

Intellectual diplomacy of Nowruz Building Bridges for Peace and Prosperity



By Majid Afshani
Director of International
Department at the Governance
and Policy Think Tank

EXCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

More than 300 million people around the world celebrate the first day of spring as Nowruz every year and this celebration has been alive for over 3000 years. Traditions, ceremonies, and cultural events on this occasion are held from the Balkans to India, from Kazakhstan to southern Iran. But what does this ancient ritual have to do with diplomacy?

Nowruz has been inscribed in 2009 on the list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO, and the United Nations has recognized March 21 as international day of Nowruz Day under a resolution adapted by general assembly on 2010.

The connection of this day with nature reminds us that we are all responsible for the Earth. Environmental crises are one of the major challenges of the 21st century, and their geopolitical consequences cannot be ignored. These cross-border crises, including climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events, require the participation of all and diplomatic solutions.

Diplomacy has been described as the art of persuading others and gaining their support. Diplomacy follows resolving conflicts between countries through means other than war. From this perspective, focusing on similarities, values, and common customs that make cooperation easier in the subconscious of nations takes precedence. The great lesson that Nowruz teaches us is the revival of relations after a cold and wintry period—a process that diplomacy always pursues. Just as families exchange old clothes for new ones during Nowruz and enjoy colorful and delicious sweets and dishes together, diplomats must also renew their approach and move towards collaboration to bring about a brighter future.

Another aspect of Nowruz is its emergence from the heart of a great civilization. A civilization that utilized its power for establishing security, peace, and prosperity during its glory days. The people of this great civilization have been hospitable and tolerant, preserving their cultural diversity. Three thousand years of history show that this civilization has been subjected to murder, plunder, and ignorance but has not sought revenge. Diplomacy in this ancient civilization was not hindered by religious or ethnic differences, as evidenced by the welcoming and honoring of foreigners at Persepolis. This illustrious past demonstrates that preserving and reviving the noble human values of this civilization is commendable, achievable, and valuable.

Modern civilization building is a global process achieved through the participation of all people in this vast geographic region and led by the intellectual elite. Therefore, the development of intellectual diplomacy alongside official diplomacy of nations can create and expand cultural power. A civilization's cultural power can establish stability and peace or else conflicts between countries will never cease.

Intellectual Diplomacy focuses on the role of non-governmental actors such as think tanks, research centers, universities, foundations, charities, non-governmental organizations, technology companies, and knowledge-based organizations in shaping and implementing foreign policy. Academic collaborations aimed at increasing commonalities and reducing differences fall under intellectual diplomacy when conducted with purposeful programs. The serious gap in diplomacy, among the geographical area of Nowruz, is the neglect of serious, constructive, and unostentatious dialogues among non-official intellectuals. Monopolizing diplomacy in official institutions does not fully utilize the vast cultural and historical capacities and distances the peoples of an ancient civilization from each other.

The increasing engagement of universities, think-tanks, professors, and students holds the key to resolving conflicts and fostering greater peace and security. This mission rests on the shoulders of the intellectuals of this region who know history and are far-sighted and enlightened. They are the heirs of a unique civilization, symbolized by the venerable tradition of Nowruz. It is hoped that the experts of the Nowruz region will embrace this human duty and, with high resolve, break down the barriers erected by differences, so that once again, the world will pay homage to the civilization that created Nowruz and stand united in respect.

Nowruz an opportunity for increased int'l interactions



By Masoud Bonabian
Vice-Chairman of the
Tabriz CCIM

EXCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

Nowruz presents a suitable opportunity for strengthening a country's social capital and increasing international interactions with the aim of enhancing its economic potential. It has been proven that the economic prosperity of a country is only feasible through the optimal combination of both material and human capital. Developed countries, by making new investments in land, machinery, technology, and other tangible assets as well as human resources, have managed to create an environment for sustainable economic growth within their nations.

Developing countries, on the other hand, do not experience as much growth due to the lack of material capital. While some developing countries, especially those with abundant natural resources like oil-rich nations, possess significant material resources, their economic development and growth have not been substantial. One of the most overlooked values in developing countries is social capital. Neglecting social capital can impose undeniable costs on society, the economy, and the culture of a nation. Therefore, attention must be paid to social capital for the growth and enhancement of economic capacities within a country.

In Iran, there are many religious festivals and ceremonies that may strengthen relationships among community members, ethnic groups, and families, and highlight activities that revolve around common interests. One of the most important annual celebrations for Iranians is Nowruz. Nowruz is the oldest and most significant cultural symbol of Iran, an ancient cere-



A family gathers around a table adorned with the Haft Sin arrangement as part of their Nowruz celebration in northwestern Iran.
ISNA

mony that has encompassed the highest human and cultural values throughout the history of this land. It is deeply rooted in the subconscious cultural heritage of Iranians, to the extent that it cannot be eliminated from any part of Iran's history.

