

CHAPTER 3

The iron fist of Reza Shah

There is room in Iran for only one shah – and I will be that shah.
Reza Shah

THE COUP

In the early hours of February 21, 1921, General Reza Khan, commander of the Cossack garrison in Qazvin, took control over Tehran with three thousand men and eighteen machine guns. This coup, hailed later as the glorious 3rd Esfand (February 21) liberation, launched a new era. Reza Khan, who had risen through the ranks, was self-educated – some claim semi-illiterate. He came from a military family that fled Russian advance into the Caucasus and received a fief in the fertile village of Alasht in the Sefid Rud region of Mazanderan. His relatives, including his father and grandfather, had served in the provincial regiment – the latter had been killed in the 1848 siege of Herat. Reza Khan himself had enrolled as a teenager in the Cossack Brigade. Rumor had it that he had at one time or another served as a stable boy, either for the royal palace, the Farmanfarmas, the Dutch legation, or the American Presbyterian Mission. During the civil war and the subsequent upheavals, he made his mark as an up-and-coming officer nicknamed “Reza Khan Maxim.” In later years when he built himself a palace in Mazanderan, he decorated the entryway with a large mosaic depicting a Maxim machine gun. He was multilingual: he spoke Alashti – a dialect of Mazanderani – with his neighbors; Persian with the outside world; pigeon Russian with the Tsarist Cossack officers; and variant of Turkish with his men.

In carrying out the coup, Reza Khan declared martial law, won over the local gendarmes, skirmished briefly with the city police, and assured Ahmad Shah that he had come to save him from the Bolsheviks. He also installed as premier Sayyed Ziya Tabatabai, a young journalist described by the British legation as “notorious for his Anglophilia.”¹ The previous premier, Sepahdar, who for months had failed either to convene a majles or form a

cabinet, fled to the Turkish embassy. Before marching on Tehran, Reza Khan had given two promises to Ironside, the British general who had recently taken charge of the Cossacks and replaced Russian officers with Iranians. He had promised to facilitate the withdrawal of British troops and not to overthrow Ahmad Shah.² Unbeknownst to Curzon, Ironside considered the Anglo-Persian Agreement a lost cause, and was on the look-out for a suitable man on horseback to save the situation. Ironside had placed Reza Khan in charge of the Qazvin garrison and hurriedly promoted him general. Thus many 1920–21 sources still referred to Reza Khan as a colonel. Ironside also provided Reza Khan with ammunition and pay for his men – immediately after the coup the Cossacks received generous bonuses. On the eve of his march on Tehran, Reza Khan assured a joint delegation from the royal palace and the British legation that he was pro-shah and pro-British and that once the latter had withdrawn from the country he would organize a force capable of dealing with the Bolsheviks.³ Not surprisingly, many Iranians still consider the coup a “British plot.”

Reza Khan kept his promises – at least for the time being. He facilitated British withdrawal, abrogated the Anglo-Iranian Agreement, and instead signed a Soviet–Iranian Agreement. The Soviets agreed not only to withdraw promptly from Gilan, but also to cancel all Tsarist loans, claims, and concessions – everything except the Caspian fisheries. They, however, reserved the right to return in full force if a third power ever invaded the country and posed a threat to the Soviet Union. This gave Iran a protective umbrella. The British, meanwhile, with a straight face and no sense of irony, presented Tehran with a bill for weapons delivered to the Cossacks and the South Persian Rifles. The bill totaled £313,434 17s. 6d.⁴ In abrogating the 1919 agreement, Reza Khan assured the British that this would “throw dust in Bolshevik eyes.”⁵ He also assured Theodore Rothstein, former *Manchester Guardian* editor who had just been appointed Soviet minister in Tehran, that his government was determined to eradicate British influence and pursue a policy of strict neutrality in foreign affairs. The Soviets soon elevated their legation to a full embassy. The British legation summed up the post-war situation:⁶

From an external point of view Great Britain was generally regarded as the enemy, Russia as the possible friend. Although the obvious Russian efforts to diffuse Communist ideas and propaganda caused certain uneasiness, the apparent generosity of canceling Persia’s debts to Russia, of returning all Russian concessions acquired in Tsarist times, of handing over the Russian Banque d’Escompte to the Persian Government and surrendering the Capitulations had made a profound impression, and the Russian-inspired idea that Persia had everything to gain by association with a Russia purged by the fires of revolution and everything to lose by

succumbing to the imperialist and colonizing ambitions of Great Britain, was sufficiently plausible to gain many Persian adherents.

Reza Khan, however, for the time being kept his promise to the Qajars even though he lost no time in making himself, in the words of the British legation, a “virtual military dictator.”⁷ He established himself as the real power behind the throne, first as army chief, then as war minister, and then as premier as well as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. During these years, he made and unmade ministers and premiers, including Sayyed Ziya who was packed off to exile after ninety-nine days. He did not openly venture on to the central stage until 1925–26 when he convened a Constituent Assembly, deposed Ahmad Shah, accepted the crown, named his son heir apparent, and crowned himself monarch – much in the fashion of his heroes, Napoleon and Nader Shah. It was rumored that at the coronation the Speaker of the Majles stepped forward to bestow the crown, but he took it in his own hands, declaring “This is not something someone else can place on my head.”⁸ The ceremony was choreographed along the lines of European as well as Safavid and Qajar coronations. It opened with a prayer by the Imam Jum’eh, and closed with a flowery oration by the prime minister with long passages from the *Shahnameh*. Reza Khan had become Reza Shah. He remained so until the Anglo-Soviet invasion of 1941. These fifteen years, together with the preceding five, can be described as the Reza Shah era.

The hallmark of the era was to be state-building. Reza Shah came to power in a country where the government had little presence outside the capital. He left the country with an extensive state structure – the first in Iran’s two thousand years. It has been said of Stalin that he inherited a country with a wooden plough and left it with the atomic bomb. It can be said of Reza Shah that he took over a country with a ramshackle administration and left it with a highly centralized state. In assessing him, historians, especially Iranian ones, have invariably raised two loaded questions. Was he a true patriot or a British “agent”? Was he comparable to other contemporary strongmen, especially Ataturk and Mussolini? The first question was made obsolete by later events – especially his removal by the British. The second is anachronistic since these other rulers had inherited centralized states. A more apt comparison would be with the Tudors, early Bourbons, or sixteenth-century Habsburgs – monarchs whose goal had been to create centralized states. Reza Shah drove like a steamroller toward this goal, crushing all opposition, whether from the left or right, from the center or the provinces, from the aristocratic notables or the nascent trade



1 Coronation stamp, 1926

unions. A man of few words, he had little time for rhetoric, philosophy, or political theory. The main ideological baggage he carried stressed order, discipline, and state power. He conflated his own persona with the monarchy; the monarchy with the state; and the state with the nation. Not averse to harnessing religion, he gave the state a motto containing three words: *Khoda* (God), Shah, and *Mehan* (Nation). Some quipped that as his power increased, the middle word rose to dwarf the other two. In his eyes, however, the trinity was so interwoven that opposition to him was tantamount to opposition to the state, the nation, and even religion. In other words, political dissent was tantamount to subversion and treason.

STATE-BUILDING

Reza Shah built his new state on two main pillars: the military and the bureaucracy. During his rule, the military grew tenfold and the bureaucracy

seventeenfold. In 1921, the military totaled no more than 22,000 men – some 8,000 Cossacks, 8,000 gendarmes, and 6,000 South Persian Riflemen. By 1925, it numbered 40,000 troops consolidated under one ministry of war. And by 1941, it mustered more than 127,000 men. Likewise, in 1921 the central government had been no more than a haphazard collection of semi-independent mostowfis, monshis, and titled grandees. But by 1941, it had eleven full ministries employing in excess of 90,000 salaried civil servants. The largest ministries – interior, education, and justice – had scarcely existed in 1921.

