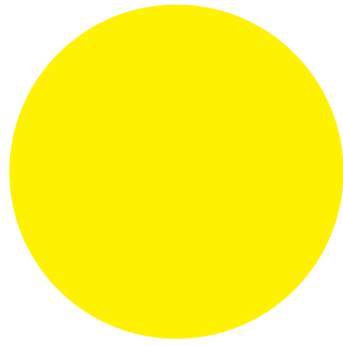


**President:**  
Gender  
justice 'social  
necessity'  
for country's  
progress



8 >



# Iran Daily

Vol. 7527 ● Monday, December 23, 2024 ● Dey 3, 1403 ● Jumada al-Thani 21, 1446 ● 100,000 rials ● 8 pages



> [irandaily.ir](http://irandaily.ir)

> [newspaper.irandaily.ir](http://newspaper.irandaily.ir)

> [IranDailyWeb](http://IranDailyWeb)



## Iran neither has nor needs proxy forces in region: **Leader**

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Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks in a meeting with a group of religious eulogists in Tehran, Iran, on December 22, 2024.  
● [khamenei.ir](http://khamenei.ir)



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A project to 'disturb Iran'  
**Strategies to counter  
Turkey's soft war,  
TRT Persian network**

By Navid Kamali  
Foreign policy expert

OPINION  
EXCLUSIVE

The recent official launch of TRT Persian network has operationalized the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) Director General's controversial promise from several months ago to "disturb Iran." These concerning statements, which explicitly revealed intentions to create challenges for Iran, have now doubled concerns about the true objectives of this media project with the network's formal launch. [Page 8 >](#)

فارسی TRT

هر انسان یک جهان،  
هر خبر یک روایت Her İnsan Bir Dünya,  
Her Haber Bir Hikâye

فارسی TRT  
TRT Farsça  
Tahsin Programı



فارسی TRT

## Energy Ministry carps about insignificant funding for renewable energy



Energy Ministry's fundamental plan for renewable energy is to leverage community capacities, said Abbas Aliabadi on Sunday, adding that, "We have not received substantial funding for renewable energy to date."

In an interview with ILNA, he referred to the electricity and gas agreements between Iran and Turkmenistan, and stated, "I have traveled to Turkmenistan twice. We successfully extended the electricity contract, but gas is not part of our responsibilities. Fortunately, we have renewed our electricity supply based on their available capacity."

He noted that Turkmenistan has two electricity generation lines fully utilized to supply power to major cities in eastern Iran, such as Mashhad.

On Saturday, the energy minister said six gigawatts (GW) of new electricity capacity will be connected to the country's power grid by next summer, noting that the new capacity will include 3 GW of renewable power plants.

Aliabadi stated that the country also plans to change electricity meters for heavy consumers as part of plans to control the demand next summer. Iran's peak demand for electricity reached nearly 80 GW in the last summer, nearly 15% more than the summer of 2023.

Authorities said at the time that the consumption was equal to the usage in industrialized countries like Germany. However, Aliabadi insisted that Iran's current electricity issues, which have forced closures in the country in recent days, are related to inconsistencies in the supply of fuels to power plants.

Reports earlier this week suggested that some 17 power plants in Iran, out of a total of 143 in the country, had stopped generating electricity because they had been disconnected from the nationwide gas grid due to increased demand for heating in the country.

That came as fuel inventories at those power plants had also declined because of various reasons, including overconsumption in summer months.

Authorities have ordered a ramp-up in diesel production in recent days to offset the shortage.

# Parliament okays general provisions of Iran-EAEU free trade bill

Members of the Iranian Parliament agreed on the general provisions of the bill for a free trade agreement between Tehran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and its member states.

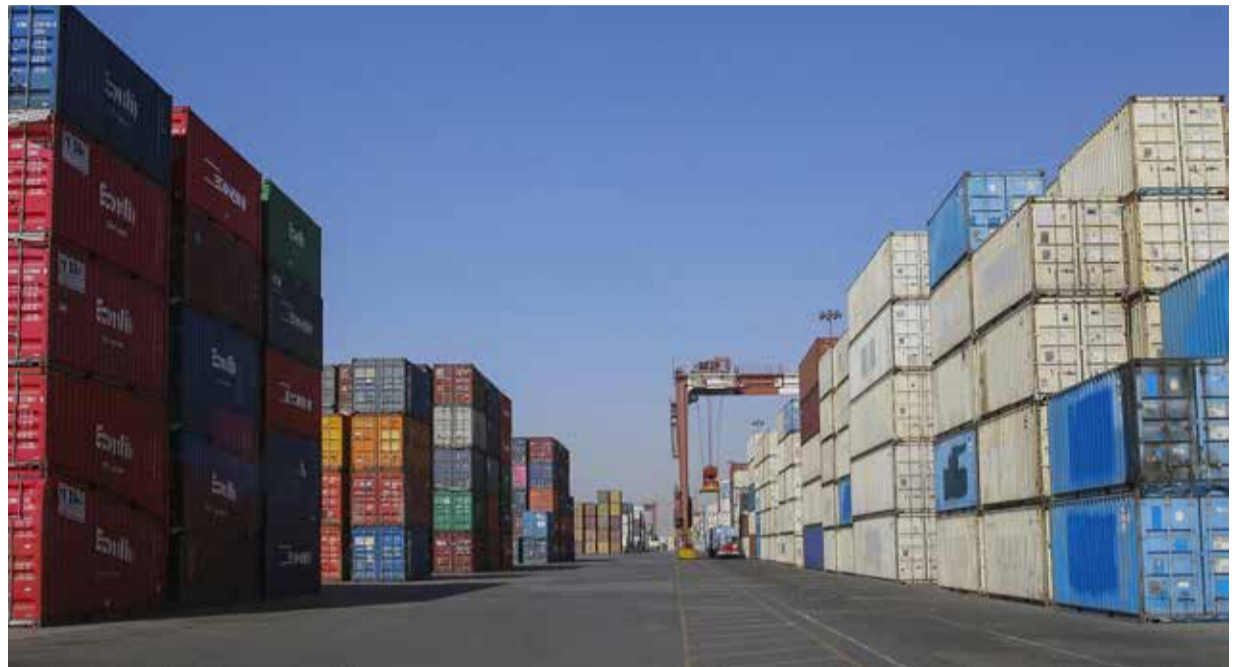
On Sunday, the legislature reviewed its Economic Committee's report on the bill for the free trade agreement, and the lawmakers ratified the overall provisions, IRNA reported. According to the bill, the free trade agreement between Iran and the EAEU and its member states includes a preamble, 147 articles, and 6 annexes, as well as authorization for

the exchange of documents.

Iran and EAEU reached a preferential trade agreement in 2018, which came into effect on October 27, 2019. The union previously signed an interim agreement on free trade with Iran on March 14, 2022.

The volume of trade between Iran and the EAEU increased by 11% in the first nine months of 2024 compared to the same period last year.

The EAEU is an intergovernmental economic association comprising Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia.



## Leading woman entrepreneur shares challenges of own career



By **Bitia Mir-Azimi**  
Staff writers

Fahimeh Dokhanchi, a 45-year-old manager of a food processing factory in Tabriz, the capital city of East Azerbaijan Province in northwestern Iran, has made her mark as the first exporter of egg powder in the country. She began her entrepreneurial career over two decades ago with her

husband and has been acclaimed multiple times as the northwestern province's top entrepreneur, according to Persian-language daily Iran.

