



IRANZAMIN, TEHRAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

IRANZAMIN, TEHRAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL (Irānzamin, Madrasa-ye Baynalmelali-e Tehrān), a combined Iranian and American international school founded in 1967. Iranzamin developed out of the American Community School (Madrasa-ye Āmrikā'i) in Tehran. Community School's roots go back to Alborz College (q.v.) and an American Presbyterian missionary, Justin Perkins, who founded a church, a school, and a printing house in Urmia in about 1839 (Elder, pp. 10-12, 82, 27-28).

Background. Presbyterian missionaries established schools in Tehran, Hamadān, Kermānšāh, Tabriz, Mashad, and Rašt. Alborz College in Tehran (q.v.), led by Dr. Samuel Martin Jordan (q.v.) from 1898-39, began as an elementary school in 1873 and became an accredited liberal arts college by 1928 (see [ALBORZ COLLEGE](#); see also Elder, pp. 27-28, 73). Community School was established in Hamadān in the 1930s to accommodate missionary children and moved to Tehran in 1935. In Tehran the school's clientele included expatriate families as well as Iranian parents, many of whom had attended the Alborz College before that school was closed and its property bought by the government of Iran in 1940 (Elder, pp. 73-77). Iranian families found the Community School educational program advantageous, even though its diploma was not authorized by the Ministry of Education (Jordan, p. 348). In 1967 concerned Iranian parents, aware of the reforms being introduced for Iranian schools, proposed formal recognition by Iran's High Council of



Education (Šurā-ye ‘āli-e farhang). Bearing in mind that the 1939 government order closing all foreign schools for Iranians had brought to an end 106 years of educational service to Iran (Elder, p. 77), the Community School Committee was not prepared to accept a Ministry of Education license. On 21 Kordād 1346/11 June 1967, the Iranian Ministry of Education authorized Presbyterian missionary J. Richard Irvine, who had been Principal of the Community School since 1951, to found a new school in Tehran. This new school was named Iranzamin, Tehran International School, and took its inspiration from the service and experience of its predecessors, Alborz College and Community School. Irvine resigned from the Presbyterian Mission to become headmaster of the new school.

Alborz College President, Dr. Samuel Martin Jordan, intended to “adapt the best Western methods to the needs of the country” and “retain all that is good in their own civilization” (East Persia Mission, vol. 189, no. 2). The main function of the college was character building, including the following values; the dignity of work, the virtue of service, democracy and equality, equality of women, and love of Iran. The curriculum of the college, supported by a library of 20,000 books, was that of American schools of the time adapted to an Iranian clientele (Allen, 18 October 1918), using the Persian language as the language of instruction.

Community School, educating both boys and girls, shared the purpose and values of Alborz College. Having primarily served foreign nationals in grades nursery through ten, the school was not closed by the government in 1940 when foreign schools for Iranians were nationalized. Iranian citizens were permitted to attend the school by special authorization from the Iranian Ministry of Education, even though the school diploma was not official in Iran. With English as the language of instruction, the curriculum included Persian, French, English, history, geography and social studies, Bible study, world religions, arithmetic, mathematics, biology, physics, chemistry, music, art, drama, physical education, and sports. The school housed a library which was planned to nurture broad cultural and liberal education. Students were encouraged to purchase their textbooks and develop libraries of their own. During the period of Dr. Moḥammad Moṣaddeq’s premiership (1951-53) and the subsequent resurgence of the monarchy, the school curriculum was strengthened by adding the eleventh and twelfth grades and increasing the number of foreign languages taught. As a result, some Community School graduates were granted advanced placement of as much as a full year in



American colleges and universities, and others achieved admission to universities in Europe. With a student population representing almost all national, ethnic, and cultural homelands, the school encouraged pride in one's own heritage and at the same time celebrated the school's international diversity (Fisher, pp. 18-19). Students who spoke little or no English were given instruction in English concurrently with their regular classes. The school conducted a small College of Business and Library Science with the participation of Reżāzādeh Šafaq (1959, repr. 1976).

During the 1950s and 1960s the United Nations International School in New York, Atlantic College in Wales, the Lycee International de St. Germain in France, the Goethe Gymnasium in Germany, the Geneva International School, and Community School in Tehran were engaged in developing an internationally oriented course of study which became known throughout the world as the International Baccalaureate (IB; International Baccalaureate Office, 1979). The Community School Committee decided not to go forward with the IB. However, with the establishment of the Iranzamin School, the IB Office in Geneva accepted the new school, which became a founding International Baccalaureate School on 28 November 1968 (from Gerard Renaud, Assistant Director, International Baccalaureate Office; Peterson, pp. 26-27).

Establishment of the school. In the spring of 1967 J. Richard Irvine, Iranzamin's headmaster, presenting as collateral the promissory notes (*softas*) made over to him by forty Iranian and expatriate supporters of the new school, arranged a line of credit with the Bank of Iran and the Middle East. He rented a town house, which had housed the Chinese Embassy on Avenue Simetri opposite the Gendarmerie Headquarters, to provide facilities for the new school. The school occupied this site until the late 1970s, when the Iranian Plan and Budget Organization built a campus on property held in West Tehran by the Ministry of Court (West Tehran Development Organization, "Comprehensive Plan for Iranzamin, Tehran International School," December 1975). The campus was designed by Kenneth D. B. Carruthers for Mojda-Perkins and Will embodying Iran's centuries-old tradition for organizing community life. Provision was made for the Iranzamin School and a College of Business and Library Science. By the autumn of 1967 Mr. Irvine had engaged forty teachers for an enrollment of 326 students (*Iranzamin Yearbook*, 1967-68).

