



# Nowruz; A cultural force for unity

**EXCLUSIVE** Nowruz, the ancient celebration of renewal and hope, transcends borders, uniting over 300 million people across diverse cultures, languages, and religions. Rooted in the shared heritage of the Aryan civilization, this festival has endured millennia, surviving political upheavals, wars, and cultural shifts. Today, Nowruz serves as a powerful symbol of peace, humanism, and respect for nature, fostering kinship and solidarity among communities from the Balkans to South Asia. Beyond its cultural significance, Nowruz has emerged as a vital tool for diplomacy, promoting mutual understanding and regional cooperation in a fragmented world. By celebrating shared values and traditions, Nowruz bridges gaps, encouraging dialogue and collaboration among nations. Nowruz reminds us of the enduring power of culture to inspire unity and build a more harmonious world. Below, we present a collection of exclusive op-eds by scholars and experts exploring the cultural, historical, and diplomatic significance of Nowruz, offering unique insights into this timeless celebration.



Haft sin, an arrangement of seven symbolic Nowruz items, whose names start with the letter "s" in Persian, is displayed on a table in front of the flags of countries that celebrate Nowruz.

IRNA

## Nation of Nowruz



By Mahmoud Shouri  
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### OPINION

From the perspective of many cultural and historical sociologists, nations are primarily formed through cultural, linguistic, religious, and historical ties that set them apart from other groups. In this sense, the real boundaries of nations lie more in the collective consciousness and psyche of their people than in what can be seen on maps. If we accept that a nation's identity is shaped by shared cultural, linguistic, religious, and historical characteristics, then we also have to accept that these traits can create cultural boundaries that may extend beyond geographical and political borders. In other words, just as a nation can be recognized and distinguished based on its cultural features and unifying tools such as language, history, and shared customs, these shared customs and cultural traits can also represent a nation. Although, throughout history, cultures have undergone significant changes due to political and non-political events such as migrations, natural phenomena, wars, and expansions, and although nations have, in the same vein, found new reasons and criteria for political formations, the more resilient elements of culture have often found ways to endure amidst these transformations. Regardless of emerging boundaries, they have consistently represented signs of a shared historical identity. And that's why if we temporarily set aside [separative] political considerations and obligations and fully embrace [uni-

fying] cultural sources and elements, we can speak of a "Great Nation of Nowruz," whose boundaries span from the western regions of China to Eastern Europe and from India to Turkey. According to historical sources, Nowruz, as the oldest celebration of the New Year in the world, is linked to the pre-literate era of Aryan civilization. Contemporary researchers believe that the important centers of Aryan civilization were located in what is now southern Russia and Ukraine. However, between the fourth and second centuries B.C., the Aryans migrated to more southern regions. Before this period, various customs and traditions emerged and spread among the Aryan tribes. The rituals and traditions of Nowruz also took shape during this ancient Aryan era and became widespread in other major Aryan regions. Although the narratives about Nowruz and its origins are intertwined with numerous religious and national myths and rituals, its endurance and geographical scope indicate the existence of deep-rooted elements and connections. Even significant events such as the spread of Islam, the Mongol invasion, and the formation of the Soviet Union within this geographical expanse have not led to the forgetting or erasure of this tradition. Indeed, the popular nature of Nowruz — which has not been officially overseen by authorities or clergy unlike many other festivals — and its connection to the natural life of humans and respect for nature have been the key to its endurance and continuity throughout history. Currently, a large part of the geographical domain of Nowruz lies in

