

“The major part of infrastructure of the Iranian Industry is installed by German companies”

by Helene Rang,

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H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The economy of Iran is facing challenging times. The country did not suffer directly due to the financial crisis, but dropping oil prices are affecting the national budget. Nevertheless, the country has concrete ambitions for the future. The Middle East country is determined to make use of its central, geostrategic position towards becoming a transport hub. Moreover, it aims at high-value investment so as to create jobs for the large group of educated young people, alongside with boosting modern technologies fields like renewable energies.



H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Helene Rang, CEO of NUMOV

In the interview below, **H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar** who has been assigned Iranian Ambassador to Germany in October 2008, speaks with the CEO of NUMOV, **Helene Rang** about the economic relations between his country and Germany, major challenges and plans for the future and gives insight into promising business opportunities for German companies.

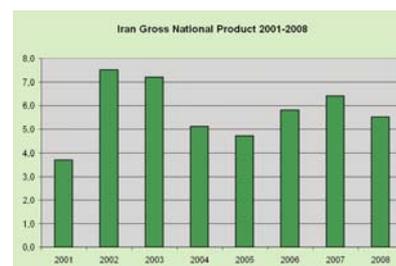
H.R.: How would you assess current Iranian-German economic relations?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: Germany has had a prominent role in the formation of an Iranian modern industrial base for about a century. The major part of the infrastructure of Iranian industry, communication and services has been installed by Germany and German companies. A number of German companies have a long-standing economic background in Iran. For a while Germany was our first trading partner in Europe

but at the moment Italy is taking Germany's position. In the context of world trade China has emerged as an important player in the global markets, so that now the number of our bilateral economic relationships with China is much higher than with Germany. On the one hand we look back on a long tradition of trade relations with Germany, but on the other hand there are competitors. This also means that Germany can go back to its previous position if it can realize the opportunities in Iran.

Our bilateral trade amounted to 3.2 billion Euro between January and September 2008, according to the latest figures. These are 430 million Euro of exports from Iran to Germany and 2.8 billion Euro of exports from Germany to Iran. There has been an increase in the bilateral trade, particularly in Germany's exports to Iran. Within the said period of time we have seen about 9% increases in the overall trade relationship. It does not seem out of reach to go back to our previous position of 4.5 billion Euro and it is quite possible that it can exceed even that. There are many reasons for this. Iran is concentrating on its infrastructure needs and definitely Germany and German companies can be a good provider for our infrastructure development.

H.R.: In which way do you suggest these relations be enhanced and where do you see the best areas of cooperation for German companies?



continued on page 6

“The major part of infrastructure of the Iranian Industry is installed by German companies”

continued from page 4

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: We do have a particular position in the region. This position is due to our geopolitical and geostrategic position. We want to be a transit corridor, because we have the capability for it. Actually, we are a bridge between South Asia, Central Asia, the Persian Gulf and Europe. We are currently focusing on developing infrastructure for transport and transit, such as railways, air transit and shipping. These are the priorities of our development programmes. Germany can play a good role



Azadi Square, Teheran

in all these areas. Take railways for instance: the first Iranian railway network was established by Germany. Now we are thinking about expanding our railway network from 11.000 km to 20.000 km. At the moment our trains move at low speed, the maximum speed for passenger trains being at 140-150 km/h. We are interested in high-speed trains due to the number of passengers. Let me give you an example, the holy city of Mashad in the North-East of Iran, one of the very important destinations for Muslims. Annually we have 20 million travellers to this destination, about 45% of our flights go there. In order to transport this amount of passengers we do also need high-speed trains, moving at 300-400 km/h. On low-speed trains travel time can be up to twelve hours, on high-speed trains five to six hours. If we decrease it to three to four hours, we can allocate a

good portion of our railway transport capacity to other destinations.

In order to be a transit point between South Asia and Europe we need to link our South-Eastern border with Pakistan and our Eastern border with Afghanistan to our railway network, which is connected to Europe via Turkey. Therefore the connection of our railway system to Pakistan and Afghanistan is another priority. Yet another area to consider is the North-South corridor. We want to create a railway line that goes directly from Bander-abbas, our main port in the Persian Gulf to Moscow and St. Petersburg. We do have a railway network up to the North-Eastern border which goes to Turkmeni-

stan. There is a plan to connect it up to the Caspian Sea, but we should also connect it to Azerbaijan, in order to have better access to Moscow. Indian goods being transported to Moscow and St. Petersburg could be shipped to Bandar-abbas and be put on the rails, taking 10 – 15 days instead of going via the Red Sea, which takes an average 35 days by ship. As you can imagine the time advantage is huge.

