

# Nowruz propagated to the remotes Persi

Nowruz, as ancient as Iranian history, is the greatest symbol of the cultural identity of our nation which has gallantly outlived all adversities and adversaries. Differing only slightly from area to area, under the influence of local norms and moralities, Nowruz ceremonies are observed in much the same way. The main characteristics of Nowruz, such as feasting, friendly visits, giving and receiving gifts, wearing new dress, arranging the “Sofreh Haft Seen” (a special piece of cloth normally of the highest quality on which in addition to the Holy Quran and a mirror, are put 7 certain items whose names start with the letter sounding - as S in English -, opening the gates of hearts to happiness, are the strong strings which bind Iranians, from the southern coasts of Persian Gulf to the shores of Caspian Sea, to this feast which is lovingly observed.

# Nowruz

## st parts of the world via the Persian Gulf

Nowruz, starting from 21st March until 2nd of April, is an all-encompassing national ceremony that Iranians have always felt emotionally compelled to observe. However, this ancient custom which has in the course of history faced many troubles, has had a specially tragic history in the southern coasts of Iran, where, after each dark era, the people have always redeemed its glory.

Without any doubt, the bitterest animosity with Nowruz came from the capital of the Caliphs of Umayyad dynasty. Historical evidence indicates that the Caliphs of Umayyad had many conflicts with Nowruz which was considered as a non-Islamic celebration and behaviour, but in most parts of Iran it was observed in secret by Iranians; later Nowruz was glorified by Alavites as a worthy ceremony. Islamic Caliphs, with their characteristic racist zeal prohibited all Iranian feasts and customs. This prohibition forced

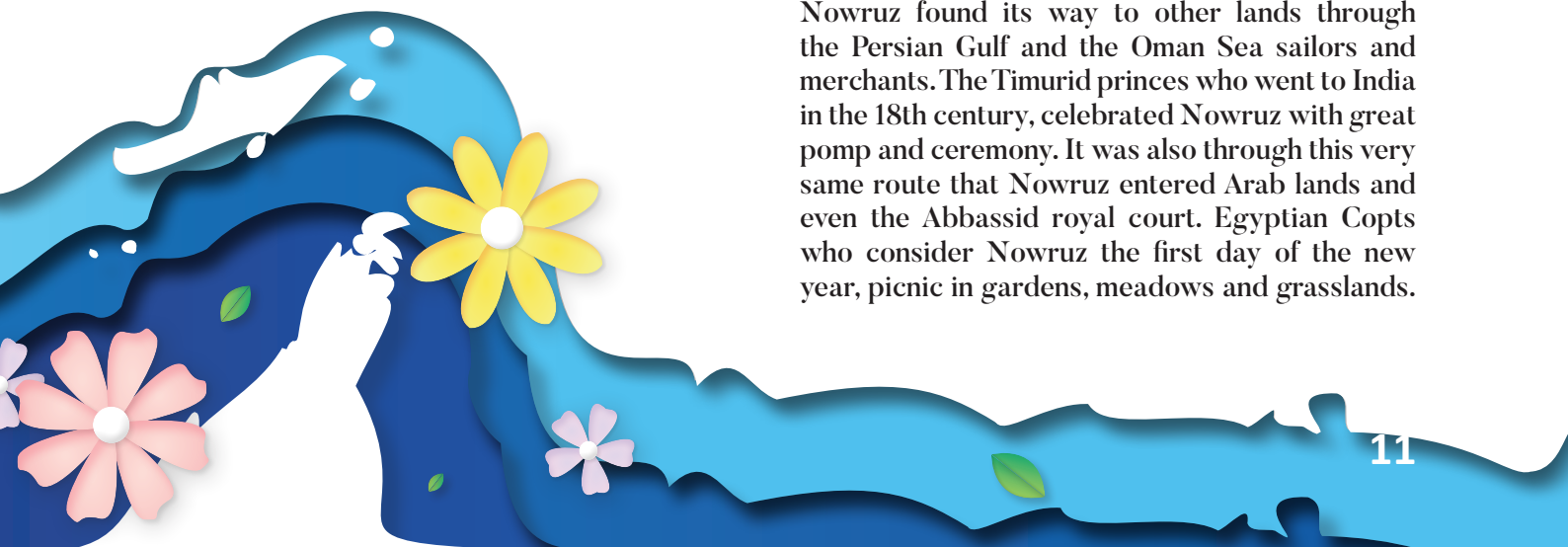
Iranians to present gifts to the greedy agents of the caliph to gain permission to celebrate Nowruz. Giving gifts, the bulk of which were transferred to the treasuries of the caliphs, became a regular practice through which the people of Iran the coastal areas had to present to the caliph's court, their most precious belongings like, musk, ambergris, gold, silver, cashmere, silk, and valuable pieces of cloth as an official tax, but under the pretence of gifts.

### ■ Revival of Nowruz

Abu Muslim Khorasani, not only abolished this practice in the era of Abbassid caliphs, but reversed the process by forcing them to hand out gifts to the artisans and poets during the Iranian feasts and especially Nowruz. The history of observance and respect for Nowruz by Arabs, started in Khozestan during the Abbassid caliphs. It was from that era that the word Nowruz became customary in Arab lands.

### ■ Diffusion of Iranian culture

Nowruz found its way to other lands through the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea sailors and merchants. The Timurid princes who went to India in the 18th century, celebrated Nowruz with great pomp and ceremony. It was also through this very same route that Nowruz entered Arab lands and even the Abbassid royal court. Egyptian Copts who consider Nowruz the first day of the new year, picnic in gardens, meadows and grasslands.



