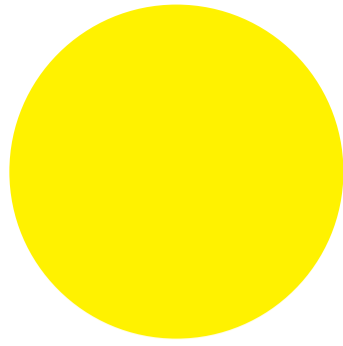


Japan to assist in normalizing Iran's FATF status



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## Syrian Army Confronts Shock Offensive by Militants in Aleppo

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Escalating tensions in Syria put shaky stability on the line

Vehicles burn after an airstrike against foreign-backed militants in Aleppo, Syria on November 29, 2024. AP

By Hoda Yousefi  
Guest contributor

### PERSPECTIVE

On Wednesday, November 27, 2024, a coalition of various armed groups, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, commenced military operations in Syria. These developments have escalated the situation, resulting in direct confrontations with the Syrian Army and the advance of these groups toward Aleppo. This unfolding scenario comes on the heels of a decade-long civil war in Syria, which lasted from 2011 to 2020, and follows a recent period of fragile stability in the region. The Syrian Army has faced significant challenges due to years of conflict, and the government continues to address the economic impacts stemming from this ongoing situation. The regional situation in Syria has become increasingly challenging. Russia, a key military ally of the Bashar al-Assad government, is currently focused on its involvement in the Ukraine conflict. At the same time, Iran and Hezbollah, which also support Syria, are addressing their own engagements in Lebanon and their ongoing tensions with Israel. In light of the reduced Russian military presence and the logistical support from Iran and Hezbollah, there has been heightened activity from terrorist groups attempting to expand their influence within Syria. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which currently leads this movement, was formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra and was associated with Al-Qaeda in Syria. Over time, however, the group made the significant decision to distance itself from Al-Qaeda, officially establishing itself as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in 2016. Since then, the organization has declared its intent to operate independently, emphasizing its separate identity.

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## Tehran, Doha to connect power grids via undersea cable

### Economy Desk

The CEO of Tavanir, Iran's state electricity company, announced on Saturday that measures are underway to establish an undersea power connection with Qatar. Mostafa Rajabi-Mashhadi stated that a virtual meeting was held last week, as an in-person meeting is scheduled to take place in Qatar within the next month to finalize technical studies to begin operational work. Talking to ILNA, the official discussed the strategic importance of synchronizing Iran's power grid with Russia and Azerbaijan, noting that Iran currently imports 500 megawatts of electricity from Turkmenistan and Armenia during the winter and has agreements, known as AIR and AGIR, with Azerbaijan and Russia to receive up to 300 megawatts. Rajabi-Mashhadi highlighted that although Iran has never imported electricity from Azerbaijan during the winter, improved political relations now enable electricity exchange among Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan. He added that the current 300-megawatt exchange could increase to 1,000 megawatts as transmission lines are expanded. The official also mentioned an upcoming trilateral meeting between the energy ministers of Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan to further develop electrical connections. Regarding Armenia's recent announcement of its ability to increase electricity exports to Iran by 400 megawatts, Rajabi-Mashhadi explained that this would be possible with the completion of Armenia's third transmission line. He noted that the line is 90% complete and represents a significant step in enhancing energy cooperation between the two countries.

**Mohammad Ali Rajabi**  
Cartoonist



# Japan to assist in normalizing Iran's FATF status

### Economy Desk

The head of Japan's delegation to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) announced that Tokyo intends to support the process of normalizing Iran's status and helping it exit the list of high-risk countries for money laundering and terrorist financing. According to a report by IRNA on Saturday, Hadi Khani, the secretary of the High Council for the Prevention and Combating of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing who also heads Iran's Financial Intelligence Unit, met with Mitsutoshi (Toshi) Kajikawa, the deputy vice minister of

affairs at Japan's Ministry of Finance. Toshi also serves as the head of Japan's delegation to FATF and co-chair of the Asia/Pacific Group (APG) on money laundering. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the 41st Eurasian Group (EAG) Plenary Meeting in Indore, India, which was held on November 25-29. During the meeting, Toshi expressed satisfaction with Iran's progress in combating money laundering and terrorist financing. He stated that Japan is committed to helping normalize Iran's status with FATF and will serve as a voice for Iran's efforts among the G7 nations,

which are the founding members of FATF. Both sides also discussed strategies for sharing knowledge and expertise in areas such as cryptocurrency regulation and combating money laundering and terrorist financing. Iran has taken significant steps toward implementing the FATF's action plan, including passing key legislation to align with international standards on anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT). Officials have expressed hope that these measures will improve Iran's standing and facilitate its reintegration into the global financial system.



## Soil erosion rate over four times global standard: Minister

### Economy Desk

Iran's Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri-Qezelgeh warned that the country's soil erosion rate is approximately 16.5 tons per hectare annually—more than four times the global standard, stressing that reversing this trend is essential for ensuring food security. Speaking at the World Soil Day event in Tehran on Saturday, held under the theme of "Caring for Soils: Measure, Monitor, Manage," the minister highlighted the critical role of soil in food production and emphasized that environmental protection, particularly soil conservation, is included in Iran's Constitution. The minister noted that the law on soil protection, passed by Iran's Parliament in 2019, requires widespread public involvement to succeed. "Public awareness and participation are essential to creating a national commitment to protecting our soil," he said. Nouri-Qezelgeh underscored that soil is the foundation of global food security and stated, "There is no alternative to



protecting our soil." The minister went on to say that a coordination headquarters has been established to ensure the enforcement of the law on soil protection. Nouri-Qezelgeh said that Iran ranks first worldwide in soil conservation (in terms of education, awareness, and advocacy), thanks to efforts made in recent years as he expressed optimism about future soil conservation measures in the country. The minister criticized international sanctions for limiting Iran's access to advanced soil protection technologies, saying, "Sanctions have restricted our access to many of the modern technologies necessary for soil conservation."

## Iran's Digital Rial explained from A to Z

### Economy Desk

The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has announced the imminent launch of the Digital Rial, stating that it is currently in the pilot phase. The CBI has entered this field at the right time, said Mohammadreza Farzin, emphasizing that many countries are developing or researching digital currencies to optimize their financial systems. Iran, too, has engaged in the experimental stage, testing the Digital Rial on the Kish Island. The Digital Rial is already being used in several banks, including Bank Melli Iran, Bank Mellat, and Bank Tejarat. Five more banks are expected to join the project soon. Plans for a digital currency began in 2021, following initial studies and approval from Iran's High Council of Money and Credit. The pre-pilot phase started in early 2022, and a limited pilot phase began in mid-2023. By July 2024, the project expanded to a broader experimental phase, integrating two major banks. The Kish Island has become a key testing ground, where banking customers and tourists can use this digital payment tool.

