

The Role of Nowruz in Strengthening Cultural Relations between 12 Countries

Nowruz is one of the greatest of ancient Iranian festivities, which marks the arrival of new year and is celebrated every year. This joyous festivity and its brilliant historical background are closely linked to nature and its revival as well as the renewal of the entire world of existence. This festivity belongs to both Aryan Iran and Islamic Iran and is an ancient ceremony that has, through the millennia and various eras of this land encompassed the loftiest of human and cultural symbols and has so deeply got rooted in the cultural subconscious of this land that no section of Iran's history can monopolize it.

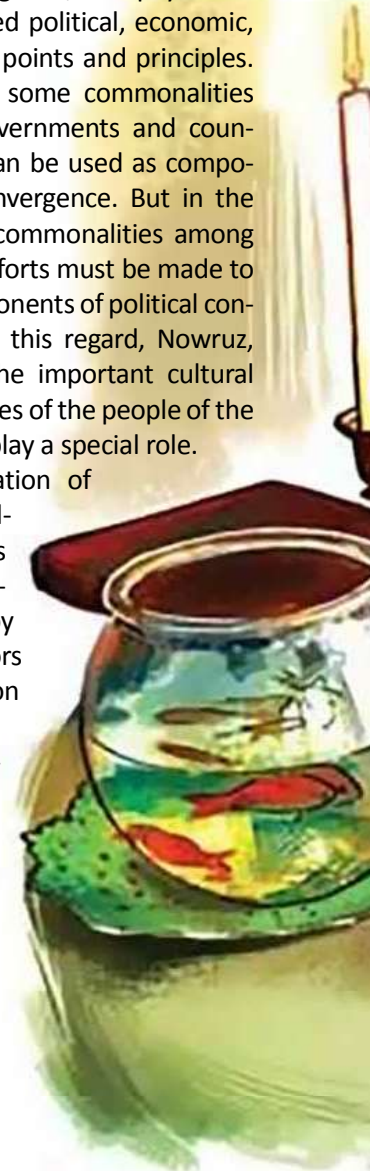
The survival and endurance of Nowruz celebrations over the past millennia and among all Iranian communities of diverse ethnicity, language, and subculture, show that this festivity is of acceptance to all Iranians; irrespective of their religion and ethnic background, and it the symbol of solidarity and unity of identity among all ethnic groups that constitute the Iranian nation. Therefore, defending the territorial integrity aimed at protecting its national interests calls for respecting the ancient and original national and cultural ceremonies as well as ancient traditions and beliefs, which, in turn, ensure cohesion, solidarity, and cultural and social ties in different societies.

As stated by the renowned German Iranologist, Bertold Spuler, from among the old Iranian festivities, Nowruz (beginning of the new year) and Mehregan (marking the end of summer and beginning of autumn) have been celebrated according to the old calendar. Thus, following the advent of Islam in Iran and the spread of this religion in a wide area from the Indian subcontinent to North Africa, Nowruz found the opportunity to spread among non-Iranian communities. This is the reason it can be discussed by overlooking ideological, geographical, and political boundaries.

Nowruz is an ancient and transnational festivity and is the symbol of the cultural identity of the vast Iranian Plateau and is the common axis between the countries of the region. The inhabitants of these countries celebrate this ancient festive day in various ways and forms. Nowruz is one of the cultural and historical discords that is celebrated every year (on March 21) with great fervor over the vast geographical area of the Iranian Plateau, encompassing Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Kurdish parts of Iraq, Turkey and Syria and can be regarded a suitable platform for cultural cohesion and conver-

gence among the nations neighboring Iran. Given that increasing convergence between countries will ensure world peace and security, efforts should be made for finding such elements that reduce the level of political divergence and increase political convergence. The issue that most important theorists emphasize, in order to create political convergence, is to pay attention to shared political, economic, and cultural points and principles. If there are some commonalities between governments and countries, they can be used as components of convergence. But in the absence of commonalities among countries, efforts must be made to create components of political convergence. In this regard, Nowruz, as one of the important cultural commonalities of the people of the region, can play a special role.

The formation of regional alliances is mostly influenced by two factors of common geographical and environmental features as well as common historical



and cultural features. Keeping in view the fact that the three Persian-speaking countries of the region (i.e., Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan) are parts of one geographical region and share some similar characteristics and also face certain similar challenges, convergence among them is especially important in the field of culture.

The global celebration of Nowruz is a positive step towards the development and elevation of cultural and public diplomacy and can increase cultural convergence between nations, and the registration of Nowruz on the "UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" and as a global tradi-

tion has strengthened the existing grounds for cultural cooperation and exchange. Nowruz, a world festivity with Iranian roots, is a day of reminiscing man's kinship with nature, the glory of the traditions of which has not diminished over the centuries because of the fact that commemoration of its traditions is associated with the notions of peace, friendship, and solidarity.

It is, therefore, a matter of pride that this great day was registered on the list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in March 2009 and has been recognized by the United Nations as a

global event.

Finally, it can be said that not only this great occasion plays a great role in the identity and solidarity of today's Iranian society but can be a link between all those who love and celebrate Nowruz outside the geographical borders of Iran. This is because common culture and mythical symbols play the most outstanding role in the solidarity of nations and the permanence of national and religious ceremonies such as Nowruz celebrations is quite important from this perspective.

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