The expansion was made possible by revenues from four sources: oil royalties; extractions from tax delinquents; higher customs duties; and new taxes on consumer goods. Oil royalties, which started as a trickle in 1911 and totaled no more than £583,960 in 1921–22, grew to £1,288,000 in 1930–31, and £4,000,000 in 1940–41.⁹ The other revenues began to increase once Arthur Millspaugh, another American, was named treasurer-general to restart Shuster's aborted project to create an effective tax-collecting system within the finance ministry. When Millspaugh arrived in 1922, skeptics gave him "three months to learn his job, three months to set his work in motion, and three months to collect his salary before leaving in despair."¹⁰ But in five years, he managed to create a new department, abolish tax farms, update old rates, tighten up levies on opium sales, and, equally important, retool mostowfis as full-time civil servants. Soon he was able to present Iran's first comprehensive annual budget. In all this he was greatly helped by Reza Shah – until the latter decided that the country had room for only one shah. Millspaugh writes that he was able to collect back taxes from important magnates such as Sepahdar (Sepahsalar) simply because the new commander-in-chief threatened to seize their assets.¹¹ It was thought that these extractions led to Sepahdar's suicide in 1926. "Reza Khan," Millspaugh remarked, "belongs to the class of statesmen of which Henry II of England and Philip Augustus of France were the prototypes. He supplied the personal and military force necessary to establish the authority of the central government."¹² Similarly, he pressured the Bakhtiyari khans and Sheikh Khaz'al to hand over their oil shares to the central government. The British minister reported in 1923:¹³

This degree of success would not have been possible without the influential assistance of Reza Khan, which has rendered possible the collection of revenues, both arrears and current, in districts where former Governments had no power to enforce the payment of taxes. Every part of the kingdom has now been brought under the control of the Central Government, and taxes are being paid regularly into the Treasury for many districts where, in former years, not only did nothing reach the Treasury, but large sums had to be disbursed by the Government.

Government revenues also increased as trade recovered after World War I; as income tax – mainly on salaries – was introduced; and, most important, as state monopolies and taxes were imposed on a variety of consumer goods, especially sugar, tea, tobacco, cotton, hides, and opium. Customs revenue jumped from 51 million qrans in 1921 to 93 million in 1925, and further to 675 million in 1940. Revenues from consumer taxes rose from 38 million qrans (rials) in 1925 to as much as 180 million in 1940. The tax on sugar and tea – introduced in 1926 – brought in 122 million qrans in 1928, 421 million in 1938, and 691 million in 1940. In other words, the revenue from sugar and tea alone rose sixfold. Total government income rose from less than 246 million rials in 1925–26 to more than 3,610 million in 1940–41. The British estimated that by 1935 more than 34 percent of this income was being spent on the armed forces.¹⁴

The armed forces constituted the main pillar of the new regime. Reza Khan began work on the military immediately after the 1921 coup. He merged the Cossacks with the remnants of the gendarmerie and the South Persian Rifles to form a national army of 20,000. He replaced the Russian, Swedish, and British officers with his Cossack cronies. He took charge of road tolls and opium taxes in order to pay for this new army. Within two years, he had five divisions totaling 30,000 men – separate divisions for Tehran, Tabriz, Hamadan, Isfahan, and Mashed. According to the British, he spent “the whole of 1921–23 building up a well-disciplined force . . . the first proper such force since the days of Fath Ali Shah in 1834.”¹⁵ This new army successfully crushed a number of provincial rebels – especially Kuchek Khan and the Jangalis in Gilan, Khiabani in Tabriz, Simku in Kurdistan, and Sowlat al-Dowleh in Fars. It also crushed gendarmerie mutinies led by Major Lahuti in Tabriz and Colonel Taqi Peysan in Mashed.

The armed forces continued to grow – especially after the introduction of conscription in 1925. The conscription law can be described as the regime’s central piece. With conscription came Iran’s first birth certification as well as mandatory family names. The conscription law required all able-bodied males over the age of twenty-one to serve two full years in active service and another four years in the reserves. The conscripts were drawn first from the peasantry; then from the tribes; and eventually from the urban population. By 1941, the military had eighteen full divisions totaling 127,000 men – one division in each of the twelve provinces with extra ones on the northern border with Russia. The cavalry and mechanized divisions contained some 100 tanks and 28 armored vehicles. The air force had 157 planes; the navy 2 frigates and 4 gunboats.¹⁶ The services were coordinated by a newly created joint office of the chiefs of staff. In 1939, the war minister approached the British with an ambitious proposal to buy 30 Blenheim bombers,

Table 3 *Government budgets, 1925–26 and 1940–41*
(in million qrans-rials)

	1925–26	1940–41
Revenue		
Total	245	3,613
Direct taxation	34	75
Road tax	20	85
Indirect taxes total	36	180
Customs	91	298
Expenditures	245	4,333
(Major ministries)		
War	94	565
Finance	30	265
Education	7	194
Industries	–	992
Agricultural	–	121
Roads	–	1,092
Imbalance	–	71

Note: Compiled from D. Nowruzi, “The Development of the Budget in Iran,” *Razm Nameh*, Mo. 6 (November 1948), pp. 11–18; and from British minister, “Annual Reports for Persia (1923–41),” FO 371/Persia 1924–42/34-10848 to 27180. These reports are highly detailed and informative – so much so that in 1933 the foreign office instructed the legation in Tehran to pare them down. It complained that the 1932 report on Persia had been ninety-seven pages long whereas those on the USSR, USA, France, and Italy had each been fewer than seventy-two pages. See Foreign Office, “Note to the Legation (22 April 1933),” FO 371/Persia 1934/34-16967.

30 Wellington bombers, 35 Hurricane fighters, and 30 American Curtis fighters. He argued that these planes could “come in useful for bombing Baku.”¹⁷ Such proposals would not have sat well with the northern neighbor. In analyzing the military budget, the British minister commented:¹⁸

The main burden of the taxpayer will continue to be the army. Tanks, artillery and other material are being acquired in increasing quantities, so much so that neighbouring States are beginning to wonder whether Iran may not be a potential aggressor in the future. The reasons which have led the Shah to spend so much on armaments are probably, however, quite simple: he had to have a sufficient force to keep order and, having acquired this, his natural wish, as a soldier, was to see his army provided with up-to-date material. Further, he has vivid recollections of the sufferings of a weak Persia in times of war and confusion, and is determined to avoid the recurrence of such a state of affairs.

Reza Shah also strengthened the rural gendarmerie and the urban police. He replaced Yeprem's Armenians in the Tehran police department and the Swedish advisors in the gendarmerie with his own men. He expanded the police force into provincial cities.¹⁹ He substituted short-term detention jails with long-term prisons – institutions unknown in traditional Iran. He created two security organizations: the *sharbari* attached to the urban police; and the *Rokn-e Dovom* (Second Pillar), modeled after the French Deuxieme Bureau, attached to the army. The British minister feared that he was creating a police state: "Political suspects, however slight the ground of suspicion – an incautious remark or a visit to an unpopular friend – may find themselves in prison or banished to the provinces without any semblance of a trial."²⁰

Reza Shah worked hard to harness the officer corps to his regime. He invariably appeared in public wearing military uniforms. He took personal interest in their promotions, training, and living conditions. He sold them state lands at discount prices; rewarded them with bonuses; appointed them to governorships; and turned a blind eye to their financial irregularities. He communicated with field commanders directly through the military office in the palace, bypassing the cabinet, the premier, and the war minister. He built in Tehran an impressive array of military establishments – an arsenal, a machine-gun factory, an airplane repair shop, a military hospital, an officers' club, an army bank, a staff college, and a military academy. He sent military personnel to Europe for further training – army officers, numbering as many as 300, went mostly to France; pilots and naval officers went mainly to Italy. He filled crucial military posts with such former Cossacks as Generals Muhammad Ayrom, Morteza Yazdanpanah, Ahmad Amir Ahmadi, and Fazlollah Zahedi. Ayrom, a fellow Cossack colonel in 1921, served as his chief of police until absconding to Nazi Germany with an ill-gotten fortune.

What is more, Reza Shah raised Crown Prince Muhammad Reza to be first and foremost a military officer. He was tutored in the palace with other officers' sons; spent three brief years with the same tutors and playmates in the exclusive La Rosey School in Switzerland; returned home to enter the military academy; and, upon graduation, received a commission to become special inspector in the armed forces. Reza Shah gave a similar upbringing to his six other sons. The crown prince – like his father – rarely appeared in public out of military uniform. The British legation noted that his activities outside the military were limited to the "boy scouts, athletic meetings, visiting institutions, and appearing for the Royal family at State functions."²¹ This was a regime that can be truly defined as a military monarchy.