### What is Digital Rial?

The Digital Rial is a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) issued by the Central Bank of Iran. Unlike cryptocurrencies, it is fully regulated by the state and serves as an electronic version of the national currency. The Digital Rial aims to improve financial transparency and efficiency while providing a modern alternative to hard cash. It is not intended for investment purposes but rather to replace banknotes. The CBI envisions transforming hard cash into programmable, smart money through the Digital Rial. Users will exchange their cash for Dig-



ital Rial stored in e-wallets. Unlike traditional cryptocurrencies, the Digital Rial is not decentralized but functions on a private, state-controlled blockchain. Benefits of Digital Rial include cost reduction with minimizing costs for printing and distributing banknotes, and financial transparency with enhanced oversight to combat money laundering and corruption. Economic control is another benefit with improved monetary policy execution and inflation management as well as digital economy growth with facilitating e-commerce and digital financial transactions. Sanctions-proofing which provides an alternative to international payment systems and reduces vulnerability to international bans is a main benefit of the Digital Rial. It has also some challenges and concerns of privacy issues as traceable transactions raise concerns about user privacy. Infrastructure needs of Digital Rial requires robust internet access, which may be limited in rural areas and cybersecurity risks which despite high-level security, risks of hacking and fraud remain. Also, centralized control of the CBI could limit user access in specific situations. Adoption barriers is another challenge for the Digital Rial as public skepticism and lack of familiarity with digital finance may slow adoption.

## Iran, India, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan discuss transit via Chabahar Port

Facilitating commercial transactions, as well as the transportation and transit of goods from Chabahar Port, have been reviewed in the third joint working group of Iran, India, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. According to Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran, the third joint working group was held in Mumbai, India, with the presence of Hossein Shahdadi, the deputy director of port and economic affairs of Chabahar Free Zone, IRNA reported.

The participants discussed the capacity and infrastructure of transportation and the obstacles in this field. Presenting the necessary proposals to facilitate commercial transactions through Chabahar was also on the agenda of the meeting as transportation and transit of goods from the southern port were also discussed. Officials from the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways of India, along with ambassadors of Uz-



bekistan, Afghanistan, and Indian diplomats attended the event.

# Archaeological insights from Bazeh Hur in Khorasan Razavi Province



## Iranica Desk

Archaeologists, after seven seasons of excavation at the historical site of Bazeh Hur in Khorasan Razavi Province, have concluded that the discovered fire temple at this location is the largest and most significant fire temple in the northeastern cultural region of the Iranian Plateau during the pre-Islamic era. It is likely the same fire temple referred to in Sassanid religious and historical texts as Azar Barzin Mehr. The Bazeh Hur historical site, situated 75 kilometers southeast of Mashhad and adjacent to the village of Rabat-e Sefid, is recognized as

one of the most important Sassanid settlement sites. Covering an area of 20 hectares, Bazeh Hur comprises a settlement, a cemetery, and two groups of religious architecture, notably featuring a four-arch stone structure located at its northern edge. This structure was registered as the first listed monument of Khorasan on Iran's National Heritage List in 1931. Archaeological excavations that commenced in 2018 on the southern side of this site led to the identification of architectural remains of a Sassanid fire temple that remained active into the early Islamic period before being ultimately destroyed by a

significant earthquake.

The seventh season of excavation at the Bazeh Hur site has recently concluded, following a contract between the Cultural Heritage Research Institute and the University of Tehran's Department for Communication with Industry and Society. Meisam Labaf Khaniki, an associate professor in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Tehran and head of the Bazeh Hur archaeological team, discussed the results of this season's work. He noted that archaeological activities at this historical site since 2014 have uncovered valuable evidence related to archi-

tectural styles, decorations, pottery traditions, literature, and the practice of Zoroastrian rituals in Khorasan prior to the advent of Islam. In alignment with the defined objectives, this season's excavation aimed to address existing uncertainties regarding the quality of architectural decorations on the southern front of the Qaleh Dokhtar fire temple and to identify the nature of the architectural spaces adjacent to the fire temple. Labaf Khaniki stated that targeted excavations in specific workshops yielded valuable remnants of wall paintings, plasterwork, and figural ornaments found in their

original locations. These findings contribute significantly to our understanding of pre-Islamic art and architecture in eastern Iran and the decorative methods employed in religious architectural complexes. Furthermore, he mentioned that excavations in the workshops located within the enclosed area south of the fire temple provided valuable information about the quality of the surrounding wall architecture, the shape and function of architectural spaces, as well as a unique assemblage of pottery spanning from the Parthian period to the early Islamic era. Labaf Khaniki emphasized

that the seventh season of archaeological work at the historical site of Bazeh Hur has confirmed previous hypotheses, demonstrating that the uncovered fire temple is indeed the largest and most significant fire temple in the northeastern cultural region of the Iranian Plateau during the pre-Islamic era. This temple is likely the same one referred to in Sassanid religious and historical texts as Azar Barzin Mehr.

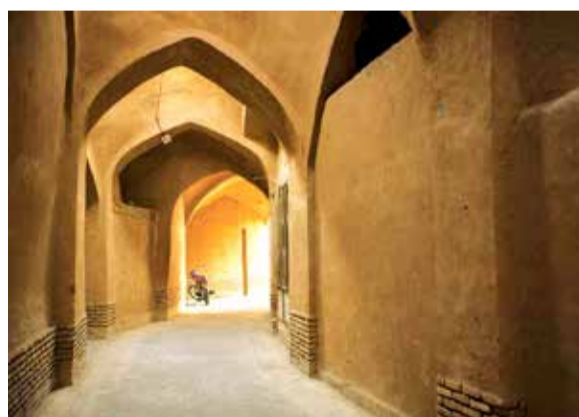
He concluded by stressing the extraordinary importance of this site in architectural history and the unique role of this fire temple in elucidating the social, political, and cultural history of Iran. Therefore, it is essential for relevant organizations and institutions to make timely decisions and implement practical measures to preserve and protect this invaluable historical site.

## Role of traditional architecture in cultural heritage tourism

### Iranica Desk

Today, the tourism industry is recognized as one of the most significant sources of income globally and a crucial factor in fostering cultural exchanges among nations. Through various tourism activities, the economies of historical cities can be revitalized and reshaped. By focusing on sustainable practices, these historical centers can transform into valuable economic resources, benefiting both local communities and the wider society.

