

Iran's reading habits surpass global average: *Official*



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INTERVIEW

Despite the publication of various statistics in recent years suggesting that Iran's reading culture and book-reading habits fall short of global standards, Mehdi Ramezani, the secretary-general of the Iran Public Libraries Foundation (IPF), remains optimistic, believing that the Iranian people's inclination to read books surpasses global norms.

The 32nd National Book Week of the Islamic Republic of Iran, themed "Reading for Empathy", is set to take place from November 13 to 20. Every year, during this week, the media and public attention focus on the state of reading and book culture among Iranians.

Regarding per capita reading in Iran, conflicting statistics have been presented, with estimates ranging from 2 to 70 minutes per day. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, several comprehensive studies have cited varying numbers, including 15 minutes, 18 minutes, 21 minutes, and 30 minutes. However, the most recent official statistics on reading in Iran, recorded by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) in 2010, indicate that individuals aged 15 and above spend

an average of 4 hours per month reading non-academic books (excluding the Qur'an and prayer books), while the total per capita reading time for non-academic books is 6 hours and 32 minutes per month.

According to the latest available global statistics on reading per capita, India tops the list with an average reading time of 10 hours and 42 minutes per week, followed by China, Egypt, Russia, and France.

The Tehran Statistical Center reports that the daily per capita reading time in the capital is 16 minutes and 36 seconds, and 1 hour and 54 minutes per week. Other studies cite 18 minutes per week, while some mention 12 minutes per day, which includes "books, newspapers, prayers, and other materials." Official statements from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Iran Public Libraries Foundation have also referenced a per capita reading time of around 30 minutes.

Despite the less-than-ideal statistics, Mehdi Ramezani, Secretary-General of the Iran Public Libraries Foundation, remains upbeat about the state of book reading in Iran, believing that the Iranian people are genuinely interested in books and reading. Iran Daily reporter sat down with Ramezani for an exclusive interview on the topic of books and reading in Iran. The full text of the interview follows:



IRAN DAILY: We've often come across the notion that Iranians aren't big on reading, but what's your take on this issue?

RAMEZANI: Yes, it's become a common assumption that Iranians aren't keen on books, but our scientific studies tell a different story. In a survey recently conducted by the Iran Public Libraries Foundation in collaboration with the Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA) affiliated with the University of Tehran, book reading has

really taken off in Iran, with many people showing a genuine interest in getting into it. Based on this, a proposition was examined regarding visiting books, and if a book is available to someone, what percentage of people will go and read it. This survey has been conducted internationally, and the average number is around 40%, but our survey in Iran shows that this number is above 60%. This shows that Iranians are eager to read, but the problem is that books are out of reach for many. We need to break down barriers and make books more accessible to all. Plus, cultivating a reading culture in the country demands a serious commitment to nurturing a love of reading, which we must drive forward.

What measures have been implemented to build a reading culture in Iran?

We're convinced that schools

are the ideal platform to instill a love of reading, and we've devised a plan to address this issue. We've been pushing forward with this idea, and a notable achievement is the creation of the National Reading and Promoting Useful Reading Document, which has been approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. We're optimistic that this document will be put into action soon, during National Book Week, and will be a major step forward in promoting books and reading across the country. Although the document covers several facets of reading promotion, we're of the opinion that integrating reading into school curricula is the most crucial aspect, and we must see this initiative through to its conclusion in schools.

It seems that you're pushing back against the claim made by some Iranian institutions

that the per capita reading ratio in Iran is relatively low. Can you elaborate on that?

Many countries have not released per capita reading ratios for their populations, and even if they were to do so, it would be necessary for the data to be compiled by authoritative institutions, taking into account the specific conditions of each country. For instance, reading philosophical texts is a far cry from reading novels or simpler books, and all these variables need to be factored into assessing the reading habits of a society. It's only natural that reading a philosophical text requires more time and a higher level of academic background. In my view, per capita reading ratios are not a reliable indicator of a population's reading habits and book-reading frequency. I think it's a mistake to focus on this metric, and instead, we should be working to cultivate a culture of

book-reading and inculcate a love of reading in our society. This is our responsibility, and we will continue to pursue it. Of course, we still have a long way to go to reach the ideal level of book reading envisioned by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, but I believe the narrative that Iranians are not book-lovers is not entirely accurate.

Given the steady rise in paper prices, book prices have also been creeping up. How significant a factor do you believe this is in deterring people from reading books?

While the issue of high book prices is certainly a challenge, it can be mitigated by making books widely available through public libraries. We're currently pushing forward with the idea that every city in the country should have a library. At present, over 200 cities out of more than 1,000 are with-

out a library, which is a pressing concern that needs to be addressed. We've also been championing this cause in government, and we've made it a top priority to develop libraries across the country. However, it's not necessary to build new libraries from scratch; we can leverage existing resources to tackle this issue and fill the gap. Another key strategy for promoting a reading culture in the country, particularly in disadvantaged areas, villages, and nomadic regions, is the establishment of mobile libraries. We've developed a model for this, and it can be implemented through partnerships with car manufacturers, who can contribute to this initiative as part of their social responsibility. Abbas Salehi, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, has also been in touch with the Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade on this matter, and it's being actively pursued.

Iran's 'The Sound of Cloud' wins top award at Italy's Marano festival

Iranian short animation "The Sound of Cloud", directed by Mohammad Lotfali and written and produced by Hadi Firouzmandi, won the top animation award at the 27th Marano Children's Film Festival (MARANO RAGAZZI SPOT FESTIVAL) held in Marano di Napoli, Italy from October 21-26.

This achievement marks another international success for the film, which has also been selected to compete in the 3rd Arlington International Film Festival (AIFF) in the United States. The AIFF will take place in Massachusetts from November 7-10, 2024. The Arlington International Film Festival



is a reputable organization that aims to promote cross-cultural understanding through the screening of independent films and exploration of the lives of people around the world.

Iranian Oscar hopeful 'In the Arms of the Tree' to compete in US

Iranian film 'In the Arms of the Tree', directed by Babak Khajeh Pasha, was selected to compete in the Main Competition section of the 10th Asian World Film Festival (AWFF) in the United States.

This year's festival will take place from November 13 to 21 in Los Angeles, California.

According to ISNA, the film will be screened in the main competition section, vying for top awards including the Snow Leopard Award for Best Film.

The movie features a cast including Maral Baniadam, Javad Ghamati, Rouhollah Zamani, Ahura Lotfi, and Ryan Lotfi.

'In the Arms of the Tree' has also been chosen as Iran's official representative in the Best International Feature Film category at the 97th Academy Awards. The AWFF aims to introduce the best of Asian cinema to Los Angeles, promoting cross-cultural understanding and collaboration between Asian film industries and Hollywood. The festival, which is supported by diverse Asian



communities in Los Angeles and independent film enthusiasts, showcases films from over 50 Asian countries, including Turkey, Japan, Russia, and India.