

Iran's new cabinet ushers in a change

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The cabinet presented on Aug. 12 by Iranian President Mohammed Khatami to his parliament, the Majlis, promises to translate his electoral promises into concrete policy shifts. If the appointments are ratified by that body, and the new government moves energetically in the direction indicated by its composition, the result will be remoralizing for the vast majority of Iranian citizens, who voted Khatami in. The wave of optimism which will spread through the population in this case, will be important even beyond the country's borders, because optimism tends to be contagious.

Khatami's almost 70% majority of the popular vote, in the election on May 23, was a mandate for change, particularly regarding domestic economic, social, and cultural policy. Vast numbers of women and youth voted for him, in order to loosen restrictions on cultural life, meaning the press and political associations, and to open the Islamic Republic of Iran up more to impulses from the West.

Judging from the list of his nominees, this is precisely what the 54-year-old moderate, himself a former culture minister, plans to do. There are several striking features in the composition of the cabinet: first, that 17 of the 22 nominees are new; second, that the overwhelming majority of them are engineers by training and profession; and third, that several have been educated in the United States. Politically, they represent a coalition of close collaborators of Khatami's, associates of former President Hashemi Rafsanjani linked to infrastructure and reconstruction efforts, leftists, and a small number of conservative clerics.

For example, **Namdar Zanganeh**, who has been nominated to be oil minister, is a civil engineer, who headed the Construction Jihad Ministry beginning in 1983, and became energy minister in 1988, a post he also held under Rafsanjani's government. He is a member of the Expediency Council, headed by Rafsanjani, and has been teaching at the university level. **Saidi Kya**, slated for the Ministry of Construction Jihad, received his B.S. in civil engineering from Teheran's University of Science and Industry, and has concentrated his work in the rail sector. Railway expansion was at the center of the infrastructure work launched under the previous government, as part of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, or new Silk Road program. Kya was the head of a provincial road and

transportation office in 1980, became deputy transportation minister in 1981, and, the following year, took responsibility for the construction of the Bafgh-Bandar Abbas railway. He later headed up Iran's railway renovation office, then became minister of roads and transportation in 1993. He also has an academic career, and has been head of the Railway Engineering Department of the Teheran University of Science and Industry.

The nominee for housing minister, **Ali Abdolalizadeh**, holds a degree in civil engineering. He has served as deputy mayor, and on the Plan and Budget Committee of parliament. **Habibollah Bitaraf**, nominated to become energy minister, is a civil engineer who has served as deputy minister of energy, in which capacity he was in charge of several dam construction projects, and two power plants (Karoun 3 and 4). The nominee for transportation minister, Mahmoud Hojjati, studied civil engineering and was active in the five-year plan. He had administrative responsibility for the giant Karkheh Dam.

Several other of the nominees worked under Rafsanjani: **Gholamreza Shafei**, industry minister nominee, was deputy director general of Iran National Industries Association, then deputy minister of industry, and of mines and minerals; he also served as minister of cooperatives under both terms of Rafsanjani. The nominee for labor minister, **Hussein Kamali**, a political scientist and advocate of workers' rights, was the labor minister in Rafsanjani's first term.

Among the intellectuals with academic careers, are health minister nominee **Mohammad Farhadi**, who has a Ph.D. and further graduate studies in medicine. Dr. Farhadi has held several posts since 1982, in the Culture and Higher Education Ministry, as chancellor of Teheran University, and head of Iran's Institute for Promotion of Science and Research. The nominee for the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, **Atatollah Mohajerani**, holds graduate degrees in history and an honorary degree from Dushanbe University in Tajikistan. Knowledgeable in English, Arabic, and Urdu (the language of Pakistan), he served as cultural attaché to Pakistan, as well as deputy minister and other posts.

An American connection

Most noteworthy is the large number of persons who have had direct experience in the United States, and therefore know something about the country and its culture. **Mohammad Reza Aref**, nominated to be minister of communications, is an electrical engineer, with an M.S. in telecommunications, and a Ph.D. from Stanford University in California. Another nominee who studied in the United States, is **Issa Kalantari**, slated to be agriculture minister. After receiving his Ph.D. from Iowa State, he became deputy minister of agriculture, and has been serving as minister of agriculture since 1988.

