

The 4th Silk Road International Youth Photography and Short Video Competition has opened a call for entries. The competition is set to take place in China in close collaboration with Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs intended to promote cultural exchange among young people along the ancient route that once connected China to Iran and Europe, Mehr reported on Saturday. According to the news agency citing the public relations of the Fuzhou Municipal People's Government in Fujian province will be hosting the competition under the theme "Bridging Cultures." The initiative aims to enhance youth exchanges along the historical trade route. The competition is open to teenagers and young adults aged 12 to 20. Participation is free, and each contestant is allowed to submit up to two entries. The deadline for submission is August 31.

**Silk Road Intl. Youth
Photography Competition
Opens Call for Entries**

Tehran Hosted 5th Intl. Conference on Nowruz Diplomacy

Tehran hosted the Fifth International Conference on Nowruz Diplomacy and the Nowruz Trophy on March 8 at the Niavaran Cultural-Historical Center.

Organized by the Nowruz Trophy Cultural Institute in collaboration with the Art Credit Fund and Niavaran Cultural Center, the event was set to bring together government officials, ambassadors, diplomatic delegations, international artists, and members of the media.

According to organizers, the conference will feature a diverse range of programs, including the presentation of The Nowruz Trophy, performances of local and international music, a special Nowruz theater production, and speeches by experts in Nowruz culture.

The event had been commenced with an expert panel discussion titled "Nowruz Peace" led by Shirin Tajik. Key speakers included Nematollah Fazeli, who discussed "Nowruz Peace," and Mahtab Haji Mohammadi, who spoke on "Nowruz Rituals and Teaching Peace to Children."

The ancient UNESCO-registered festivity of Nowruz that marks the new year, ushers in spring, and celebrates the rebirth of nature. Various names for Nowruz, including Nooruz, Navruz, Nauroz or Nevruz, this historic celebration is observed on the 20th or 21st of March in many countries along the Silk Roads, including Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The name of this cross-cultural custom



means No - 'new', and rouz - 'day' in Persian. It celebrates new beginnings and the return of spring which is of great spiritual significance as it symbolizes the triumph of good over evil, and joy over sorrow. Nowruz includes rituals, ceremonies and cultural events, as well as the enjoyment of a special meal with loved ones.

Marking one of the holiest days of the ancient Zoroastrian calendar, Nowruz is an annual event that honors the shared heritage of the Silk Roads, its traditions, and the culture, associated with the birth of spring. Nowruz is celebrated by people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, and its customs have been passed down from generation to generation along the Silk Roads. Over time, Nowruz has de-

veloped and expanded, incorporating new social, religious, and cultural influences. Although the traditions and customs of Nowruz vary from country to country, there are many unifying features. For example, in most regions, before the festival people perform ritual dances such as leaping over fire and streams and many households also replenish their water supplies on the last Wednesday of the year.

In particular with relation to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Nowruz was inscribed as an element in 2009, and extended in 2016, on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, at the joint initiative of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran (Islamic Re-

public of), Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In 2010, the "International Day of Nowruz" was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly. This Resolution welcomes the efforts of Member States where Nowruz is celebrated to preserve and develop the culture and traditions related to Nowruz, and encourages Member States to make efforts to raise awareness about Nowruz and to organize annual events in commemoration of this festivity.

In December 2024, Iran's tourism minister Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri said the global registration of Nowruz transformed its cultural scope from a national and regional level to a global status that serves a sustainable foundation for enhancing peace and stability in today's world, both for Iran and neighboring countries. He also emphasized that Nowruz connects the shared culture of Iranian ethnicities within the country, fostering national unity. On a regional level, it links the intangible heritage of 13 countries in the Asian continent. Salehi-Amiri added that Nowruz is a key component of Iran's cultural capacity, rooted in nature and shaped by a system of beliefs and calendrical calculations. Over time, it has evolved into a cultural identity and heritage. Thus, Nowruz symbolizes the creation of the world—earth, sky, water, plants, animals, and humans. It signifies the renewal of life, as the creative energy of spring revitalizes humanity's cultural and social systems."

UN Tourism Chief Underlines Iran's Role in Developing Tourism Industry

Secretary General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization Zurab Pololikashvili emphasizes Iran's "important role" in development of tourism industry.

Secretary General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization Zurab Pololikashvili has emphasized the need for enhancing cooperation between his organization and Iran on the sustainable development of tourism industry. Pololikashvili sent a letter to Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tour-

ism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri, in which he emphasized the country's role in the world tourism system, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts said in a press release on Monday.