Tourism plays an essential role in many national and regional economies, particularly in less developed areas where it can drive development effectively. Historical cities and cultural heritage sites are especially significant in these regions, as archaeological sites and ancient buildings serve as primary attractions for international tourists. When these sites possess remarkable features, they can become global symbols, drawing visitors from around the world, chntn.ir wrote. The architectural style of each region is intricately reflected in its buildings and urban planning. One of the most valuable aspects of any city is its tradition-



al fabric and architecture, which hold considerable cultural significance due to historical events, the residence of notable figures, and collective memories associated with specific architectural styles. With proper management and planning, these areas can be transformed into comprehensive destinations for cultural heritage tourism, offering visitors a rich experience of the local history and culture. In contemporary society, traditional architecture is receiving increasing attention as a vital component of cultural heritage. Evaluating and reconstructing traditional architectural forms while considering the requirements of modern life is crucial for preserving this

heritage. Valuing traditional architectural practices in the development of tourism destinations is one of the most effective ways to protect human heritage from the threats of degradation and loss. Cultural heritage showcases diverse aspects of human cultures and the legacies left by our ancestors. It serves as a mechanism for preserving social evolution and fostering a sense of global cohesion. Heritage encompasses customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions, and values that are essential for identity and self-awareness. Just as heritage has been passed down through generations, its benefits must be preserved for future generations.

Heritage embodies a sense of identity that promotes diversity among cultures, reflecting the uniqueness of humanity. It includes a blend of social and emotional elements along with various human activities. Cultural heritage can be divided into two interconnected categories: tangible and intangible heritage. Tangible heritage consists of physical elements that integrate with life and the environment, including buildings and sites such as temples, the Pyramids of Egypt, and public structures. Intangible heritage encompasses local features such as traditional crafts, cuisine, and unique cultural practices produced by indigenous communities. Historical artifacts and tan-

gible elements of cultural heritage represent significant historical and cultural events and are regarded as works of art. They express cultural viewpoints, values, beliefs, political ideas, customs, and traditions, reflecting the people, their culture, and their history. International tourism serves as a platform for showcasing diverse cultures, reflecting various lifestyles, beliefs, and values. A specific domain of tourism that encompasses cultural heritage is known as cultural heritage tourism. This form of tourism is defined as travel to visit historical sites, participate in local festivals, enjoy local arts and crafts, and engage in recreational activities. It includes various branches

such as religious tourism (visits to churches and monasteries), museum tourism (exploring museums), architectural tourism (visiting archaeological parks and museums), cave tours (in protected areas), and cultural tourism (engaging with traditions, culture, folklore, music, art, and architecture). Cultural tourism, like heritage tourism, is regarded as a promising factor for economic development in tourist areas. The primary motivation for travel often stems from a desire to understand and appreciate culture and history, with traditional architecture serving as a key indicator of a community's heritage. The subject of architecture in tourism is explored under the term "architectural tourism." While there is no universally accepted definition, architectural tourism encompasses a wide range of applications of traditional architecture, primarily viewing it as an attraction for visitors. With improved economic conditions and increased demand for food and clothing, the demand for tourism has also risen. Just as there are many products for food and clothing, numerous natural and human-made attractions exist for tourism. Architectural elements are

among the most sought-after items by tourists. Therefore, the quality of a city, region, or country's architecture must be carefully monitored and protected as part of cultural heritage tourism resources. Today, tourism based on architectural heritage has become one of the most popular forms of tourism, with countries worldwide embracing traditional architecture as a tool for economic development and support for local culture and heritage. The phenomenon of vernacular architecture is a significant subject in aesthetics and philosophy, reflecting a deep respect for nature and the importance of introspection. Although vernacular architecture has undergone transformative changes throughout history, it has managed to maintain its unique identity, representing the customs, spirit, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, tastes, and artistic expressions of a community. What past architectural cultures held as tradition is often presented to us today as a lifeless form. Consequently, contemporary societies, in their pursuit of rediscovering and utilizing past values, are compelled to explore and recognize unfamiliar and forgotten values.

# Inside Israel-Hezbollah cease-fire



By Mitchell Plitnick  
President of  
ReThinking  
Foreign Policy

## OPINION

the fighting. So, what did the two sides agree to, how durable is the agreement, and what does it mean for a potential regional war and the ongoing genocide in Gaza?

One chapter in the long war Israel has waged throughout the Middle East is over. Lebanon and Israel agreed to a cease-fire that went into effect on Wednesday morning. It's been clear for several weeks that Israel and Hezbollah were both ready to take a break from

### Terms of cease-fire

The text of the cease-fire calls for the fighting between Hezbollah and Israel to stop immediately. Over the course of the next 60 days, Hezbollah will move all of its personnel and equipment north of the Litani River, some 18 miles from the border with Israel, and Israel's forces will fully withdraw from Lebanon. Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon will be replaced by the Lebanese military, which will operate alongside the UNIFIL team. The Lebanese army will be responsible for ensuring

that no weapons or military materiel reaches Hezbollah and that all of Hezbollah's forces and equipment are dismantled or removed from the area south of the Litani River. Israel, Lebanon, the United States, and France will form a "Mechanism" group, which will work with UNIFIL to monitor and ensure enforcement of the commitments made by both sides. The US and the United Nations will facilitate negotiations between Israel and Lebanon to settle the remaining border disputes between the two countries.



A man celebrates carrying a picture of the late Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut, Lebanon, following a cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah that went into effect on November 27, 2024.  
● BILAL HUSSEIN/AP

### 'Side letter' from US to Israel

Alongside the cease-fire agreement, a letter from the United States to Israel affirms American support for Israel to "act in self-defense," a term Israel has historically stretched beyond all recognition. This was the Joe Biden administration's way of satisfying both Israel's demand that it be allowed to act against Hezbollah if it felt the need and Lebanon's refusal to compromise its own sovereignty in such an agreement. The letter also commits the United States to provide Israel with intelligence on Iranian efforts to send weapons to Hezbollah or influence politics in Lebanon, and on any attempt by Hezbollah to "in-

filtrate" the Lebanese army. Israel is to be permitted to act "in self-defense" if Hezbollah violates the cease-fire in the area south of the Litani, and can only act elsewhere in Lebanon if there is a violation that the Lebanese army is unable or unwilling to address. It also allows Israel to conduct reconnaissance flights over Lebanon as long as its aircraft don't breach the sound barrier. Lebanon and Hezbollah are not involved in the side letter, so they do not necessarily agree with its contents. Clearly, though, they are aware of it and were willing to agree to the cease-fire with the understanding that this is how the US will approach any future Israeli decision on aggressive actions in Lebanon.

