

BEIRUT (Dispatches) -- The secretary general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has lauded sacrifices made by Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, saying the iconic commander was a "great leader" who defeated the Daesh terrorist group and stopped Israel from further occupation.
Speaking at a ceremony titled 'Soleimani International Award for Resistance Literature,' Nasrallah said the top commander surpasses both time and place, and belongs not only to Iran but to all nations.
"Martyr Soleimani is a martyr...that transcends time (Continued on Page 7)

TEHRAN -- The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran reiterated Wednesday that the UN nuclear agency has been fully informed about all nuclear activities and sites inside the country.

"We proclaim clearly that, as announced by the IAEA, there are no undeclared nuclear activities or sites in the Islamic Republic of Iran," Muhammad Eslami told reporters. He said IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi has expressed readiness to visit Iran, adding he will come to Iran as soon as his plans are finalized.

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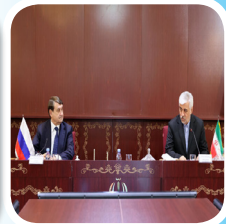
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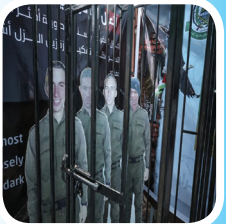
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Quake Leaves Over 100 Injured in Northwest Iran

TEHRAN -- More than 120 people have been left injured and 200 houses wrecked by an earthquake in northwest Iran.

The quake struck the city of Khoy in West Azarbaijan Province around 40km away from the Turkish border.

Officials reported a 5.4-magnitude quake that has left buildings wrecked and more than 100 people injured. The extent of the injuries is not yet known.

The director of West Azarbaijan Red Crescent: "The earthquake of magnitude 5.4 in the vicinity of Khoy has injured 120 people so far. The evaluation of Red Crescent aid groups continues."

The Red Crescent said no casualties have been reported yet, but that the search continues.

Videos and images on social media showed houses reduced to piles of bricks and rubble. In other footage, people can be seen scrambling and sprinting through the streets to avoid the rumble.

Earlier this year, another magnitude 5.4 quake shook Khoy, causing irreparable damage to 1,100 residences. An additional four thousand homes, both urban and rural, were also partially damaged.

According to the Islamic Republic News Agency, many of the injured were admitted with

broken bones while leaving their homes.

Victims have been sent to Qamar Bani Hashim Hospital in Khoy.

Rescue workers and teams to assess the damage have been sent to inspect the affected areas.

IRNA added that the initial 5.4 quake was followed by a 3.6 rumble.

Iran sits above several major geological fault lines which crisscross the country, making it more susceptible to earthquakes.

Back in July last year, at least five people were killed in a series of massive earthquakes that struck a region in southern Iran.

A major rescue operation took place in the darkness in the southern port city of Bandar-e Lengeh and surrounding villages as teams looking for survivors in the rubble.

One video showed a village of buildings that had razed to the ground by the quake and many people are in the streets.

"Here is Sayeh Khosh, one of the villages affected by the earthquake in Hormozgan. The pictures show the 100% destruction of this village. The population of Sayeh Khosh is 1,600 people," tweeted a local journalist.

Leader: We Need Unity, Empathy



Ayatollah Khamenei meets with officials of the Islamic Propagation Organization in Tehran on Wednesday.

TEHRAN -- Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on Wednesday described plans to develop cultural products based on new ideas and awareness of the socio-cultural requirements as an important duty of cultural organizations in Iran.

Addressing officials of the Islamic Propagation Organization, the Leader said the two important duties of the cultural and propagation organizations are the production and presentation of rich content

based on new ideas and thoughts, as well as taking into account the social and cultural requirements of cultural activities while being God-worthy at the same time.

Ayatollah Khamenei also praised the Islamic Propagation Organization for its endeavors. Referring to verses from the Qur'an, the Leader said the fear of God in the meaning of "consideration, observance and mindfulness" is a necessary and permanent strategy for those active in the fields of culture and

propagation.

"Cultural-propagation organizations must make sure that the word and decree of God are not overlooked under any circumstances. One should not be afraid of controversies and accusations in this field," the Leader said.

The Leader stated that paying attention to social requirements in propagation does not equal with ignoring God's awareness and His eminence.

Ayatollah Khamenei also described attention to the taste of the

audience in cultural and propagation related activities as one of these requirements.

"The language you use to communicate with a young person is different from the language you use to talk to an ignorant, or antagonistic person. In the same way, the language of speaking and preaching in other countries should be different in nature to the kind of cultural-propagation work that is being implemented inside the country, in Revolutionary institutes and organizations included."

