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NUFDI Unveils Report Documenting Persecution of Religious Minorities

Humiliated by the 12-Day War, the Islamic Republic has turned its gaze inward, cracking down on Iranians within the country, particularly religious minorities. NUFDI's latest report, Faith Under Siege, documents the Islamic Republic's campaign, profiling dozens of Christians, Jews, Baha'is, and Sunnis that have been targeted in the course of this crackdown.

Brief Notes

Regime Executes Student for 'Espionage': The Islamic Republic executed 27-year-old architecture student Aghil Keshavarz on December 20 after his death sentence was confirmed by the Supreme Court. Arrested in May, Keshavarz was accused of carrying out "more than 200 missions" for Mossad. His execution is part of a series of recent executions involving individuals accused of spying for Israel since the 12-Day War.

Navy Dispatches Flotilla to South Africa for BRICS Drill: The Islamic Republic Navy is dispatching flotillas 103 and 104 to South African waters, with flotilla 103 joining a BRICS joint naval exercise, according to Navy Commander Shahram Irani. Irani did not specify the date of the joint naval drill or when the Iranian flotilla would arrive in South African waters. A previously planned Russia–China–South Africa naval drill was postponed in November to avoid overlapping with the G20 summit.

Armed Forces Chief Accuses Israel of 'False-Flag Operations': Armed Forces Chief of Staff Abdolrahim Mousavi accused Israel of carrying out "false-flag operations" to manage internal crises and shift the international narrative away from the Gaza conflict. Speaking at a graduation ceremony at IRGC-affiliated Imam Hussein University, Mousavi claimed Israel had staged attacks against Jewish communities abroad to "play innocent." His remarks follow similar messaging from Islamic Republic state media and MPs describing the recent terrorist attack in Bondi Beach as a false-flag operation.

FM Condemns U.S. in Meeting With Venezuelan Counterpart: Islamic Republic Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi condemned U.S. actions "against maritime security" in the Caribbean and threats of force against Venezuela as a "blatant violation" of international law and the UN Charter. Speaking with his Venezuelan counterpart, Yvan Gil

Pinto, Araghchi expressed solidarity with the "elected government" of Venezuela and called on the international community to confront U.S. "unilateralism."

Armed Forces Warn of 'Decisive Response' to Any Aggression: The Islamic Republic Artesh (the conventional/"regular" armed forces, as opposed to the IRGC) are boosting combat readiness to counter any "hostile act," commander-in-chief Amir Hatami said during visits to bases in western Iran. Hatami said forces are closely monitoring enemy movements and would "respond decisively" if an attack were to take place. The remarks come amid reports that Israeli leaders are considering potential strikes on the Islamic Republic and that recent IRGC exercises could be masking preparations for an Islamic Republic offensive attack.

Conflicting Reports on Missile Tests

This morning, reports of missile tests in several Iranian cities went viral with the IRGC-controlled Fars News Agency corroborating these reports. However, the state broadcaster IRIB later denied that any launches had occurred, attributing observed phenomena to high-altitude flight trails.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei said at a press conference today that the regime's missile program is non-negotiable, and is "designed to deter any potential aggressor." Baghaei dismissed claims that the program posed an existential threat to Israel, denouncing what he called "media propaganda" and the "hypocrisy" of focusing on the regime's missile capabilities while Israel is "flooded with heavy arms and even weapons of mass destruction."

The remarks came as Israel reportedly plans to brief U.S. President Donald Trump on potential strikes against the regime's ballistic missile program, with U.S. Senator Lindsay Graham warning that the regime's missiles now rival its nuclear threat to Israel, and Israeli officials cautioning that recent IRGC exercises could mask preparation for an attack.

NUFDI Senior Research Analyst Khosro Isfahani spoke with i24 News on this topic today.

Parliament Speaker Warns Ministers of Possible Impeachment Amid Economic Unrest

Islamic Republic Majles (Parliament) Speaker Mohammad Ghalibaf has warned that if the government fails to implement reforms to address the depreciation of the national currency and rising prices of essential goods, lawmakers may begin impeachment proceedings against cabinet members.