a region where, for nearly seven decades under the official policies of the Soviet Union, there was no desire to preserve or practice the rituals of this ancient celebration. Although no official document banning the celebration of Nowruz in the Soviet Union has been found, archival records suggest that the Muslim people of the Soviet Union held their celebrations and ceremonies at home or occasionally in public spaces but under strict surveillance by Soviet security agents. These gatherings were informal, simple, and devoid of any enthusiasm. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nowruz is once again celebrated simultaneously with Iran and some other countries across all Central Asian and Caucasus nations, as well as parts of Russia and even Ukraine. The Crimean and Volga Tatars in Ukraine, with more or less similar ceremonies, share the same reasons for spring cleaning, wearing new clothes, visiting friends and relatives, and rejoicing as the Tajiks in Tajikistan, Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turkmen in Central Asia, Kurds in Turkey, and even Albanians in Albania, as well as many others in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and elsewhere. Due to the change of the year and the arrival of spring, the Nation of Nowruz, even if only for a few days, sets aside boundaries and potential new political differences to celebrate with a shared purpose. For this reason, it can be confidently reiterated that the Nation of Nowruz is a nation of peace, humanism, and respect for nature, and this noble human tradition must be preserved with special care and attention.

## Nowruz in today's world



By Mandana Tishehyar  
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### OPINION

How can Nowruz be relevant in the world today? The twelve countries that share the Nowruz tradition have inscribed this ancient festival on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Furthermore, numerous nations — from the Balkans and the Caucasus to West Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia — celebrate Nowruz each year at the arrival of spring. But how can Nowruz, a festival uniting diverse peoples and founded on the principles of affection and friendship, contribute to the world today? Nowadays, modern regions have reshaped the world in new ways, and we are living in a "regionalized world". This emerging model of regionalism is not based on traditional structures or established institutions but is instead shaped by the accumulation of knowledge, education, and the construction of new shared identities. New regionalism is not driven by rigid structures but by ideas. Today, even the actions of political and economic actors derive meaning from a broader socio-cultural context. Historical structures and global orders are giving way to dynamic social ecosystems, and the moral man is gradually replacing the economic man. In this landscape, political matters serve to uphold fundamental values such as cultural and social development, security, peace, and environmental sustainability. Moreover, governments are no longer the sole architects of regions; civil society, along with scientific, cultural, and social institutions, play an increasingly crucial role in shaping these spaces. Formerly, official regions were state-centered, but today, communities and associations forge real regions. Imagine the possibilities if official and organic regions were to converge; how much deeper and more meaningful regionality could become. Regionalization is an effort by imagined communities to create a new world based on the cultural affinities and connections among people. And Nowruz em-

bodies all the qualities needed to inspire different nations to come together and construct a new region.

● **Nowruz holds historical significance:** It serves as a reminder of the historical bonds among the inhabitants of many lands.

● **Nowruz has social significance:** The festival reinforces values such as kinship, communal solidarity, and the strengthening of friendship and goodwill.

● **Nowruz has economic significance:** It encourages families to refresh their belongings while revitalizing markets across cities and countries.

● **Nowruz has cultural significance:** Over centuries, this celebration has nurtured a rich literary heritage in multiple languages and has inspired artistic expressions in photography, film, theatre, music, and painting.

● **Nowruz has security significance:** How can we imagine the peoples of the Nowruz region knowing one another, sitting together at the Nowruz table, and then turning to conflict and hostility?!

● **Nowruz has political significance:** This ancient tradition upholds the ideals of equality among all social groups and classes, while traditions like the Mir-e-Nowruz ceremony reflect early democratic principles.

● **Nowruz has religious significance:** It is the only festival within our civilizational sphere that brings together followers of different religions and sects in a shared celebration of nature's renewal.

● **Nowruz has environmental significance:** From the sprouting of sabzeh in homes to the flowers adorning young girls' hair from Kurdistan to Kashmir, Nowruz instills an appreciation of nature in children.

Accordingly, this ancient heritage of our ancestors presents a valuable opportunity to shape a new region and increase convergence among the peoples of the Nowruz civilization. In this regard, our task is to move beyond material definitions of power and recognize ideas and meanings as new elements shaping power. In this way, we can modernize Nowruz and construct a new peaceful world.



Representatives of different nationalities and ethnic groups that celebrate Nowruz gather on stage at a Nowruz festival in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, western Russia, on March 21, 2019.

RUSSIA BEYOND