### Reasons to agree to cease-fire now

For Hezbollah, Israeli attacks did significant damage to the group. The loss of key leaders, the loss of much of its firepower, and the damage to the group's infrastructure were severe. While Hezbollah has been able to regroup sufficiently to beat back Israeli ground forces, the toll Israel has taken is significant. More importantly, the damage that Israel has done to Lebanese civilians and civilian infrastructure is more than Hezbollah can tolerate. Lebanon was already reeling from economic and physical calamities over the past few years. But even many who still admire the group's ability to stand up against Israel's military force are seeing too many of their children, their

siblings, and their neighbors being killed. Hezbollah cannot afford to simply allow that kind of civilian toll on the country. While people still blame Israel primarily for its crimes, Hezbollah's status in Lebanon is going to crater if they are seen as stubbornly refusing a cease-fire when they can stop this devastation of Lebanese civilians. On the Israeli side, neither Benjamin Netanyahu's rivals nor allies in the Knesset are supporting him, but there is reason that the criticism is more political posturing than real attempts to pressure Netanyahu out of the cease-fire. Netanyahu was faced with the reality that Israeli forces were being stretched too thin. With fighting in Gaza ongoing and

Hezbollah's ability to resist Israel's advances on the ground proving resilient, there is a real strain on their military. Some reservists have been on duty for a year or more. Perhaps more importantly, incoming US President Donald Trump has made it clear to Netanyahu that he wants the fighting to end. Netanyahu has no intention of stopping the genocide in Gaza, but he has every incentive to stop the fighting in Lebanon, at least for a while. Reports that Netanyahu was pushed into the agreement by a threat from Biden to support a UN Security Council resolution are nonsense. Not only is it highly unlikely that Biden would suddenly take such a step, but if he did, the idea that

Netanyahu would stop a war he wanted based on that threat is absurd. He would much more likely call Biden's bluff and, even if Biden was serious, he'd simply defy the resolution, as Israel always has. When Trump comes into the White House, Netanyahu can decide to try to strengthen the cease-fire sufficiently to return Israeli citizens to their homes in the north or to work with the many Iran hawks in Trump's administration to provoke a potential war for regime change in the Islamic Republic, a path which would almost certainly mean renewed fighting in Lebanon. Either way, an opportunity to lower the strain on Israel's military for a period of time will be advantageous.



### Both claim victory; Who's right?

Hezbollah once again proved that despite all of the devastation and slaughter that Israel brought to bear, it can not only survive but still prevent an Israeli ground invasion. On that basis, they can claim victory if they want. Israel, too, is claiming victory, but a realistic look throws that claim into doubt. Ultimately, for all the blood it spilled and all the infrastructure it destroyed, Hezbollah is still standing. It's damaged but will likely recover from that damage. Netanyahu can talk about bringing Israelis back to their homes in the north, but many will rightly doubt that it's really safe for them to go back. As much as Israel got its way in the terms of the cease-fire, they are still aware that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are no better equipped today to enforce the deal on Hezbollah than they were before. The LAF still needs to be very cautious about engaging Hezbollah as any encounter of that kind risks a quick march down the road back to civil war. Additionally, many of the LAF are going to be sympathetic to Hezbollah or, at the very least, queasy about fighting fellow Leb-

anese in defense of an agreement with Israel. By agreeing to the cease-fire, Israel is veering away, at least for the moment, from its efforts to compromise Iran's position in the region and provoke a confrontation that settles the cold conflict that has been simmering for decades. That could change in the coming months, but for now, this is at least a pause in that effort, perhaps even a step back. One more loser is worth mentioning, and that is international law. France was eager to be part of this process, as it often is when Lebanon, its former mandatory territory, is involved. Israel, angry that France has taken the position that it would obey the ruling of the International Criminal Court that issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, opposed French involvement. To convince Israel to allow France to participate in the monitoring process, French authorities said that Netanyahu would be "immune" from French enforcement of the ICC warrant. This transactional approach to law is a major blow to the gains international law made with the ICC warrants.

**A Trump influence?**

Donald Trump communicated clearly to Netanyahu that he wanted the fighting to end before he took office. He doesn't want to inherit Joe Biden's mess, and he wants to enhance the illusion that he brings peace while the Democrats bring war.

Netanyahu won't end the genocide in Gaza. It is clear that Israel is digging in for a long operation there. The fighting with Hezbollah can be stopped, at least for a while, and that will have some benefits for Israel as well.

But as much as Trump might talk about being against a war in the Middle East, his picks for senior staff reflect a very different agenda. His Ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, is a Christian Zionist who yearns to see the Third Temple built on the ruins of Al-Aqsa Mosque and believes there is

"no such thing as a Palestinian".

His Secretary of Defense nominee, Pete Hegseth, sports a Jerusalem Cross tattoo, a symbol of the Crusaders and Christian nationalism, and was enough of a concern that, when he was in the National Guard in 2021, he was barred from providing security at Joe Biden's inauguration.

Major Iran hawks such as Mike Waltz and Marco Rubio, as well as Islamophobic ideologues like Seb Gorka, are also key figures on Trump's team.

With this lineup, there is every reason for Netanyahu to believe that he will be able to manipulate circumstances toward the large-scale attack on Iran that he has wanted for decades.

Trump is also going to be sympathetic to the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies, and they are working very hard to avoid

that outcome. The Saudis, Emiratis, and Qataris will be able to incentivize Trump with business interests and massive arms purchases, whereas Netanyahu has, at times, fallen out of favor with Trump. These factors give some reason for hope.

But Netanyahu knows Washington better than the Arab leaders and will have far more sway over members of Trump's team. It will remain to be seen which of those influences prove the more powerful.

But at least for the first few months of Trump's term, it seems likely that the cease-fire with Lebanon should hold. Given the amount of blood spilled in Lebanon since September, any such respite has to be welcomed.

*The full article first appeared on Mondoweiss.*



A man gestures as he holds a Hezbollah flag in Tyre, Lebanon, after a cease-fire between Israel and Lebanon took effect on November 27, 2024.

● AZIZ TAHER/REUTERS



Smoke billows above Beirut's southern suburbs following Israeli airstrikes on November 26, 2024, a day before the cease-fire between Israel and Lebanon took effect.

● FADEL ITANI/AFP

## Cease-fire in Lebanon will not last long



By **Belén Fernández**  
Author,  
columnist

### OPINION

And so it has come to pass. Late on Tuesday night, Israel agreed to a cease-fire in Lebanon, which came into effect at 4 am (02:00 GMT) on Wednesday. The deal, in theory, puts an end to a nearly 14-month war that has killed thousands of Lebanese and dozens of Israelis. Over a period of 60 days, Israel will withdraw its forces from Lebanon, and Hezbollah will pull back from the border area. The Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip will meanwhile carry on undeterred.

Those familiar with Israel's modus operandi could sense the imminence of a cease-fire in Lebanon, given the recent surge in manic bombardment by the Israeli military, which has a habit of stepping up its acts of lethal barbarism whenever there is a looming danger of temporary peace.

True to form, Israel spent much of the day prior to the cease-fire announcement bombing the living daylight out of various parts of Lebanon, including the capital, Beirut, where its sadistic pounding of residential areas — pardon, "Hezbollah infrastructure" — sent much of the population fleeing in terrorised panic. After all, there is nothing like an impending cease-fire to empty your arsenal and make room for new goodies. All the better if you go ahead and pulverise as much territory as possible before the referee says — time's up.