Speaking at an open parliamentary session yesterday, Ghalibaf called for a cabinet reshuffle to "achieve the quickest resolution with minimal tension" and stressed the need to alleviate public concern over surging costs.

His remarks sparked widespread debate in newspapers, with "reformist" outlets criticizing the Speaker's intervention and framing it as a hardline "currency war against the government," while conservative papers highlighted Ghalibaf's warning and urged the government to "fix up" so ministers "do not get impeached."

Judiciary Adds to Criticism Over Currency Crisis

Islamic Republic Judiciary Chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei criticized the Central Bank for failing to curb surging foreign exchange rates, which have worsened the currency crisis and driven up living costs.

Speaking to senior judiciary officials, Ejei questioned the Central Bank's handling of "rented" foreign trade licenses and the failure to ensure repatriation of foreign exchange earnings, noting that hundreds of suspects accused of money laundering had operated through thousands of bank accounts without effective oversight.

He tasked a judiciary body with leading efforts to stabilize the currency market. The remarks come amid mounting pressure on the Pezeshkian administration, with Parliament Speaker Ghalibaf warning of potential ministerial impeachments if market turbulence continues.

The US dollar was trading at 1.3 million rials in Tehran's market today showing a 36.2% devaluation in the Rial since the start of the 12-Day War.

Viral Social Media Trend Repurposes Religious Symbolism to Challenge Regime

A viral trend on Instagram has generated thousands of reels juxtaposing archival footage of the Pahlavi dynasty with traditional Shia mourning music and asking, "Which holy person are you a supporter of?"

By repurposing ritual aesthetics traditionally used by the Islamic Republic, Iranians are challenging the regime's claim over Iranian shared history.

The trend reflects a broader cultural pushback against regime-imposed cultural narratives.

On the Radar

- Foreign Minister Araghchi spoke with his Pakistani counterpart Muhammad Ishaq Dar today, reviewing progress in several areas of Islamabad–Tehran relations. The call follows recent visits by senior officials to Pakistan aimed at strengthening economic ties and enhancing border security cooperation.
- Islamic Republic Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi met with Turkmen Special Representative on Caspian Affairs Murat Atajanov on December 21 to discuss cooperation among Caspian Sea littoral states. They covered plans to hold the next Caspian littoral states' summit in Tehran in August 2026,

environmental issues including relocating the Tehran Convention Secretariat closer to the Caspian, and measures to address falling water levels, alongside broader bilateral ties.

- Islamic Republic President Masoud Pezeshkian said in a message to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) summit on December 21 that he hopes for a "leap" in trade with the Union. Pezeshkian's remarks were delivered to the summit by Tehran's ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali. He highlighted Tehran's active participation in EAEU meetings as a sign of its commitment to expanding economic ties with all five member states. Pezeshkian framed cooperation with the Union as a long-term strategy to strengthen regional sovereignty, trade, energy security, and joint financial and technological infrastructure. He also noted Tehran will host a meeting of EAEU trade ministers and the Expo Eurasia trade exhibition in February 2026.
- Regime authorities seized 150 pistols and arrested four individuals in Sistan-Baluchestan Province. A video released by regime authorities shows one of the arrested individuals describing the process of transporting the pistols from Saravan to Iranshahr for sale. Armed clashes in Sistan-Baluchestan Province have seen a notable increase in recent months.
- Araghchi spoke by phone with UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper on December 19 to discuss the Islamic Republic's nuclear program and "consular affairs." Araghchi criticized the "irresponsible approach" of the UK, France, and Germany on the nuclear issue, while saying Tehran remains open to negotiations that respect its legal rights and interests. The call also touched on bilateral matters, including potential arrangements involving detained individuals. The Islamic Republic is currently holding a British couple hostage, accusing them of espionage.
- President Pezeshkian met with the regime's ambassador to Georgia, Ali Moujani, today, emphasizing the need to expand economic cooperation and develop regional transit routes in the Caucasus.

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