Dokhanchi focuses on producing a variety of food products, including egg powder, sports and protein supplements, various types of Yufka dough, Baklava, and paper bags. She has directly employed 350 individuals and has

created indirect jobs for more than three times as many.

Pointing to egg powder production, Dokhanchi noted, "Eggs are the most perishable food item and cannot be stored. The best way to utilize them efficiently is through processing."

With this in mind, her company has extended the shelf life of eggs from one month to two years through processing, this is while, egg production in the country has been done in conventional ways, which posed challenges for exports.

Now, converting eggs into powder has significantly enhanced the potential for exporting to neighboring countries.

Dokhanchi also highlight-

ed the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs who have various responsibilities, saying, "When it comes to women's participation in management and advisory roles, there is a prevalent issue of underestimating women and a lack of trust in their abilities."

She asserted that this traditional perspective must change within educational frameworks and families, where important responsibilities should be allocated regardless of gender biases.

Moreover, she emphasized that women should support one another through trust and collaboration, overcoming challenges collectively and making a significant contribution to the nation's development.

## SCI: Annual inflation rate drops to 32.5%

Economy Desk

The annual inflation rate for households in Iran reached 32.5% in the month to December 20, registering a 0.6 percentage point decrease compared to the previous month, according to the Statistical Center of Iran. In the ninth Iranian month that ended on December 20, the Consumer

Price Index (CPI) for households rose to 285.1, showing a 2% increase compared to the previous month and a 31.4% rise compared to the related figure for the ninth month of the previous Iranian year (which ended on March 19, 2024), ILNA reported.

The CPI for the 12 months that ended on December 20, 2024, also registered a 32.5% increase compared to



the 12 months that ended on December 20, 2023.

## Iran-Africa Chamber: Tehran should grab opportunities in African markets with national interest focus



The head of the Iran-Africa Chamber highlighted the need to focus on national interests in order to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by African markets.

Masoud Barahman spoke at a meeting on strategies for entering African markets on Sunday, stating that Africa has become increasingly significant for developed countries, IRNA reported.

He continued by noting that Africa has developed a roadmap for growth up to 2063, but the efforts by other countries to attend the African market indicate that results may come much sooner.

Barahman highlighted China's extensive presence in Africa, reporting that the country plans to send 300 million of its citizens to the continent, stating that China has a \$147-billion trade with Africa.

The senior trader estimated Africa's total trade volume at around \$1.5 trillion and stressed the need for serious consideration and action regarding engagement in this untapped market.

To succeed in Africa, he added, collaboration is essential and individual efforts should be avoided. Barahman stated that if progress is to be made, the private sector must lead the initiative.

## Iran's female business owners shine in BRICS competition

Four out of 22 projects submitted by Iran were recognized as top projects in the BRICS Women Entrepreneurs Forum competition, the head of the International Organizations Cooperation Group affiliated with the Iranian Presidential Center for Transformation and Progress announced.

Zahra Farahani made the announcement on Sunday during the Women, Innovation, and Technology event held at The Iran House of Innovation and Technology (IHIT) in Tehran, reported ifnews.com.

She said out of 1000 projects submitted by 30 countries to the forum in September, 26 projects were winners, with four of them belonging to Iranian women entrepreneurs.

The criteria for participation required women over 18 who were developing and implementing projects to establish innovative companies with a vision for commercialization and growth in BRICS member countries.

The winners were selected based on their capacity for significant commercialization

and innovative features, ensuring future growth in the BRICS markets.

Farahani noted that the competition fields included information technology, artificial intelligence, healthcare, innovation ecosystems and infrastructure, food security, and agriculture. Established in 2020, BRICS Women Entrepreneurs Forum aims to promote entrepreneurship and women's participation. BRICS currently includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates, and



Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Malaysia have formally applied for membership.

# Magic of Varzaneh; from historic sites to desert wonders



The city of Varzaneh  
iribnews.ir

Varzaneh is a town in Isfahan Province, central Iran, located near the Gavkhuni Wetland. With a population of approximately 13,000, Varzaneh is renowned for its historical monuments and has earned the nickname "The Whitest City in Iran."

Notable sites include the Jaame Mosque of Varzaneh, the last bridge on the Zayandeh Rud River, Qurtan Citadel — one of the largest adobe fortresses in Iran — the Pigeon Tower, and the picturesque Salt Lake of Varzaneh. Visitors can enjoy various desert activities such as hiking, driving, camel riding, and ziplining.

The Varzaneh Desert, situated on the western edge of the Gavkhuni Wetland, spans over 17,000 hectares of sandy terrain. The hills reach heights of about 100 meters and extend approximately 30 kilometers in width, stretching 60 kilometers south of Gavkhuni Wetland to the village of Khara. This area has become popular among desert enthusiasts, offering unique natural phenomena, including forests, rivers, and salt flats, inboundpersia.com wrote.

Gavkhuni Wetland features increased vegetation due to higher humidity levels. While some areas near the wetland have lush forests, the southern sections near Khara village and the Salt

Lake are predominantly barren due to salt winds. Varzaneh Desert is conveniently located just 110 kilometers from Isfahan, making it accessible for travelers, with a journey taking about an hour and a half.

The nearest town to the desert is Varzaneh, located less than 10 kilometers from the sand dunes. Visitors may encounter wildlife such as jackals, foxes, and kangaroo rats, as well as scorpions and rattlesnakes, particularly in areas with dense vegetation.

Despite the presence of these animals, there have been no reported bites among tourists. The main access road is the Varzaneh-Hassan Abad Road, leading to recreational sites like oasis. Along this route, you'll find traditional Camel Mill (Asiyab Shotor) and Cow-Well (Gav Chah). Services in Varzaneh Desert include camel rides, off-road driving, quad biking, kite flying, and ziplining. Deserts are captivating destinations for backpackers and nature lovers. Varzaneh Desert allows you to walk on soft golden sands and immerse yourself in its serene atmosphere. If you visit in April or May, you can participate in camel riding competitions. The ziplining experience here is unique, and motorbiking and off-roading offer exhilarating adventures. However, en-

vironmentalists caution that these activities may harm the landscape, so to preserve the desert's beauty for future generations, it's advisable to limit such recreational pursuits.

One interesting spot to visit is Gav Chah, which reflects traditional local life. Historically, cows were used to draw water from wells, a practice that has evolved with technology and is now symbolically demonstrated for tourists.

Another attraction is Qurtan Citadel, which is claimed to be the second largest adobe structure in Iran after Arg-e Bam. This 15-meter tower is located at the eastern end of the Zayandeh Rud River in Qurtan village and is known as Kabootar Khaneh (House of Birds) due to the nesting birds.

Khara Salt Cave, filled with salt crystals and red algae, is another notable site where salt is excavated for industrial use, offering a stunning view of the landscape.

Winter and autumn are the best seasons to visit the desert, particularly autumn when temperatures are milder.

The entire route to Varzaneh is paved, making it easy to access by hired car. Visitors can stay overnight in traditional lodges or camp under the stars.