During Israel's last major war on Lebanon in 2006, which killed approximately 1,200 people over a span of 34 days, the Israeli military geared up for the inevitable cease-fire by launching millions of cluster bombs at the southern part of the country. As is par for the course with such weaponry, a large percentage of bombs failed to explode on impact and instead functioned as de facto landmines for years to come.

Indeed, one could argue that this quite literally illustrated Israel's intention not to attain a lasting peace but rather to prepare the ground for future conflict. Now, almost two decades later, the game is hardly over — as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu all but confirmed on Tuesday with his pledge to "strike decisively" in the event that Hezbollah violates the cease-fire: "In full coordination with the United States, we retain complete military freedom of action."

Given Israel's track record of violating regional cease-fires and then blaming the violation on the opposing party to justify bouts of mass bloodshed, we can safely assume that Israel will decide to "strike decisively" whenever it decides it is up for another round in Lebanon.

The gist of the current cease-

fire agreement is basically the same as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which served as the basis for the cease-fire in 2006. Israel must withdraw from Lebanon, the Lebanese army must deploy to the south of the country as the only armed outfit aside from UNIFIL — the UN's supposedly "interim" force that has been in place since 1978 — and both Israel and Hezbollah must abstain from cross-border violations. But since we have already had 18-plus years to ponder the effectiveness of Resolution 1701, it is a bit difficult to share US President Joe Biden's optimism regarding the newly repackaged cease-fire: "This is designed to be a permanent cessation of hostilities."

For starters, the Lebanese army is a force that is entirely incapable of defending the country against Israel's predatory designs — and the US will continue to ensure that it remains so. As for respecting the mutual border, consider that, even prior to the onset of outright hostilities in 2023, the Israeli military continuously violated Lebanese airspace, including by breaking the sound barrier over Beirut and other cities — a nerve-annihilating little trick that not only constitutes a blatant viola-

tion of Resolution 1701 but also amounts to a form of terrorism in itself.

At the end of the day, Israel accuses Hezbollah of "terrorism" in order to distract from the fact that its military has been terrorising Lebanon for decades. And what do you know: the whole arrangement has been directly enabled by the very country that is now presiding over the "permanent cessation of hostilities," with Biden additionally promising: "What is left of Hezbollah and other terrorist organisations will not be allowed, I emphasise, will not be allowed, to threaten the security of Israel again."

Israel, of course, will be allowed to proceed in its quest to eradicate the population of the Gaza Strip, while also "threatening the security" of everyone else in the region — and all with the assistance of billions upon billions of dollars in aid and weaponry from the US. Netanyahu himself has straight-up acknowledged that a cease-fire in Lebanon will permit the Israeli military to better focus its energy on Hamas and Iran.

An Al Jazeera dispatch outlining the details of the cease-fire specifies that "an international task force headed by the United States that includes French peacekeepers would also be

deployed to oversee implementation of the truce". This may sound vaguely familiar.

After the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and siege of Beirut that killed tens of thousands of Lebanese and Palestinians in the country, a US-brokered agreement oversaw the evacuation from Beirut of officials and fighters belonging to the Palestine

Liberation Organization (PLO). Under the terms of the deal, a multinational force involving — who else — the Americans and the French was meant to guarantee the safety of Palestinian refugees remaining in the city. And yet no sooner had the PLO leadership departed than it was time for the notorious Israeli-orchestrated Sabra and

Shatila massacre of up to 3,500 Palestinian refugees and Lebanese civilians.

And as we watch to see how the latest cease-fire plays out, just remember that "permanent cessation of hostilities" is never on the US-Israeli agenda.

*The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.*



A man waves a Lebanese flag as he stands amidst the rubble of a building destroyed in Israeli strikes, after a cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah took effect, in Tyre, Lebanon, on November 27, 2024.

● ADNAN ABIDI/REUTERS

# Iranian women to chase historic podium in Asian Handball Championship

## Sports Desk

Iranian women's team will be looking to make history by winning a first-ever medal at the Asian Handball Championship in New Delhi, India, where four quotas for next year's World Championship will be on the line.

Iranian girls secured the berth for the global showdown in the previous two editions of the Asian event, but ultimately missed out on the podium following defeats against Kazakhstan and China in the third-place playoffs.

Nashmin Shafeian's team will get its campaign underway against Asian powerhouse Japan – runner-up to South Korea in the last five editions – in Group B on Tuesday, in a repeat of the 2022 semifinal, where the Japanese walked away with a comfortable 43-19 victory. Iran will take on the host on Wednesday, before concluding the group phase against Hong Kong two days later at the Indira Gandhi Arena.

"The first game will be a



● IRIHF

really tough one as Japan is one the best teams in the continent, but we will be looking to take all points

from the next two outings to clinch a world berth, and then hopefully battle for a podium finish," Shafeian

said before her team headed to New Delhi on Friday. The bad news for the Iranian head coach is that she

will have to do without star player Fatemeh Merrikh, who missed the Indian trip after suffering an elbow in-

jury on the eve of the tournament.

With South Korea and Japan being the clear favor-

ites to square off in a sixth successive final showdown, it will likely be a three-way battle between China, Kazakhstan, and Iran for a third-place finish.

China and Kazakhstan are in Group A of the eight-team competition – also featuring 16-time champion South Korea and Singapore – and their encounter on Tuesday will likely decide the runner-up spot in the final standing of the group.

"Our top priority is to seal the World Championship quota, and then we will set our sights on the biggest achievement of our careers, which is an Asian medal," Iranian captain Mina Vatanparast told ISNA, adding: "To that end, I believe we will have overcome China."

"We have played against all of our group opponents before. Japan is a strong team, not only in Asia but on a global level. We defeated Hong Kong in 2018, and beat India by a high margin two years ago, though they will be a much better side at home," added Vatanparast.

## Iran's Maqsoodlou finishes third in Int'l President Cup

### Sports Desk

Iranian chess grandmaster Parham Maqsoodlou settled for a third-place finish in the 3rd International President Cup in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Maqsoodlou, who captained the Iranian gold-winning team in last year's Asian Games, defeated the host's inter-

national master Saidakbar Saydaliev to finish his campaign with seven points.

This was a sixth win for the Iranian second-seed in Tashkent, with his sole loss coming against Uzbek international master Ortik Nigmatov in the second round. Indian grandmaster Nihal Sarin tallied 7.5

points to win the tournament, which was held in a nine-round Swiss format, with Uzbek GM Javokhir Sindarov standing runner-up with seven points.

Seyyed Mohammad-Amin Tabatabaei was the other Iranian in the tournament, scoring 5.5 points, courtesy of four wins, three draws, and two

losses, to finish 26th in the final standing. Compared to its previous two editions, this year's tournament was the biggest and strongest yet, with 120 players participating in the A Open tournament that boasted a 2401 average rating, with 24 grandmasters among that group.



