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INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

The assault upon Lamerd County, southern Iran, during the course of the 40-Day War constituted not merely a security incident or a humanitarian catastrophe; this occurrence, simultaneously, functioned as a trial of the resilience pertaining to one of the most preeminent energy hubs, mineral industries, and strategic infrastructures of the country's southern region. Notwithstanding that the principal component of the attack targeted residential zones and civilian spaces, resulting in the martyrdom or injury of dozens of noncombatant citizens, the proximity of this event to the Lamerd Special Economic Zone directed the attention of analysts toward the geo-economic significance of this territory and its role within Iran's production chain, export apparatus, and energy security. This zone, which today, through the establishment of large-scale industries — including the nation's largest aluminum complex — the possession of uncommon energy advantages, adjacency to South Pars, substantial capacity for renewable energy development, and a noteworthy contribution to the exports of Fars Province, has evolved into one of the propulsive engines of industrial development in southern Iran. Under such circumstances, the perpetuation of productive activities, the preservation of employment for thousands of individuals, the management of the supply chain, the continuation of exports, and the prevention of disruption to economic infrastructures transformed into one of the most pivotal challenges confronting the administrators of this zone. In the ensuing interview, Amir Borhani Naeini, the Chief Executive Officer of the Lamerd Special Economic Zone, by delineating the dimensions of the attack and recounting that which transpired during the critical days of warfare in this region, discourses upon the measures undertaken for the maintenance of production, support for afflicted families, management of the war's economic repercussions, and the sustained pursuit of investment. Furthermore, through the proposition of suggestions for attracting the capital of Iranians residing abroad, revising the developmental paradigm of special zones, reinforcing the imperatives of passive defense, and expanding vital infrastructures, he presents a vision of Lamerd's prospective plans; plans whose objective consists of augmenting economic resilience, elevating investment security, and consolidating this zone's status as one of Iran's strategic poles of industry and energy in the years ahead. The full text of this dialogue follows:

CEO of Lamerd Special Economic Zone talks about war-time management

Lamerd; test of Iranian industry's resilience



The photo shows an overview of the Lamerd Special Economic Zone, southern Iran.
● lamerdsez.ir

Amir Borhani Naeini

IRAN: In your estimation, which factors precipitated the inclusion of the Lamerd region and its industrial and economic perimeter within the adversary's list of targets? Does this matter bear relevance to the region's strategic standing within the nation's economy and energy sector?

BORHANI NAEINI: Lamerd is not a large city; it is a municipality situated at the southernmost point of Fars Province, beyond which, subsequent to the counties of Lamerd and Mohr, one effectively exits the territorial bounds of Fars Province. The Lamerd Special Economic Zone is likewise located within this same county and encompasses an area of approximately 5,000 hectares; a landmass that nearly corresponds to the size of Kish Island. Regarding the recent attack, however, I must clarify a particular point. The assault that occurred during the initial days of the war upon Lamerd did not directly target the Special Economic Zone. Contrary to certain economic zones of the country — such as the Pars Energy Zone, wherein economic objectives were subjected to attack — in Lamerd, the modality of assault was dissimilar. The primary target consisted of a residential compound and a sports hall; a location situated more than 7 to 10 kilometers away from the special zone and positioned within one of the most densely populated urban areas. The type of ordnance employed likewise indicated that the objective was not exclusively destruction. Four missiles were launched, each containing approximately 180,000 tungsten fragments; hence, a cumulative total of 720,000 projectiles were disseminated across a residential district. This is a city whose population does not even reach 30,000 individuals. This magnitude of incendiary ordnance demonstrates that the aim was the maximization of human casualties and the creation of a humanitarian catastrophe. In our assessment, this attack was entirely premeditated. Of course, during subsequent days, we also experienced impacts in proximity to the Special Economic Zone (Lamerd Airport), which indicated that Lamerd had been positioned upon the adversary's target list, and this occurrence was not fortuitous.

Notwithstanding the human and social dimensions of this incident, its media reverberation was comparatively less pronounced than that of certain analogous events. In your view, which factors caused the magnitude of this occurrence not to be perceived within public opinion and the media to the extent that it ought to have been?