With regard to the electric power plants, we are producing less than 50.000 MW annually. We want to increase it up to 70.000 MW according to our development plan, a part being provided by nuclear power, and a part being produced by gas and fossil energy.

Regarding air transit we have seven international airports at the moment. We



H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran

want to increase the capacity and capability of these airports and of our air fleet. Out of the 30 airports we have, only seven airports are international, the others are domestic.

Regarding ship cargo, our fleet is now the largest in the Middle East with 145 ships excluding tanker vessels, but this is not enough for our ambitious programmes. We need to expand our fleet, we need to renovate it. Definitely Germany is one of the countries with the necessary background and experience in ship-building. Not only do we want to buy ships, we also want to manufacture them. This is a difference between Iran and our neighbouring countries. We think that Iran can be a harbour for the whole region. For German companies

THE MAJOR TRADE PARTNERS IN 2007

Partners	Mio Euro	%
World	97.788	100,0
1 EU	23.770	24,3
2 China	14.153	14,5
3 Japan	9.536	9,8
4 Korea	6.147	6,3
5 Turkey	5.502	5,6
6 United Arab Emir.	4.318	4,4
7 South Africa	2.607	2,7
8 Russia	2.389	2,4
9 India	2.149	2,2
10 Brazil	1.658	1,7
11 Philippines	1.424	1,5
12 Singapore	1.321	1,4
13 Turkmenistan	1.249	1,3
14 Kazakhstan	1.182	1,2
15 Saudi Arabia	1.043	1,1
16 Oman	810	0,8
17 Malaysia	780	0,8
18 Ukraine	759	0,8
19 Syrian Arab Rep	716	0,7
20 Thailand	681	0,7

MACRO DATA OF IRAN

	2004/05	2005/2006	2006/2007
Balance on current account (in % of GNP)	0.9	8.9	9.2
Foreign indeptness (bn US-\$)	14.3	12.9	10.5
Currency reserves (bn US-\$)	33.3	46.3	59.1
Import covering (month)	8.2	10.2	12.1

one way of deepening and enhancing our bilateral relations is looking at Iran from a new angle.

Beyond being a market for consumption goods and machineries, Iran can be a harbour, a centre for development of the whole region and German companies can have a role in that.

H.R.: What are the effects of the current global financial crisis on the economic situation of Iran?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: Fortunately, our economy is not closely linked with the American economy. Contracting with American banks has been interrupted for many years in our banking system. We are not losing in this crisis, because we were not active in the New York stock market, we were not present in the American banking system and we have no investments in those financial systems. We have been affected much less than all of our neighbouring countries. For this reason regional investors are nowadays approaching Iran so as to transfer investments from those countries hit by the crisis, because they feel Iran is safer for them, the effect of the crisis being minimal. Of course we can be affected by a long-term crisis, like a decrease of the oil and gas prices, but not on the short term. And should there be a long-term crisis, we can protect ourselves by avoiding budget deficits and by privatizing more and more.

H.R.: Could you illustrate the challenges faced by the growing group of educated young people in Iran?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: Iran is one of the youngest societies in the world. Citizens under 30 years of age make up more than 60% of our population, most of which is highly educated. Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution the capacity of universities in Iran was less than 200.000 students. Now, we have more than 2 million students at various levels,