As the oldest and most superior cultural symbol of Iran, Nowruz is a popular and pleasant ritual for all Iranian minorities. Therefore, in terms of cultural order and social cohesion, it has been beneficial for bringing Iranian ethnic groups closer together and enhancing national solidarity. Nowruz, with traditions such as visiting each other and reinforcing family ties, as well as mutual assistance in case of problems, plays an effective role in the unity of society.

Social capital, through engendering trust among people, promoting norms and common values, and creating various economic relationship networks, leads to a noticeable reduction in transaction costs. Most economists believe that since social capital is a source of collective action, its most important role in devel-

opment is reducing transaction costs. There is a reverse relationship between social capital and transaction costs, meaning that as social capital decreases, production becomes more expensive overall. Social capital acts as the ethics and rules of the game. If there are no rules in the economic game or if ethical principles do not govern individuals' behavior, then either the whole game stops or the game becomes very expensive. Conversely, the existence of ethical rules and adherence to the rules of social capital make the game less expensive, smoother, and more attractive. Therefore, Nowruz should be viewed as a renewed covenant among the people. By utilizing such a ritual, unity and social capital should be strengthened within the society, and with effort, dedication, and investment, the economic foundations of the country should be reinforced.

The impact of Nowruz on economic development can be highlighted from another perspective, which is an international viewpoint. It has been proven that not

all countries have access to all resources for economic growth. So, in order to meet their economic needs, they are obliged to have effective relations with other countries to provide a platform for exporting their surplus and importing to meet their deficits. This, in turn, provides the necessary ground for economic growth and development.

Nowruz is a ceremony celebrated in countries such as Iran, Turkey, Tajikistan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Syria, Iraq, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Albania, China, Turkmenistan, India, and Pakistan. Having shared rituals and customs with other countries lays the groundwork for strengthening friendly, economically beneficial relations with these countries and enhances the potential for economic prosperity. In other words, Nowruz is an opportunity for strengthening social capital both domestically and internationally, creating cohesion and unity among the people of our country through the cooperation and selflessness needed for economic growth and development.

Nowruz diplomacy, neighborly relations



By Afifeh Abedi
Regional affairs
expert

EXCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

Nowruz, one of the old, beautiful, undying, and prominent celebrations and rituals left of the ancient Iranian civilization, is considered a cultural bond that ties together Iran and the countries that once were part of that great civilization. This ritual is celebrated not only in Iran but also in neighboring countries, such as Iraq and Turkey, and even distant countries that traditionally celebrated it, from Central Asia and the Caucasus to the Middle East. Therefore, this tradition can be utilized as an important tool in neighborly relations, as Nowruz has the power to foster convergence among nations and consequently enhance governmental interactions.

Within the realm of Iran lies a territory where the four seasons naturally unfold. Historically and culturally, the spring season, which follows the long and bleak winter and is marked by fatigue and the end of food shortages, is considered a season of transformation that heralds new life. Thus, spring represents a unifying force for people living within the geography of Nowruz. In Nowruz, there are no traces of conflict, idolatry, or hopeless matters; everything there embodies divinity and humanity.

Exercising diplomacy in neighborly relations requires various elements, including hard and soft instruments — each contributing to the realization of a particular aspect of politics. Nowruz stands out as one of these diplomacy instruments. One prerequisite for neighborly relations is finding common ground with your neighbors, which strengthens bonds. In the cultural geography of Iran, Nowruz is unquestionably one

of the most significant commonalities.

Nowruz can enhance tourism ties between Iran and countries located within the Nowruz geography. If harnessed, motivations for developing and completing joint transportation infrastructure would soon follow suit and increase. The tradition of "wearing new garments" in the new year, for example, can contribute to increased interaction in related industries, including textiles, clothing, and Nowruz-related foodstuffs.

The production of television programs about Nowruz and entertaining activities during the Nowruz period is also one of the industries related to Nowruz. Not only does Nowruz provide an avenue for the exchange of such programs for display on the television channels of these countries, but it also serves as a tool for public diplomacy and cultural solidarity.

The splendid and captivating celebration of Nowruz itself

and its promotion can even aid in attracting tourists from neighboring countries that fall beyond the Nowruz geography, including those in the Persian Gulf region.

These benefits of utilizing Nowruz in public and economic diplomacy have led to competition among countries that share Nowruz. However, in the cultural geography of Iran, Nowruz is a shared ritual for creating unbreakable bonds. Therefore, when discussing efforts to find connecting links in neighborly relations, attention should be paid to shared aspects such as Nowruz.