Varzaneh Desert  
safarzon.com



Gavkhuni Wetland  
IRNA



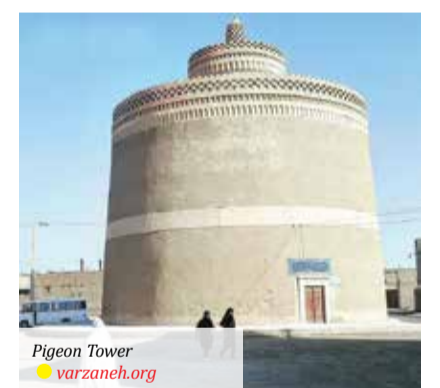
Qurtan Citadel  
maghamimedia.com



Gav Chah  
varzaneh.org



Asiyab Shotor  
IRNA



Pigeon Tower  
varzaneh.org



## Threads of tradition in kamand-duzi

One of the most beautiful and delicate embroideries of Iran is called *kamand-duzi* (*kamand-weaving*). The word *kamand* means a long rope that is used to trap animals or to climb up the walls. It is also called *khamand*. But in terms of embroidery, it is a kind of sewing that is done by threads such as silk *gheytan*, silk, wool, glass beads, *sormeh* and filigree.

After sewing kinds of margins, *kamand* is applied as the inner and outer margins and surrounds the inside and outside of the margins, just like margins of the books, visitiran.ir wrote.

*Kamand-duzi* is never used alone but it is applied as a complementary element of a sewing piece. This embroidery is very close to the art of

*kamand-andazi* in book layout and traditional book designing. From ancient times until today, *kamand-andazi* has been done by wide or simple grids around the texts and then the decorative motifs of *sharafeh* were added. But in *kamand-duzi*, decorations such as *tagarg*, *zarak* or blanket stitches and *sharafeh* are sewed.

The art of *kamand-duzi* traces back to thousands of years ago in Iran. There are many carving and reliefs from Achaemenid dynasty and other artifacts that prove it was common at the time. During the Parthian empire, since gold-brocade fabrics were popular and exported, decorative crafts such as *kamand-duzi*, silk *qeytan* and *golabatoon* were sewed on the margins and *kamand-*

*duzi* was used to decorate clothing, bundles and drapery margins. *Kamand-duzi* is also used in other kinds of embroidery such as *tekeh*, *pateh*, *Bokhara*, *ajideh*, *katibeh*, *Baluch*, glass beads, *sormeh*, filigree and silk.

Since these crafts are popular in different parts of Iran, it can be said that *kamand-duzi* is common as complementary sewing in most parts of Iran. Alongside other embroideries, *kamand-duzi* is used to decorate kinds of prayer rugs, bundles, decorative tableaux, hats, clothes, cushion covers, tablecloths, fabric covers, box covers, teapot covers and etc. These embroideries can be found in museums all over the world and especially museums of decorative arts.

# Israel, not 'liberators' of Damascus, will decide Syria's fate



By Jonathan Cook  
Author,  
award-winning  
journalist

O P I N I O N

*There has been a flurry of "What next for Syria?" articles in the wake of Bashar al-Assad's hurried exit from Syria and the takeover of much of the country by Al-Qaeda's rebranded local forces. Western governments and media have been quick to celebrate the success of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), even though the group is designated a terrorist organization in the United States, Britain, and much of Europe.*

*Back in 2013, the US even placed a £10 million bounty on its leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, for his involvement with Al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS) and for carrying out a series of brutal attacks on civilians. Once upon a time, he might have expected to end up in an orange jumpsuit in the notorious, off-the-grid detention and torture facility run by the Americans at Guantanamo Bay. Now, he is positioning himself as Syria's heir apparent, seemingly with Washington's blessing.*

*Surprisingly, before either HTS or al-Jolani can be tested in their new roles overseeing Syria, the West is hurrying to rehabilitate them. The US and UK are both moving to overturn HTS's status as a proscribed organization.*

*To put the extraordinary speed of this absolution in perspective, recall that Nelson Mandela, feted internationally for helping to liberate South Africa from apartheid rule, was removed from Washington's terrorist watch list only in 2008 — 18 years after his release from prison. Similarly, western media are helping al-Jolani to rebrand himself as a statesman-in-the-making, airbrushing his past atrocities, by transitioning from using his nom de guerre to his birth name, Ahmed al-Sharaa.*

## Piling on pressure

Stories of prisoners being freed from Assad's dungeons and of families pouring onto the streets in celebration have helped to drive an upbeat news agenda and obscure a more likely dismal future for newly "liberated" Syria — as the US, UK, Israel, Turkey, and Persian Gulf states jostle for a share of the pie. Syria's status looks sealed as a permanently failed state. Israel's bombing raids — destroying hundreds of critical infrastructure sites across Syria — are designed precisely towards that end. Within days, the Israeli military was boasting it had destroyed 80 percent of Syria's military installations. More have gone since.

Israel has prioritized instead targeting Syria's already beleaguered military — its planes, naval ships, radars, anti-aircraft batteries, and missile stockpiles — to strip the country of any offensive or defensive capability. Any hope of Syria maintaining a semblance of sovereignty is crumbling before our eyes. These latest strikes come on top of years of Western efforts to undermine Syria's integrity and economy. The US military controls Syria's oil and wheat production areas, plundering these key resources with the help of a Kurdish minority. More generally, the West has imposed punitive sanctions on Syria's economy. It was precisely these pressures that hollowed out Assad's gov-

ernment and led to its collapse. Now, Israel is piling on more pressure to make sure any newcomer faces an even harder task. Maps of post-Assad Syria, like those during the latter part of his beleaguered presidency, are a patchwork of different colors, with Turkey and its local allies seizing territory in the north, the Kurds clinging on to the east, US forces in the south, and the Israeli military encroaching from the west. This is the proper context for answering the question of what comes next.



“

Al-Jolani understands only too well the options ahead of him. Perhaps not surprisingly, he appears far keener to become a Syrian Mahmoud Abbas than a Syrian Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader killed by Israel in October. Given his clean-cut military makeover, al-Jolani may imagine that he can eventually upgrade himself to the Syrian equivalent of the US-backed leader of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky.

term, the targeted population would understand that, given the severity of the punishment, any future resistance to Israel should be avoided at all costs. Back in 2007, four years before the uprising in Syria erupted, a leading articulator of the neocon agenda, Caroline Glick, a columnist for the Jerusalem Post, set out Syria's imminent fate. She explained that any central authority in Damascus had to be destroyed. The reasoning: "Centralized governments throughout the Arab world are the primary fulminators of Arab hatred of Israel." She added: "How well would Syria contend with the IDF [Israeli military] if it were simultaneously trying to put down a popular rebellion?" Or, better still, Syria could be turned into another failed state like Libya after Muammar Gaddafi's ousting and killing in 2011 with the help of NATO. Libya has been run by warlords ever since. Notably, both Syria and Libya — along with Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Lebanon, and Iran — were on a hit list drawn up in Washington in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 by US officials close to Israel. All but Iran are now failed or failing states.

