

## PEOPLE AND POPULATION

Groups historically associated with the contemporary country. *Ethnic and linguistic groups.* Iran is a multi-lingual and diverse cultural society. About 45 percent of the approximately 30,151,000 people in 1971 spoke Persian, and another 23 percent some other Indo-European language or dialect. These are descendants of the Aryan tribes, whose origins are lost in antiquity. The Kurds, a fierce nomadic people, dwell in the western mountains and have maintained their clannish identity. Their dialect has seen scant modification over the centuries. Also inhabiting the western mountains were 350,000 seminomadic Lurs, thought to be aboriginal Persians. Closely related, and known as Great Lurs until the 15th century, are the Bakhtyārī tribes, who live in the Zagros Mountains west of Isfahan. Both speak Luri, a Persian dialect, as do the Baluch, the agrarian, seminomadic group, famed for their superb horsemanship, who inhabit Baluchistan, the eastern part of which is Pakistani territory.

The Armenians, with a different ethnic heritage, have maintained their Indo-European linguistic identity. They are concentrated in Tehrān, Isfahan, and Azerbaijan and are engaged primarily in commercial pursuits. A few isolated remnants of Dravidians are found in the Seistan region to the east.

Although the proportion of Turkic ethnic stock is small, approximately 26 percent of the Iranians speak Turkish, as a result of the long imposition of Turkish rule on the Persians in the north. The two Turkic ethnic groups are the Qashqā'ī in the Shīrāz area to the east of the Persian Gulf and the Turkmen of Khurasan in the northeast.

Semites—Jews, Assyrians, and Arabs—constitute only a small percentage of the population. The Jews, like the Armenians, have retained their ethnic, linguistic, and religious identity and traditionally have clustered in the largest cities. The Assyrians are concentrated in the northwest, and the Arabs live primarily in the Persian Gulf islands and in Khuzistan.

Wars, intermarriage, and commerce have resulted in the intermingling of both blood and vocabulary. English and French, and to a lesser degree German and Russian, are widely used by the educated class.

*Religious groups.* The vast majority of Iranians are Muslims, mostly of the Shī'ah sect; Shī'ism is the official state religion. The Kurds and the Turkmen are Sunnīs. Major religious minorities are Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Christians comprise the largest minority group, of whom in the early 1970s the 190,000 Orthodox Armenians constituted the bulk. Assyrians are Nestorians, Protestants, and Catholics, as are a few converts from other ethnic groups. The Jews totalled about 68,000. The 25,000 Zoroastrians were largely concentrated in Yazd in central Iran, Kerman to the south, and Tehrān to the north. Religious toleration is growing, and, with increasing secularization, religion is becoming a matter of individual conscience rather than of political significance, particularly in urban centres.

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*Mineral resources.* In the early 1970s, Iran was the world's fourth largest producer of oil, after the United States, the Soviet Union, and Venezuela, and was the largest exporter of this commodity. Its reserves were estimated to be 70,000,000,000 barrels, 11 percent of the world total, exceeded only by those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and the Soviet Union. Production was concentrated in the southwest, but oil has also been discovered in Qom and the Kavīr-e Lūt as well as under the offshore waters of the Persian Gulf.

A 1901 oil concession to foreign interests, which originally covered 448,000 square miles, has now been reduced to 75,000 and has been assigned to a consortium of eight Western companies (American, British, Dutch, and French). Government royalties amounted to 55 percent in 1969.

By 1971 government-owned National Iranian Oil Company, formed in 1951, had development and marketing agreements with more than 20 foreign companies and produced 10 percent of the country's petroleum. The industry's output was over 4,000,000 barrels a day. About 16 percent was processed in five refineries; the remainder was exported in crude form.

Natural gas, found in the south as well as in the Elburz Mountains and in Khurasan, was also becoming a valuable asset. Reserves estimated at 214,000,000,000 cubic feet were the sixth largest in the world. Until recently, most of the production was flared up (burned off). Of the 1969 production, only 10 percent was utilized. The government is implementing steps to increase consumption. A 708-mile line was completed in 1970, running from the southern oil fields to the Soviet town of Astara on the western shore of the Caspian; the gas was supplied in exchange for Soviet assistance in building an Iranian steel mill. Delivery to the Soviet Union was expected to reach more than 1,000,000,000 cubic feet per day in 1975. Gathering and distributing spur lines run to Tehrān, Kashan, Isfahan, and Shīrāz. A pipeline to Mashhad in the northeast was being constructed. This state-owned system, known as IGAT, was the largest gas line in the Middle East.