

## **Don't Sacrifice Norooz!**

**Celebrating Norooz before Chaharshanbeh Soori is one of the most Bizarre Events in History!**

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The Persian Cultural Center of San Diego, which has for many years been admirably active in "promotion of language and literature" and the "preservation of Iranian cultural values", has unfortunately, committed a grave mistake this year, along with few other good Iranian non-profit cultural organizations, including the House of Iran.

Due to the proximity of the anniversary of the martyrdom of the third Imam of the Shiites to Norooz, (this year the beginning of Moharram coincides with 25<sup>th</sup> day of the last month in Persian calendar and the Hosseini Tassou'a coincides with Sunday, March 24<sup>th</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup> day of the new year), the respectable members of the Board of Directors of the Persian Cultural Center and other organizations have decided to celebrate the Norooz - -this several thousand-year-old tradition that belongs to all Iranians as well as millions of non-Iranians in China, India, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakestan, Tajikestan, Uzbekistan, Turkmanestan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan...- - on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> of Esfand (two weeks before the true date). By making such a decision, which is on the pretext of respecting the religious beliefs of the Shiites, for the first time in history the New Year is celebrated before the traditional ceremony of the last Tuesday of the old year (Chaharshanbeh Soori)!

This is grossly wrong in many aspects.

First of all it is contrary to the charter of the registered non-profit organizations. The Persian Cultural Center is a Corporation that has been registered in California and, based on its status as a non-profit organization, has received tax exemption from the Federal Government. And because of this status, it has been able to receive Grants from the City of San Diego. The Center's by-laws expressly stipulate that it is: " independent of any affiliations, political, religious, or otherwise; created to serve the Iranian community... maintaining a non-sectarian, apolitical profile at all times." Since the House of Iran and other non-profit organizations should also have such stipulations in their charters, I must humbly and respectfully implore the Board of Directors of all these organizations to carefully read their own by-laws and be informed of their legal responsibilities lest, God forbid, they subject themselves to unpleasant actions by the government authorities and the public for taking illegal decisions, thereby, endangering the very existence of these beneficial institutions.

It would serve us well to take a look at the official brochure of the Center, that had been beautifully prepared a few years ago in English and Farsi and distributed to all, including the U.S. governmental organizations, which begins as follows: 'The Persian Cultural Center... belongs to all Iranians without regard for their creed...or their religious beliefs.' This clearly indicates that the Board of directors of the Center and other organizations, unwittingly, has disregarded their own by-laws and the legal rights of many Iranians of Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, Baha'i, Mormon, Buddhist as well as those who do not have any religious beliefs.

Secondly, there are many among the followers of Islam that, in spite of being Shiite, at present time as well as throughout the history have given priority to their national identity over their religious faith, and have not consented to changing the observation of Norooz because it had coincided with the month of Moharram. In addition, many Iranians whose roots are from the provinces of Baloochestan, Sistan, Kordestan, Golestan (Gorgan), Torkaman Sahra, and the shores of the Persian Gulf, as well as the majority of the world's Islamic population (more than a billion of the 1.1 billion Moslems of the world), follow the Sunni sect and do not believe in "Imamat" and particularly in mourning during the month of Moharram.

Thirdly, the members of the Board are certainly aware that in no developed country in the world, would they ever change the national festivities, which unite the people of different religions, for the sake of the mourning of the followers of one particular religion - even if it happens to be the majority's faith- not to mention that in no developed country in the world, do they observe religious mourning! Isn't it time for us, who are enjoying the benefits of this progressive land, to keep our religious beliefs private and between our God and ourselves?

Furthermore, because the lunar year- on which the Shiite mourning days are based- is shorter than the solar year by 9 days, in the next few years the Shiite mourning days would continue to coincide with our national holidays. And if the same Board of Directors of these organizations are still in office and want to continue making the same mistake, it would not be far fetched to say that they might want to celebrate Norooz after Sizdah Bedar (the thirteenth day of the New Year celebrations)!

I wish and hope that the dear members of the Board of Directors of the Persian Cultural Center, the House of Iran and other organizations, who wholeheartedly and with good intentions, volunteer their time and energy in the service of people, would not become disheartened by these critical points, which have been raised with sincerity for the purpose of guidance for more success; and grasp the depth of the issue instead of attempting to shrug their responsibility by making statements such as: "our main problem was finding a place, not observing Moharram", "you can't keep everyone happy", or "Iranians only whine".

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