

Gisum's ancient forests highlighted as key to tourism, heritage

Iranica Desk

In the village of Gisum, where the ancient Hyrcanian forests still maintain their rare connection with the sea, veteran natural resources scholar Mohammad Taher Nezami-Nav reminded residents of a simple but vital truth: forests are not a resource to be consumed today, but an investment for future generations. Pardel Amiri-Nejad, involved in the activities related to tourism sector, recounted a recent gathering in Gisum, where a man nearing 90 spoke not merely about trees and soil, but about heritage, memory, and responsibility for the future. The speaker, Nezami-Nav, is a senior professor of natural resources who earned his Ph.D. in soil science from the University of Nancy in 1970 and has spent more than 45 years teaching forestry, natural resources, and forest conservation at universities across Iran. In addition to his academic career, he held senior executive

and managerial positions in the country's natural resources sector, according to chtn.ir. What resonated most with the audience, however, was not his academic credentials but his childhood memories. Though not born in Gisum, he spent part of his early years in the village alongside its elders. From those formative days, he developed a curious spirit and a deep respect for the forest. He spoke of an elder named Cheraghali, a member of a generation that saw the forest as a trust. According to Nezami-Nav, elders in the past never entered the forest carelessly with sickles or axes; they used its resources sparingly and always with respect.

This early exposure to indigenous values and environmental stewardship shaped Nezami-Nav's life and career. He told villagers that his first research on forest conservation took place in the 1960s in Gilan Province, at a time when environmental protection was not yet widely recognized. Over



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the years, he became a university professor, trained generations of students, and played a pivotal role in managing Iran's natural resources. Yet his connection to Gisum and its ancient forests remained unbroken. Gisum Forest is far more than a recreational area. It is part of

the millennia-old Hyrcanian forests, showcasing a rich diversity of tree species and wildlife in northern Iran. Along Gilan's coastal strip, Gisum is one of the few remaining areas where the natural link between forest and sea has endured, while much of the coastal plain has been de-

graded in recent decades. This unique characteristic has made Gisum one of the region's most important tourism assets and a key driver of rural development. Nezami-Nav stressed that tourism development is meaningless without forest protection. "If the forest is damaged, neither

nature nor tourism will survive," he told villagers, emphasizing that local residents are the first guardians of this land. "If you protect it, no threat can destroy this heritage."

As Gisum seeks to establish itself as a distinctive global tourism destination, the need to integrate knowledge, experience, and public participation has never been greater. The gathering offered a lifetime of scientific and managerial insights, presented in simple language to the local community, with a clear message for residents and visitors alike: forests are the capital of future generations, not a legacy for today's consumption.

The most important lesson from the meeting may be this: if past generations entered the forest with reverence, today's generation must protect it with knowledge and responsibility — so that Gisum remains green and continues to stand as a natural showcase of tourism in Gilan and across Iran.



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Shahr-e Rey's cement museum seen as driver of urban tourism

Iranica Desk

The head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Shahr-e Rey, Tehran Province, has underscored the historical and industrial importance of the old cement factory of the city, describing the complex as one of the city's key urban tourism hubs and a suitable venue for cultural events and handicrafts exhibitions.

Mohsen Sa'adati said the facto-

ry, now operating as the National Museum of Cement Industry, plays a significant role in attracting visitors and hosting handicrafts exhibitions, and holds considerable potential for the development of urban tourism, chtn.ir wrote.

He added that, following coordination with the management of the museum and the factory complex, the necessary arrangements have been made to hold exhibitions at the site, along with

joint cooperation with the municipality. Sa'adati noted that, as a result of follow-ups by his department and coordination with site managers, an exhibition focusing on traditional stone carving is scheduled to be held at the complex next month under the supervision of the Cultural Heritage Department. He emphasized that, given its geographical location and existing industrial structures, the historic factory is regarded as one of the

region's major tourism assets and can play an effective role in introducing the history of Iran's industrial development. Sa'adati said the factory — with the National Museum of Cement Industry now operating on-site — is the first cement factory in Iran and the Middle East and one of the country's oldest centers of modern industry. The site was officially registered on the Iran National Heritage List on December 5, 2018.

Reading Room

History, identity, cultural survival in Iran

Iranica Desk

IBNA presents an interview with Reza Shabani, a prominent historian and enduring figure in the study of Iranian history, exploring his insights on Iran's culture and historical experience.

Conducted at Shahid Beheshti University, the conversation explores Shabani's intellectual formation, his understanding of Iran's historical experience, and his deep concern for preserving Iranian identity through historical awareness. Drawing on decades of scholarship and personal experience, Shabani presents a perspective in which history is not merely an academic discipline, but a vital means of safeguarding national dignity and cultural continuity.

