

Dubai No Longer Safe Haven for

Iranian Investors

by Arash Hassan-Nia

IranTimes: "We welcome all the dear Iranians for whom the UAE is a second home. We welcome you with open arms and offer you commercial, touristic, economic and social benefits..." The above is a translation of a message in Arabic written on a billboard at the entrance to a recent three-day exhibition at Tehran's International Fares site. The event was first held more than five years ago to entice investors over to the Arab countries on the opposite side of the Persian Gulf. The Arab sheikhs of the UAE are wise to the needs of Iranian investors. The promise of a three-year residency permit, plus easier travel to Europe and the United States is as appealing to Iranians and their families as the financial returns promised by construction companies and estate agents. Five years ago, the promotional films on the huge monitors at the exhibition looked more like something from a Hollywood special effects department than real life, but all the various projects have since come into being, one by one, as the new Dubai is born. In Iran, rumor has it that Dubai was built with Iranian money, and perhaps that is not so far from the truth. Certainly, Iranians have been involved in Dubai's property boom from the word go. The flow of investment money out of Iran has been on the rise and many Iranians have settled in Dubai. According to a report by the Iran Commerce Council, Iranians run 10-30 percent of all property companies in there. Another report, from the Iran Cultural Press, claims that 400,000 Iranians between them control 200 billion U.S. dollars worth of assets in Dubai, a figure that could top 500 billion dollars over the next two years. With the rise in property prices in Iran, it became possible to buy an apartment in a fabulous Dubai highrise, paying far less than you would for something similar in Tehran. But the advantages weren't only financial, as a young man who owns a construction company explained. "The issue of residency is very important to me. Freedom and peace of mind are other important matters. Apart from that, the beautiful, luxurious flats here could be bought in installments with a mortgage. Conditions are not as attractive as before, but prices are still lower than on Argentina Square and Valiasr Street in central Tehran," he said. A middle-aged man who owns a residential flat in Dubai agreed. "High-rises in Dubai are cheaper than [those in Tehran]. Besides, there is a quality here that you would never find in buildings in Tehran," said the man. The tension surrounding Iran's nuclear program during the past three and a half years has made investing in Iran riskier, encouraging property agencies in Dubai to pour money into publicity. Pick up a remote control and flick through any Farsi satellite channel and you will quickly come across adverts aimed at Iranians, some with endorsements from celebri-



ties such as the weightlifting champion Hossein Rezaeadeh. But some investors who rushed in have ended up the victim of fraud. All my friends have invested in Dubai, but of course they bought from more credible companies and they have not had any problems. One has to be very careful. Laws in Dubai are different from the laws in Iran and companies exploit our [ignorance]," said one man, who has not seen a written contract since making his investment two years ago. "People who invested in property in the UAE, looking for profit have instead sustained losses. With the new economic downturn, some of the projects are not worth even half the price that was paid for them." The man has since moved some of his money into Malaysia. "Iranians have rushed into Dubai and it's no longer the calm, attractive place it used to be. Now in Dubai there's heavy traffic, inflation and other problems that we left Tehran and came here to avoid," he said. Reports show that the value of the UAE economy has shrunk by more than 50 per cent compared with 2004. Falling oil prices have damaged its once flourishing property market. Prices have dropped from 200,000 to 50,000 dirhams per square meter in some parts of Dubai. "Before this crisis, you could buy and sell property in Dubai in a matter of a few days, or even hours, and make a huge profit, but it is not like that anymore. I cannot sell my apartments. I cannot even cancel the construction contracts," said one man. Even investors whose original motives for buying property were not purely financial are having problems. "I intended to obtain permanent residence in Dubai. Now, I can neither extend my visa nor pay the installments on my apartment," said one. An investor who has managed to obtain residency has a different view. "Before, I was reluctant to leave Iran, but with the new [economic] situation [there], I am glad that I am in Dubai. Conditions in Iran may become worse in the future," he said. There is no sign that the number of adverts targeted at Iranian investors and tourists is waning. But Dubai is no longer the safe haven that it once was. Iranians will have to keep their options open in the search for a stable place for their money.

