

First Sunni female governor in Kurdistan Province: Women's glass ceiling in reaching managerial posts shattered



By Bitā Mir-Azimi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

The approach of President Masoud Pezeshkian's government in leveraging the capacities and capabilities of women and local forces at high managerial levels, as well as the appointment of the first Sunni female governor in the history of Kurdistan, conveys a message of equality and justice for women in Iran. These influential actors believe in their abilities and seek to enhance their status within the governmental structure and play a vital role in the development and

prosperity of the country through the revival of gender justice in the national unity government. "Soudabeh Zarghamnejad" is the first woman entrusted with the responsibility of governing the Dehgolan County in Kurdistan.

Her name has been recorded as the first female governor in Kurdistan Province, a region where, after 44 years of demands from the people of Kurdistan, the appointment of a Sunni governor was realized in the Pezeshkian government. The first Sunni female governor of Dehgolan was born in the Chaharbagh neighborhood of Sanandaj. She was in the first grade when her father attained the esteemed status of martyrdom.

"Soudabeh Zarghamnejad" began her career in January 2007 in Kurdistan Province as an agricultural planning expert in the Economic Coordination Office. In 2020, she became the Deputy for Planning and Development at the Sanandaj County Governorate, and three years later, in May 2023, she took on the role of Deputy Director-General for Women's Affairs and Family at the Governorate. A reporter from "Iran" conducted an exclusive interview with the first female governor in the history of Kurdistan, exploring the barriers and challenges to women's participation in managerial positions and high-level decision-making in the country.



Soudabeh Zarghamnejad



IRAN DAILY: Can your appointment as the first Sunni female governor in the history of Kurdistan be interpreted as a shift in gender attitudes in the region? This is an unprecedented occurrence not only in Kurdistan but also in many provinces across the country.

ZARGHAMNEJAD: I believe that being the first in any role shapes perceptions regarding various issues. This is a significant responsibility, and I must fulfill it appropriately. A positive policy must be established for the selection of women in high managerial positions, and this should be accepted by both government officials and public opinion—that a woman can perform just as well as, if not better than, a man in these roles. By achieving this, we can pave the way for other women in my country to enter important managerial positions, fostering a sense of self-belief that if I can succeed, they can as well. Undoubtedly, the trust of the governor is based on a developmental perspective towards the capabilities of women in this land and their appointment to managerial roles, which has fostered social hope and balanced development in political and social spheres. During this short period, I have witnessed the happiness and kindness expressed by my fellow citizens, colleagues, managers, and department heads, especially the Iranian women.

Did you expect this appointment? That a Kurdish woman would take on such an important role for the first time in the province, with people confidently entrusting their problems to her? Please share your feelings about this appointment.

With the national unity government's discourse led by President Pezeshkian, it was not surprising that women would be selected for the position of governor. Reports suggest that a female governor is being appointed in some provinces. The selection of a Sunni Kurdish woman for the governor's position for the first time depends on the perspective of the governor-general, [Arash Zareh Tan] Lohouni, and his trust in the abilities and qualifications of women. I must exert all my efforts to ensure that this trust is not compromised. I am not only happy for myself but also for the women of the country, as they have come to real-

ize that their experiences are as valuable as those of men and that they can hold high government positions in a county. I hope this justice-oriented perspective on women persists across the country, enabling us to see the greatest representation of capable women in other key government roles.

What is the public opinion in Dehgolan County regarding this appointment? Will traditional gender structures pose obstacles to your goals? How will you overcome these challenges and address issues one by one?

I hold public meetings with the honorable people of Dehgolan every Monday. Since my appointment, I have held two consecutive public meetings where everyone, both men and women, expressed their happiness regarding this selection. Kurdish women are actively engaged in all professions alongside men. Fortunately, this appoint-

ment has received no negative feedback, and during this time, managers and heads of departments and executive bodies who have come to congratulate me have shown a heartfelt belief in the presence of women in managerial roles, irrespective of any gender bias. Therefore, I do not anticipate any significant issues in advancing the objectives of Dehgolan County.

