



## ASTARĀBĀD BAY

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**ASTARĀBĀD BAY**, also known as Gorgān Bay or Kalīj-e Gorgān, is a lagoon in the extreme southeastern corner of the Caspian Sea. It is some 40 km long and only a few meters deep. It is separated from the Caspian Sea proper by the Mīānkāla peninsula, a narrow tongue of land which consists largely of sand dunes and extends almost the length of the lagoon. As a result of the drop in the level of the Caspian Sea, the area of Astarābād Bay is nowadays shrinking fast. The once three islands of *Āšūrāda* are now parts of the peninsula. The marshy shores are covered with a broad fringe of halophytic flora. The bay is not particularly rich in fish, though the sandbanks off the coast often provide basking places for seals (*Phoca caspica*). The peninsula is uninhabited but there are numerous villages along the southern shore of Astarābād Bay whose populations are in part employed in the fishing industry.

The two harbors in Astarābād Bay—Bandar-e Gaz and Bandar-e Šāh—are no longer of any importance. While Bandar-e Gaz is nowadays no more than a farming settlement and fishing village, Bandar-e Šāh enjoyed a boom period between 1925 and 1945. Originally established to serve the Russian fisheries at the entrance to Astarābād Bay, Bandar-e Šāh became in the reign of Reżā Shah the northern terminus of the Transiranian Railway and a large harbor was built, with a breakwater reaching far out into the bay. Due to a drop of over two meters in the level of the Caspian Sea between 1930 and 1945 the harbor is now silted up and unimportant.



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