The growth in the bureaucracy was equally impressive. The four nineteenth-century ministries (foreign affairs, interior, finance, and justice), as well as the

three more recent ones (public works and commerce, post and telegraph, and education and endowments), all grew to become substantial bureaucracies. What is more, three new ministries were created – industry, roads, and agriculture. Reza Shah ended his reign with eleven fully fledged ministries. The interior ministry, the central bureaucracy, was in charge of provincial administration including the urban police and rural gendarmerie. The eight old provinces were remapped into fifteen: Tehran, Azerbaijan, Fars, Gilan, Mazandaran, Hamadan, Isfahan, Kerman, Kermanshah, Khurasan, Arabestan, Kurdistan, Lurestan, Baluchestan, and the Gulf Ports. These provinces were divided into counties, municipalities, and rural districts. The shah, via the interior minister, appointed the governor-generals, who, in consultation with the minister, appointed the regional governors and town mayors. For the first time, the hand of the central government could reach the provinces. The governors were no longer semi-independent princes, as in Qajar days, but military men and civil servants totally dependent on the central government.²² A British consul described the administrative structure in a typical province:²³

Isfahan is the headquarters for the whole province. The province has various departments each with its own head, army (9th Division), police, municipality, finance, industry and commerce, public health, roads, registration of property and documents, census, education, agriculture, posts and telegraphs, justice, gendarmerie, conscription. In addition there are departments for the distribution of cereals, opium and tobacco. These departments have representatives in the chief towns of the district outside Isfahan. The police only operate within the municipality limits of Isfahan city and in Najafabad. Police work outside these two areas and the maintenance of general security are the tasks of the gendarmerie.

Reza Shah buttressed his two pillars with an extensive patronage network – so much so that he created the post of court minister outside the cabinet. The soldier who had risen through the ranks accumulated enough land during the course of his reign to become the wealthiest man in Iran, if not in the whole Middle East. A sympathetic biographer estimates that by the time he died he had accumulated a bank account worth £3 million and farm lands totaling 3 million acres.²⁴ The lands, concentrated in his ancestral Mazandaran, were mostly plantations for tea, rice, silk, cotton, and tobacco. He also had wheat farms in Hamadan, Asterabad, Gurgan, and Veramin. He accumulated these estates in part by outright confiscation, in part by dubious transfer of state properties, in part by irrigating waste lands, and in part by forcing landlords, both large and small, to sell him property at nominal prices. Sepahdar was one of his victims.

Even as early as 1932, the British legation reported that Reza Shah had developed an “unholy interest in land” and was putting whole families into

prison until they agreed to sell him their properties: "His insatiable land hunger is reaching such a point that it will soon be permissible to wonder why His Imperial Majesty does not, without more ado, register the whole of Persia in his own name."²⁵ It added that, whereas an "increasing number of landowners are discontented," others are saying that he is merely doing what previous dynasties have done, that he is making better use of the land, and that "the whole country really belongs to him in any case."²⁶ The British minister was less generous: "He has continued to amass wealth by questionable means and has allowed his senior military commanders to do the same. At the same time, he loses no opportunity of discrediting them if he suspects them of becoming too powerful or of keeping too much of the wealth they amass for their own use. If they do not forget to give him a reasonable share, he condones their robbery."²⁷ He added: "Reza Shah is avaricious and greedy of wealth, and all means whereby he can acquire money and lands are good to him . . . A new road leading to the Chalus Valley across the Elburz (into Mazanderan) has been constructed at enormous expense, simply to gratify his private whim."²⁸ Many felt he drained the rest of the country to nourish his home region.

To develop Mazanderan, Reza Shah constructed not only roads but also a railway line from Tehran to the new port of Bandar Shah. He constructed luxury hotels in Babulsar and Ramsar. He placed state factories producing sugar, tobacco, and textiles in Babul, Sari, and Aliabad which he renamed Shahi. For cheap labor, he resorted to the corvee, military conscription, and even kidnapping of Isfahan textile workers. The British legation reported that his factories could not function without "slave labour."²⁹ In short, court patronage offered many lucrative positions, salaries, pensions, and sinecures. This placed him in good standing – at least in Mazanderan. Years later, in August 1953, when his statues were being toppled throughout the country, those in Mazanderan remained untouched.

TRANSFORMATIONS

Reza Shah is often seen as a great "reformer," "modernizer," and even "secularizer." In fact, his main aim in establishing new institutions was to expand his control by expanding his state's power into all sectors of the country – into its polity, economy, society, and ideology. The legacies he left behind were byproducts of this single-minded drive to create a strong centralized state.

He gained absolute control over the political system mainly by transforming the Majles from an aristocratic power center into a pliant rubber

stamp. In the previous era, from the Second Majles in 1909 until the Fifth Majles in 1925, independent politicians and rural magnates had been able to shepherd retainers and peasants to the voting polls. In the words of Malek al-Shu'ra Bahar, the poet laureate and veteran constitutionalist:³⁰

The electoral law, which continues to plague us even today (1944), is one of the most harmful and least thought-out bills ever passed by us Democrats. By introducing a democratic law from modern Europe into the paternalistic environment of traditional Iran, we weakened the liberal candidates and strengthened the conservative rural magnates who can herd their peasants, tribesmen, and other retainers into the voting polls. It is not surprising that when liberals in the Fourth Majles tried to rectify their mistake, the conservatives staunchly and successfully rallied behind the existing "democratic law."

Reza Shah retained the electoral law, but closely monitored access into parliament. He personally determined the outcome of each election and thus the composition of each Majles – from the Fifth in 1926 to the Thirteenth in 1940. The class composition may not have changed – more than 84 percent of members continued to be landowners, local notables, civil servants, and court-connected businessmen.³¹ In fact, the number of deputies whose sole occupation was landowning actually increased. But the political composition did change in that only compliant candidates were permitted to enter. The control mechanism was simple. The shah – together with his chief of police – inspected the list of prospective candidates, marking them as either "suitable" or "bad," "unpatriotic," "mad," "vain," "harmful," "stupid," "dangerous," "shameless," "obstinate," or "empty headed."³² The suitable names were passed on to the interior minister, who, in turn, passed them on to the provincial governor-generals and the local electoral boards. The sole function of these boards was to hand out voting papers and supervise the ballot boxes. Needless to say, these boards were all appointed by the central government. Unsuitable candidates who insisted on running found themselves either in jail or banished from their localities. Consequently, the successful candidates were invariably "suitable" ones who enjoyed some support in their home constituencies – often because they owned estates there. For example, in the Seventh Majles elections, the shah decided that the two largest landlords in Maragheh, Abbas Mirza Farmanfarma and Iskander Khan Moqadam, should both retain their seats on the grounds that they enjoyed considerable "local support."³³ The former had represented Maragheh in three assemblies; the latter in nine.

To ensure that deputies remained pliant, the shah took away parliamentary immunity; banned all political parties, even royalist caucuses; closed

down independent newspapers; and planted what the regime itself described as “spies” and “informants.” The British minister reported as early as 1926 that Reza Shah appeared to be “working towards a military autocracy” and “his sole aim seemed to be to discredit not only elder statesmen but parliamentary government itself”: “He has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. The Cabinet is afraid of the Majles; the Majles is afraid of the army; and all are afraid of the Shah.”³⁴

Deputies and other politicians who openly criticized the shah met sticky ends. For example, Samuel Haim, a Jewish deputy, was executed for “treason.” Mirzazadeh Eshqi, a prominent socialist poet and editor of *Qarn-e Bestum* (The Twentieth Century), was gunned down in broad daylight. So was Kaykhosrow Shahrokh, a Zoroastrian deputy. Muhammad Farokhi-Yazdi, another deputy and former editor of the socialist paper *Tofan* (Storm), died suddenly in a prison hospital. Sayyed Hassan Modarres, who had succeeded Behbehani as leader of the Moderate Party, was exiled to an isolated village in Khurasan where he suddenly died. It was rumored that he had been strangled.³⁵ Unaware of these rumors, the British legation reported in 1940:³⁶

Modarres leads a simple life, and is much revered by the lower classes, who used to frequent his house and ask his advice on all sorts of questions. He is quite fearless and frank and expresses his opinions freely, and nobody, not even the Shah, escaped his criticisms. An apparently organized attempt to assassinate him was made in October 1926 one morning in the street, but, although wounded in three places, he managed to escape with his life. For an old-fashioned cleric he is cute and far-sighted, but is a demagogue and obstinate.