U.S. court rules young Iranian deported illegally

IranTimes: An Iranian-born man who came to the United States in 1988 as a 12-year-old but was deported in 2007 for overstaying his visa has now won the right to a full deportation hearing. Pedram Mokarram won the right to a hearing that an appeals court ruled had been illegally denied to him. The Fifth Amendment gives him that right, the court said. A three-judge panel of the 11th U.S.

manently reunite Mokarram with his Charlotte-based mother and sister. The panel found that Mokarram legally could not have waived his rights in 1988 at the age of 12 and would have needed the signature of a parent or guardian above the age of 18. He had flown into the United States accompanied only by a friend of a relative. "Even if that person signed a waiver, it wouldn't be valid because it had to be [signed by] a parent or guardian," Cohen said, adding that Mokarram's Iranian-American mother got him out of Iran and into the UK where he stayed with a relative until he came to the United States. Citizens of the U.K. are entitled to 90-day tourist visas provided they waive a deportation hearing in case they overstay their visit. Mokarram was working in Charlotte when he was stopped for a traffic violation June 30, 2007. When his alien status was discovered, the Department of Homeland Security deported him August 16, 2007, without a hearing. The 11th Circuit panel concluded that once Mokarram was admitted to the United States and became subject to its jurisdiction, he was entitled to "due process" under the Fifth Amendment. It ruled that—in the absence of a legal waiver—he should not have been deported without a hearing. But the ruling does not resolve all of Mokarram's claims. The court said the remaining claims against the immigrant must be left to immigration officials in the Department of Homeland Security.



Circuit Court of Appeals found the Iranian immigrant did not waive his due process rights when he was granted a 90-day tourist visa upon arrival in Charlotte, North Carolina, from the U.K. in 1988. He was deported to Britain in 2007 because he arrived in the U.S. on a British passport. Mokarram's lawyer, Marshall L. Cohen, said he hopes to per-

Princeton's Iran physicist named to 'Brilliant 10'

IranTimes: Popular Science magazine has named an Iranian-American physics professor at Princeton University as one of its "Brilliant 10" top young scientists. Dubbed "The Atomic Visionary" by the magazine, Ali Yazdani gained notice for his work using a desk-size scanning-tunneling microscope to research high-temperature superconductors. The machine can cool a sample to just above absolute zero, seal it in a nearperfect vacuum and block even the slightest noise. "As a result, he can continuously track single atoms for months at a time," the magazine said. "The Brilliant 10 are the brightest researchers of 2008, making the breakthroughs of tomorrow," said Mark Jannot, editor-in-chief of Popular Science. "PopSci is paying homage to these young scientists, who explore the world with an altogether original eye." Yazdani, who was born in Tehran in 1967, told the magazine his interest in science began as a teenager in Iran when he enrolled in a class on how to repair television sets. After he immigrated to the United States in 1984, a course in quantum mechanics at the University of California at Berkeley peaked his interest in physics. Yazdani told the Iran Times, I was always interested in science as a kid in Iran, but it was my year at UC Berkeley that got me interested in physics. I took a course on quantum mechanics and decided to do physics instead of engineering." He subsequently went on to earn his Ph.D. from Stanford University in 1995 and then completed his postdoc at the IBM Almaden Research Center in San Jose, California. He served on the physics faculty of the University of Illinois-Urbana from 1997 until 2005, when he moved to New Jersey to join the faculty at Princeton. The "bril-



liant" Iranian's research has disproved longheld beliefs on high-temperature superconductors with provoking results based on two years of experiments he led with his research group at Princeton. In one experiment, he and his group proved that high-temperature superconductivity does not hinge on a magical glue binding electrons together. The secret to superconductivity may rest instead on the ability of electrons to take advantage of their natural repulsion in a complex situation. Yazdani conducts his research at Princeton's Nanoscale Microscopy Laboratory, a state-of-the-art, ultra-low-noise lab. Yazdani and his group study condensed matter physics, searching for simple, unifying explanations for complicated phenomena observed in liquids and solids. To select this year's 10 recipients, the editors at Popular Science contacted hundreds of individuals, including heads of departments at universities around America, professional associations, and award-granting institutions.