Shabani's interest in history took shape in the early 1950s, when he left his village in the Taleqan region to continue his education in Tehran. These years coincided with a period of intense political and social upheaval, marked by the nationalization of Iran's oil industry and the leadership of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq. Experiencing this atmosphere of political open-



Reza Shabani

ness, foreign pressure, and ideological conflict firsthand, Shabani developed a strong sense of national consciousness. Studying history allowed him to understand the roots of Iran's resistance to external domination and to critically examine the consequences of foreign intervention, particularly by Russia in the north and Britain in the south.

According to Shabani, Iran's modern history cannot be understood without recognizing the sustained impact of colonial policies that repeatedly threatened the country's independence and territorial integrity. He points to the loss of regions such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan as a result of Russian and British expansionist strategies in the nineteenth century. This historical reality, he argues, deeply affected Iran's political development while also

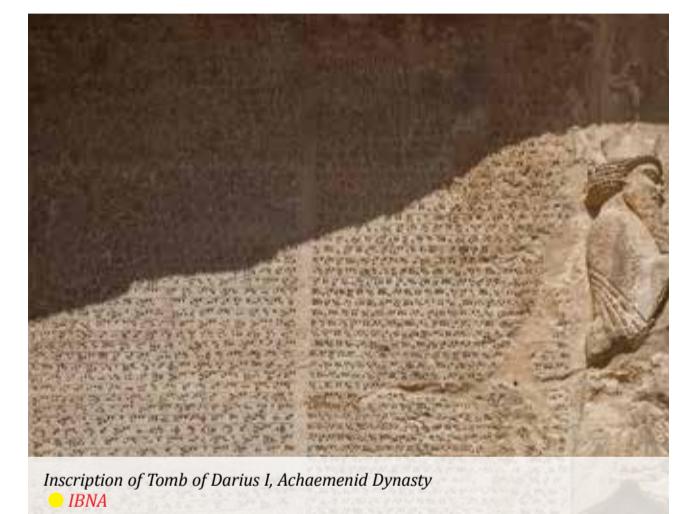
strengthening a collective awareness rooted in cultural resilience and attachment to the land.

Shabani situates this modern experience within a much longer historical continuum. He emphasizes that Iranians are among the earliest peoples to have simultaneously developed organized statehood, codified law, and ethical principles of governance. From the Median and Achaemenid periods onward, Iranian society emerged as a mature civilization possessing military strength, administrative order, and cultural sophistication. For Shabani, the Achaemenid era in particular represents a formative moment in world history, demonstrating ideals of justice, tolerance, and responsible rule that continue to resonate.

A defining feature of Iran's historical experience, in Shabani's view, has been its fundamentally defensive orientation. He argues that Iranian military campaigns were overwhelmingly conducted to protect borders and preserve national security rather than to pursue conquest for its own sake. Even the campaigns of Nader Shah Afshar, often cited as examples of imperial expansion,

are interpreted by Shabani as strategic responses to persistent threats against Iran's territorial integrity. Nader Shah's incursions into India, he notes, were not followed by permanent occupation but aimed at securing Iran's eastern frontiers and stabilizing the Iranian plateau.

Shabani also underscores the central role of Iranians in the formation and expansion of Islamic civilization. Following Iran's conversion to Islam, Iranian scholars, administrators, jurists, and mystics played a decisive role in shaping Islamic thought, science, and culture across vast regions — from Central Asia and South Asia to North Africa and parts of Europe. He stresses that much of what is today recognized as Islamic civilization emerged through the intellectual and cultural contributions of Iranians, particularly through theology, philosophy, historiography, and Persian-inflected Islamic mysticism. This synthesis of Iranian identity and Islamic faith, he argues, ensured the survival and continuity of Iran's civilization through centuries of political change. Equally important in Shabani's intellectual formation was



Inscription of Tomb of Darius I, Achaemenid Dynasty

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the role of family and lived culture. Although his parents were formally illiterate, they were deeply immersed in Iranian literary and historical traditions, having memorized large portions of classical Persian poetry. Works such as the Shahnameh were read aloud in the household, transforming the family environment into an informal school of cultural memory. Despite financial hardship, his parents provided unwavering moral and material support for his education, reinforcing his belief that Iranian identity is sustained not only through institutions, but through everyday cultural transmission within families and communities. For Shabani, being Iranian is not a matter of chance, but a meaningful privilege grounded in a long and continuous civilizational heritage. He maintains that studying history is both an intellectual and moral responsibility — essential for understanding the past, preserving national dignity in the present, and ensuring a conscious and informed future. Iran's enduring contributions to culture, science, and political thought, he concludes, must be protected and passed on through sustained historical research and a deep respect for the collective memory that has shaped Iranian society for millennia.