Pololikashvili, in his letter, also highlighted the importance of maintaining structural cooperation between Iran and the World Tourism Organization.

He lauded the 18th Tehran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition (TITE), which was held on February 11-14, describing it as a great platform to foster modern international tourism interactions.

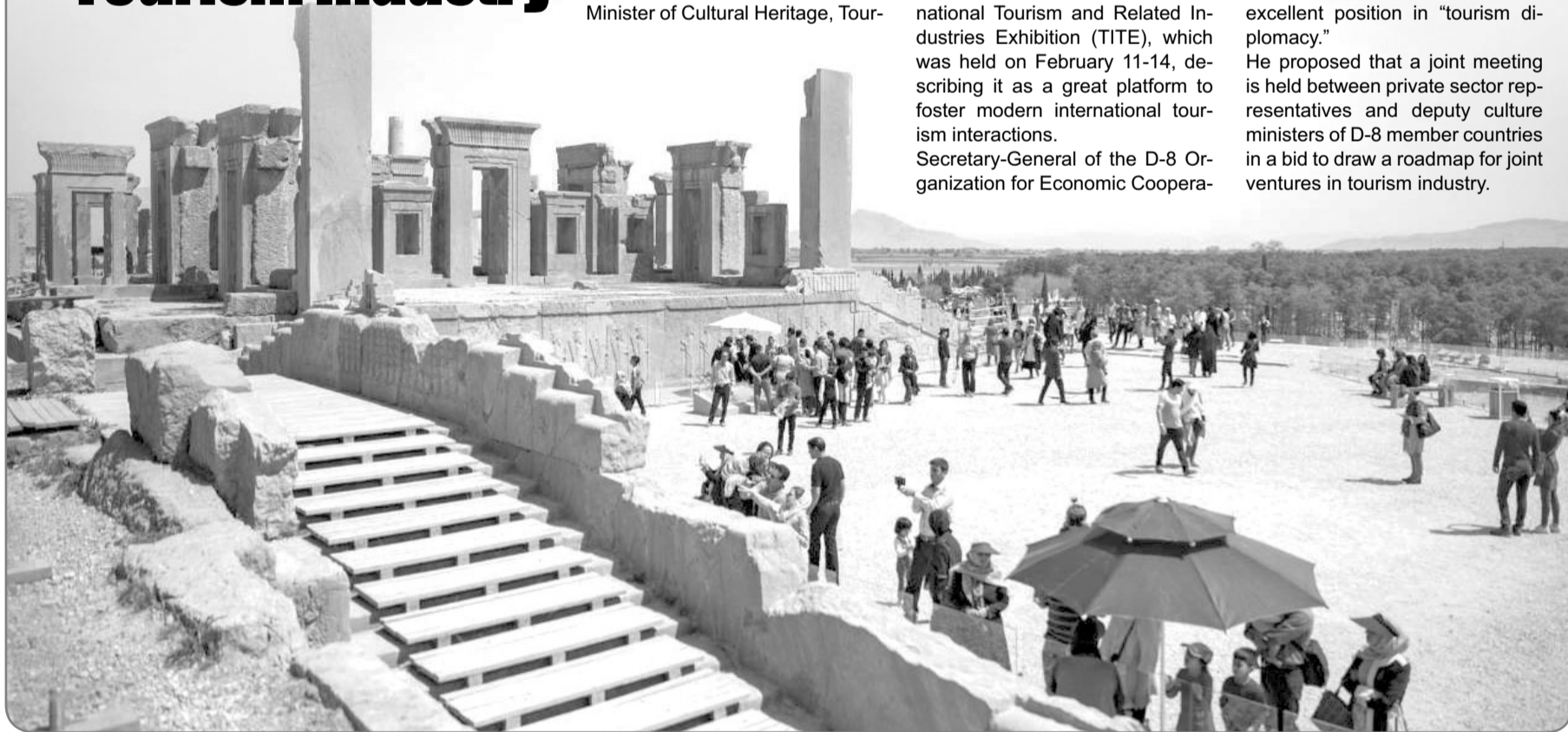
Secretary-General of the D-8 Organization for Economic Coopera-

tion Isiaka Abdulqadir Imam sent a letter to Salehi-Amiri as well, according to the same press release by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.

