

# Yalda, an Ancient Tradition

By Sadeq Dehqan

Yalda, an ancient festivity of the Iranians, marks the longest night of the year (December 21). To mark the occasion, people gather at the house of the oldest member of their family to celebrate the long night. Melons, watermelons, pomegranates and nuts are popular fruits which are served on the occasion. Dehkhoda dictionary defines 'Yalda' in the Syriac word meaning

longest to give birth to 'god of Sun', so the night of Yalda had the privilege of becoming a unique night in the year to enable it to give birth to light (sun) of the universe. When Mehr festivity was prevalent in Europe, the Europeans used to celebrate Yalda, but, after Christianity replaced Mehr customs, Christian leaders found out that it was impossible to ignore Mehr as its memory lived on among the people. So they decided to replace the celebration of birth-

day of Mehr (sun) by celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ (PBUH) on December 25. There is a slight gap between Yalda festivity and Christ's birthday owing to miscalculation in the calendar. In fact the birthday of Jesus Christ (PBUH) is on the same day as followers of Zoroaster in Iran also celebrate Yalda. Followers of Roman civilization, also call 'Natalis Anouk', the birthday of the Sun as invinc-

ble. According to Iranian mythology, Yalda festivity is the culmination of conflict between light and dark (Ahura and Ahriman). Ahriman enjoys the longest night and darkness of the night in the conflict, but, the light came out victorious in the struggle and the Sun was born. After the birth of the Sun, the day (light) gradually became longer from the minimum at the time of the conflict. Iran Daily correspondent compared Yalda with the festival in which the Europeans welcome Santa Claus.



Melons, watermelons, pomegranates and nuts are popular fruits for Yalda night.

Professor Farhad Abizadeh said that Iranian culture is a blend of national and Islamic cultures. So, the ancient culture adapted itself to Islamic norms and at the same time, the religious culture adapted itself to national culture. He said there are common features both in religious and national culture citing the conflict between light and dark. "Our national culture talks about conflict between light and dark. Fire is a symbol of national culture and the Sun is admired for its light and brightness, but, the darkness is considered as something you should get away from." "In our religious culture, God is considered Light of the Universe and light is symbol of God. So struggle against darkness existed in our national culture and Islam also advocated such a theme," Abizadeh said.



Seagulls flying over the Caspian Sea in Iran. (Photo by Kavous Sadeqzou)

**GALLERIES**

**Pictures of Donkeys**  
by Oshin D. Zakarian & Siavash Saffarian-Pur  
Date: Dec. 24-29  
Add:  
Nichol Gallery, #31.1, Azadi Alley, Akbari St., Opposite of Soleiman Khater St., Motahhari Ave. (88748343)

**Artworks**  
by Mitra Ahmadi  
Date: Until Dec. 21  
Add:  
Banafsheh Gallery, #50, Bahar Alley, Near Shiraz St., Mollasadra Ave. (88034247)

**Photos**  
by Fariborz Jabbarnia  
Date:  
Dec. 30 to Jan. 4  
Add: Banafsheh Gallery, #50, Bahar Alley, Near Shiraz St., Mollasadra Ave. (88034247)

**INFORMATION**

**Prayer Timings**

Dawn: 5:40  
Sunrise: 7:11  
Noon: 12:02  
Evening: 17:15

**WEATHER GUIDE**

	WED	THU
Tehran:		
High:	14 °C	13 °C
Low:	6 °C	6 °C
	High °C	
Athens:	10	11
Ankara:	-1	0
Paris:	5	7
New Delhi:	22	22
Rome:	11	10
Riyadh:	27	28
Frankfurt:	2	5
Cairo:	17	17
Kuwait City:	23	24
Karachi:	27	27
Copenhagen:	5	6
London:	11	11
Moscow:	-5	-5
Madrid:	9	10
Vienna:	2	3

## Anthropology Conference Opens

TEHRAN, Dec. 20--The Anthropology Conference was inaugurated here at Tehran Art Center on Monday in a ceremony attended by a number of experts from the Asian, European, American and African continents, reported IRNA. Discussions on holy cities, centers of pilgrimage and the experience of Central Asian cities on globalization are high on the agenda of the three-day event. A number of specialists from Iran, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Uzbekistan, Nigeria, Britain, Iraq, Austria, Italy and Turkey are participating in the event. Some 26 articles will be presented by domestic and foreign researchers at the conference. "Globalization, Urban Developments and Pilgrimage, Expression of Religion in a Restructured