## Security contractor

The other possible outcome is that Syria becomes a larger version of the West Bank. In that scenario, HTS and al-Jolani are able to convince the US and Europe that they are so supine, so ready to do whatever they are told, that Israel has nothing to fear from them. Their rule would be modeled on that of Mahmoud Abbas, leader of the much-reviled Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. His powers are little greater than those of the head of a municipal council, overseeing schools and collecting the rubbish. His security forces are lightly armed — effectively a police force — used for internal repression and incapable of challenging Israel's illegal occupation. Abbas has described as "sacred" his service to Israel in preventing Palestinians from resisting their decades-long oppression. The Palestinian Authority's active collusion was on show again at the weekend when its security forces killed a resistance leader in Jenin wanted by Israel. Al-Jolani could similarly be cultivated as a security contractor. Largely thanks to Israel, Syria

On Monday last week, Israel unleashed 16 strikes on Tartus, a strategically important port where Russia has a naval fleet. The blasts were so powerful, they registered 3.5 on the Richter scale. During Assad's rule, Israel chiefly rationalized its attacks on Syria — coordinating them with Russian forces supporting Damascus — as necessary to prevent the flow of weapons overland from Iran to its Lebanese ally, Hezbollah. But that is not the goal currently. HTS's Sunni fighters have vowed to keep Iran and Hezbollah — the Shia "Axis of Resistance" against Israel — out of Syrian territory.

ernment and led to its collapse. Now, Israel is piling on more pressure to make sure any newcomer faces an even harder task. Maps of post-Assad Syria, like those during the latter part of his beleaguered presidency, are a patchwork of different colors, with Turkey and its local allies seizing territory in the north, the Kurds clinging on to the east, US forces in the south, and the Israeli military encroaching from the west. This is the proper context for answering the question of what comes next.

## Two possible fates

Syria is now the plaything of a

power plays. Beginning in 2013, Israel ran a covert program to arm and fund at least 12 different rebel factions, according to a 2018 article in Foreign Policy magazine. In this regard, Syria's fate is being modeled on that of the Palestinians. There may be a choice, but it will come in no more than two flavors. Syria can become the West Bank, or it can become Gaza. So far, the indications are that Israel is gunning for the Gaza option. Washington and Europe appear to prefer the West Bank route, which is why they have been focusing on the rehabili-

and the neocons. It draws on lessons Israel believes it learnt in both Gaza and Lebanon. Israeli generals spoke of returning Gaza "to the Stone Age" long before they were in a position to realize that goal with the current genocide there. Those same generals first tested their ideas on a more limited scale in Lebanon, pummeling the country's infrastructure under the so-called "Dahiya" doctrine. Israel believed such indiscriminate wrecking sprees offered a double benefit. Overwhelming destruction forced the local population to concentrate on basic survival rather than organize resistance. And in the longer



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (C) stands on the Syrian side of Mount Hermon on December 17, 2024, after the Zionist regime's army violated the 1974 armistice agreement between Syria and Israel.  
● IDF

Syrian air force's planes have been bombed in the hangar by Israel while Damascus was being handed over to the HTS faction.

● NICOLE TUNG/THE NEW YORK TIMES



now has no army, navy, or air force. It has only lightly armed factions such as HTS, other rebel militias like the misnamed Syrian National Army, and Kurdish groups. Under CIA and Turkish tutelage, HTS could be strengthened, but only enough to repress dissent in Syria.

HTS would have powers but on license. Its survival would depend on keeping things quiet for Israel, both through a reign of intimidation against other Syrian groups, including the Palestinian refugee population, who threaten to fight Israel, and by keeping out other regional actors resisting Israel, such as Iran and Hezbollah.

And as with Abbas, al-Jolani's rule in Syria would be territorially limited.

The Palestinian leader has to contend with the fact that large swaths of the West Bank have been carved out as Jewish settlements under Israeli rule and that he has no access to critical resources, including aquifers, agricultural land, and quarries. Off-limits to HTS would likely be Kurdish areas policed by Turkey and the US, where much of the country's oil is located, as well as a swath of territory in Syria's southwest that Israel has invaded over the past two weeks.

It is widely assumed Israel will annex these Syrian lands to extend its illegal occupation of the Golan, which it took from Syria in 1967.

#### 'Love' for Israel

Al-Jolani understands only too well the options ahead of him. Perhaps not surprisingly, he appears far keener to become a Syrian Abbas than a Syrian Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader killed by Israel in October.

Given his clean-cut military makeover, al-Jolani may imagine that he can eventually upgrade himself to the Syrian equivalent of the US-backed leader of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky.

However, Zelensky's role has been to fight a proxy war against Russia, on behalf of NATO. Israel would never countenance a leader of a country on its border being given that kind of military muscle.

Al-Jolani's commanders have lost no time explaining that they have no beef with Israel

and do not want to provoke hostilities with it.

The heady first days of HTS's rule were marked by its leaders thanking Israel for helping it to take Syria by neutralizing Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. There were even declarations of "love" for Israel.

Such sentiments have not been dented by the Israeli army invading the large demilitarized zone inside Syria next to the Golan, in violation of the 1974 armistice agreement.

Nor have they been damaged by Israel's relentless bombing of Syria's infrastructure — a violation of sovereignty that the Nuremberg tribunal at the end of the Second World War decried as the supreme international crime. This week, al-Jolani meekly suggested that Israel had secured its interests in Syria through air strikes and invasion and could now leave the country in peace.

"We do not want any conflict, whether with Israel or anyone else, and we will not let Syria be used as a launchpad for attacks [against Israel]," he told the London Times.

A Channel 4 reporter who tried last week to press an HTS spokesman into addressing Israel's attacks on Syria was startled by the response.

Obeida Arnaout sounded as though he was following a carefully rehearsed script, reassuring Washington and Israeli officials that HTS had no bigger ambitions than emptying the bins regularly. Asked how HTS viewed the attacks on its sovereignty by Israel, Arnaout would only reply: "Our priority is to restore security and services, revive civilian life and institutions, and care for newly liberated cities. There are many urgent parts of day-to-day life to restore: bakeries, electricity, water, communications, so our priority is to provide those services to the people."

It seems HTS is unwilling even to offer rhetorical opposition to Israeli war crimes on Syrian soil.

#### Wider ambitions

All of this leaves Israel in a strong position to entrench its gains and widen its regional ambitions.

Israel has announced plans to double the number of Jew-

ish settlers living illegally on occupied Syrian territory in the Golan.

Meanwhile, Syrian communities newly under Israeli military rule — in areas Israel has invaded since Assad's fall — have appealed to their nominal government in Damascus and other Arab states to persuade Israel to withdraw. With good reason, they fear they face permanent occupation.

Predictably, the same Western elites so incensed by Russia's violations of Ukraine's territorial integrity that they have spent three years arming Kyiv in a proxy war against Moscow — risking a potential nuclear confrontation — have raised not a peep of concern at Israel's ever-deepening violations of Syria's territorial integrity.

Once again, it is one rule for Israel, another for anyone Washington views as an enemy.

With Syria's air defenses out of the way, Israel now has a free run to Iran — either by itself or with US assistance — to attack the last target on the neocons' seven-country hit list from 2001.

The Israeli media have excitedly reported on preparations for a strike, while the transition team working for incoming US president Donald Trump are said to be seriously considering joining such an operation.

And to top it all, Israel looks like it may finally be in sight of signing off on "normal" relations with Washington's other major client state in the region, Saudi Arabia — a drive that had to be put on hold following Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Renewed ties between Israel and Riyadh are possible again in large part because coverage of Syria has further disappeared from the West's news agenda, despite Palestinians there — starved and bombed by Israel for 14 months — likely dying in larger numbers than ever.

