



## BAHĀRESTĀN (TEHRAN)

**BAHĀRESTĀN**, the name of a garden, public square, and complex of buildings in central Tehran, the main part of which presently forms the headquarters of an Islamic revolution militia, the Central Committee of the Islamic Revolution (Komīta-ye Markazī-e Enqelāb-e Eslāmī); the southern section houses the Majles library.

The site was originally the property of Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan Sardār Īravānī and was purchased by Ḥāji 'Alī Khan E'temād-al-Saltāna. Toward the end of his life (1293/1896), Mirzā Ḥosayn Khan Mošīr-al-Dawla Sepahsālār purchased the property, intending to construct a mansion, a mosque, and a grand *madrasa* on it (Momtaḥen-al-Dawla, *Kāṭerāt*, ed. Ḥ. Kānšaqāqī, Tehran, 1352 Š./1973, p. 234; the *madrasa*, Madrasa-ye 'Alī-e Sepahsālār, a center for theological studies, has, since the revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79, been renamed Madrasa-ye Šahīd Moṭahharī). When Sepahsālār died without an heir in 1298/1881-82, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah seized the property and its buildings. In imitation of the name of the nearby Negārestān palace (the site of Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah's private quarters), the shah dubbed the property "Bahārestān" (J. Šahrī, *Gūša-ī az tāriḵ*, Tehran, n.d., p. 204). The spacious public square fronting the site also came to be known as the Bahārestān ('A. Mostawfī, *Šarḥ-e zendagānī-e man*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1343 Š./1964, I, p. 499).

The Bahārestān building has been the scene of many historical events. Sepahsālār, a reformer and an admirer of European culture and law, is said to have hoped that the building and the *madrasa* would perhaps one day become a place where the nation's deputies could meet. A statement attributed to Zell-



al-Solṭān seems to confirm this report: “I visited [Sepahsālār] while he was on his way to Khorasan. As he was at prayer, I spoke with my aunt [Sepahsālār’s wife]. . . . His prayers completed, Mīrzā Ḥosayn turned to my aunt and said, “Your brother has taken my house and school from me, but I hope that the day will come when this same house will be a house of parliament where representatives will meet and that parliament will uproot the Qajar tyranny”” (M. Nāẓem-al-Eslām Kermānī, *Tārīḵ-ebīdārī-e Īrānīān*, 4th ed., ed. ‘A.-A. Sa’īdī Sīrjānī, Tehran, 1362 Š./1983, I, p. 142). These statements seem apocryphal, since Sepahsālār’s death preceded Nāṣer-al-Dīn’s confiscation of his property. Sepahsālār may have been referring to the fact that the Qajar ruler had driven him from his home and exiled him to Khorasan (K. M. Sāsānī, *Sīāsatgarān-e dawra-ye Qājār*, Tehran, 1346-52 Š./1967-73, I, p. 92); such sentiment would be understandable in a man who visited Europe several times and realized the advantages of its legal systems, and who was also aware of the corruption of the Qajar court.

The Bahārestān garden and buildings were completed in 1296/1879 (the date 1288/1871 given by Bāmdād [*Rejāl* II, p. 322 n. 3] is evidently wrong); the date is celebrated in a chronogrammatic ode by Ḥājī Mīrzā Ḥasan Eṣfahānī Ṣafī ‘Alīšāh with which the calligrapher Moḥammad-Ebrāhīm Badāye’negār adorned the architrave of the inner building in the east wing of the garden. This architrave was later transferred to the new structure built to house the Majles library in the south wing.

The Bahārestān consisted of two structures, an outer quarter (*bīrūnī*) and an inner one (*andarūnī*) located in the eastern part of the garden. After Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah confiscated the property, the inner quarter became the residence of Malījāk, ‘Azīz-al-Solṭān and his wife, the shah’s daughter; thus it came to be known as the ‘Azīziya (M.-Ḥ. E’temād-al-Salṭana, *Rūz-nāma-ye kāṭerāt*, ed. Ī. Afšār, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1350 Š./1971, p. 961). During Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah’s reign, the outer quarter, which contains a spacious hall and luxurious rooms, was used to receive important foreign visitors and on occasion served as the crown prince’s temporary residence in Tehran (Mostawfī, I, p. 499).