Parliament ceased to be a meaningful institution. Instead it became a decorative garb covering up the nakedness of military rule. As one prime minister later admitted: “The Majles was retained for ceremonial purposes since the shah insisted that executive actions should get the seal of approval from the legislative branch.”³⁷ It carried out this ceremonial task so well that the shah found it unnecessary either to convene the senate – which would have given him more power – or to make significant changes to the constitutional laws – the only change the 1925 Constituent Assembly made was to pass the crown from the Qajars to the new shah. The British minister reported as early as 1926: “The Persian Majles cannot be taken seriously. The deputies are not free agents, any more than elections to the Majles are free. When the Shah wants a measure, it is passed. When he is opposed, it is withdrawn. When he is indifferent, a great deal of aimless discussion takes place.”³⁸

Reza Shah also handpicked cabinet ministers to produce both docility and stability. In the previous two decades (1906–25) when parliaments had participated in the formation of governments, the country had seen as many as thirty-five changes of premier and sixty changes of cabinet. In the next fifteen years (1926–41), the country had only ten cabinets and eight changes of premier. In all, fifty men filled ninety-eight cabinet posts in these years. Thirty-five of them had started their careers in government service – mostly in the ministries of finance or foreign affairs. Another six were former Cossacks. Thirty-seven had titles or had been born into titled families. Of the others, two came from clerical families; four from landowning ones; and five from middle-level government ranks. Twenty-six had studied abroad, and fourteen had graduated from the Dar al-Fanon. Almost all were fluent in one or more European languages: thirty-four spoke French, twelve English, eleven Russian, and six German.

Although well-educated, well-trained, and well-heeled, these ministers were at the shah's beck and call. When addressing the monarchy, they aptly resorted to ancient terminology and referred to themselves as his royal highness's *chakers* (slaves). This abject subservience was encouraged by the fate that befell the "triumvirate" who had helped forge the new regime: Mirza Abdul Hussein Khan Timourtash, Ali Akbar Khan Davar, and Firuz Mirza Farmanfarma.

Timourtash (Sardar Mo'azem Khurasani), the court minister, was, in the words of the British legation, the "most powerful man in the country after the shah" until his sudden demise in 1934.³⁹ He came from a wealthy landed family in Khurasan, and had graduated from a military academy in Tsarist Russia. After his return in 1915, he served on financial commissions, sat in parliament as a deputy from Khurasan, and, as governor of Gilan, helped the Cossacks defeat the Jangalis. The British minister described him as "witty," "clever," "energetic," "eloquent," but a "confirmed gambler." Just before accusing him of embezzlement, the shah had bestowed on him the title *Jenab Ashraf* (Noble Highness). He died in prison from "food poisoning," thus becoming the first minister since 1848 to be put to death. For some Reza Shah was a "modernizer"; for others, he was reviving early Qajar practices.

Davar, one of the few ministers without an aristocratic title, was the son of a minor government official. He started his career in the ministry of post and telegraph and was sent to Geneva in 1910 to serve as Persian tutor to the shah's children. While there, he had obtained a Swiss law degree. After his return, he edited a newspaper that focused on the need for legal reforms; worked as an independent lawyer; represented Veramin in the Fourth and

Fifth Majles; and, in the Constituent Assembly, drafted legislation that permitted the smooth transfer of the crown. Davar was rewarded with the justice ministry. He was highly regarded as “studious,” “intelligent,” “well read,” “hardworking,” and “upcoming” – until accused of financial irregularities. He dropped dead in prison at the age of fifty, supposedly because of a “heart attack.” His right-hand man, Abdul Hassan Diba, died in similar circumstances. Farah Diba, the future empress, was the latter’s niece.

Firuz Farmanfarma (Newsrat al-Dowleh) was the son of the famous Prince Farmanfarma. A graduate of the Sorbonne, he began his career in 1916 as an assistant to his father who was minister of justice. Subsequently he became foreign minister and helped Vossuq al-Dowleh negotiate the infamous 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement. Reza Shah placed him in charge of the ministries of justice and finance before accusing him of taking bribes. After spending years in and out of prison, where he translated Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis* and wrote books on penal law and his jail experiences, he was eventually banished to his estates where he was smothered to death.⁴⁰ The British legation reported that “his ability marks him as one of the leading men in the country, whether in the Cabinet or in the Majles, and the Shah, who probably does not trust him, recognizes his usefulness.” It added: “Like Timourdash, whose intimate friend he is, he is a born gambler. He owes money in every direction, including tailor’s bills in London, which he declines to pay, and for which he would be liable to prosecution should he at any time return to England.”⁴¹ His probable reason for avoiding London, however, had more to do with the £160,000 “advance” he had taken for the 1919 Agreement. Like many aristocrats, high living and large retinues created cash-flow problems. And like others with similar life styles, he was seen as “corrupt” by the general public. Reza Shah could at the drop of a hat destroy such public personalities. For the elite, life was not nasty, poor, and brutish. But it could definitely be short.

Reza Shah extended state power over the economy by pursuing what was then called *étatisme*. He eased out foreign financial administrators, including Millspaugh and the Belgians. He annulled the nineteenth-century capitulations that had given foreign powers commercial and extra-territorial privileges. The British minister sounded alarm bells as early as 1927: “No one was prepared for the bombshell which fell upon the foreign community in Tehran when, following a speech by His Majesty on the occasion of the inauguration of the new law court buildings, the Persian Government addressed notes to all the foreign representatives concerned denouncing at one year’s notice, the old treaties which allowed for extra-territorial jurisdiction, including the Spanish and French perpetual treaties of 1842 and

1855.”⁴² Similarly, the National Bank took over from the British Imperial Bank the right to print money. This came in handy when paper money helped finance industrialization in the late 1930s. This fueled a 54 percent rise in basic prices.

The other ministries also expanded their reach. The ministry of post and telegraph nationalized the Indo-European Telegraphy Company, started a telephone network, and in 1939 launched Radio Iran to compete with the BBC and Radio Moscow. The commerce ministry controlled foreign trade by setting up tariff walls and issuing import-export licenses. The industries ministry built some 300 plants producing sugar, tea, cigarettes, rice, canned food, soap, cotton oil seed, glycerin, jute, sulfuric acid, cement, lumber, copper, batteries, and, most important of all, electricity – by 1938 most towns had some electrical lighting. It also gave low-interest loans to businessmen to start manufacturing companies – especially for cotton textiles, carpets, matches, beer, hides, and glass wares. The roads ministry constructed 1,000 kilometers of paved roads linking Tehran to Mashed, Tabriz, Julfa, Mahabad, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Bushire. It also constructed 5,000 kilometers of gravel roads linking Tehran to most provincial capitals. By the late 1930s, these roads carried as many as 27,000 vehicles, including some 5,000 cars, 8,000 trucks, and 7,000 buses.⁴³ The regime’s main showpiece, however, was the Trans-Iranian Railway. Cutting through some of the most difficult terrain in the world, it was contracted out in small parcels to numerous foreign companies – German, French, Scandinavian, Swiss, Czech, Italian, American, British, and Belgian. By 1941, the Trans-Iranian Railway connected Tehran to Shahi and Bandar Shah in the north; Semnan on the way to Mashed in the east; Zanjan on the way to Tabriz in the west; and all the way to Ahwaz and Abadan in the south. It was financed mostly by taxes on sugar and tea. When a cabinet minister was overheard complaining that the money could be better spent on roads, he found himself in prison accused of being part of the British “conspiracy” to keep the country backward.

The state also extended tentacles deep into society. Military conscription did more than expand the armed forces. It extracted males from traditional environments and immersed them for the very first time in a nationwide organization where they had to speak Persian, interact with other ethnic groups, and pay daily allegiance to the shah, the flag, and the state. Two-thirds of the conscripts spent their first six months learning Persian. In fact, the draft was designed in part to turn peasants and tribesmen into citizens. The draft, of course, created the need for identity cards and thus family names. Reza Shah himself adopted the name Pahlavi – after the ancient