Abdulqadir stressed the importance of continuous interactions and using capacities in the field of tourism.

He referred to the 18th Tehran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition, saying that the event was indicative of Iran's excellent position in "tourism diplomacy."

He proposed that a joint meeting is held between private sector representatives and deputy culture ministers of D-8 member countries in a bid to draw a roadmap for joint ventures in tourism industry.



Chaharshanbe Suri: Experiencing Iran's Fiery Festival



Chaharshanbe Suri, an ancient Persian festival dating back to 1700 BCE, marks the eve of the last Wednesday before the Persian New Year (Nowruz). This revered celebration, rooted in Zoroastrianism, symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness and purity over pollution. Participants leap over bonfires, chanting for vitality and health, in a vibrant tradition blending cultural heritage with communal joy. The name 'Chaharshanbe Suri' translates to 'Wednesday Feast' in Persian. It derives from the words 'Chaharshanbe' (Wednesday) and 'Suri' (red, fiery, or festive).

The celebration also includes other customs like the banging of pots and pans to ward off the last remnants of the passing year's bad luck and misfortune. Additionally, there are fireworks, public dances, and a variety of street foods that create a festive atmosphere. This ancient festival, deeply rooted in Iranian culture, marks a unique tradition where peo-

ple leap over bonfires, chanting "sorkhi-ye to az man, zardi-ye man az to," which translates to "your fiery red color is mine, and my sickly yellow pallor is yours." This symbolizes the exchange of a person's paleness, sickness, and problems with the warmth and vibrancy of the fire, signifying a renewal.

The Festival of Fire (Chaharshanbe Suri) holds on the Last Wednesday of a year (which marks the arrival of spring). People hope for health and happiness through the coming year by lighting fires and embracing the light.

Iran, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Turkey celebrate this ancient festival, dating back to at least 1700 BCE. Iranians celebrate an old tradition known as "Chahar Shanbeh Suri."

It occurs on the last Tuesday evening of every Persian calendar year. Iranians gather with friends and family to celebrate and enjoy this occasion. Chahar Shanbeh Suri, or the "Fes-

tival of Fire," serves as a prelude to Nowruz, which signifies the arrival of the spring season. The celebration of Chahar Shanbeh Suri usually begins in the evening, with people creating bonfires in the streets and leaping over them. In Iran, the emblematic festival of Chaharshanbe Suri revolves around the saying, "Sorkhi-ye to az man, zardi-ye man az to," meaning "Your fiery red color is mine, and my sickly yellow pallor is yours." This traditional phrase captures the festival's essence, as participants leap over bonfires, symbolically exchanging their yellow pallor, indicative of illness and pain, for the fire's vibrant red energy, signifying health and vitality.

Some believe that jumping over bonfires is a way to eliminate negative energy, sickness, and problems and to receive fulfillment, warmth, and energy in return. Chaharshanbe Suri serves as a cultural festival for many Iranians.

Perspective



Iran Set to Implement Comprehensive System for Medical Tourism

Iran is set to roll out a comprehensive management system dedicated to medical tourism across the country, following a successful pilot program in Khorasan Razavi province.

According to Hossein Nikounam, head of the Khorasan Razavi Health Tourism Association, the comprehensive system will be implemented from the beginning of the upcoming Iranian year (1404), which starts on March 21. "The pilot project, which began in October 2024 under the directive of the Ministry of Tourism, has yielded positive results.



Due to its success, implementation will be mandatory nationwide in early 1404." Nikounam highlighted significant challenges affecting Iran's health tourism industry, including political and security tensions, the cancellation of flights, and negative media campaigns. "These factors led to a 30% decline in medical tourism in 1403 compared to the previous year. Additionally, the diversity of medical tourists has decreased, with 85% now coming from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan, primarily due to geographic proximity and religious tourism in Mashhad.

Discrepancies in official statistics further complicate the situation. Nikounam noted that some government agencies count foreign nationals who have lived in Iran for more than six months as health tourists, which distorts actual figures. Iran's health tourism sector experiences fluctuations during religious and national holidays. During Ramadan, medical tourist numbers typically decline as many patients from neighboring Muslim-majority countries postpone treatment. Similarly, the Nowruz (Persian New Year) holiday sees reduced foreign patient visits due to hospital closures and doctor vacations. For sustainable development, Nikounam urged policymakers to streamline administrative processes, enhance inter-agency collaboration, and maximize the potential of private healthcare institutions.