The narrative of Syria's "liberation" currently dominates western coverage. But so far, the takeover of Damascus by HTS appears only to have liberated Israel, leaving it freer to bully and terrorize its neighbors into submission.

The article first appeared on Jonathan Cook's Blog.

## Feeding chaos

### Israel cripples Syria's defence



By Binoy Kampmark  
Scholar

#### OPINION

The justifications are always the same. We are moving into territory for security reasons. We are creating a temporary buffer zone from which tactical advantage can be gained against potential dangers. Then, over time, these buffers become strategic fixtures, de facto real estate seizures, and annexations. Israel now finds itself in what was a United Nations-patrolled buffer zone on the Golan Heights, and Turkey is established in parts of northern Syria, keeping a watchful eye on Kurdish militants.

Since October 7 last year, Israel's response to the attacks by Hamas has been one of sledgehammers and chisels, a conscious attempt to broaden the conflict beyond its Palestinian confines to targeting the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah and its sponsor, Iran. In doing so, Israel has played an increasingly destructive role in Syria, where Hezbollah targets and Iranian supply lines have been struck with regularity. The move is intended to cripple Tehran's Axis of Resistance, a patchwork of Shia armed groups spanning Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria.

With the collapse of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Israel intends further disruption. This marks a departure from a policy it had maintained with Assad for some years, one that permitted him and the Syrian Arab Army to operate without molestation subject to one stern caveat: that Hezbollah and, by virtue of that, Iran's influence could also be contained. This point is made in documents recently unearthed by the New Lines magazine, one that directly involved a channel of communication between an Israeli operative code-named "Mousa" (Mosses) and the Syrian Defence Minister Lt. Gen. Ali Mahmoud Abbas.



An aerial photo shows Syrian naval ships destroyed during an overnight Israeli attack on the port city of Latakia on December 10, 2024.  
● AAREF WATAD/AFP

A message dated May 17, 2023, outlines Israel's indignation at an incident involving the firing of three rockets on Israel from the Golan Heights, an action purportedly instructed by Khaled Meshal and Saleh al-Arouri of Hamas. "Lately, because of Quds Day and Flag March, we are observing Palestinian activities on your land [...] We warn you of the prospect of any activity of these parties on your territory and we demand you to stop any [Iranian] preparations for the use of these forces on your territory — you're responsible for what is happening in Syria."

The collapse of Assad's rule, spearheaded by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), has brought Israeli intentions to the fore. The group's leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, has made previous mutterings favouring the Hamas October 7 attacks and expressing solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Since then, al-Jolani has expressed no desire to do battle "with Israel or anyone else and we will not let Syria be used as launchpad for attacks," promised to protect minority rights and disband rebel groups for incorporation into the Ministry of Defence, and dissembled on whether the new administration would be focused on Islamic law. On December 10, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made fairly redundant remarks that his cabinet had no intention of meddling in Syria's internal affairs, only to warn Assad's successors that any move allowing "Iran to re-establish itself in Syria or allows the transfer of

Iranian weapons or any other weapons to Hezbollah, or attacks us — we will respond forcefully and we will exact a heavy price from it."

Defence Minister Israel Katz similarly warned Syria's triumphant rebel forces that "whoever follows in Assad's footsteps will end up like Assad did. We don't allow an extremist Islamic terror entity to act against Israel from beyond its borders... we will do anything to remove the threat."



Since Assad's fleeing on December 7, Israel's air force has made it a priority to destroy the military means of any successor regime in Damascus, citing concerns that material would fall into the hands of undesirable jihadists. Over December 10 and 11, 350 strikes were conducted on anti-aircraft batteries, airfields, weapons production sites including chemical weapons, combat aircraft, and missiles (Scud, cruise, coast-to-sea, and air-defence varieties) in Damascus, Homs, Tartus, Latakia, and Palmyra. "I authorised the air force to bomb strategic military capabilities left by the Syrian army," reasoned Netanyahu, "so that they would not fall into the hands of the jihadists."

Israeli soldiers cross the security fence moving towards the so-called Alpha Line that separates the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights from Syria on December 15, 2024.  
● MATIAS DELACROIX/AP

the state that awaits the fledgling ruling parties in Syria, who can only count themselves as a ragtag transitional entity at this point, stirs an already turbulent, precarious situation. The very scenario that Netanyahu and his planners wish to avoid, and Assad sought to prevent, may well be realised.

The article first appeared on Eurasia Review.

# Garrido on the brink as Persepolis hits new low in Iranian top flight

## Sports Desk

Spanish coach Juan Carlos Garrido's tenure at Persepolis could be cut short after just six months, following the defending champion's latest setback in the Persian Gulf Pro League.

A 3-1 home loss to Mes Rafsanjan on Saturday saw the Tehran Reds match their worst record of four defeats after 13 games into a league campaign over the past nine seasons. Persepolis's set-piece vulnerability was exposed again as Amirhos-

sein Jolani and German fullback Kofi Schulz scored on two corner kicks, giving the visitors a 2-0 lead in the first half. Ali Alipour pulled one back from the spot for Garrido's side after a VAR review deemed Schulz to have fouled substitute

striker Lucas Joao, but Mohammad Alinejad restored the two-goal cushion in the 11th minute of added time, finding the empty net from 40 yards out, as Mes celebrated a third victory of the season to move up to 13 in the 16-team table.

A win would have seen Persepolis close the gap on top of the table after both Tractor and Sepahan dropped points, but the Reds - seven-time champions in the past eight seasons - are now fourth, trailing the top two by five points and one point behind Yahya Golmohammadi's Foolad Khuzestan.

"I don't really have any explanation for the first-half goals. It wasn't a tactical issue, but unforgivable individual errors," Garrido said after the game, taking a veiled swipe at Iranian international center-back Hossein Kan'anizadegan, who was clumsy on both goals before being taken off

at the break.

"We can't afford to gift the opponent these kinds of goals. You have to be more focused in those situations. A defender has to be more resilient on set pieces and aware of where the ball is going. We were simply dreadful and disgraceful, and I can only apologize to the fans for today's performance," added the Spaniard, whose team was the only unbeaten team in the league until October 30 but has now lost four in six outings.

Rumors and speculations are already swirling around the future of the Reds' bench following the defeat. Several reports in the Iranian media

on Sunday suggested that the club hierarchy is willing to part ways with Garrido in the coming days, with chairman Reza Darvish in talks with the Spaniard to agree on a compensation fee.

With the club also struggling in the AFC Champions League Elite, sections of the Reds crowd at the Shaher-e Qods Stadium were outspoken in showing their frustration in the closing stages of Saturday's game, calling for the Spanish coach to step down from his role.

Next for Persepolis is a home game against Khaybar on Friday, followed by a visit to bottom side Havadar on January 1 before the midseason break.

## Tractor stunned, Sepahan held

Persepolis is still lucky to remain five points adrift of the summit, after Tractor suffered a shock 1-0 defeat at home against Shams Azar earlier in the day, while second-place Sepahan salvaged a point in a 1-1 draw away to Golgozar Sirjan.

In Tabriz's Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, Shams Azar keeper delivered a man-of-the-match performance as Mojtaba Najjarian's first-half strike proved the difference between the two sides, ending Tractor's run of five consecutive league wins.