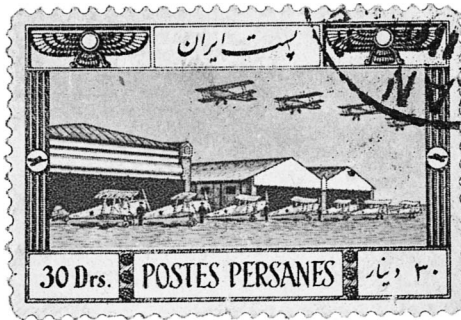


2 Road construction stamp, 1934

3 Stamps set depicting Pahlavi ideology, 1935



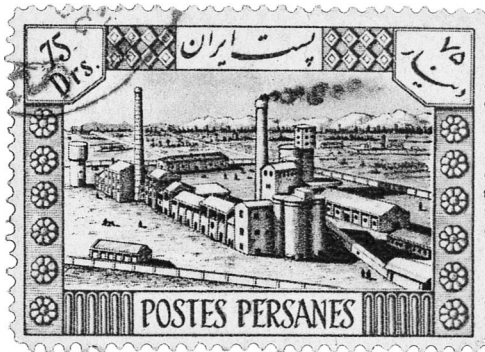
3.1 Persepolis



3.2 Tehran airport



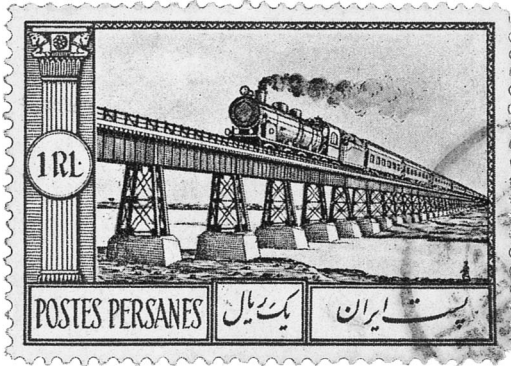
3.3 Sanatorium near Tehran



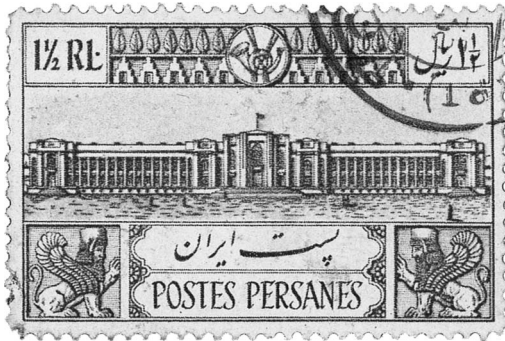
3.4 Cement factory in Abdul 'Azim



3.5 Gunboat



3.6 Railway bridge over Karun



3.7 Tehran post office



3.8 Justice: woman with scales and sword



3.9 Education: angel teaching youth

4 Stamp set celebrating ancient Iran



4.1 Persepolis: ruins of Main Palace



4.2 Persepolis: lion carving



4.3 Persepolis: Darius



4.4 Persepolis: warrior



4.5 Pasaraga: Cyrus' tomb



4.6 Carving at Naqsh-e Rostam: God Mazda's investiture of Ardashir



4.7 Carving at Naqsh-e Rostam: Shahpour accepting Emperor Valerian's submission

language that had evolved into modern Persian. He forced a family that was already using that name to relinquish it. He also forced his own children from previous marriages – one to a Qajar – to find themselves other surnames. In mandating names, he abolished aristocratic titles. Many notables shortened their names. For example, Vossuq al-Dowleh became simply Hassan Vossuq; his brother, Ahmad Qavam al-Saltaneh, became Ahmad Qavam; and Firuz Mirza Farmanfarma (Nowsrat al-Dowleh) became Firuz Farmanfarma. Ordinary citizens often adopted names that reflected their occupational, regional, or tribal backgrounds. Reza Shah also abolished the royal tradition of using bombastic designations and announced that he would in future be addressed simply as His Imperial Majesty.

In the same vein, Reza Shah implemented a series of measures to instill in the citizenry a feeling of uniformity and common allegiance to himself and his state. He introduced the metric system; a uniform system of weights and measures; and a standard time for the whole country. He replaced the Muslim lunar calendar with a solar one which started the year with the March 21 equinox, the ancient Persian New Year. Thus 1343 (AD 1925) in the Muslim lunar calendar became 1304 in the new Iranian solar calendar. Muslim months were replaced with such Zoroastrian terms as Khordad, Tir, Shahrivar, Mehr, and Azar. The standard time chosen was intentionally half an hour different from neighboring time zones.

Reza Shah also implemented a new dress code. He outlawed tribal and traditional clothes as well as the fez-like headgear that had been introduced by the Qajars. All adult males, with the exception of state “registered” clergymen, had to wear Western-style trousers and coat, as well as a front-rimmed hat known as the “Pahlavi cap.” In the past, bare heads had been

Table 4 *Expansion of public education, 1923–24 and 1940–41*

	1923–24	1940–41
Pupils in kindergartens	0	1,500
Primary schools	83	2,336
Pupils in primary schools	7,000	210,000
Secondary schools	85	241
Pupils in secondary schools	5,000	21,000

considered signs of madness or rudeness, and headgear identified the person's traditional or occupational ties. The Pahlavi cap was now seen as a sign of national unity. It was soon replaced by the felt-rimmed fedora known in Iran as the "international hat." Men were also encouraged to be clean shaven, or, if they insisted on moustaches, to keep them modest – unlike large ones sported by Nasser al-Din Shah and the famous or infamous lutis. In the past, beardless men had been associated with eunuchs. In the words of one government official, the intention of the dress code was to "foster national unity" in lieu of local sentiments.⁴⁴ In decreeing the early dress code for men, Reza Shah instructed the police not to harass women – to permit unveiled women to enter cinemas, eat in restaurants, speak in the streets to unrelated members of the opposite sex, and even ride in carriages with them so long as they pulled down the carriage hoods. By the mid-1930s, there were at least four thousand women, almost all in Tehran, who ventured into public places without veils – at least, without the full-length covering known as the *chadour* (tent).⁴⁵ These four thousand were mostly Western-educated daughters of the upper class, foreign wives of recent returnees from Europe, and middle-class women from the religious minorities.

A uniform educational system was another target of reform. In 1923, students at Iran's institutions of learning, including those administered by the state, private individuals, clerical foundations, missionaries, and religious minorities, totaled no more than 91,000. State schools had fewer than 12,000 students.⁴⁶ According to Millsbaugh, the total number of schools did not exceed 650. They included 250 state schools, 47 missionary schools, and more than 200 clerically administered *maktabs* (religious primary schools) and *madraseshs*.⁴⁷ Female pupils – almost all in missionary schools – numbered fewer than 18,000. By 1941, the state administered 2,336 primary schools with 210,000 pupils, and 241 secondary schools with 21,000 pupils including 4,000 girls.⁴⁸ The missionary schools, as well as

those started by religious minorities, had been “nationalized.” Similarly, the *maktabs* had been absorbed into the state secondary system. The state system was modeled on the French lycees with primary and secondary levels each formed of six one-year classes. It emphasized uniformity, using throughout the country the same curriculum, the same textbooks, and, of course, the same language – Persian. Other languages, even those previously permitted in community schools, were now banned. The policy was to Persianize the linguistic minorities.

Higher education experienced similar growth. In 1925, fewer than 600 students were enrolled in the country’s six colleges – law, literature, political science, medicine, agriculture, and teacher training. In 1934, these six merged to form the University of Tehran. And in the late 1930s, the university opened six new colleges – for dentistry, pharmacology, veterinary medicine, fine arts, theology, and science-technology. By 1941, Tehran University had more than 3,330 students. Enrollment in universities abroad also grew. Although wealthy families had been sending sons abroad ever since the mid-nineteenth century, the numbers remained modest until 1929 when the state began to finance every year some 100 scholarships to Europe. By 1940, more than 500 Iranians had returned and another 450 were completing their studies. Tehran University – like the school system – was designed on the Napoleonic model, stressing not only uniformity but also the production of public servants.

The state also exerted influence over organized religion. Although the seminaries in Qom, Mashed, Isfahan, and, needless to say, Najaf, remained autonomous, the theology college in Tehran University and the nearby Sepahsalar Mosque – the latter supervised by a government-appointed imam *jum’eh* – examined candidates to determine who could teach religion and thus have the authority to wear clerical clothes. In other words, the state for the first time determined who was a member of the *ulama*. Of course, clerics who chose to enter government service had to discard turbans and gowns in favor of the new hat and Western clothes. Ironically, these reforms gave the clergy a distinct identity. The education ministry, meanwhile, not only mandated scripture classes in state schools but also controlled the content of these classes, banning ideas that smacked of religious skepticism. Reza Shah aimed not so much to undermine religion with secular thought as to bring the propagation of Islam under state supervision. He had begun his political career by leading Cossacks in Muharram processions. He had given many of his eleven children typical Shi’i names: Muhammad Reza, Ali Reza, Ghulam Reza, Ahmad Reza, Abdul Reza, and Hamid Reza. He invited popular preachers to broadcast sermons on the national radio

station. What is more, he encouraged Shariat Sangalaji, the popular preacher in the Sepahsalar Mosque, to declare openly that Shi'ism was in dire need of a "reformation." Sangalaji often took to the pulpit to argue that Islam had nothing against modernity – especially against science, medicine, cinema, radios, and, the increasingly popular new pastime, soccer.