● IRNA

## Onus on Guardiola to prove himself amid City's winless slump

**REUTERS** – With Manchester City mired in a six-game winless slump and facing one of their biggest challenges this season at Liverpool today, manager Pep Guardiola said the onus was on him to prove he can right the ship.

A loss at Anfield would leave Guardiola's men 11 points adrift of the leaders in the Premier League title race, but the Spaniard said he was thinking big picture rather than the potential ramifications of one game.

"Of course, I am thinking what I can do to help them (the players) but in the long career as a player and a manager you live these situations," said Guardiola, who recently signed a two-year contract extension.

"When you live it – accept it and challenge it. No com-

plaining, no blaming, no pointing the figure or running from your responsibility. If you don't win, you're in trouble, I know that," he added.

"The moment I feel I am not positive for the club, another one (manager) will come but I want the opportunity to try it and I want to rebuild the team in many aspects from now on until the end of the season and the next seasons. I ask for that challenge and this opportunity to do it," he continued, in an answer that stretched for nearly four minutes.

"I know what we need, what we have to do. We don't have the consistency we had right now but which team during 10 years in the world has been consistent, tell me one. They don't exist – not in NBA, tennis, golf.

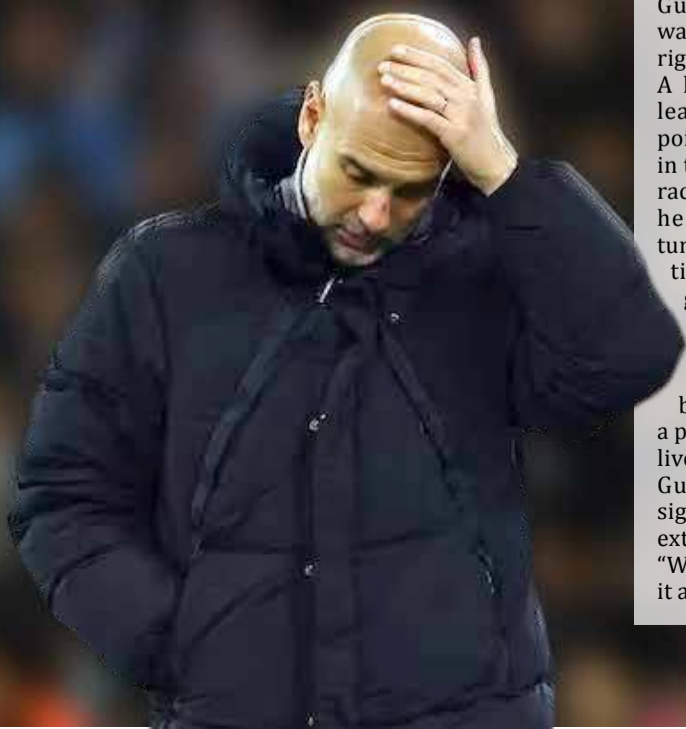
"It proves how we are as sportsmen and competitors. It is easiest when you have 10, 12 games in a row and everyone is fit and in their prime. I have to prove myself now. I have to find a solution and a way to do it and I am trying every day." City have been stung by injuries to key players but Guardiola kept his cards close to his chest about who might be fit to play today, saying: "We will see." A 4-0 rout by Tottenham Hotspur at The Etihad last weekend marked their third successive Premier League loss and a defeat at Anfield would be their first four-game losing streak in the top flight since 2007. It would also surpass their total number of losses from the whole 2023-24 season. City fans can take comfort

in the fact that their side have climbed back from deficits of eight points or more to win the league four times with Guardiola at the helm.

While a defeat today would make City's title hopes "more difficult," Guardiola said, the Spaniard reiterated that he was not thinking of trophies.

"In the situation we're in, it's not realistic to think about big targets. The situation is to think about the next game and getting the momentum to continue and that will come back," he said.

"I have learned all my life to move forward in the good moments and the bad moments. It's how many times you stand up when again and again you fall. "We will be back, I know that. I don't know when that is – the truth."



# Syrian Army confronts shock offensive by militants in Aleppo

## Kurdish forces brace for insurgents' attacks

### International Desk

Syrian troops on Saturday battled foreign-backed militants inside the country's second largest city, Aleppo, for the first time since 2016, while warplanes targeted militants' supply lines following a surprise attack by the insurgents. The insurgents broke through government defense lines in Aleppo on Friday and entered the city's western neighborhood. The insurgents launched their shock offensive in Aleppo and Idlib countryside on Wednesday and wrested control of dozens of villages and towns along the way, including a strategic town south of Aleppo.

The Al-Watan newspaper reported airstrikes on the edge of Aleppo city, targeting militant supply lines.

Twenty fighters were reportedly killed in the airstrikes that targeted militants' reinforcements.

State media reported that a number of "terrorists" have infiltrated parts of the city. Syrian troops chased them and arrested a number who posed for pictures near city landmarks, state media said.

### Preparing for counterattack

Syria's armed forces said in a statement Saturday that to repel the large attack on Aleppo and save lives, it has redeployed and is preparing for a counterattack. The statement acknowledged that the insurgents entered large parts of the city but said they have not established bases or checkpoints. The resurgence of militants "is a temporary measure and (the military central command and armed forces) will work to guarantee the security and peace of all our people in Aleppo," the military statement said.

Russia's state news agency TASS quoted Oleg Ignasyuk, a Russian Defense Ministry official coordinating in Syria, as saying that Russian warplanes targeted and killed 200 militants who launched the offensive in the northwest on Friday.

The foreign ministers of Iran and Russia in a phone conversation on Saturday firmly supported Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity and backed the country's government and army in confronting terrorist groups.

In a phone conversation with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi "emphasized the need for vigilance and coordination" between Iran and Russia "to confront the actions of terrorists in Syria," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

The Kurdish-majority neighborhood of Sheikh Maqsood in Aleppo is bracing also for a possible attack by militants. The People's Protection Units (YPG), which controls the neighborhood, published a video early Saturday morning that it said shows "civilians... preparing to defend their neighborhood in the event of an attack."

### Turkey's role

Farhad Shami, spokesperson for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a US-backed force spearheaded by the YPG, said on Friday that they are closely following the developments and that Turkey is behind the offensive.

On a Syrian state TV morning show Saturday, commentators also blamed Turkey for supporting the insurgents' push into



AFP

Aleppo and Idlib Provinces.

Reuters reported on Saturday that opposition sources in touch with Turkish intelligence said Turkey had given the green light to the offensive.

However, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, whose country has backed militants in Syria since the beginning of foreign-backed insurgency in the Arab country in 2011, said on Friday that Ankara

is not involved in the ongoing conflict in Aleppo.