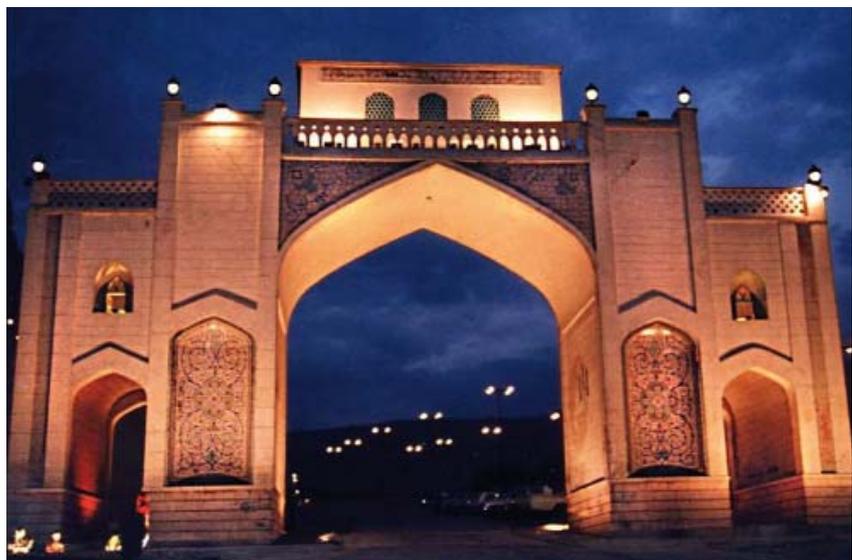
from BA up to Ph.D., and 64% of these students are women. This shows that the next generation will be quite different from the present one, it will be a generation of managers. In our region, Iran has the highest-educated population and this is both an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity because we are a talented society. It can be a challenge because we have to create jobs for our talent. Therefore we have realised the best solution is privatizing and promoting small and medium-sized industries. In the small scale industry when you recruit an engineer, that engineer should also be capable of working in marketing for instance, i.e. he has to be flexible. As a result, the expectations of potential employees are not as high in the private sector as in the public sector. This is one of the ways in which we want to convert a challenge into an opportunity.

H.R.: How do you see the supply and demand of energy in Iran and the horizons for energy export?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: Iran is one of the largest producers of energy in the world, in gas we are the second. Russia owns about 27% of the gas resources while we own 16%. Regarding crude oil, we possess the second largest resour-

ces in the OPEC countries after Saudi Arabia. Our oil sources amount to more than 110 billion barrels. We are a major energy producer with a century of background in the field. We are the oldest petroleum producer in the Middle East, our oil having been explored much earlier than in other Persian Gulf countries. Our production of crude oil nowadays is at 4.3 to 4.4 million barrels per day, 1.3 barrels being consumed in the increasing domestic market. We have an expanding middle class. We manufacture one million cars per year. And unlike here, where the life of a car is approximately six to eight years, in Iran people keep their car for 15 - 16 years on average. This means that this number of cars is not being substituted by new ones which consume less fuel. The new families of the young generation are purchasing new cars. All these cars need gasoline, and they consume a lot of energy.

We are an expanding urban society. All urban buildings need gas for heating and we have a very big gas network even in the villages. The domestic consumption of energy is continually on the rise, which is a challenge for us. On the other hand we are an exporter of energy. We have to be one, because so far our main income is generated from exporting oil and gas. So we want to decrease energy consumption on the local market. For this, we have developed two solutions. First, cutting subsidies. Ironically, the gasoline price in Iran is at about 8 cent per litre. This is not the real price, it results from government subsidies.



Guran Gateway, Fars



H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran

According to our new reform plan we are going to cut subsidies and direct the money toward the lower-income classes. We plan thus to decrease consumption of gasoline, petroleum and gas like here in Germany. Secondly, we want to use non-fossil energies. Fortunately Iran is a sunny country. We are planning on using solar energy. Apart from solar energy we have very good sources of geothermal energy and some opportunities of using wind energy. We are thinking very seriously about substituting our fossil energy with non-carbonate energies and nuclear energy. German companies, who have a lot of experience working in different countries of South-East Asia are welcome to join this market.

H.R.: The Hermes cover is a common way of referring to an export credit guarantee (ECG) by the German Federal Government. In view of current diplomatic changes and the Iranian situation which alternatives do you see to the Hermes cover so as to give German-Iranian business relations a new impulse?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: I may assure you that these are very temporary. We do not believe that it takes a long time, and in a period which is not prolonged the situation will be normalised. Iran has some proposals for this temporary period. If Hermes or any other insurance company in Europe defines a ceiling or a limitation of insurance, then the Iranian Central Bank would be ready to give a guarantee, as it happened 14 - 15 years ago. At the time, Hermes put some limitations on credit lines to Iran, but the

Central Bank provided the necessary guarantees to those companies wanting to work with us. Now we are ready to be more flexible and provide much better conditions within the guarantee. The Central Bank of Iran is ready to give guarantees to all credit lines. Due to the credibility and good reputation of Iranian Banks and the Central Bank these guarantees are not less valued than a lot of others. So if any company

or bank wants to deal with Iran in credit line, the Iranian Central Bank will provide the guarantee. German companies can contact the Central Bank through the Iranian Embassy.