They have acquired this tradition from sailors. They call the Nowruz day, "Shamm al Nassim" (scenting the zephyr). Apart from this, the barges travelling on Arvand Rood used to celebrate Nowruz hanging beautiful stings of lights the beauty of which was doubled by their reflections on the water.

Burning shrubs was a characteristic of Nowruz observed in Baghdad and all southern coastal areas of the Persian Gulf.

Even now, if not in Baghdad, it is practiced in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf. The Barez tribe of Kerman, the Qashqaie tribe of Fars, along with other southern tribes burn shrubs and dance round the fire in Nowruz and other feasts. Choobi dance, Sareban dance, and shepherd boys' dance are still practiced in Baluchestan and Bushehr. In Sistan, on Nowruz eve young Sistani girls sing around the Hamoon Lake. The Nowruz ceremonies in Sistan are quite unique. But in recent decades, the economic and cultural problems have relegated them to marginal rank.

### ■ Precocious spring and Samanoo Pazan ceremonies

The southern parts of the country being warmer, the spring arrives much sooner. The palm orchards, plains and meadows turn emerald green. The people start preparing themselves for the arrival of Nowruz earlier than their other compatriots by obtaining new clothes, repairing and cleaning their homes, resurfacing the roof tops. Those who have dear ones away from them, or, expect Nowruz guests in Nowruz holidays, prepare themselves to welcome them by washing the carpets, the bedding and making arrangements for their guests to assure a pleasant stay for them. Within their means, they paint the walls and the doors, and above all, they dust the misunderstandings and conflicts away from their hearts. Then they await Nowruz, counting the days down.

One specially local practice in this region is Samanoo Pazan (cooking a kind of sweet thick soup from wheat). Apart from the wheat that they grow on plates as a symbol of greenness, they soak wheat and as soon as the seed, germinate, they cut it into small portions to be beaten in mortars. Mixed with wheat flour, wall nuts or almonds, this is then poured in big cauldrons and left to boil. On the special night of making the Samanoo, or as locally called,

Samanoo Pazan feast, close and distant relatives are invited to steer the Samanoo. They believe that, those who make wishes while steering the Samanoo

with the ladle, will have their wishes granted. For this very reason, the young men and girls marriage age have a very active part in these ceremonies. The next morning when the Samanoo is properly boiled, or as they call it, matured, it will be poured in big or small pots for distribution among neighbors. It is believed that making Samanoo is a way of paying vows.

The reasons for making Samanoo in that particular time are, first, the fertilization of wheat plants at that time of the year and, second, they decorate their Haft Seen Sofreh with that Samanoo.

These ceremonies, and other rituals which are common among all Iranians, are observed by the islanders and the inhabitants of these coastal areas with special splendor and grandeur. Nowruz visits, receiving gifts from the elders, the dances and the happiness are symbols of unity and accord among the inhabitants of our vast country. The climatic conditions of southern coasts bring the precocious spring to the region, filling meadows and grasslands with colored flowers, like hyacinth and narcissus.

Since in Bushehr, Kangan, Dashti, Dashtistan, Ganaveh, Bandar Abbas, and other coastal areas, the majority of the people are fishermen, one of the dishes which decorate their Haft Seen Sofrehs, is Sabzi - polo- mahi; a dish made of rice, vegetables and fish.

Despite their distance, The people of Fars province are, because of their relations with the coastal people, under the influence of their rites and ceremonies. The moderate climate of the Fars province and its similarity to the coastal weather has augmented these relationships to such a degree that many Iranians from all over the country spend their Nowruz Holidays in Fars, Khuzistan, Bushehr and Hormozgan provinces, enjoying the clean delicate air of the south. As a poet might have put it: The air is so mild in February, you see blossoms on our almond tree.

Hana Bandan and baking of homemade sweets: Another Nowruz ceremony in south of Iran is the ancient practice of Hana Bandan, where, women and children dye their hands and feet with henna. The women who have to work in the



fields believe that henna having many medical properties, will protect their skins against many natural elements including sun shine. The beauty of Nowruz becomes even more attractive when groups of women and children adorned in colorful dresses, wearing anklets and shining with colorful spangles, travel from of village to another. These create very pleasant scenes for travelers.

Another local Nowruz custom is baking sweet bread, locally called” Kaak” which is generally known as New Year’s Sweet Bread. The difference between Kaak and Tonok Bread is that sugar and oil is added to the former. The dough is baked on frying pans and then rolled and cut into lozenges. Making Samanoo and baking such breads being rather expensive, the rich seeing it as form of paying vows, share them with less well off families so that they could have them on their Haft Seen Sofrehs.

Nowruz is the most ancient heritage of our ancestors. This feast is observed not only in every corner of the country, but also anywhere Iranians live, even aboard ships and barges. In this way many foreigners have come to know Nowruz and eagerly participate in its festivities and ceremonies. Among our neighboring countries, and especially in the Indian sub-continent, Nowruz feasts are held with great grandeur. This in itself is a proper means of transmitting the Iranian culture to other parts of the world.

Iranians living abroad have in their new homes acquainted the locals with aspects of Iranian culture. Their children take Nowruz ceremonies to their schools. The florist and pet shop salesman now realize that whoever seeks hyacinths and little goldfish close to the spring time, must be an Iranian.