Back in 2011, demonstrations against Syrian government turned into a full-scale war which was supported by many Western and regional countries.

Ankara initially sought to topple President Bashar Assad after the foreign-sponsored conflict erupted in 2011, but as government forces regained territory with the

help of Russia and Iran, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reversed course.

Since then, Turkey has continued to support the militants who fled to Idlib Province. The militants also were given an opportunity to leave for Idlib with their families. Following an agreement between Russia, Iran and Turkey in May 2017, Idlib governorate became part of a 'de-escalation' area.

## Iranian luminary grills UNHRC president on Gaza

Gholam Ali Afroz, an inductee to Iran's scientific and cultural hall of fame, took to his X social media handle to question the United Nations' double standards and duplicitous approach regarding the ongoing suffering of Palestinian children in the besieged Gaza Strip. In a scathing swipe at Omar Zniber, the sitting president of the UN Human Rights Council, Afroz pushed a line of Socratic questioning that suggests that the council has not performed its duties even by its own standards and definitions of "human beings" and "[human]

rights". "Do the oppressed children of Gaza have the right to live?" asked the distinguished professor of psychology at the University of Tehran poignantly.

"What is UN role in this matter?" he underlined.

The United Nations has for months been criticized for its inaction, at best, and shrugging, at worst, at the unspeakable horrors that the Israeli army is inflicting in Gaza through incessant air strikes and unlawful use of starvation against civilians, including women and children.

## No more capacity to host migrants in Iran: Minister

### International Desk

Iran's Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni said on Saturday that the country has no capacity to host more migrants, adding that good measures have been taken by the government to organize migrants.

Referring to the presence of millions of illegal migrants in the country, Momeni said, "Our country is not able to allocate so many subsidies and job opportunities to foreign nationals because there are six million foreign nationals in the country, some of whom are illegal."

He also pointed to the progress in construction of walls along the borders to prevent the illegal entry of migrants in the country, saying that organizing of foreign

nationals starts from the borders and the regulations related to blocking the entry routes are being implemented.

He also said that the laws related to the employment of migrants by Iranian employers must be implemented properly, although good measures have been taken in this regard.

Under the international laws, the country which hosts migrants from other countries should receive international aid while the international aid given to Iran with several million immigrants is close to zero.

Iran has recently begun to repatriate illegal Afghan nationals living in Iran. The move is part of the efforts to meet the target set by the government to deport two



million illegal migrants by the end of the Iranian calendar year on March 20.

The number of illegal immigrants in Iran is unofficially estimated to be around 10 million, with many seeking better economic opportunities or fleeing conflict in their home country, especially since the 2021 takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

## Escalating tensions in...

### Unfolding events

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In a remarkable series of events over the course of less than three days, insurgent forces were able to take control of several cities and villages, including the strategically important town of Saraqib, located south of Aleppo. On Friday, November 29, they also gained control of Aleppo, which represents a notable shift as it is the first time since 2016 that the city has changed hands. The implications of this development are both symbolic and practical for the Syrian government, reflecting a significant moment in the ongoing situation.

Aleppo is widely recognized as Syria's economic hub, and its potential capture by opposition forces could significantly impact Bashar al-Assad's territorial control. For more than a decade, Aleppo has symbolized state governance in northern Syria, and its occupation may alter the military dynamics, potentially favoring the insurgent groups.

The recent events coming to pass in northern Syria, marked by the loss of General Kiomars Haj Hashemi, a senior Iranian military advisor, underscore the intricate dynamics at play in the region. This situation may illustrate the wider involvement of multiple nations in the ongoing developments. Additionally, reports have emerged indicating that insurgents are

now equipped with advanced weaponry and new drones, which suggests the possibility of external support for their activities.

### Foreign stakeholders

Israel perceives the ongoing tensions in Syria, particularly those influenced by anti-Assad groups, as an opportunity to enhance regional stability. Since October 7, Israel has focused on disrupting communication channels within the Axis of Resistance, which operates across Lebanon and Syria. In this context, Israeli airstrikes have targeted various weapon depots in northern Syria, which Israel suspected were intended to support Hamas.

Following a ceasefire agreement with Hezbollah, Israel acknowledges the necessity of redirecting its focus to the Syrian front. In this regard, Israel seeks to foster stability in the region, encourage a reduction of Iranian and Hezbollah influence along its borders, and engage diplomatically with Assad's government to gain potential concessions.

Conversely, the present circumstances pose significant challenges for Russia. While Moscow remains committed to addressing its involvement in the conflict in Ukraine, it is important to recognize that Syria retains considerable strategic importance for the country. Should Russia be unable to extend military support to

the Syrian government and if the opposition achieves notable progress, there is a risk that Moscow could lose its strategic presence in the Middle East. This situation could potentially limit access to the Mediterranean via Tartus, which has implications for regional stability.

Russian leaders face the important task of navigating the situation in a way that promotes success on one front while preserving influence on others. It is essential to consider the Syrian Army's reliance on Russia for support, including military supplies and the deployment of personnel. Acknowledging this interdependence can foster a positive and sustainable partnership moving ahead.

Concerns have been raised regarding Turkey's actions, with some observers suggesting that Ankara may be employing strategies reminiscent of its previous support for Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in addressing Kurdish forces in northern Syria, now directed toward exerting pressure on Assad's government. In 2019, Turkey initiated an operation known as "Peace Spring" in northern Syria, justifying its actions as measures taken in self-defense and highlighting the need to address potential threats beyond its borders to ensure regional stability.

This statement reflects Turkey's perspective that its military operation in north-

ern Syria aims to mitigate the potential regrouping of terrorist groups. Nevertheless, the operation's primary objectives are twofold: to create distance between Kurdish forces and Turkey's borders, and to establish a secure buffer zone intended to accommodate Syrian refugees who are currently in Turkey.

In light of the setbacks from a recent operation, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has adjusted his approach and indicated a willingness to engage in dialogue with Bashar al-Assad. The anticipated discussions are expected to focus on the Kurdish issue in northern Syria and the development of a framework to facilitate the safe return of Syrian refugees currently residing in Turkey. However, President Assad has emphasized that any negotiations would require the complete withdrawal of Turkish forces from northern Syria as a prerequisite.

Given the current situation, where Russia is on one side and Iran and Hezbollah are on the other, and the Syrian government lacks sufficient military support, Turkey appears to be taking advantage of the opportunity. It seems to be supporting groups like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in an effort to pressure Assad into negotiations or to pursue its objectives through violent means.

It turns out that Erdogan may not be the primary architect behind the recent devel-

opments in Syria. Rather, he seems to have skillfully navigated a situation that was already evolving.