Despite the remarkable victory, Shams Azar remains

second from bottom in the table with 13 points.

Tractor will be eager to get back in the ways when playing Nassaji Mazandaran on the road next, with Shams Azar looking to build on Saturday's triumph against Golgozar at home.

Sepahan missed a glorious opportunity to overtake Tractor on top of the standings, though Patrice Carteron's side still felt fortunate to leave the pitch with a point after finding a controversial late equalizer.

Reza Asadi came off the bench to bag his first goal for Sepahan in 284 days in the 86th minute, cancelling out Alireza Alizadeh's

second-minute opener for the home side, though TV replays clearly showed the ball going in off the striker's arm.

Second to Tractor in the table on goal difference, Sepahan will take on Havadar on Friday, and then visits Tehran for a highly-anticipated encounter with Esteghlal at the renovated Azadi Stadium.

Elsewhere, Hassan Shoushtari's 16th-minute spot-kick helped Zob Ahan beat Malavan 1-0 at home.

A third league defeat in a row left Maziar Zare's Malavan in the fifth place with 18 points, with Zob Ahan in seventh with 17.



IRNA

## 'Judges gave Usyk Christmas gift': Fury on rematch loss



Unified heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk (R) lands a punch on Tyson Fury during a world title fight in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on December 21, 2024.   
 © RICHARD PELHAM/GETTY IMAGES

BBC - Tyson Fury refused to accept he lost his rematch against unified heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk and claimed the judges gave his opponent a "Christmas gift". All three judges scored the fight 116-112 in Usyk's favour, handing the Ukrainian a second successive win over Fury. Fury and his promoter Frank Warren were both adamant the Briton had done enough to win the contest in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

"The judges gave him a Christmas gift," Fury said. "I feel like I won both fights. "I know I had to knock

him out but it's boxing and this happens. There is no doubt in my mind I won this fight.

"Frank [Warren] had me three or four rounds up and a lot of people had me up by at least two." Fury, 36, did not answer any questions in the ring after the bout, choosing to head backstage where he eventually spoke to the media.

"I'm not going to cry over spilled milk, it's over now," Fury added.

"I've been in boxing my whole life but I'll always feel a little bit hard done by - not a little bit, a lot." Queensberry's Warren made clear his frustration with the result in

the ring and continued to make his case for a Fury win afterwards.

"I'm dumbfounded at how they [judges] scored it," Warren said.

"His jabbing was superb, his footwork was superb, he wasn't slow. He was very evasive."

Victory for Usyk extends his unblemished record to 23 victories and further strengthens his claim as one of the greatest of this generation.

"Uncle Frank, I think he is blind," Usyk said.

"If Tyson says it is a Christmas gift, then OK, thank you God, not Tyson. Thank you to my team."

## Iranian weightlifter Keshtkar wins Asian youth bronze

### Sports Desk

Iran's Maryam Keshtkar won a first medal for the country at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships in Doha, Qatar, bagging a bronze in the women's competitions.

A first lift of 94kg saw the Iranian girl finish third in the clean & jerk discipline of the 59kg class in the youth age group. Having registered 67kg with her third snatch attempt, Keshtkar went to stand fifth in total with 161kg.

Uzbekistan's Marjon Abdumutalova made a clean sweep of triple golds, thanks to an 84-103-187 record, followed by Kazakhstani duo Darya Balabayuk and Nursuila Berikbol, who tallied 185kg and 165kg in total respectively.

The event, featuring 127 male and 110 female weightlifters from 19 Asian countries, will continue in the Qatari capital until Wednesday.



IWFIR

## Barca disappointed after Atletico loss but life goes on, says Flick

REUTERS - Barcelona extended their poor run of form and slipped off the top of LaLiga by losing 2-1 at home to Atletico Madrid on Saturday but coach Hansi Flick urged his side to move on and come back stronger after the winter break. Barca have now gone three games without a LaLiga win having picked up five points out of a possible 21, suffering defeats by Leganes and Las Palmas in their previous two home games. They are three points behind Atletico having played a game more. Despite their first home defeat against Atletico in 18 years, Flick said they

put on a good performance and expected the winter break to help them regain their early season form.

"Today it was unbelievable how we played. Maybe this break came at the right time. I appreciate how we played. But we have to learn from these things. Losing nine points is not normal and we have to work on it," Flick told reporters.

"The points lost against Las Palmas and Leganes are in the past. We will show after the break how strong we are. We are very disappointed with the defeat, but life goes on." In spite of their latest setbacks, the

former Bayern Munich coach said he was proud of his young team and will work to restore their confidence.

"When I drive at 0630 to go to training I am happy because I can train with these players. Now there is not a good atmosphere in the dressing room, but that's football. We will be back for sure," he said.

"We have to build confidence and make them proud of how they play. My job is to give confidence to all the players. In Munich there was another team with a lot of experienced players. But I'm happy with this team, it's young and has fantastic quality."

# Iran neither has nor needs proxy forces in region: *Leader*

## International Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has dismissed claims that Iran has been cut off from its "proxy forces" in the region, asserting that the Islamic Republic neither has nor needs such forces to achieve its objectives. He made the remarks on Sunday during a meeting with a group of religious eulogists on the occasion of the birthday anniversary of Lady Fatima (PBUH), the be-

loved daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Leader asserted that the resistance fighters in Yemen, and groups such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad, are fighting because of their faith. "They (the enemies) consistently say that the Islamic Republic has lost its regional proxies—this is yet another mistake! The Islamic Republic does not have any proxy forces," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Resistance fighters, he explained, "are driven by their beliefs; they fight because of their convictions, not on our behalf." He also noted that should Iran ever decide to take action, it would not require a proxy force to do so. Concerning the situation in Syria, the Leader foresaw the emergence of a "strong and honorable establishment." The United States' plot to dominate countries involves establishing a dictatorship or foment-

ing chaos and riots, with the latter being the case in Syria, he added. "The Americans, the Zionist regime, and their allies mistakenly believe they have emerged victorious, leading them to make absurd statements," he said, referencing comments from a US official that appeared to promise support for anyone inciting unrest in Iran. "The Iranian nation will trample under its strong feet anyone who assumes a mercenary role for the US in this matter."

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks in a meeting with a group of religious eulogists in Tehran, Iran, on December 22, 2024.

● khamenei.ir



## Israel's opposition leaders accuse Netanyahu of sabotaging Gaza cease-fire talks

### International Desk

Political opponents of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused him of sabotaging negotiations to reach a captive-prisoner exchange deal with Palestinian group Hamas. Opposition leader Yair Lapid, a former prime minister and leader of the Yesh Atid party, said the Netanyahu's cabinet has imposed new conditions. "We have nothing left to achieve in Gaza; we need to start preparing for the day after the war and bring back 100 hostages," he told the public broadcaster Kan. "Once the war ends, we can return to Gaza and do what we need to do," he said. "Now, we need to stop the war and finalize a deal to bring all the hostages back." Lapid said Netanyahu, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes in Gaza, does not want to end the war, fearing that it would lead to his cabinet's collapse.

Avigdor Lieberman, a former defense minister and leader of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, also criticized Netanyahu. He told the Maariv newspaper that "the deal can be done".