Finally, there is the nominee for foreign minister, **Dr. Kamal Kharrazi**, who has been Iran's Permanent Represen-

tative to the United Nations, in New York, since 1989. The 53-year-old Dr. Kharrazi, who received his B.A. in Persian Language and Literature from Teheran University, took a master's degree there in education, and received his Ph.D., also in education, from Houston University. Through his tenure at the UN, Dr. Kharrazi has been the highest-ranking diplomat on American soil, and is reputed to be extremely knowledgeable about the political process in the country. The man appointed to replace him at the UN is **Mohammed Hashemi**, who is the brother of the former President, Rafsanjani.

It is therefore reasonable to expect that the Khatami government will seek to improve relations with the United States, although there is still opposition to such a course, on the part of the arch-conservative wing of the clergy in the Majlis. One nominee, slated to become minister of culture and Islamic guidance, Mohajerani, caused a sensation in 1990 when, as vice president under Rafsanjani, he publicly called for direct talks with Washington. Considered an ultra-liberal, his nomination is one of the few which the conservatives may try very hard to block.

There are further positions that Khatami has filled, which do not need to be confirmed through Majlis hearings, among them the head of the Presidential Office. This post has been given to **Mohammad Ali Abtahi**, who formerly held posts in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, under then-minister Khatami, and also worked at the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), where Khatami also was active. **Dr. Hassan Habibi** has been named to maintain his position as first vice president; he was a close collaborator with Rafsanjani on infrastructure and reconstruction projects.

Certainly the most revolutionary appointment announced, is one of the vice presidencies. This has gone to a woman, for the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic. **Mrs. Massoumeh Ebtekar** does not appear to be merely a "token" nominee, however. The 36-year-old mother of two studied in the United States, where she earned a Ph.D. in chemistry. She has been teaching chemistry in Teheran University. She worked as a journalist for *Kayhan International*, and later was responsible for a women's magazine, *Farzaneh*. In addition, she has already held positions of political responsibility, though not in government; she was a delegate to the UN conferences in Cairo and in Beijing. Known as a modern, liberal woman, Mrs. Ebtekar is expected to promote greater equality between women and men in Iran.

The ministries considered most sensitive, dealing with intelligence and security matters, have gone to new people. The information minister nominee, **Hojatoleslam Qorbali Dorri Najafabadi**, is an economics expert, with experience in the budget committee of the parliament, and is considered a conservative. He is joined by **Ali Shamkhani**, nominee for defense minister, and **Abdollah Nouri** as interior minister.

A fight is coming

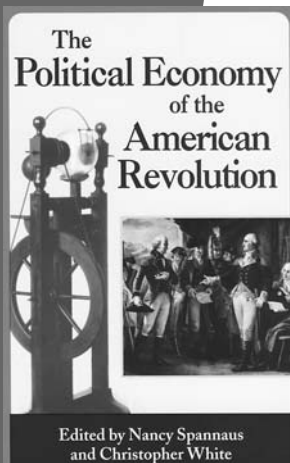
The confirmation hearings in the Majlis promise to be lively. During the consultations with political figures and groups, Khatami was reportedly put under considerable pressure by the conservatives, who handed him lists of their candidates, in no uncertain terms. One of their press organs, the daily *Jumhuri Eslami*, accused Khatami's supporters of circulating rumors about inordinate conservative pressure tactics—rumors it promptly denied. At the same time, the paper had to comment, sadly, on the cabinet coming into being: "A glance at the circulated list of leading choices points to the fact that the opposition has no share of the proposed cabinet."

The Speaker of the Majlis, Nateq Nouri, also put the President under pressure, exhorting him in statements made to the press, to deliver his list of nominees quickly. Nouri, who ran on a conservative profile against Khatami, and was roundly defeated, argued that the Majlis would need the time to deliberate, before its scheduled recess on Aug. 22, and therefore, had to have the names early.

This means, there will be a fight. The fact that the fight is of such a nature, signifies that a profound process of change has been initiated in Iran, not only of personalities, but of outlook.

DO YOU KNOW

- that the American Revolution was fought against British "free trade" economics?
- that Washington and Franklin championed Big Government?
- that the Founding Fathers promoted partnership between private industry and central government?



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