her car" and called for backup. But Tom Blake, a deputy state attorney general representing the CHP, wrote that the officer actually removed Sedaghatpour from the car only after the woman began making suicidal comments. The decision by Sedaghatpour to drop the case came after a federal judge



granted a request by the CHP attorneys seeking an independent mental health examination of Sedaghatpour. Sedaghatpour's attorney, Hunter Pyle, however, said the judge's ruling was not the reason his client chose not to pursue the suit further.

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Iranina loves Inernet...

Minister Mohammad Soleymani insisted the current speed is perfectly adequate "to use at home and universities and even for downloading a 500-page book from the Internet," and said there are not enough private Internet users willing to pay for high-speed Internet connections. But Internet experts and media-rights advocates accused the authorities of intentionally keeping connections slow in order to deter people from logging on, therefore reducing the amount of information Iranians can access. Habibi-nia said, "I don't believe that the problem here is the lack of



customers. The minister himself once said the highspeed Internet would create security problems. In reality, the low Internet speed has become a tool to keep the net restricted, it has become a tool to censor the Internet directly and openly." Reza Moeni, who heads the Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan desk at the Parisbased organization Reporters Without

Borders, noted official bans on certain websites and unofficial website filtering and called the lack of high-speed Internet connections yet another way for the Islamic Republic to block the flow of information. Iranian authorities, for their part, claim they only block immoral websites that contradict Iranian society's ethical values—such as pornographic websites. "Were those websites that have been blocked most recently in Iran—including the websites of the Iranian Women's Society, the One Million Signatures Campaign, and Amir Kabir University—against moral values or were they only using freedom of speech to freely distribute information? The majority of the websites that face censorship and filtering in Iran are news sites and blogs, the kinds of websites that exist freely elsewhere in the world," Moeni said. The filtering isn't limited to political content. Social networking sites like Facebook have been filtered in Iran. Online social forums and chatrooms have become increasingly popular among Iranian young people, with many of them finding friends and even spouses through such networking sites. But as the authorities try to limit youth access to the Internet, crafty and tech-savvy Iranian users are finding ways to get through the state's technological barriers. Some Iranians use so-called proxy sites or antifiltering search engines to access websites that have been blocked by the government, in turn further slowing the already slow Internet speeds. "Well, we had to find our own ways to use the Internet because it seems the authorities want to block every single site on the Internet, apart from the Iranian security services' website," Mohammad said.

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Iranian actress...

port has been returned to her, but she fears what might happen if she goes back to Iran. "I'm on trial," the actress, who has been living in France with her husband, told the Daily News. "I'm totally in love with Iran. I have family there. But now, if they want to see me, they have to leave," the actress who lived in Iran until August said. "I'm going to stay here," she said. "I lost one opportunity to do a screen test, for 'The Prince of Persia.' I'm not ready for that again." Farahani is not the first Iranian woman to appear without hejab in America. Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi defended her decision to appear without hejab by stating that the Iranian Constitution does not require Iranian women to cover their heads when they are abroad. The headline daily Kayhan reported that Farahani's scarf-free appearance in the film was part of a conspiracy in an article headlined, "The cinema mafia takes female actress to America." The article claimed Farahani was forced to appear with-

out hejab. "They have forced her to appear in front of cameras without hejab and in inappropriate clothing. They immediately published the pictures on websites. Western groups try to break the taboo of being without a headscarf," the newspaper wrote. Meanwhile, a new Iranian film in which Farahani stars is scheduled to be released soon. But several government supporters have demanded that the film, entitled "Darbareh Elli," be banned in Iran. "Body of Lies," is a film directed by Ridley Scott and adapted from a 2007 novel by The Washington Post's David Ignatius's about a CIA operative, Roger Ferris—played by DiCaprio—who uncovers a lead on a major terrorist leader operating out of Jordan. Reviews of the film were varied. Some praised it for a "sophisticated line of thinking" while others panned it as yet another tired film about "good" American agents chasing "bad" Muslim terrorists across the Middle East, pointing to recent films with similar plots such as "Syriana," "Rendition" and "The Kingdom." The film was released last month and came in third in U.S. box office."

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