H.R.: The Middle Eastern countries are competing in attracting foreign investment. What is your government's policy with regard to drawing investments into Iran? What incentives does your government offer foreign investors?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: Our foreign investment framework provides a number of very important incentives. First, when you compare our laws and regulations for foreign investment implemented six to seven years ago to those of our neighbouring countries we provide unique opportunities. For instance, our foreign investors receive guarantees from the Government of Iran for remitting their profits and for safeguarding their capital. To this end, a committee has been set up including the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Minister of Economy, the Deputy Governor of the Central Bank and the Deputy Minister of Planning. Project approvals issued by the committee according to our law are valid as an approval of the cabinet ministers. The Minister of Economy will sign the guarantee letter. Thus there cannot be any confusion or obstacles to remitting capital or profit. Moreover, there is no percentage or limitation for foreign investors having a portion on a joint venture scheme, so that foreigners are allowed to own 100% of the shares themselves. In some of our neighbouring countries a

local partner would be mandatory, but not in Iran. Furthermore, foreigners can acquire land in Iran. This is a very important consideration not available in some of our neighbouring countries. Those who come to Iran for investment can acquire land and buildings. Another thing to consider are our highly attractive tax exemptions in certain areas. In general areas tax exemption is valid for four years, whereas in some areas it is valid for up to ten years. In free zones, it is valid for up to 15 years for industry. Labour Law is also less strict in the free zones. In the agriculture sector there is complete tax exemption. In tourism there is a 50% tax exemption. All of these are very attractive options for foreigners.

Another instrument for attracting foreign investors is privatization. Up until two years ago 80% of our economy was in the public sector: oil, gas, petrochemicals and various industries. Now, our President has issued an instruction based on Article 44 of our Constitution: within the next five years the majority of our sectors, with the exception of a few specific areas shall be privatized. Steel mills, petrochemicals, refineries, power generators, communication, railway, air transport. The only exceptions will be the defense industry and the upstream of the oil industry, i.e. the exploration of oil fields which could not be privatized. But downstream should be completely privatised, such as refineries, gas stations and the like. I think if you compare the prices this is quite feasible. If you keep in mind that the cost of expenditure in Iran is low because of energy and labour cost, then the feasibility becomes clear. Next to that there is the well-educated manpower and the geographical position of Iran. These are our means of attracting foreign investors in a nutshell.

H.R.: Some countries in the region create a lot of publicity and invest a lot of money in marketing. Do you think Iran should advertise more in international media?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: This is in fact a deficit. For a long time we have concentrated on our domestic markets. Unfortunately in Iran production for the

continued on page 10

“The major part of infrastructure of the Iranian industry is installed by German companies”

continued from page 8

TRADE VOLUMEN GERMANY –IRAN 2005-07

2005	Exports to Iran	EUR 4,429 million (+24%)
	Imports to Iran	EUR 462 million (+18%)
2006	Exports to Iran	EUR 4,120 million (-7%)
	Imports to Iran	EUR 417 million (-10%)
2007	Export to Iran	EUR 3,604 million (-13%)
	Import to Iran	EUR 583 million (+40%)

domestic market was a lot more feasible than exporting. The domestic market was thirsty and you could sell all your production on the domestic market. But if you want to export you need competition. This is another reason why Iranian producers did not concentrate very much on export, but now gradually minds are changing.

H.R.: How does Iran deal with its environmental problems?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: We have a very tough lady in charge of the environment organization, Dr. Fatemeh Javadi. She does not show any flexibility and she does not compromise at all. Right now, the industrialists in Iran have a lot of complaints against her strict observance of the environmental measures. Dr. Javadi is the Vice-President and she is an iron lady regarding environment protection. She receives a lot of criticism that her manner is not appropriate for a developing country, but she and her



H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Helene Rang, CEO of NUMOV

team are very tough. They have already stopped a high-way project connecting Tehran to the Caspian Sea. It was to pass through the Alborz mountains and forests and she stopped it because of the detrimental effect to the environment and the animals living in it.

H.R.: What is your opinion of German-Iranian bilateral cooperation in third countries? Which countries or projects do you consider most appropriate to this end?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: Actually this is a new avenue of cooperation for us, because in recent years Iran stepped up projects in third countries, particularly in Latin America, Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq and Central Asia. Now Iran is well represented exporting its engineering servi-

peration between Iran and Germany. We can set up cooperation on the projects we have won in these countries, or we can work for German companies that have won projects in these countries as sub-contractors.