The Iranzamin pre-school, primary, and elementary school curriculum for boys and girls was planned to culminate in the secondary school IB program



of studies (*General Guide to the International Baccalaureate*, 3rd ed. Geneva, 1977), which was authorized by the Iranian High Council of Education. Using English as the language of instruction, the school provided for the teaching of the Studies of Man (world religions, civilization and culture, history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics, the theory of knowledge), Creative and Aesthetic Studies (music, art, drama), Mathematics (geometry, algebra, trigonometry, advanced mathematics), Laboratory Science (biology, chemistry, physics), and Languages and Literature (Arabic, Persian, English, French, German, Polish, Russian, and others according to demand). Students chose six subjects for the IB Diploma complemented by a mandatory course in the theory of knowledge and participation in extra-curricular activities. Depending upon his or her selections, a student's program of studies might typically include Persian and English language and literature, another language, geometry, algebra, chemistry, Islamic History and Civilization, music, a course in the theory of knowledge, and participation in physical education and some form of creative and aesthetic activity or social service. Having chosen Islamic History and Civilization, the student would, in addition, be required to complete substantial independent work in Western studies and write an extended essay upon it. This would complement and give balance to the Middle Eastern emphasis. Extra-curricular activities might include participation in the miracle play *Noyes Fludde* and football or basketball. The student's secondary school diploma would be three-fold: a Ministry of Education Diploma which qualified the holder for entrance into Iranian universities, an American High School Diploma with advanced placement in American colleges and universities, and the International Baccalaureate Diploma which qualified the holder for entrance to university in any country.

Although the license given by the Ministry of Education to J. Richard Irvine delegated authority to him over nearly every aspect of Iranzamin school's life, he arranged in 1967 to form a Board of Trustees and have Iranzamin, Tehran International School, incorporated as a non-profit educational institution. Articles of Incorporation were based upon those of such American schools as Exeter, Mount Hermon, and Choate in the United States. Such incorporation was unprecedented in Iran, because for-profit private schools were considered good business. Compliant with the Articles of Incorporation, the Board of Trustees determined policy under the aegis of Iran's High Council of Education. The headmaster, Mr. Irvine, a Foundation Trustee, administered the school. Founding members of the Board included Honorary Trustee Iranian Prime Minister Amir 'Abbās Hoveydā (q.v.) and Foundation Trustees



Kodādād Fa-mānfarmā'iān (Chair), Aḥmad Aḥmadi, A. A. Baṭā'i, J. Richard Irvine, 'Abd-al-Majid Majidi, A. Majidiān, Rezā Moqaddam, George Ovanessoff, N. Rā'in, Majid Rahnemā, and Julia Sami'i (Iranzamin, Tehran International School, Inc., 1967).

The Iranzamin founding board served until the revolutionary crisis of 1978-80, when the upheavals disrupted its established activities and scattered the Board of Trustees. Early in January 1980, a Revolutionary Board came forward to serve under the chairmanship of Anuṣiravān Naṣari. With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Irvine was unable to continue to administer the school according to the terms of his Ministry of Education license, and he left the school in July 1980. During the academic year 1980-81 the Ministry of Education allowed the relationship between Iranzamin and the International Baccalaureate to lapse, and the Iran-zamin School metamorphosed into a traditional school for boys following an Iranian government curriculum.

Goal and enrollment. At the end of Iranzamin's first year in June 1968 the school's fifteen senior students completed the IB program. In the years that followed the school enrolled students from as many as sixty-eight countries (1974) and graduated classes of as many as eighty-nine students (June 1977). Iranian enrollment averaged approximately 65 percent. There were 1,450 students from more than fifty countries and a faculty of 112 teachers from sixteen countries in 1978 (*Iranzamin Yearbook*, 1979-1980, pp. 17-29). In the midst of Iran's revolutionary upheaval Iranzamin graduated its last IB class, the Class of 1980, numbering only twenty-four students. This marked the end of a school where Iranian and foreign boys and girls from nearly every cultural and religious community had studied together in harmony and mutual esteem.

Iranzamin clearly affirmed the vision of Iran's High Council of Education in authorizing the International Baccalaureate, and brought to fruition Dr. Samuel Jordan's intention to "adapt the best Western methods to the needs of the country" and "retain all that is good in their own civilization." Iranzamin alumni and faculty who live in Iran and many other parts of the world gather periodically to celebrate their diverse relationships and enjoy the genuine companionship of like-minded friends, delighting in the fruits of a great tradition where knowledge is the fountain of youth (*Tavānā bovad har ke dānā bovad, ze dāneš del-e pir bornā bovad* "who becomes learned grows strong; with learning, the heart of the aged grows young" [Ferdowsi, *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Dj.



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