The truth is that during the period of warfare, the country was traversing an exceedingly difficult situation, and the volume of distressing news was extraordinarily high. Perhaps the geographic distance of Lamerd from the center also contributed to this incident being less visible. On the other hand, we ourselves, during the initial days, did not precisely apprehend with which type of attack we were confronted, nor what the actual dimensions of the event were. Interestingly, the first analytical reports concerning this attack were published by certain foreign media outlets, and it was only thereafter that the extent of the destruction attracted greater attention. During that same period, economic administrators



Interestingly, the first analytical reports concerning this attack were published by certain foreign media outlets, and it was only thereafter that the extent of the destruction attracted greater attention. During that same period, economic administrators were likewise prohibited from conducting interviews due to security considerations; a decision that, in my opinion, was entirely correct. Our strategy was to continue economic activities without generating a media atmosphere, so that information would not be exploited by the adversary.

were likewise prohibited from conducting interviews due to security considerations; a decision that, in my opinion, was entirely correct. Our strategy was to continue economic activities without generating a media atmosphere, so that information would not be exploited by the adversary. Throughout all the days of warfare, the personnel of the Special Economic Zone, the customs administration, and the operational complexes — notwithstanding that some among them had lost their loved ones in this attack — did not permit even a single day of interruption in the zone's economic activity. This self-sacrifice is truly commendable. Today, however, I believe it is our collective duty to speak about this incident and to ensure that this occurrence does not fall into oblivion.

Prior to entering into economic discussions, kindly provide a depiction of the Lamerd Special Economic Zone's standing within the national economy. What are the most significant competitive advantages of this zone, and what role does it play within the country's energy chain and industrial sectors? Allow me first to mention one point. We are presently a Special Economic Zone; however, we have also submitted a request to the government for the conversion of this complex into a Free Zone. We are convinced that if this transformation materializes, in addition to the expansion of investment, the residents of Lamerd County will also benefit from greater economic advantages, employment opportunities, and facilitations; a matter that could compensate for a portion of this region's deprivations. Lamerd, from an infrastructural perspective, still ranks among the country's less privi-

leged areas, and the conversion of the special zone into a free zone could represent a significant opportunity for development.

The rationale for establishing a Special Economic Zone in Lamerd likewise resides in the existence of substantial energy advantages. This zone is situated in proximity to Asaluyeh, and the principal natural gas transmission lines of the country — including the IGAT 4 and IGAT 8 gas pipelines — traverse its vicinity. Furthermore, active major gas fields and newly discovered fields in the southern part of Fars Province have endowed this region with a very considerable capacity. For this reason, Lamerd is among the few locations in the country where industries encounter the least difficulty in securing energy supplies. On the other hand, this zone possesses an extraordinary capacity in the domain of solar energy. During certain seasons of the year, there exist 16 to 17 hours of direct sunlight with exceptionally low humidity, which has created ideal conditions for the development of solar power plants. In this regard, a 10-MW solar power plant is currently operational within the Lamerd Special Economic Zone, and the plan for expanding this capacity is also on the agenda.

In the days subsequent to the attack, what policies and measures did the Lamerd Special Economic Zone place on its agenda for supporting afflicted families, preserving employment, and preventing the economic consequences of the crisis?

The Lamerd Special Economic Zone today has generated employment for more than 3,700 individuals directly and approximately 12,000 individuals indirectly. Given the county's population, a considerable segment of Lamerd's families have their livelihoods, in one way or another, dependent upon this zone's activities. Hence, we do not perceive our responsibility as confined solely to the industrial domain, and we believe that the special zone bears a serious social obligation as well.

Our first decision following the commencement of warfare was the prohibition of any workforce reduction within the units established in the zone. We conducted numerous meetings with investors and company managers to examine their difficulties and, through the utilization of the banking system's capacities, governmental apparatuses, and the zone's own resources, we prevented any harm to the people's employment.

Fortunately, we succeeded in controlling a considerable portion of the war's economic effects, so that the livelihoods of Lamerd's families would not be placed in jeopardy. Of course, human losses are irreparable. According to the announcement of the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs after the enemy's attack, 21 citizens — ranging from a 2-year-old child



Lamerd Hospital is filled with the civilians who were injured during the US-Israeli missile attack on a sports hall and residential areas in the small town in southern Iran.
● IRIB NEWS



A large solar farm has been constructed in the Lamerd Special Economic Zone.
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