Let me give you a concrete example from Iraq. We have given USD one billion of credit line to Iraq for construction and developing. These are mostly divided into projects like railways, the pipeline between the Basra and Abadan refineries, power plants, hospitals and industrial zones. We are ranking first among the countries having given Iraq a credit line. This credit line is like a soft loan, provided that the Iranian companies implement the projects. The German companies can definitely have a role, notably managerial or financial.

ECONOMIC DATA OF IRAN

Data Profile	2000	2005	2006	2007
World view				
Population, total (millions)	63,94	69,09	70,10	71,02
Population growth (annual %)	1,6	1,5	1,5	1,3
Surface area (sq. km) (thousands)	1,745,2	1,745,2	1,745,2	1,745,2
GNI, Atlas method (current US\$) (billions)	106,67	177,61	207,37	246,54
GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$)	1,670	2,570	2,960	3,470
GNI, PPP (current international \$) (billions)	435,01	631,73	691,83	766,86
GNI per capita, PPP (current international \$)	6,800	9,140	9,870	10,800
Economy				
GDP (current US\$) (billions)	101,29	192,01	222,88	270,94
GDP growth (annual %)	5,1	4,6	5,9	7,6
Inflation, GDP deflator (annual %)	26,4	17,0	12,1	14,4
Agriculture, value added (% of GDP)	14	10	10	9
Industry, value added (% of GDP)	37	45	45	42
Services, etc., value added (% of GDP)	50	45	45	49
Exports of goods and services (% of GDP)	23	38	41	33
Imports of goods and services (% of GDP)	17	30	33	30
Gross capital formation (% of GDP)	33	34	34	37
Revenue, excluding grants (% of GDP)	23,4	36,5	35,4	33,4
Cash surplus/deficit (% of GDP)	1,8	6,0	3,2	4,1
States and markets				
Time required to start a business (days)	..	47	47	47
Market capitalization of listed companies (% of GDP)	7,3	20,2	17,0	16,8
Fixed line and mobile phone subscribers (per 100 people)	16	42	56	75
Internet users (per 100 people)	1,0	17,8	25,7	32,4

Source: World Development Indicators database September 2008

ces. We have large-scale contracts and projects with various countries. We deal with industrial plants, cement factories, petrochemical complexes, roads, dams and mass production of houses. For example, there are two projects in Venezuela for 5.000 and 10.000 apartment units.

Thus in the areas just mentioned there is a new avenue of coo-

Regarding Afghanistan, we have pledged to allocate USD 500 million for reconstruction. So far we have spent and allocated an average of USD 230 million. The rest is still outstanding, so that German companies have an opportunity of becoming involved.

Moreover, we have a share fund with the government of Venezuela of USD one billion for the area of petrochemical cement and housing. In all these countries German companies can come into contact with the relevant Iranian companies involved in specific projects. The companies in question are usually inter-

nationally experienced and are no newcomers. Cooperation should thus be easy. In Syria we are a major contractor and investor for cement factories, automobile manufacturing and refinery. In Africa we are involved in dam projects.

H.R.: Iran is attempting to become a member of WTO. Why in your opinion has this attempt failed thus far?

H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar: First of all I must recall that the process of joining WTO is not a merely a technical and legal process, but a political one. You know what happened to countries like China or Saudi Arabia in the past and Russia at the moment. The United States sometimes block the process. As an example, it took China about 12 years and Saudi Arabia about 8 years to join WTO.

With Iran it is the same. At the moment, our application has passed through the WTO General Council. Bilateral negotiations are also ongoing. However, the Working Party which would need to be established by the General Council to consider our application has not been formed so far. This is due to pressure from the side of the United States. Then again the recent global financial crisis has shown that we should not be as eager to join WTO, because this system of a globalised economy is showing some kind of failure. We have witnessed what happened during the Doha negotia-

