



## ĀSTĀNA

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**ĀSTĀNA**, town and district in the province of Gilān. The town, also called Āstāna-ye ašrafiya, is located at lat 37°16' N, long 49°57' E, along the highway between [Rasht](#) and [Lāhijān](#) and approximately 2 miles to the east of its crossing of the Safidrud. Āstāna, although only a small community, is of regional importance because of the Emāmzāda Čenār Pādšāh. This shrine, established under the Safavids and constructed with a Chinese-style wooden roof and remodeled as well as enlarged in recent years, attracts annually increasing numbers of pilgrims from all parts of Gilān and Māzandarān. Especially during the month of Moḥarram it is one of the most important centers of pilgrimage in northern Iran with processions, passion plays (*ta'zia*), and other religious activities. This fact as well as the favorable location of the town in the middle of a rich agricultural region have contributed to its emergence as one of the major business locations in northern Iran. The fact that Moḥammad Mo'in (see [FARHANG-E MO'IN](#)) was born and buried in Āstāna contributes to its reputation.

As a result of this growing importance, Āstāna, the center of a sub-district (*baḳš*) within the district (*šahrestān*) of Lāhijān since Reza Shah's reign (see the map in Razmārā), was promoted in 1971 to the position of center of a new *šahrestān*, by grouping the two sub-districts of Āstāna and Ḥasankiā-deh, with an area of 356 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 83,595 in 1976 (Markaz, 1976). The town's population grew from 16,689 in 1976 to 36,298 in 2006. In the latter year, the *šahrestān* as a whole—the area of which had been increased to 417 km<sup>2</sup> through an administrative reform in 1998—had a population of 108,017,



yielding the very high density of 259 persons per km<sup>2</sup>; this includes the coastal township of Ḥasankiā-deh, which was renamed Bandar-e Farahnāz in the late Pahlavi era and Kiā-šahr after the Islamic Revolution. Its population is 13,762 (urban) and 57,957 (rural; Markaz, 2006).

In all the villages of the *šahrestān*, paddy cultivation is prevalent, often to the point of a quasi-monoculture, modernized by generalized use of motor tiller instead of the traditional *gājeme*-type plow (Bazin and Bromberger, pp. 18-19; see [BERENJ](#)) and giving a first-quality rice, with a cultivated area of 15,076 ha and a production of 43,813 tons in 1986 (Balai, p. 172). In the early 20th century, however, hemp, flax, and wheat, as well as melons, watermelons, and pumpkins, were also cultivated in these settlements. As for sericulture, it remained an important activity until the mid-1990s: in 1973, Āstāna was the third silkworm-breeding area in Gilān after Langarud and Lāhijān (see [ABRIŠAM ii](#)), but sericulture has suffered since then, due to the low quality of seeds and to international competition. A number of complementary products are common throughout the district: vegetables and herbs, plantations of poplars, and a highly developed pisciculture. Others are local specializations, such as peanuts (*bādām-e zamini*) cultivation between Noqra-deh and Kiā-šahr, and buffalo raising in a few settlements with a Kurdish population (see [GILAN xiv. ETHNIC GROUPS](#)).

Although this micro-region is relatively rich, most farmers are obliged to have recourse to poly-activity to make a living. Hunting waterfowls, either with nets or with snares, is traditionally important in the region; in its ponds and marshes many bird species find their permanent or seasonal habitat. Peasants also fish for carp (*kopur*) and surmullet (*māhi-e safid*, *Rutilus friskii kutum*), among other species, using sweeping-nets called *sali* in ponds and marshes or putting temporary dams across the rivers. Along the shore, sea fishing is conducted through two quite different organizations. (1) Fisheries for catching sturgeons and extracting caviar belong to the public Iran Fishery Company (*šilāt*). Kiā-šahr is the seat of Section (*nāhia*)<sup>2</sup> of eleven local fishing stations, six of which are located on the shore of the Safidrud delta in the limits of Āstāna district. (2) Cooperative societies (*šerkat-e ta'āwoni-e māhigiri*) for catching scaly fish such as *māhi-e safid* use a seine, pulled formerly by two teams of fishermen and nowadays by two tractors. Before the 1980s, sea fishing was mainly in the hands of Āzaris from [Ardabil](#) or of refugees from Soviet Azarbaijan (in the sturgeon fisheries) and from [Kaḵkāl](#) (in the cooperative societies; see [Gilan. Ethnic Groups](#); Vieille and Nabavi; Bazin, II,



pp. 131-39). More recently, however, these activities have seen a gradual “Gilānization” process.

The main meeting places are the weekly markets, on Mondays and Thursdays in Āstāna and on Wednesdays in Kiā-šahr (Thorpe). This coastal town and its surroundings have become a source of tourist attraction regionally and nationally. Beside its lively market, it has a famous *emānzāda*, that of Sayyed Abu Ja’far, and the Bujāq natural park in the vicinity. Many people from Tehran have built country houses along the coast and even in nearby inland villages, causing a construction boom, while affluent farmers emigrate to the main cities and leave their holdings to the peasants coming from the highlands of Gilān.

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