Reza Shah perpetuated the royal tradition of funding seminaries, paying homage to senior mojtaheds, and undertaking pilgrimages – even to Najaf and Karbala. He granted refuge to eighty clerics who fled Iraq in 1921. He encouraged Abdul Karim Haeri Yazdi, a highly respected mojtahed, to settle in Qom and to make it as important as Najaf. Haeri, who shunned politics, did more than any other cleric to institutionalize the religious establishment. It was in these years that the public began to use such clerical titles as ayatollah and hojjat al-islam. Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Naini, another mojtahed, supported the regime to such an extent that he destroyed his own early book praising constitutional government. Reza Shah also exempted theology students from conscription. He even banned the advocacy of any ideas smacking of "atheism" and "materialism." Some ministers waxed ecstatic over *'erfan* (mysticism) in general, and Sufi poets such as Rumi and Hafez in particular. They equated skepticism with materialism; materialism with communism. In the words of a minister and textbook writer, "the aim of elementary education is to make God known to the child."⁴⁹ Reza Shah would have subscribed to Napoleon's adage: "One can't govern people who don't believe in God. One shoots them." Not surprisingly, few senior clerics raised their voices against the shah.

Reza Shah created cultural organizations to instill greater national awareness in the general public. A new organization named Farhangestan (Cultural Academy) – modeled on the French Academy – together with the Department of Public Guidance, the National Heritage Society, the Geography Commission, the journal *Iran-e Bastan* (Ancient Iran), as well as the two main government-subsidized papers, *Ettela'at* (Information) and *Journal de Teheran*, all waged a concerted campaign both to glorify ancient Iran and to purify the language of foreign words. Such words, especially Arab ones, were replaced with either brand new or old Persian vocabulary.

The most visible name change came in 1934 when Reza Shah – prompted by his legation in Berlin – decreed that henceforth Persia was to be known to the outside world as Iran. A government circular explained that whereas "Persia" was associated with Fars and Qajar decadence, "Iran" invoked the glories and birthplace of the ancient Aryans.⁵⁰ Hitler, in one of his speeches, had proclaimed that the Aryan race had links to Iran. Moreover, a number of prominent Iranians who had studied in Europe had been influenced by

racial theorists such as Count Gobineau who claimed that Iran, because of its “racial” composition, had greater cultural-psychological affinity with Nordic peoples of northern Europe than with the rest of the Middle East. Thus Western racism played some role in shaping modern Iranian nationalism. Soon after Hitler came to power, the British minister in Tehran wrote that the journal *Iran-e Bastan* was “echoing” the anti-Semitic notions of the Third Reich.⁵¹

The Geography Commission renamed 107 places before concluding that it would be impractical to eliminate all Arabic, Turkish, and Armenian names.⁵² Arabestan was changed to Khuzestan; Sultanabad to Arak; and Bampour to Iranshahr. It also gave many places royalist connotations – Enzeli was changed to Pahlavi, Urmiah to Rezaieh, Aliabad to Shahi, and Salmas to Shahpour. It decreed that only Persian could be used on public signs, store fronts, business letterheads, and even visiting cards. The Cultural Academy, meanwhile, Persianized administrative terms. For example, the word for province was changed from *velayat* to *ostan*; governor from *vali* to *ostandar*; police from *nazmieh* to *shahrbani*; military officer from *sahab-e mansab* to *afsar*; and army from *qoshun* to *artesh* – an entirely invented term. All military ranks obtained new designations. The qran currency was renamed the rial. Some purists hoped to replace the Arabic script; but this was deemed impractical.

Meanwhile, the Society for National Heritage built a state museum, a state library, and a number of major mausoleums. The shah himself led a delegation of dignitaries to inaugurate a mausoleum for Ferdowsi at Tus, his birthplace, which was renamed Ferdows. Some suspected that the regime was trying to create a rival pilgrimage site to the nearby Imam Reza Shrine. In digging up bodies to inter in these mausoleums, the society meticulously measured skulls to “prove” to the whole world that these national figures had been “true Aryans.” These mausoleums incorporated motifs from ancient Iranian architecture. The society’s founders included such prominent figures as Taqizadeh, Timourtash, Musher-al-Dowleh, Mostowfi al-Mamalek, and Firuz Farmanfarma.⁵³ Politics had become interwoven not only with history and literature, but also with architecture, archeology, and even dead bodies.

Reza Shah placed equal importance on expanding the state judicial system. Davar and Firuz Farmanfarma, both European-educated lawyers, were assigned the task of setting up a new justice ministry – a task that had seen many false starts. They replaced the traditional courts, including the shari’a ones as well as the more informal tribal and guild courts, with a new state judicial structure. This new structure had a clear hierarchy of local, county, municipal, and provincial courts, and, at the very apex, a supreme court. They

Table 5 *Changes in place names*

Old name	New name
Barfurush	Babul
Astarabad	Gorgan
Mashedsar	Babulsar
Dazdab	Zahedan
Nasratabad	Zabol
Harunabad	Shahabad
Bandar Jaz	Bandar Shah
Shahra-e Turkman	Dasht-e Gorgan
Khaza'alabad	Khosrowabad
Mohammerah	Khorramshahr

Table 6 *Changes in state terminology*

Old term	New term	English equivalent
Vezerat-e Dakheleh	Vezerat-e Keshvar	Ministry of interior
Vezerat-e Adliyah	Vezerat-e Dadgostari	Ministry of justice
Vezerat-e Maliyah	Vezerat-e Darayi	Ministry of finance
Vezerat-e Mo'aref	Vezerat-e Farhang	Ministry of education
Madrasesh-ye Ebteda'i	Dabestan	Primary school
Madrasesh-ye Motavasateh	Daberestan	Secondary school

transferred the authority to register all legal documents – including property transactions as well as marriage and divorce licenses – from the clergy to state-appointed notary publics. They required jurists either to obtain degrees from the Law College or to retool themselves in the new legal system. They promulgated laws modeled on the Napoleonic, Swiss, and Italian codes. The new codes, however, gave some important concessions to the shari'a. For example, men retained the right to divorce at will, keep custody of children, practice polygamy, and take temporary wives. The new codes, however, did weaken the shari'a in three important areas: the legal distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims was abolished; the death penalty was restricted exclusively to murder, treason, and armed rebellion; and the modern form of punishment, long-term incarceration, was favored over corporal punishments – especially public ones. By accepting modern codes, the law implicitly discarded the traditional notion of retribution – the notion of a tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye, a life for a life.

To meet the inevitable need, Davar and Firuz Farmanfarma drew up plans to build five large prisons and eighty smaller ones.⁵⁴ Many were not completed until the 1960s. Qasr, the largest, was completed in the 1930s and came to symbolize the new regime. Located on the ruins of a royal retreat on the northern hills of Tehran, its full name was Qasr-e Qajar (Qajar Palace). Its thick, high walls not only absorbed the inmates but also concealed the wardens and the occasional executions from public view. One former inmate writes that passersby were easily intimidated – as they were supposed to be – by its formidable walls, barbed wire, armed guards, searchlights, and gun turrets.⁵⁵ Some dubbed it the Iranian Bastille. Others called it the *faramush-khaneh* (house of forgetfulness) since the outside world was supposed to forget its inmates and the inmates were supposed to forget the outside world. Ironically, Firuz Farmanfarma became one of its first inmates. He did not tire of boasting to fellow prisoners about the modernity and cleanliness of the place. But Ali Dashti, a Majles deputy who spent a few months there, complained that being confined there was like being “buried alive in a cemetery.” He chastised the West for inventing such “horrors” and complained that incarceration was “torture far worse than death.”⁵⁶ The reforms also restricted the traditional custom of taking and giving *bast* (sanctuary). Protestors and criminals could no longer seek shelter in telegraph offices, royal stables, and holy shrines. A British visitor noted in 1932: “The general opinion is that at last *bast* has shot its bolt.”⁵⁷ It reappeared intermittently in the 1941–53 period, but only inside the parliament building and the royal gardens.