### Conclusion

Given the complex dynamics in the region, it stands out a mile that Syria's allies are engaging on multiple fronts. This situation underscores the strategic importance of Damascus and the need to support its allies. As a result, Russia may contemplate deploying some of its military resources to Syria, which could include either weaponry or personnel. Additionally, Iran, a key regional ally of Syria, has consistently expressed its support for the Syrian government. There is now a growing motivation for Iran to consider direct intervention, especially in light of recent attacks on its military positions and the unfortunate loss of one of its advisors.

In this context, should Israel choose to discontinue its military support for certain groups, or if Turkey decides to reassess its interests in collaborating with them, it is probable that the insurgent advance will be effectively curtailed in the near term. However, if these groups continue to receive considerable and ongoing foreign assistance, it could lead to a resurgence of tensions on the Syrian front, underscoring the need for careful diplomatic engagement.



This group of individuals, except in exceptional cases such as being a university student after reaching the age of 18, have a six-month deadline to introduce themselves to Iran's Public Conscription Organization and, depending on their service status and location, serve 18 months (non-native individuals) or 21 months (native individuals) of military service. Otherwise, in accordance with Article 58 of the law, those who fail to determine their service status within the specified deadline will be considered absent.

Absent individuals, according to the law, face deprivation of various rights, including the inability to receive bank facilities, obtain a business permit, or get employed officially. They are also barred from running for elections in the Islamic Consultative Assembly and other legal councils and associations, and cannot receive their high school diploma or higher education certificates from the relevant ministry, among other things.

It's worth noting that Iran's Military Service Act is also in place in many countries other than Iran, and in some countries, including Cuba, North Korea, Georgia, and others, the law of compulsory military service applies to women as well. Some countries, however, have opted to make military service voluntary and optional, instead relying on a fully professional army. Unlike Iran, their armed forces are composed solely of employed personnel, with no distinction between permanent staff and conscripts. That being said, some of these countries have not entirely dismissed the possibility of reinstating conscription, and instead, have reserved it for times of war or crisis.

In Iran, the law of universal military service was approved by the National Consultative Assembly in June 1925. This law has continued to be enforced since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, with some changes and adjustments to the duration of military service based on the country's circumstances.

It's natural that Islamic law, which considers defending the Islamic territory a duty for all Muslims, men and women alike, does not oppose this law. However, over the past 40 years, efforts have been made to facilitate the process of military service for young people by introducing new regulations and plans, such as the possibility of buying military service, exemptions, increased military salaries, and new proposals.

All these plans and actions, including the proposal to buy military service, have had both opponents and supporters. The Islamic Consultative Assembly is one of the institutions that, in cooperation with the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, follows up on proposals related to military service and has approved many bills and proposals in this regard over the years.

Regarding the issues related to universal military service, including the proposal to increase military salaries and the proposal to buy military service, Iran Daily reporter conducted exclusive interviews with parliamentarians, which will be presented in the following:

### Military service purchase plan discriminatory

Mohammad Amir, a lawmaker representing Ahvaz, and a member of the Article 90 Commission of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, is one of the opponents of the military service purchase plan, which he believes is discriminatory.

According to him, the plan creates a divide between the haves and have-nots, as well as those who have a good financial situation and those who do not. This is because individuals who do not have a good financial situation are forced to serve in the military, while wealthy individuals can buy their way out of service by paying a fee.

He added, this is a form of discrimination, and I believe such a plan should not exist. Instead, exceptions could be made for individuals who have specialized skills or are considered to be among the country's elite, and who could be more productive in other areas, contributing to the economy and the country's benefit. However, the idea that someone can simply pay a fee to receive an exemption card and have the money deposited into the treasury, and think that this creates economic benefits, is a mistake. Instead, the individual's presence in other areas should have economic justification, and their abilities should contribute to the economy and other sectors.

# To serve or to pay: Debate over Iran's Military Service Act

By Sadeq Dehqan  
 Staff writer

## INTERVIEW

*The term "military service" or "compulsory military service" refers to the mandatory military period for men in Iran, which has always been one of the most significant challenges and concerns for every Iranian man at the beginning of his youth.*

*According to Iran's Military Service Act, and in accordance with Article 2 of this law, every male Iranian individual, upon reaching the age of 18, becomes subject to the regulations of universal military service.*



Abdolkarim Hashemi Nakhle Ebrahimi



Mohammad Amir

### Military expertise for economic growth

Regarding the increase in military salaries, Amir believes that if we compare the current salaries of soldiers to those of a few years ago, we will see positive developments. Since the increase in military salaries, there has been an increase in voluntary enlistment for military service, whereas previously, there was less enthusiasm for going to military service, and many individuals avoided it. This is because there are individuals who are struggling to make ends meet and provide for their families, and military service puts them in a worse situation. He emphasized the need to utilize the abilities of soldiers optimally, saying, "Of course, it's essential to use the labor force of soldiers in a logical and rational way in the economy and various sectors of the country. Simply having a large number of soldiers in barracks, with the significant economic costs that come with it, is not beneficial, and the costs should be offset in other ways. There are many skilled, semi-skilled, and specialist laborers among soldiers, and these capacities can be utilized during military service to generate income and economic benefits for the country."

He suggested, "Soldiers can be used in areas other than purely military matters, such as in industry and production, so that they can prepare for the job market in the future and generate income for the country."

Regarding military salaries, he believes, "In my opinion, the current salaries of soldiers are suitable considering the country's economic situation, as soldiers make up a significant portion of the population, and paying higher salaries would require a large budget. However, if the abilities of soldiers are utilized in the country's economic sectors, the government will certainly have a better economic capacity to increase military salaries."



### Military service purchase plan not a bad idea

Abdolkarim Hashemi Nakhle Ebrahimi, a lawmaker representing Hormozgan province and a member of the Plan and Budget Committee, is one of the supporters of the military service purchase plan.

According to him, the plan has both supporters and opponents, but overall, he believes that the plan is not a bad idea. He thinks that some individuals may not be able to perform their military service for various reasons and may be willing to pay the cost of exemption. In this way, instead of evading military service and leaving the country through illegal means, they would pay the cost to the country. Of course, the issue of buying military service is related to peacetime, and in the event of war, military service would be mandatory for everyone.

### Soldiers' pay should exceed average wage

Regarding the increase in military salaries, he said, the salaries of our soldiers should be such that it motivates them, so that they consider their military service as part of their career and can count on their salary. We should be careful not to create conditions in the military that make individuals think that serving in the military is a waste of time and that they should not expect any income or benefits from it. Hashemi emphasized, "In my opinion, the salary of soldiers should be higher than the average monthly income of other individuals in the country, and a soldier should at least receive a salary equivalent to that of a government employee. Of course, soldiers can receive even higher salaries, considering the tough nature of their job which is 24 hours and the fact that the government can transfer them to any location and utilize their force in various areas."

Therefore, the salary and income of soldiers should be sufficient to ensure that they do not face economic difficulties, given that they are married or have family responsibilities."