### Cease-fire talks

Talks to reach a Gaza cease-fire and captive release deal between Israel and Hamas are 90% complete, but key issues remain that need to be bridged, a senior Palestinian official involved in the talks told the BBC. One of the main sticking points is the



● OLIVIER FITOUSSI/FLASH90

continued Israeli military presence in the Philadelphi corridor, a strategically important strip of land in southern Gaza along the border with Egypt. Despite efforts by international mediators, Israel continues its deadly attacks on the besieged territory. Gaza Health Ministry said on Sunday that Israeli attacks killed at least 32 Palestinians and wounded 54 others across the Gaza Strip in 24 hours. More than 45,000 Palestinians – mostly women and children – have been killed in the Israeli strikes on Gaza.

### 'Cruelty' of Israeli attacks

For the second time in as many days, Pope Francis denounced the "cruelty" of the Israeli attacks on Gaza. "And with pain I think of Gaza, of so much cruelty, of the children being machine-gunned, of the bombings of schools and hospitals. What cruelty," he said after his weekly Angelus prayer. On Saturday, the pope had referenced the bombardment of children and said: "This is cruelty. This is not war. I wanted to say this because it touches the heart."

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## US launches airstrike on Yemen Yemen warns countries supporting Israel

### International Desk

The United States said it struck targets in Yemen's capital, hours after a missile attack by Yemen's Armed Forces wounded people in Israel's commercial hub Tel Aviv.

The missile, which wounded 16 people, was the second such attack in two days. Yemen's foreign minister condemned the US airstrikes in Sana'a, asserting that any nation supporting Israel's aggression shares responsibility for its atrocities. "Any country that supports the Zionist regime in any way in its aggression against Sana'a is a partner in this aggression, and must assume responsibility for the repercussions of such conduct," Jamal Ahmed Ali Amer wrote in a post on X (formerly Twitter) on Sunday.

He also warned Western countries of the disastrous consequences of their support for Israel's ongoing aggression against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, saying they will have to pay a heavy price and must brace themselves for a strong response. "The terrified Zionist regime,

which speaks of a bank of targets inside Yemen, has demonstrated its failure and defeat by bombing facilities that have already been struck," the senior Yemeni diplomat pointed out.

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement that among the targets of US forces was a missile storage center and a "command-and-control facility." American forces also shot down multiple Yemeni drones and an anti-ship cruise missile over the Red Sea, it said, shortly after the Al-Masirah TV channel reported that an "aggression" had targeted the Attan district of Sana'a, blaming Western forces.

American and British forces have repeatedly struck targets in Yemen this year in response to attacks by Yemeni Armed Forces on Israel-bound ships, which Yemen says are in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel has also previously struck back, including against ports and energy facilities.

The Ansarallah resistance movement claimed responsibility for the Saturday strike on Israel, saying they direct-



● BBC

ed a ballistic missile at "a military target of the Israeli enemy".

The Israeli military said it failed to intercept the missile, forcing many residents to leave their homes in the early hours.

Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israel since Israel launched a devastating war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, after the territory's resistance movements carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity.

### Friendly fire

Meanwhile, two US Navy pilots were shot down over the Red Sea early Sunday in "an apparent case of friendly fire," the American military

said. Both pilots were recovered alive but "initial assessments indicate that one of the crew members sustained minor injuries," the United States Central Command said late Saturday local Florida time – where CENTCOM is headquartered.

"This incident was not the result of hostile fire, and a full investigation is underway," CENTCOM said the guided missile cruiser USS Gettysburg "mistakenly fired on and hit the F/A-18" fighter aircraft, which was flown by the Navy pilots off another ship, the USS Harry S. Truman.

The potentially disastrous mistake underscores the dangers of a mission the United States has been involved in for more than a year.

## Iran protests US arrest of its nationals on 'baseless accusations'

### International Desk

Tehran formally protested the arrests of two Iranians in Italy and the United States on allegations of transferring sensitive US technology to Iran.

US prosecutors on December 16 charged Mahdi Mohammad Sadeghi and Mohammad Abedini Najafabadi with "conspiring to export sophisticated electronic components from the United States to Iran in violation of US export control and sanctions laws", according to a statement from the US Department of Justice.

The statement claimed that the exported technology was used in a January drone attack that killed three US servicemen in Jordan. Iran denied any involvement in the attack, dismissing the claims as "baseless accusations."

"We consider both the cruel and unilateral US sanctions against Iran and these arrests to be contrary to all international laws and standards," Foreign Ministry official Vahid Jalalzadeh told the Tasnim

News Agency late Saturday.

Jalalzadeh said the ministry had "invited" the Italian chargé d'affaires and the Swiss ambassador to Tehran – who represents US interests in the country – to "declare its protests to the arrests".

Abedini Najafabadi, 38, was arrested on December 16 in Italy by Italian authorities at the request of the United States, the US Department of Justice said.

Meanwhile, Mahdi Mohammad Sadeghi, 42, a US resident, was arrested in Massachusetts around the same time. According to reports, the arrests of the two individuals are allegedly linked to a January 28 drone attack carried out by Iraqi armed groups against a US military outpost in Jordan known as Tower 22.

The attack killed three American soldiers and injured 47 others. The FBI claims that the equipment used in the drone attack was supplied by these two individuals.

A university peer of Abedini Najafabadi said that he is an Iranian national and the CEO of Sanat Danesh Rahpooyan

Aflak (SDRA), a company in Iran specializing in precision measurement equipment.

The company's products have diverse applications, including medical and sports technologies.

Abedini Najafabadi also headed a Swiss-based company, Illumove SA, which focused on motion capture equipment manufacturing. All activities of these companies were conducted under the legal and financial oversight of the Swiss government.

The unnamed source explained that due to their advanced technology, the equipment produced by these companies has multipurpose uses. Once legally sold in Iranian markets, the products can be purchased and utilized by any individual or entity.

However, the US government has fabricated charges, claiming the equipment was used in drones involved in the aforementioned attack, leading to the arrest and prosecution of these individuals.

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# President: Gender justice 'social necessity' for country's progress

## Social Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that gender justice is not merely a moral principle but a vital social and economic necessity for the country's advancement. Speaking during a ceremony in Tehran on National Women's Day on Sunday, Pezeshkian asserted his government's commitment to fostering women's active participation across all sectors, including cultural, economic, and social fields, president.ir reported.

"The country's sustainable development needs a comprehensive view and cooperation. Achieving development goals will not be possible without women's active participation," he stated, highlighting that respect and opportunity should be granted based on individual

abilities, rather than gender, ethnicity, or religion. "If a woman has a better performance than a man in a specific field, she should receive more respect," he added.

The president drew attention to the significance of Islamic teachings regarding the respect and status of women, noting that the birth of Lady Fatima (PBUH), the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), symbolizes the high standing of women in Islam.

He remarked, "This divine gift signifies the importance and status of women in Islam," pointing out that, contrary to the societal norms of 14 centuries ago, daughters and women hold a revered position in the Islamic faith.

Pezeshkian recognized the crucial role mothers play in nurturing future generations,

stating, "Mothers are the main pillars of families and shape the personalities of children." He underscored that the love and care mothers provide are fundamental to human and social development, assuring that improving the status of women and mothers guarantees a brighter future for the nation.

Plus, he acknowledged the recent advancements women have made in leadership roles within the government, citing the presence of female governors, deputy ministers, and senior managers as evidence of their capabilities.