What are your priorities as the first female governor in Dehgolan County? As you know, the people of this county have been struggling with water shortages in their farms and gardens for years. How will this issue be addressed during your term? Do you have specific solutions in mind?

A serious pursuit for the allocation of water for the development of agricultural lands and the existing dams in the county is on the agenda. It is essential to note that the agricultural lands in the region are classified as prohibited plains, and excessive extraction of groundwater will lead to environmental damage, such as land subsidence, in the near future. Consequently, reducing the use of groundwater is crucial for Dehgolan County. Additionally, since Dehgolan is considered an agricultural hub, developing agricultural processing industries, expanding greenhouses, and cultivat-

ing greenhouse products to increase efficiency and optimize water consumption are prioritized. This includes replacing some water-intensive crops like potatoes with less water-consuming crops such as corn, canola, and saffron, in collaboration with the Agricultural Jihad Organization.

Do you have specific plans for reviving inactive production units?

Given that Dehgolan houses the largest industrial park in Kurdistan, addressing the issues of production and industri-

holds and those without support, as well as their home-based businesses?

In Dehgolan County, establishing markets for showcasing home-produced products, increasing sports and cultural facilities, organizing festivals and cultural events suited to the local ecosystem, promoting awareness to reduce social harms, supporting women who are heads of households or lack support, prioritizing them for self-employment training, and utilizing banking facilities for home-based businesses and sustainable rural

efforts on the assigned responsibilities. I do not spend hours aimlessly browsing social media without gaining anything new; I am not one for unnecessary shopping trips. If I need to shop, I do so efficiently and return home promptly. Therefore, I must emphasize that taking on administrative roles and accepting social responsibilities does not create limitations for women in fulfilling their other responsibilities and interests when priorities are set correctly, planning is appropriate, and time



I hope this justice-oriented perspective on women persists across the country, enabling us to see the greatest representation of capable women in other key government roles.

al units, securing and attracting banking credits to create jobs, reviving inactive production units, and reintegrating them into the production cycle are all on the agenda.

What measures have you considered to address youth unemployment in the county and support female heads of house-

employment credits are all being pursued diligently. Additionally, we are focused on developing rural infrastructure, expediting the implementation of rural development plans, and strengthening rural housing to achieve balanced and sustainable development in underprivileged areas.

Does taking on social responsibilities limit women in their other responsibilities and interests? Has this been a challenge in your life so far?

I believe that with proper time management, it is possible to effectively address social responsibilities while fulfilling the primary duties of a woman, such as being a mother and a wife. I have long understood the true meaning of the proverb "time is gold" and live by it. In the workplace, I focus all my thoughts and

is managed efficiently. Fortunately, this has not posed any challenges in my professional or personal life. Of course, mutual understanding with my husband and child has been helpful, and some challenges have been alleviated by their supportive presence. Over the years, in addition to taking on social responsibilities outside the home, I have continued my education and worked on personal development. I am interested in reading and I closely monitor current political and economic news. I have a passion for arts and crafts, engaging professionally in embroidery, crocheting, jewelry making, carpet weaving, and crafting accessories. I also have a keen interest in cultivating flowers and plants, especially cacti, and I enjoy household management and cooking with love.

What impact will your appointment as the first Sunni Kurdish female governor have on women's participation in significant political and executive roles? Can this presence herald a greater involvement of women in managerial positions and the utilization of their rich capacities in other key roles?

I believe this appointment will pave the way for the maximum involvement of women in key and high-level managerial positions. The reality is that the glass ceiling that has historically hindered women's advancement in the workplace is slowly but surely being shattered, and I hope to see more managerial positions at the provincial level allocated to women in the coming years. In this regard, I am also striving to leverage the experience and capabilities



of deserving and experienced women in managerial roles in Dehgolan County and facilitate their professional advancement.