U.S. citizenship backlog is now cut to six months

IranTimes: The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have announced they have eliminated the backlog for FBI name checks for citizenship applications pending more than six months. The backlog has been a source of frustration and anger for people who have applied for U.S. citizenship and been kept waiting—

May 30 and, by the end of June, the FBI is scheduled to complete 98 percent of USCIS name check requests within 30 days and process the remaining two percent within three months. The move comes after an increasing number of immigrants, waiting sometimes years for U.S. immigration officials to act on their citizenship applications, took to the courts last year to force a decision from USCIS. The Washington Post reported last year that beginning in January 2008 through the end of March 2008, 1,300 people filed lawsuits against the USCIS to speed up their applications. A major factor that contributed to the slow pace was that immigration officials began scrutinizing applicants' backgrounds more extensively after the September 11, 2001, attacks. Applicants for citizenship must undergo an FBI check to determine whether they appear on any terrorism watch list or are named in a federal law enforcement investigation. This is troublesome because oftentimes, due to name overlaps or because a person may have testified in court, the applicant's name may draw a red flag. Many also complain that applicants with Muslim names also draw attention and are more closely scrutinized. Muzaffar A. Chishti, a lawyer and senior official at the nonpartisan, Washington, D.C. based-Migration Policy Institute, said, "The mere bringing of an action puts pressure on the immigration service by the assistant U.S. attorneys, who call them and say, 'Look, I don't want to deal with these 400 cases. Why aren't you acting on them?'"



sometimes for years—for the FBI to conduct its check of criminal records as required before they can become citizens. Many have filed suit against the U.S. government. Just 16 months ago, the USCIS reported about 150,000 applications had been pending for more than six months—with some pending more than three years. But as of February 28, 2009, the FBI's National Name Check Program (NNCP) had screened all USCIS requests pending for six months or more. The USCIS and FBI will now work together to complete two further goals: all name check requests pending longer than 90 days to be completed by

TV show makes monkey of prez (And TV show is then canceled)

IranTimes: A live children's television program has been booted off the airwaves after a young caller said his father named his toy monkey "Ahmadi-nejad." The family's private joke was made public on Amoo Pourang (Uncle Pourang), a program watched by millions of Iranian children three times a week on Iranian state TV. The indiscretion came when Dariush Farziayi, one of the hosts, asked the youngster the name of a stuffed animal the child had been given as a reward for good behavior. "Well, my father calls him Ahmadi-nejad," the child replied. Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) responded by canceling the show, one of the most popular children's programs. The final episode was scheduled to be aired this week after a seven-year run. Jahan News, a conservative website, quoted "reliable sources" as saying the decision to end the show was prompted by the "high financial and spiritual damage" caused by live programming. The option of taping in advance was not raised. Most American interview programs

are taped in advance so that cursing or disgusting language can be bleeped out. The monkey incident hasn't been the only embarrassing comment on Amoo Pourang. In one instance, Farziayi had asked a young caller to give the phone to his mother or father, to which the caller replied: "They're in the shower." In another episode, Farziayi had asked twins which one was kissed first by their father after he returned home from work. Their response was: "My daddy always kisses mommy first." These seemingly minor indiscretions are seen as offensive and threatening of religious and social mores in the Islamic Republic. Amoo Pourang is not the first Iranian broadcast that has been punished for spontaneous live broadcasting. In the 1980s, death sentences were reportedly handed down for the directors of a radio program after a female caller named a Japanese soap opera character as her role model, rather than the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatameh. They were later pardoned.