He expressed the need for gender equality in policymaking and management, asserting that women's competencies must be recognized and utilized for national development. The government is determined to support working mothers,



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks at a ceremony in Tehran on National Women's Day, December 22, 2024. [president.ir](#)

striving to create a balance between professional and personal lives. "Women constitute half of the country's human capital, and without their active participation, achieving developmental objectives will not be possible," Pezeshkian reiterated.

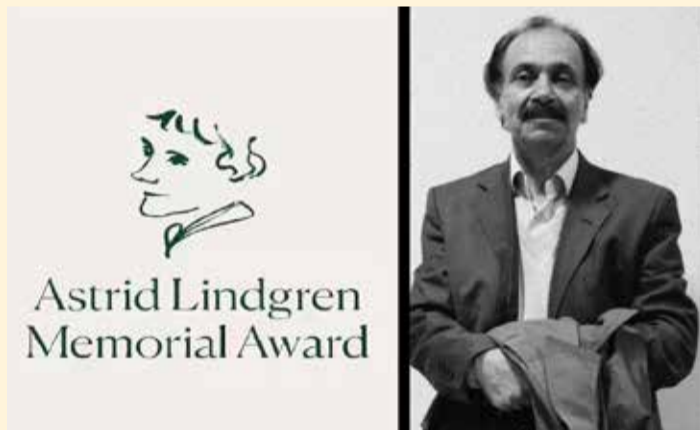
Before the president's address, Zahra Behrouz-Azar, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, highlighted the vital role of women in society, culture, and the economy. She described women as "the light of hope and the driving force of life," reinforcing the government's commitment to



gender equality and the elimination of barriers that hinder women's participation in all spheres of society. In her speech, Behrouz-Azar emphasized the importance of policies that support working mothers and prioritize family values,

affirming the government's dedication to upholding equal rights and social justice for women in Iran. "With the collaboration and efforts of Iranian women, we can create a desirable and promising future for our country," she concluded.

## Iranian author Razi Hirmandi picked for ALMA



## Arts & Culture Desk

Razi Hirmandi, a renowned Iranian author, translator, and humor researcher, was chosen as Iran's representative for the translation category of the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA). The International Federation of Translators (FIT) has expanded its award categories for 2024, includ-

ing the addition of a translation award to the ALMA. Following FIT's call for submissions from member associations, including the Translators and Interpreters' Association of Tehran, the association's Children and Young Adult Literature Translation Working Group held coordination meetings to select a representative despite the short notice. After reviewing

candidates' backgrounds, Razi Hirmandi was chosen as Iran's representative for the inaugural translation award, IRNA reported. Hirmandi began his literary career for children and young adults in 1976 with the translation of "The Giving Tree" by American author Shel Silverstein. He has worked in both translation and authorship, producing over 170 works that have earned him several prestigious awards.

The Translators and Interpreters' Association of Tehran has been a member of FIT since 2016 and has actively participated in various FIT working groups, aiming to enhance international opportunities for Iranian translators. The association holds international positions within FIT, including the secretariat of the Asian Center and membership in the Book Translation and Copyright, Translation and Artificial Intelligence, and Legal Translation working groups.

## Minister pledges support for provincial theaters, showcasing Iran's artistic diversity

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi emphasized the vital role of provincial theaters as a "national asset," following his visit to the 20th Tehran-Mobarak International Puppet Theater Festival.

He stated, "This asset is something we all must strive to protect, both in the capital and in the provinces."

Salehi highlighted that the future of Iranian art lies in the provinces, where theater serves as an essential visual representation of the country's diverse regions, IRNA reported.

During the festival, which opened on December 16 and runs through December 23, Salehi noted that provincial theaters are not merely defined by their geography and natural beauty, but also by their human contributions. "When we see the creativity that combines past heritage, history, and human artistic innovation from a province, we establish a multifaceted connection with that region," he explained.

The minister pointed out the impressive performances showcased at the festival, specifically mentioning a captivating play from Ardebil that seamlessly blended historical music and mythology, leaving audiences spellbound.



"We can see history combined with myth in the performing arts," he said, urging all stakeholders to harness their efforts to strengthen provincial theater.

Salehi acknowledged the challenges faced by the country but insisted that the commitment to enhancing provincial theater must remain unwavering. "I firmly believe that the future of Iranian art lies in the provinces, where we can witness a vibrant rainbow of diverse artistic expressions," he asserted. He praised the festival as a lively event with a long-standing history in both Iran and the world. This year, the festival received 380 entries, with about 40 performances showcased. Salehi emphasized the role of live performances in reviving forgotten or fading traditions. "As the puppet festival concludes, the secretariat will begin preparations for next year," he concluded, signaling a commitment to the continuity and evolution of theatrical arts in Iran.

## A project to ...

Analysis of Turkey's media strategies in recent years shows that the country is seeking to expand its regional influence through substantial investments in international media outlets. The experience of TRT World, Turkey's English-language state media arm, has demonstrated that these outlets effectively serve as instruments to advance the geopolitical and geostrategic policies of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Erdogan. Now, with TRT Persian's official launch, this strategy has entered a new phase focusing on disrupting Iran's stability and unity.

### Page 1 >

What transforms this media project into a serious national security threat is the hostile approach evident in its managers' pre-launch statements, which has now coincided with developments in Syria. This initiative appears to be a prelude to new political and security movements by Ankara in Iran's northwest, particularly regarding the controversial Zangezur Corridor issue.

It's important to note that in its initial days, the network will likely attempt to attract audiences through cultural and entertainment content. However, given its management's stated positions, it can be predicted that during sensitive periods, it

will become a tool for provoking public opinion and creating tension. Economically, TRT Persian's launch is part of Turkey's broader strategy to expand its influence in the Iranian market. Turkey, facing serious economic challenges in recent years, seeks to increase exports to neighboring countries. The Persian-language network can facilitate the promotion of Turkish goods and products in the Iranian market through attractive cultural and advertising content.

TRT Persian's main strategy will likely focus on sensitive ethnic and religious issues. The network may seek to create

national division by providing one-sided coverage of events and fueling disputes. Experience has shown that Turkish media consistently takes a biased and provocative approach in covering Iranian affairs.

In the current complex regional situation, the launch of a television network with declared hostile intentions could have negative consequences for bilateral relations. This action may also indicate a shift in Turkey's foreign policy toward greater confrontation with Iran.

Under these circumstances, it is essential for responsible authorities to understand the dimensions of this threat and design appropriate counter-

measures. Strengthening domestic media, improving cultural production quality, enhancing media literacy, addressing concerns and ambiguities effectively, and adopting deterrent policies such as increasing import tariffs on Turkish goods and prohibiting cooperation with Turkish media networks, particularly TRT Persian, are among measures that could reduce the impact of this media soft war.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should pursue this unfriendly action in diplomatic forums and utilize legal and international capacities to counter this hostile approach. Experience has shown that silence in the face of such actions

can lead to increased interventionist behaviors. Overall, the author believes that TRT Persian's launch should be analyzed beyond a mere media initiative and within the framework of Turkey's grand strategy to increase regional influence and weaken Iran's position. Previous statements by network managers and its official launch indicate that we face a targeted project aimed at creating instability and tension, requiring an intelligent and multilateral response. Successful confrontation with this challenge requires cooperation among all responsible agencies and utilization of national and international capacities.