DATE	FAIRS IN IRAN 2009
13.01.-16.01.2009	HT&T - Iran Hotel, Travel & Tourism Service & Equipment International Exhibition, Teheran
13.01.-16.01.2009	Agrovet - Int. Exhibition of Agricultural Machinery, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Equipment, Isfahan
24.01.-27.01.2009	INTERNATIONAL FAIR IRAN PACK & PRINT, Teheran
04.02.-08.02.2009	HOFEX - International Exhibition of Home and Office Furniture, Decoration&Interior Design, Teheran
22.04.-26.04.2009	IRAN OIL & GAS SHOW - International Exhibition of Oil, Gas & Petrochemical Industries, Teheran
April 2009	IPAS - International Fair for Police- and Safety Equipment, Teheran
April 2009	ISF - Isfahan Stone Fair, Isfahan
13.05.-16.05.2009	K&B - S&P - The Kitchen, Bath, Sauna & Pool Industries & Equipment International Exhibition, Teheran
24.05.-27.05.2009	Iran food & bev tec - International Food, Drink and Packaging Technology Fair Teheran
24.05.-27.05.2009	Iran food + hospitality - International Food, Beverages and Hospitality Trade Fair, Teheran
24.05.-27.05.2009	Iran Agro - International Agriculture Fair, Teheran
Mai 2009	TIBF – International Book Fair, Teheran
11.06.-14.06.2009	International Fair Iran Med and Lab, Teheran
06.07.-09.07.2009	Iran StoneMac - International Trade Fair for Machinery and Products for the Natural Stone Industry, Teheran
August 2009	Iran Enviro - International Environmental Exhibition, Teheran
August 2009	Tehran Confair - Tehran International Building & Construction Exhibition, Teheran
Oktober 2009	IRANTEX tech - Int. Exhibition for Textile Machineries, Embroidery Machines, Raw Materials, Home Textiles & Textile Products, Teheran
Oktober 2009	TIIE - Internationale Manufacture Fair, Teheran
22.11.- 25.11.2009	Iran Telecom - International Telecommunications and Information Technology Trade Fair, Teheran
November 2009	IEE - International Energy & Electricity Exhibition, Teheran
Dezember 2009	IMEX - Iran Kish Internationale Maritime Exhibition, Kish

tions, on the one hand disagreement between the United States and some European countries and on the other hand disagreement between developing countries such as, India and South Africa.

Now, WTO is not a forum focusing completely on advocating trade, due to these political issues. Although we are ready to join WTO we do not feel that we have

lost too much. For the time being this type of globalisation is not a completely successful project. Doha shows this and the recent crisis shows this too. So we should be cautious. But the process is ongoing and due to political reasons it will take more time.

H.R.: Your Excellency, thank you very much for taking your valuable time for our interview. ●

Curriculum Vitae

His Excellency Mr. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar

Ambassador of Islamic Republic of Iran to Germany

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND: BS, Chemical Engineering from Sharif University of Science and Technology; MA in Management; PhD Candidate, Strategic Sciences

CAREER BACKGROUND: Director General of Poly Acryl Company, Governor General of Kurdistan and West Azarbaijan Provinces, Deputy Minister of Industries; Advisor to Minister of Foreign Affairs for Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); Ambassador of Islamic Republic of Iran to India; Director General of the Foreign Minister's Cabinet; Advisor to the Supreme National Security Council and Head of Asia Department in Center for Strategic Studies; Managing Director and Editorial Chief of Hamshahri Newspaper; Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Economic Affairs; Senior Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for CIS and Middle East; Ambassador of Islamic Republic of Iran to Germany (From October 2008)

PUBLICATIONS: Kurdistan; Roots of Political Behaviors in Caucasus and Central Asia (1993, Religion and Politics in India (2003); Kurds and Regional and Trans-Regional Powers (2004). Different papers in Persian and English languages on different subjects such as Management, Central Asia, India, Iraq and Kurdistan.

NATURAL RESOURCES IRAN:

Natural Resources Iran:

Mineral	Reserve (million ton)	Mineral	Reserve(million ton)
Oil	89.7 billion barrel	Kaolin, Fire	100
Gas	26.3 trillion m ³	Lead & Zinc	94
Asbestos	120	Magnesite	5
Barite	3.8	Manganese	8
Bauxite	14	Mica	0.2
Bentonite	6.8	Molybdenum	0.05
Boron	0.02	Neohelene	1,300
Chromite	7.5	Orpiment	0.03
Celestite	0.7	Phosphate Rock	630
Coal	4,000	Salt	102
Copper	3,000	Silica & Quartz	128
Feldspar	3.7	Silver	0.4
Fluorine	3	Talc	1.6
Gold Ore	16.5	Turquoise	500
Gypsum	2,200	Dimensional Stone	3,000
Iron Ore	2,800	Limestone	8,500

Source: Ministry of Mines and Metals