Reza Shah built more than prisons in the cities. A great advocate of urban renewal, he pulled down old buildings and constructed government offices, expansive squares, and Haussman-like boulevards. He named avenues after himself and placed his statue in the main squares – the clergy had prevented his predecessors from doing so. The government buildings often incorporated motifs from ancient Iran, especially Persepolis. To erase the Qajar past, he destroyed some two thousand urban landscape photographs on the grounds that they demeaned Iran.⁵⁸ He built not only state offices and schools, but also playgrounds for soccer, boy scouts, and girl guides. By the end of the 1930s, electrical plants – both state and private – had come to the main towns, providing energy to government buildings, street lights, and factories, as well as to middle- and upper-class homes. Telephones linked some 10,000 subscribers throughout the country. And more than forty cinemas had opened up in the main cities. In short, the overall urban appearance had drastically changed. The old mahallehs based on sect – especially Haydari–Nemati and Sheikhi–Motasheri identities – had withered away. The new districts were based more on class, income, and occupation.

The regime failed in one major area: public health. With the exception of Abadan, an oil company town, other cities saw little of modern medicine and sanitation in terms of sewage, piped water, or medical facilities. Infant mortality remained high: the main killers continued to be diarrhea, measles, typhoid, malaria, and TB. Even the capital had fewer than forty registered doctors.⁵⁹ Other towns gained little more than health departments whose main function was to certify modern *doktors* and *farmasis* (pharmacists), and, in the process, disqualify traditional *hakims* practicing folk medicine based on the Galenic notions of the four “humors.” For the modern-educated, these notions reeked of medieval superstitions. Some hakims, however, retooled themselves as modern doctors. The son of one such hakim recounted his father’s experience:⁶⁰

Until 1309 (1930) he practiced mostly old medicine. When it was time to take the exam he went to Tabriz. There he studied with Dr. Tofiq who had studied medicine in Switzerland. Because there were no medical books at that time in Persian, he used Istanbul-Turkish translations of European medical texts. He studied both theory and practice. He learned from him how to use a stethoscope, to take blood pressure, and do examination of women. He then took the licensing exam and passed it. This was the most important thing in changing the way he practiced medicine.

Of course, it was Tehran that saw the most visible changes. Its population grew from 210,000 to 540,000. Reza Shah destroyed much of the old city, including its twelve gates, five wards, *takiyehs*, and winding alleyways, with the explicit goal of making Tehran an “up-to-date capital.” He gave the new avenues such names as Shah, Shah Reza, Pahlavi, Cyrus, Ferdowsi, Hafez, Naderi, Sepah (Army), and Varzesh (Athletics). He began building a grand Opera House in lieu of the old Government Theater. He eliminated gardens named after such aristocrats as Sepahsalar and Farmanfarma. He renamed Cannon Square as Army Square, and placed around it a new telegraph office as well as the National Bank and the National Museum. He licensed five cinemas in northern Tehran. They had such names as Iran, Darius, Sepah, and *Khorshed* (Sun). Their first films included *Tarzan*, *The Thief of Baghdad*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, and Chaplin’s *Gold Rush*.⁶¹ Around these cinemas developed a new middle-class life style with modern cafés, boutiques, theaters, restaurants, and bookstores.

Reza Shah also built in the capital a train terminal; modern factories nearby in the southern suburbs; and the country’s two state hospitals. One hospital was featured on a postage stamp – probably the only one to do so anywhere in the world. The city’s face changed so much that the new

generation could no longer locate places that had been familiar to their parents and grandparents – places such as Sangdalaj, Sepahsalar Park, the Arab Quarter, and *Paqapaq* – the old execution square.⁶² Early in the reign, the British minister had noted that municipal authorities were “ruthlessly pulling down homes,” paying little in compensation, and exploiting the opportunity to line their own pockets. “Their destructive propensities,” he emphasized, “pass all rational bounds.”⁶³ He sounded the same note at the end of the reign: “The capital continues to grow: new avenues, paved with asphalt, replace the old lanes; factories and residential quarters increase; and the city already attracts immigrants from all parts of the country. As in so many cases, it must be open to doubt whether the large sums devoted to reconstruction have always been judiciously spent. There is still, for instance, no clean water supply in the town.”⁶⁴

STATE AND SOCIETY

The new state attracted a mixed reception. For some Iranians and outside observers, it brought law and order, discipline, central authority, and modern amenities – schools, trains, buses, radios, cinemas, and telephones – in other words, “development,” “national integration,” and “modernization” which some termed “Westernization.” For others, it brought oppression, corruption, taxation, lack of authenticity, and the form of security typical of police states. Millspaugh, who was invited back to Iran in 1942, found that Reza Shah had left behind “a government of the corrupt, by the corrupt, and for the corrupt.” He elaborated: “The Shah’s taxation policy was highly regressive, raising the cost of living and bearing heavily on the poor . . . Altogether he thoroughly milked the country, grinding down the peasantry, tribesmen, and laborers and taking a heavy toll from the landlords. While his activities enriched a new class of ‘capitalists’ – merchants, monopolists, contractors, and politician-favorites – inflation, taxation, and other measures lowered the standard of living for the masses.”⁶⁵ Similarly, Ann Lambton, the well-known British Iranologist who served as her country’s press attaché in wartime Tehran, reported that “the vast majority of the people hate the Shah.”⁶⁶ This sentiment was echoed by the American ambassador who reported: “A brutal, avaricious, and inscrutable despot, his fall from power and death in exile . . . were regretted by no one.”⁶⁷

In actual fact, public attitudes were more ambivalent – even among the notables. On one hand, the notables lost their titles, tax exemptions, authority on the local level, and power at the center – especially in the cabinet and the Majles. Some lost even their lands and lives. On the other

hand, they benefited in countless ways. They no longer lived in fear of land reform, Bolshevism, and revolution from below. They could continue to use family connections – a practice that became known as *partybazi* (literally, playing party games) – to get their sons university places, European scholarships, and ministerial positions. They prospered selling their agricultural products, especially grain, to the expanding urban centers. They took advantage of a new land registration law to transfer tribal properties to their own names. They shifted the weight of the land tax on to their peasants. Even more significant, they obtained for the first time ever the legal power to appoint the village headman (*kadkhuda*). Thus, in one stroke the state came down in solid support of the landlords against the peasants. “Modernization” was not without its victims.

What is more, the notables who were willing to swallow aristocratic pride were accepted into the corridors of privilege – even into the court. Reza Shah took as his third wife a member of the Dowlatshahi family – a Qajar clan related by marriage to such old households as the Ashtiyanis, Mostowfis, and Zanganehs. He married off one daughter, Princess Ashraf, to the Qavam al-Mulk family that had governed Shiraz and the Khamseh for generations. He married off another daughter, Princess Shams, to the son of Mahmud Jam (Muder al-Mulk), a patrician collaborating fully with the new order. He kept on as his special confidant – both as chief of staff and as special military inspector – General Amanollah Jahanbani, a fellow officer from the Cossacks and a direct descendant of Fath Ali Shah. He also enhanced his family status by marrying the crown prince to Princess Fawzieh, the daughter of Egypt’s King Farouk. In more ways than one, Reza Shah, who some claimed had started life as a stable boy, had found his way into the top ranks of the old elite.

The new regime aroused opposition not so much among the landed upper class as among the tribes, the clergy, and the young generation of the new intelligentsia. The tribes bore the brunt of the new order. Equipped with troops, tanks, planes, strategic roads, and, of course, the Maxim gun, Reza Shah waged a systematic campaign to crush the tribes. For the very first time in Iranian history, the balance of military technology shifted drastically away from the tribes to the central government. Reza Shah proceeded not only to strip the tribes of their traditional chiefs, clothing, and sometimes lands, but also to disarm, pacify, conscript, and, in some cases, “civilize” them in “model villages.” Forced sedentarization produced much hardship since many “model villages” were not suitable for year-round agriculture. In the course of the reign, the troublesome tribal chiefs were all brought to heel. Simku, the Kurdish leader, was murdered after

being enticed to return to the country. Sowlat al-Dowleh, the Qashqa'i Ilkhani, and Sheikh Khaz'al, the Arab leader, were both carted off to house detention in Tehran where years later they died under suspicious circumstances. Imam Quli Khan Mamassani, a Lur chief, Dost Muhammad, a Baluch leader, Sartip Khan, a Boir Ahmadi, and Hussein Khan, another Qashqa'i chief, were all executed. Others, such as the Vali of Pasht-e Kuh, who, in the words of the British minister, had "enjoyed a semi-autonomous position (in Lurestan)," decided that "discretion was the better part of valour."⁶⁸ By 1927, the British minister could write that the army had finally "broken the power of the great tribal families" that had ruled for more than one hundred and fifty years.⁶⁹

