

Iranian-Americans Nurture New Generations After Revolution

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By Amy Taxin
Associated Press

IRVINE, Calif. — Minoo Sharifan came to the United States from Iran in the 1970s for graduate school, and like many others, wound up settling in America, starting a career and raising her family while a revolution upended her homeland and fractured relations with the U.S.



AP PHOTO/CHRIS CARLSON

In this Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2019, photo, Melorin Issarezal 8, plays with a scarf during Persian story time at Irvine public library in Irvine, Calif. It's been four decades since the Iranian revolution overthrew the ruling shah, prompting tens of thousands of Iranian exiles and refugees to make their lives in the United States. Years later, they have set down roots here and are finding ways to pass their love of Iranian culture to their American children and grandchildren.

The two countries remain bitter adversaries. In his State of the Union address last week, President Donald Trump said Iran does “bad, bad things” and “threatens genocide against the Jewish people”; Iran’s foreign minister countered that the U.S. has backed “dictators, butchers and extremists.”

It’s against that tense backdrop that Sharifan

ent volunteer read the Farsi-language version of the storybook about “Elmer” the patchwork elephant. One girl performed a Persian dance for the group, and the

Tens of thousands of Iranians fled to the United States.

Today, there are nearly a half-million people in the U.S. with Iranian ancestry. More than 40 percent live in California, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. The biggest community is in Los Angeles, which has led some to adopt the nickname “Tehrangeles.” Beyond Southern California, other significant populations live in the New York and Washington metropolitan areas, and in Florida and Texas.

Many who came to the United States after the revolution thought they



AP PHOTO/CHRIS CARLSON

In this Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2019 photo, children dance during Persian story time at Irvine public library in Irvine, Calif. It's been four decades since the Iranian revolution overthrew the ruling shah, prompting tens of thousands of Iranian exiles and refugees to make their lives in the United States. Years later, they have set down roots here and are finding ways to pass their love of Iranian culture to their American children and grandchildren.

would someday return to Iran but decided to stay amid icy relations between the countries. Many were upper-class and highly educated in Iran and pursued careers as doctors, entrepreneurs and professionals in America.

In recent years, Iranian-Americans also have taken on a more visible role in politics, winning seats for state office in California, Florida and elsewhere. In Beverly Hills, which has a sizable Iranian-American community, Iran-born engineer and entrepreneur

Jimmy Delshad served as mayor.

That doesn't mean the road has been easy. Many Iranian immigrants recall being taunted as children after Americans at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran were taken hostage and held for 444 days. Today, many are separated from their relatives overseas by the Trump administration's travel ban, which has made some Americans of Iranian heritage feel their standing is in question despite their citizenship status and longstanding ties to the U.S.

“In economic terms, it has been a pretty successful community, however, we have been dogged by 40 years of bad relations between the United States and Iran,” said Persis Karim, chair of San Francisco State University’s Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies. “People feel like their place in the U.S. has kind of continuously been under question, or not completely at ease, because of this bigger relationship between these two countries.”

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and others from her generation seek to build a connection to their Iranian heritage and culture among their American children and grandchildren. Now 67, Sharifan oversees the Persian collection and programming for a library in Orange County, south of Los Angeles, that hosts a weekly story time for Iranian-American children that she began six years ago.

At a recent gathering, a dozen young children sat cross-legged on the floor, listening to a par-

children twirled scarves and sang in Farsi.

“For younger kids to see kids their age coming to the library and speak Farsi, it’s a good feeling for them and it makes me happy,” Sharifan said. “For us coming from another country, (a) sense of belonging to the group is very important.”

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran overthrew the shah, a close U.S. ally, and installed Shiite clerics in power and a government headed by the anti-American Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

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