



## THE FARDA BRIEFING

# The Farda Briefing: Iran Grapples With Hijab Crisis

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By Golnaz Esfandiari

*Welcome back to The Farda Briefing, an RFE/RL newsletter that tracks the key issues in Iran and explains why they matter. To subscribe, click [here](#).*

*I'm RFE/RL correspondent Golnaz Esfandiari. Here's what I've been following during the past week and what I'm watching for in the days ahead.*

## | The Big Issue

More Iranian women and girls are flouting the country's Islamic dress code, including the mandatory hijab, in a direct challenge to the authorities.

The clerical establishment has responded by issuing increasingly severe warnings and raising the cost for girls and women who refuse to wear the Islamic head scarf in public.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah [Ali Khamenei](#) on April 4 said the removal of the hijab in public was politically and religiously banned. He blamed Tehran's enemies for encouraging women to ditch the head scarf, which is a pillar of the Islamic system in Iran.

A day earlier, Iran's Education and Science ministries published separate [statements](#) saying they will no longer provide educational services to students in schools and universities who do not follow the dress code.

Lawmaker Hossein Jalali said the judiciary, the Interior Ministry, the Supreme National Security Council, and parliament have agreed on a new plan to enforce the hijab. Under the plan, women will first receive an official warning via a text message. Repeat offenders, Jalali said, will be fined and denied access to "many public services."

The authorities have recently closed dozens of businesses, including restaurants, cafes, and hotels, for allegedly not enforcing the hijab law.

**Why It Matters:** It does not appear that the threats by the authorities in recent weeks have stopped many women from flouting the law.

Women have been emboldened by the nationwide antiestablishment protests that erupted in September following the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini soon after she was arrested by the morality police for allegedly violating the hijab law. During the demonstrations, women and girls removed and burned their head scarves.

But it also does not appear that the authorities will back down, putting women and the establishment on a collision course.

Veteran women's rights activist Mansureh Shojaei told RFE/RL's Radio Farda that the decision to deny educational services to students who refuse to wear the head scarf amounts to "gender apartheid."

"For years, we've said that women face gender apartheid in Iran. It's never been so obvious," Shojaei said in a telephone interview.

**What's Next:** Any measure to enforce the hijab law is likely to face resistance from women, particularly among Iran's Internet-savvy younger generation who want greater social and political freedoms.

Prominent human rights advocate Nasrin Sotoudeh told French magazine *Le Point* that women are unlikely to obey tighter restrictions because "they don't respect the current law." Sotoudeh said women feel "insulted" by the hijab law and efforts to enforce it could stir up more protests.

## | Stories You Might Have Missed

Iran and Russia continue to build on their defense cooperation, trading weaponry and military technology that satisfies their immediate needs. Iran's latest reported hauls include new Russian fighter jets, advanced antimissile systems, and cybertechnology in exchange for military drones and ammunition. Experts say it is unclear whether Moscow and Tehran's weapons-swapping partnership is a long-term fit, or a case of sanctioned friends with benefits.

An Iranian man allegedly attacked two women who were not wearing the hijab in a shop in the northeastern city of Mashhad. A video of the incident where the man is seen pouring what appears to be a tub of yogurt on the women's heads went viral on social media, provoking anger among Iranians.

## | What We're Watching

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) said two of its officers were killed after Israeli air strikes on March 31 in Syria, where Tehran has deployed military advisers and fighters to prop up the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Iran has vowed to avenge the deaths of the two “martyrs.”

Over the weekend, Israel said it shot down a drone that had infiltrated its air space from Syria. Israel on April 3 said it believed Iran was behind it.

**Why It Matters:** Israel has recently ramped up its attacks in Syria, where it has carried out strikes against what it described as Iran-linked targets for years.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group, said Israel has targeted Syrian territory on at least 10 occasions this year.

The attacks have heightened tensions between Iran and Israel and intensified the shadow war between the two foes.

*That's all from me for now. Don't forget to send me any questions, comments, or tips that you have.*

*Until next time,*

*Golnaz Esfandiari*

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