Reza Shah delayed the fall of the Bakhtiyaris mainly because he needed them to counter the Qashqa'is, Arabs, Baluchis, and Boir Ahmadis. In 1925–27, he gave the ministry of war and the governorship of Arabestan to Ja'far Quli Khan Sardar As'ad, the son of the famous constitutional leader. But in 1927–29, when he no longer needed their contingents, he moved to break their power. He enflamed feuds between the Ilkhanis and the Hajji Ilkhanis, and between the Haft Lang and the Chahar Lang. He shifted the tax burden on to the Haft Lang, and took away their 1909 privilege of retaining armed men. Consequently, when the Haft Lang rebelled in 1929, the Chahar Lang sided with the central government. Reza Shah seized the opportunity to disarm the Haft Lang and force them to sell land, transfer oil shares to the central government, and hand over to the army the strategic task of protecting the petroleum installations. He also imprisoned seventeen khans including Sardar As'ad. Having dealt with the Haft Lang, he turned against the Chahar Lang. He disarmed them and placed them under military administration; and carved up their region among the neighboring provinces of Isfahan and Khuzestan. Finally, in 1934, in the midst of wild rumors that Lawrence of Arabia had entered Iran to instigate tribal revolts, he eliminated seven leading Bakhtiyari khans: two, including Sardar As'ad, died suddenly in prison; and five others, serving prison sentences, were summarily executed. Other khans found it expedient to "sell" their oil shares to the government and their prized villages in Chahar Mahal to landlords and merchants in Isfahan.

Conflict with the clerical opposition, which had simmered ever since Reza Shah violated the sanctuary of Qom in 1928, did not come to a head until 1935 – and even then it was confined to Mashed. Reza Shah provoked the crisis with a series of controversial acts which some suspected were designed to show the world who was boss. He decreed a new dress code, replacing the Pahlavi cap with the "international" fedora which, because of

its brim, prevented the devout from touching their foreheads on the ground – as strict rules stipulated. The same decree encouraged – but did not initially obligate – women to discard the veil. Reza Shah obliged senior officials to bring their wives to public functions without veils, and expressed the hope that all women would eventually discard them. He also announced that female teachers could no longer come to school with head coverings. One of his daughters reviewed a girls' athletic event with an uncovered head. He himself opened the new Majles without either an officiating cleric or any hat whatsoever – an affront to both religion and convention. He allowed women to study in the colleges of law and medicine. He permitted the latter to dissect human bodies, a practice frowned upon in religious circles. He moved his official birthday to Nowruz. He extended the ban on titles to include sayyed, hajji, Mashedi, and Karbalai, titles used by those who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, Mashed, or Karbala. He restricted public mourning observances to one day, and obliged mosques to use chairs for such occasions – this, of course, ran counter to the tradition of sitting on mosque floors. He banned street commemorations for Muharram, the Day of Sacrifice, and the Feast of Zahra – the famous festive bonfire day. He opened up the Mashed shrine as well as the main Isfahan mosque to foreign tourists. He even toyed with the idea of raising the marriage age – eighteen for men and fifteen for women.

The predictable backlash came in 1935. On July 10 – the anniversary of the Russian bombardment of the Mashed shrine in 1911 – a local preacher took the occasion to denounce not only these “heretical innovations” but also rampant government corruption and the heavy consumer taxes. This inspired many from the bazaar and the nearby villages to take sanctuary inside the shrine. They chanted: “The Shah is a new Yezid”; and “Imam Hussein protect us from the evil Shah.” Local authorities watched helplessly for four full days since the city police and the provincial army battalion refused to violate the shrine. The British consul reported that frightened officials ran back and forth with their new hats hidden under their coats, ready to produce them only if they encountered other officials.⁷⁰ The standoff ended only when reinforcements from Azerbaijan arrived on the scene and broke into the shrine. Two hundred civilians suffered serious injuries; and more than one hundred, including many women and children, lost their lives. In the following months, the shrine custodian and three soldiers who had refused to shoot were executed. A British diplomat warned: “The Shah, in destroying the powers of the Mullahs, has forgotten Napoleon's adage that the chief purpose of religion is to prevent the poor from murdering the rich. There is nothing to take the place of religious

influence, save an artificial nationalism which might well die with the shah, leaving anarchy behind.⁷¹

The Mashed outburst, however, did not have much impact on the rest of the country. The mojtaheds, especially the leading ones in Qom and Isfahan, kept their silence. The shah, for his part, stepped up his controversial measures. He ended the tradition both of announcing the arrival of Ramadan with a volley of guns, and of shorter work hours during the fast. He transferred the administration of clerical foundations from the office of religious endowments to the ministry of education. What is more, he now banned outright the full-length chadour from all public places: from streets, government offices, cinemas, public baths, city buses, and even street carriages.⁷² He also ordered ordinary citizens to bring their wives to public functions without head coverings. Even road-sweepers, shopkeepers, and carriage drivers were compelled to do so. British consuls reported that those who failed to do so were summoned to police stations. The wife of one governor committed suicide. Many women took to wearing long scarves and high collars.⁷³ In describing this crisis, the British consul tried to place it within the larger picture.⁷⁴

Next to their daily bread, what affects the people most widely is what touches the code of social habit that, in Islam, is endorsed by religion. Among Moslems the Iranians are not a fanatical people. The unveiling of women inaugurated in the preceding year attacks the people's social conservatism as much as their religious prejudice. Above all, like conscription, it symbolizes the steady penetration into their daily lives of an influence that brings with it more outside interference, more taxation. But one can easily exaggerate the popular effect of unveiling; it is a revolution for the well-to-do of the towns, but lower down the scale, where women perform outdoor manual labour, its effects both on habit and on the family budget diminish until among the tribal folk of all degrees they are comparatively slight. Hence resistance among the greater part of the people has been passive, and, where existing, has manifested itself in reluctance of the older generation to go abroad in the streets. It is one thing to forbid women to veil; it is another thing to make them mingle freely with men.

The opposition of the intelligentsia to the new regime was confined mostly to the young generation that had not lived through the age of troubles. The older generation tended to be much more ambivalent. Kasravi, the well-known historian, is a good case in point. As a teenager in Tabriz during the civil war, he had sympathized with the reformers, and had written his major work to praise the whole constitutional movement. As a young man, he had watched in trepidation as the country was torn asunder by foreign invasions and internal conflicts. The main underlying theme of

his magnum opus was the danger of national fragmentation. As a madrased-trained scholar interested in the modern sciences, he had joined the judiciary, discarded his turban, attained a judgeship, and approved of legal reforms, but then quietly resigned when he realized that the shah was misusing the courts to line his own pockets. After Reza Shah's fall, however, he argued: "Our younger intellectuals cannot possibly understand, and thus cannot possibly judge Reza Shah. They cannot because they were too young to remember the chaotic and desperate conditions out of which he arose."⁷⁵ In a series of articles in his paper *Parcham* (Flag), he assessed the pros and cons of Reza Shah.⁷⁶ He gave him high marks for creating a centralized state; pacifying the "unruly tribes"; disciplining the "superstitious" clergy; spreading the Persian language and replacing Arabic words with Persian ones; opening new schools; improving the status of women; eliminating titles and undermining "feudal" structures; introducing military conscription; building modern towns and factories; and, most important of all, striving to unify the country with one language, one culture, and one national identity. But at the same time, he gave him low marks for trampling the constitution; making a mockery of the fundamental laws; favoring the military over the civilian administration; murdering progressive leaders; and, most serious of all, accumulating money and thereby creating a culture of corruption.

Much of the opposition to the regime came from the new intelligentsia – especially from young professionals who had been influenced by the left while studying in France and Germany during the turbulent early 1930s. They found little to admire in the shah. They deemed him to be not a state-builder but an "oriental despot"; not a selfless patriot but a selfish founder of his own dynasty; not a reformer but a plutocrat strengthening the landed upper class; not a real "nationalist" but a jack-booted Cossack trained by the Tsarists and brought to power by British imperialists. Some found his use – or rather, misuse – of history to be racist, chauvinistic, and designed to "keep them quiet."⁷⁷ This distrust intensified in 1933–34 when the shah signed a new agreement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. In return for a measly 4 percent increase in royalties, the shah extended the concession all the way to 1993. This confirmed the suspicion that the shah, despite all his patriotic talk, was in fact beholden to London. The British minister himself warned that "all his sins are attributed to us."⁷⁸ "Few," he added, "expect the present system of government to outlive its author."⁷⁹ Such opposition poured out into the open as soon as Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in 1941.