The Leader said the market of new ideas and new products is thriving both inside and outside Iran.

Be active in this busy market by generating new ideas, processing them, and turning them into exquisite products."

The Leader also expressed his disapproval at the lack of work in this field.

"The Islamic Propagation Organization and artistic department (Hawzah Honari) have done great work in different fields, but not as much as they should have during their 40-year lifespan. Therefore, they need to multiply their efforts and the work that they do."

The Leader underlined that attention should be given to expert human resources and that this should be the main focus of cultural organizations.

(Continued on Page 7)

Nurses Begin Two-Day Strike in UK

LONDON (AFP) -- Nurses across England began two days of strikes over pay on Wednesday, threatening fresh disruption for patients in the creaking state-run health service, as new figures showed inflation still surging.

The walkout comes after nurses held their union's first stoppage in more than a century last month, joining a wave of industrial action by UK public sector workers hit by a cost-of-living crisis driven by spiraling prices.

The latest annual inflation statistics, released early Wednesday, showed they remained close to record highs, with rates easing slightly in December to 10.5 percent, compared with 10.7 percent the previous month.

The main nursing union accuses the government of failing to negotiate seriously on improving their pay deal for the current year, which they say is crucial given the economic situation.

"We don't want to do this. This is the last thing we want to do because... we're caring

people," mental health support worker Steven Bedford said from a picket line outside a south London hospital.

"We know A&E (Accident and Emergency) is probably struggling today. But we have to make a point. We have to make a stand at some point and hopefully something can happen."

The latest walkout piles further pressure on the National Health Service (NHS) at a time of peak demand due to winter illnesses and lengthening waiting lists for treatment caused by Covid cancellations and under-staffing.

Further strikes are planned for February 6 and 7 by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) union, which has said they will "be at the highest intensity" in its history.

Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has insisted recession-hit Britain cannot afford to reopen public sector pay already set for this fiscal year, which ends on March 31.

"Unaffordable pay hikes will mean cutting patient care

and stoking the inflation that would make us all poorer," health minister Steve Barclay wrote in The Independent on Wednesday.

Two days of strikes by nurses in England and Wales in December led to the cancellation of some 30,000 elective procedures and outpatient appointments, according to Barclay.

But Pat Cullen, head of the RCN, said nurses are "the voice of the patient" and has repeatedly urged the government to negotiate over pay to retain beleaguered staff and attract new recruits.

This week's walkout could cause 4,500 cancelled operations and 25,000 cancelled outpatient appointments, the NHS estimates.

Despite the disruption, the nurses' plight has prompted public sympathy amid broad discontent over the government's management of the NHS.

A YouGov poll published on Tuesday suggested 63 percent supported their strike.

(Continued on Page 7)

Ukraine's Interior Minister Killed in Helicopter Crash

KYIV (Dispatches) -- Ukraine's interior minister was among more than a dozen people killed in a helicopter crash Wednesday near a kindergarten outside Kyiv, spurring condolences from allies.

Officials initially said that 18 people had died but later revised the toll down to 16, including one of the minister's deputies and three children.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky described the crash of the helicopter, which was en route to the frontline in eastern Ukraine, as a "terrible tragedy."

There was no immediate claim from Kyiv that Russian forces were involved in downing the aircraft and an investigation has been launched into the cause.

The helicopter carrying Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky slammed down next to a kindergarten and a residential building

in Brovary, a commuter town for the capital Kyiv that was the scene of fierce fighting with Russian forces last year.

The head of Ukraine's police service, Igor Klymenko, said in a statement that both Monastyrsky and his first deputy, Yevgeniy Yenin, were killed.

Thirty people including 12 children were hospitalized.

Klymenko from Ukraine's police service said that nine of those killed were on board the helicopter when it crashed.

The presidency said that the aircraft was en route to the frontline in eastern Ukraine.

Zelensky said he had instructed law enforcement bodies to launch an investigation into the circumstances of the crash and that emergency services were doing all they could on the scene.

Monastyrsky, 42, a trained lawyer, had served as Ukraine's

interior minister from July 2021. He was a key member of Zelensky's party and was married with two children.

The crash came on the heels of a tragedy that saw 45 people including six children die when a Russian missile struck a residential building in the eastern city of Dnipro at the weekend.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday he had "no doubt" Moscow would emerge victorious in Ukraine.

Victory was "guaranteed, I have no doubt about it," Vladimir Putin told workers at a factory in Russia's second city Saint Petersburg.

"The unity and solidarity of the Russian people, the courage and heroism of our fighters and, of course, the work of the military-industrial sector" will secure victory, he added.

Vladimir Putin also praised (Continued on Page 7)