World', 'A Look at Pilgrimage Centers', 'Nocturnal Pilgrimage in Rome's Divine Love Pilgrimage Center', 'Taj Mahal, an Ideal Pilgrimage Center', 'Ancient and Modern Pilgrimage Center', 'Pilgrims Residing in Holy Cities Permanently, A Case Study on 20th Century Mashhad' and 'The Fatima Pilgrimage Center in Portugal' are among the lectures to be presented at the event. "Ancient Pilgrimage Centers in Sistan, Eastern Iran", "Tehran in Globalization Era", "Towards Sustainable Pilgrimage Tourism" and 'Organized Identity and Local Planning at Iran's Pilgrimage Centers' are also expected to be presented at the conference. On the sidelines of the conference, several films including 'Ashura-Tasua', 'Flying Man' and 'Sunny' will be screened. The seminar has been organized by the Cultural Research Bureau. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the event, the secretary of Anthropology Conference, Soheila Shahshahanie said, "International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) was founded in 1984. It holds meetings and conferences annually in one of the member countries." Putting the number of IUAES members at 200 from 47 world countries, she said that the union is affiliated to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and a member of the International Assembly of Social Sciences and International Assembly of Human and Philosophical Researches.

## Tehran's Historical Texture In Crisis

TEHRAN, Dec. 20--The historical texture of Tehran is in state of crisis due to the low standard of buildings in the area, declared the Head of Headquarters to Prevent Natural Disasters and Crisis Management Maziar Hosseini, CHN reported. He said that if natural disaster occurs in the historical quarters of Tehran, citizens will encounter serious crisis in rescue operations. Citing weak structures in areas under Tehran's municipal districts 10, 11 and 12, Hosseini said that even low intensity quake would ruin those regions and at the same time there are no necessary infrastructures for conducting rescue operations in those districts. The official said that downtown Tehran in the neighborhood of Bazaar, particularly district 12, have structures which would collapse in

case of the occurrence of a relatively mild quake and will cause human disaster. He called on Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and Iran's Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) to take emergency measures to reinforce buildings in those districts to avert a tragedy in case of an earthquake in Tehran. Hosseini challenged the idea that the old quarters of the city should maintained without any changes and said that historical texture of Tehran would meet the same fate as Bam Citadel unless the buildings are reinforced to withstand earthquake. He said that historical heritage in the old quarters of Tehran should be strengthened while other houses in the area should be rebuilt before it is too late.

Meanwhile, Director of Historical Textures of Tehran affiliated to ICHTO Mohammad Ali Tabarsa said that the organization is ready to reinforce the cultural heritage in the historical section of Tehran. He said that ICHTO will not create any obstacle in the reconstruction of old textures of Tehran if the executive organs observe the criteria set by the organization. He added that the ICHTO is responsible for protecting the cultural heritage in Tehran's old quarters. There should be no justification in remaining inactive and not reinforce the old sections of Tehran, he declared. Tabarsa said that ICHTO welcomes any initiative taken by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to rebuild the old quarters of Tehran to minimize possible damages during an earthquake.

## 42 Countries to Attend Fajr Film Festival

TEHRAN, Dec. 20--Secretary of the 24th Fajr International Film Festival has announced that the event's inaugural ceremony will be held at the Interior Ministry's Auditorium concurrent with Muslim festivity Eid Al-Ghadir on January 19, reported ISNA. Alireza Reza-Daad noted that Iranian actors and actresses including Khosrow Sinaei, Golab Adineh and Majid Entezami will attend the festival's opening ceremony. Daad listed the various sections of the festival as short film, feature film, first and second films, documentary film, international cinema, Asian cinema, competition and meaning-oriented cinema.

"Of course, special selection committees for each section of the festival have been reviewing the works submitted to the secretariat since November 6. A total of 459 movies, short films and documentary films have applied to take part in the festival. About 22 films will be chosen for Iran's cinema section. The rest of the films will be screened in the festival's guest section," he added. Daad pointed out that a total of 42 countries, including 22 from Asia, four from the US, two from Africa and one from Asia-Pacific region will be represented at the festival.



Alireza Reza-Daad speaking at the news conference on the 24th Int'l Fajr Film Festival.

"On the occasion of 100th anniversary of the China's cinema, a collection of Chinese films will be screened in the non-competition section. Pre-sales of tickets for Fajr Festival will begin from January 10, 2006," he added. Tehran's 24th International Fajr Film Festival will be held from January 20 to 30, 2006.

## Alamout's Esmailieh Brick-Work Façade Found

TEHRAN, Dec. 20--A brick-work façade of a structure dating back to the Esmailieh era has been identified in the fifth round of archeological excavations in the southern face of the mountain overlooking Hassan Sabah Castle in Alamout, Qazvin province. The façade and pillars of the citadel are decorated with yellow tiles indicating that the castle was specially constructed for the rulers of the era. Director of Alamout Project told the Public Relations Department of Iran's Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) that façade was



Hassan Sabah Castle in Alamout, Qazvin province

partially damaged during Mongol invasion and in illegal excavations of recent years. Hamideh Choubak noted that Hassan Sabah Castle is an example of early Islamic architecture. The castle was one of the most important centers of Iran's culture and history from 1,100 years ago till the Safavid era (1502-1736 AD). The castle was discovered by a renowned Russian orientologist, Ivanov, in 1957.



(Cartoon by Stephane Peray)