After the edict of constitutional government of 25 Jomādā II 1324/17 August 1906, Prime Minister Mošīr-al-Dawla ordered that the outer building become the site of the new parliament; but the representatives, especially the clerics, objected on grounds that the Bahārestān was not centrally located and that a share of the land was still in dispute (Nāẓem-al-Eslām, I, p. 573). Therefore the first college of electors (clerics, ministers, and courtiers charged with



arranging the election of the first deputies) met at the Madrasa-ye Neẓām (Nāẓem-al-Eslām, I, p. 574). But three weeks after the elections, when the Madrasa-ye Neẓām was found to be too small to hold all the elected deputies, the meetings of the National Assembly were transferred to the building and grounds of the Bahārestān (M. M. Šarīf Kāšānī, *Wāqe'āt-e ettefāqīya dar rūzgār*, Tehran, 1362 Š./1983, p. 106; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* II, p. 322 n. 3). To commemorate the event, a gold plaque inscribed with the words *dār al-šūrā-ye mellī* (national assembly house) and *'adl-e moẓaffar* (justice triumphant; an ambiguous phrase referring also to Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah), the numerical value of which is the date 1324/1906, was placed over the entrance to the garden (Nāẓem-al-Eslām, II, p. 8; cf. M. Hedāyat, *Kāṭerāto kaṭarāt*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1344 Š./1965, p. 144, who mistakenly attributes the calligraphy to Rezā Kalhor [d. 1310/1892-93]).

During the first session of the Majles, the deputies sat on the floor of the great hall arranged in a four-row square (Ḥ. Taqīzāda, *Maqālāt*, ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 2536 = 1356 Š./1978, IX, p. 215). At that time, various opportunistic, special-interest groups would congregate in the guise of *anjomans* (leagues) in the Bahārestān garden and in the Sepahsālār *madrasa*, from which they would disrupt the Majles with their provocative demonstrations and speeches (A. Majd-al-Eslām Kermānī, *Tārīk-eenḥelal-e majles*, ed. Qalīlpūr, Isfahan, 1351 Š./1972). With the shah and the Majles at loggerheads, the shah took refuge in the *Bāḡ-e Šāh*, and imperial troops terrorized the people. Threatened by this, the lightly-armed Constitutionalists took cover in the Bahārestān and the adjacent buildings. On 23 Jomādā I 1326/4 July 1908, imperial troops commanded by Amīr Bahādor surrounded the Bahārestān garden and shelled the Majles building. Eight hours later, after a number had been killed, some of the deputies fled, others were taken prisoner, and Cossacks, imperial troops, and the rabble of Tehran looted the Bahārestān down to its curtains, doors, and windows (Nāẓem-al-Eslām, *Tārīk-ebīdārī* II, p. 156).

A year later (24 Jomādā II 1327/13 July 1909), after the leaders of the Constitutional movement had defeated the shah and entered Tehran in triumph, the Bahārestān garden was the site of a grand celebration. On the same site three days later, a high commission deposed Moḥammad-'Alī Shah and arranged the accession of his son Aḥmad Mīrzā (Nāẓem-al-Eslām, II, p. 494).

The Bahārestān building was eventually repaired and once again became the home of the National Assembly. In later years, the hall and the rooms were furnished, and the 'Azīzīya was converted into the library of the National



Assembly.

In 1312 Š./1933, a statue was purchased for the Assembly from the estate of Sardār As‘ad Ja‘farqolī Khan Baḳtīārī for the Bahārestān garden grounds. Known as the “angel of freedom,” the statue is of a winged figure spearing a vanquished devil of tyranny. The heirs of Sardār As‘ad later returned the money used to purchase the statue and presented it as a gift to the Assembly (‘A. Balāḡī, *Tārīḳ-eqesmathā-ye ġarbī wa jonūbī wa šarqī-e Tehrān*, Qom, n.d., p. 94).

The original Bahārestān building, with a few cosmetic changes, still exists, but the Majles library was moved to new quarters in the south corner of the garden. The Bahārestān garden was expanded northward and eastward, and a new National Assembly building was erected in that section of the garden. With the advent of the 1979 revolution, the name and venue of the National Assembly have changed: the Islamic Assembly (Majles-e Šūrā-ye Eslāmī) now meets in what was formerly the Senate building. The Bahārestān buildings and garden now house the “Central Committee of the Islamic Revolution.”

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Given in the text.