

TEHRAN -- In a message, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on Saturday offered condolences on the departure of Ayatollah Seyyed Muhammad Sadegh Rouhani.

Ayatollah Rouhani passed away at 96 on Friday in the city of Qom. Ayatollah Khamenei prayed for God's mercy for the soul of the departed scholar and patience of his noble family, and students and devotees of that honorable jurist.


TEHRAN -- Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi said on Saturday that timely illumination and elaboration of the issues can untie the mental nodes of public opinion and eliminate the opportunity for enemies for creating and spreading lies.

Raisi said honesty in the speech and behavior of officials is one of the most critical factors in creating trust in society. The president also highlighted the importance of relentless efforts and using effective mechanisms in solving problems.

Viewpoint

Self-Confessions of the Witless US Agents

Official: Uranium Enrichment Capacity Twice Higher



Iranian Para Weightlifters Scoop Gold Medals in 12th Dubai 2022 World Cup



UN Condemns Zionists for Making 2022 Deadliest Year for Palestinians



Iraqis Expel Americans From Gen. Soleimani Event

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- Dozens of Iraqis have expelled a group of staffers from the U.S. embassy as they sought to take part in a cultural event in commemoration of top Iranian anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who were assassinated in a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad airport more than two years ago.

The delegates were shown the door and had to leave the ceremony at Martyr's Monument in the capital Baghdad on Friday, after participants strongly opposed their presence and shouted "America is the Greatest Satan."

On November 27, a total of 78 Iraqi plaintiffs filed a lawsuit against former president Donald Trump, former secretary of state Mike Pompeo, former U.S. ambassador to Baghdad Matthew H. Tueller, former Iraqi prime minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, and former director of the National Operations Center Dhia al-Musawi over the assignation of General Soleimani and Muhandis, registering their case at the Federal Court of Appeal in the capital Baghdad.

Among the complainants is Muhammad Hassan Jaafar, a brother of Muhandis.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's

Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions were assassinated in a U.S. drone strike authorized by Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

Two days after the attack, Iraqi lawmakers approved a bill that required the government to end the presence of all foreign military forces led by the US in the country.

Both commanders were highly revered across the Middle East because of their key role in fighting the Daesh terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

On January 8, 2020, the IRGC targeted the U.S.-run Ain al-Asad base in Iraq's western province of Anbar with a wave of missile attacks in retaliation for the assassination of Gen. Soleimani.

According to the Pentagon, more than 100 American forces suffered "traumatic brain injuries" during the counterstrike on the base. The IRGC, however, says Washington uses the term to mask the number of the Americans who perished during the retaliation.

Iran has described the missile attack on Ain al-Assad as a "first slap".

Air, Rail Strikes Spread Europe Faces Christmas of Chaos



Many Europeans desperate to get home for Christmas are predicted to be hit with a double whammy of flight disruption and train cancellations.

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) -- It's not easy to be traveling to and from many places across Europe at the moment with train and flight cancellations and delays due to spreading strikes by transportation workers ranging from Britain and Belgium to Spain and France — and set to continue through the Christmas and New Year holidays.

With pay disputes roiling the continent and rail and aviation industries' unions threatening strikes throughout December and January, disruptions are highly probable as people attempt to get home for the holidays or have plans for holiday travel, particularly in several popu-

lar destinations. Currently, following various industrial actions across the continent this week, passengers are being advised to reconsider travel at least during the days of strikes in the affected countries to avoid potential disruptions and frustration. Although the Eurostar train service strike has been called off for now, Great Britain still faces mass disruptions as protests continue across Britain's train companies in what some are calling an "Advent calendar of strikes" scheduled not only in the transportation sector for the holidays. More than 100 Eurostar security

staff are still set to strike on December 22 and 23 in a dispute over pay. While both sides are in talks, if the dispute is not resolved next week's strikes will go ahead as planned. "Travelers will face 'significant disruption' to their Christmas travel plans, after U.K. Border Force officers voted to strike over the holiday period," warns Euronews. Industrial action will see Border Force officials walk out for eight days during the busy festive season, from December 23 to Boxing Day, and from December 28 to New Year's Eve. "Staff at UK borders will walk out over Christmas, the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union has announced. PCS members employed by the Home Office on passport control will take action at London Heathrow and Gatwick, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff and Glasgow airports," warns TimeOut. The mass strikes are expected to delay security checks, triggering lengthy queues. The government has announced that military personnel are being trained to attend security at airports, but chaos is still expected for travelers and commuters. According to ARGIS (Airlines Routes and Ground Services), "Heathrow Airport insists that the vast majority of travelers will be unaffected by Border Force strikes, with contingency plans in place including Armed Forces back-up and UK, EU, U.S. and Canadian passport holders able to use e-gates instead of manual booths. "A wave of industrial action is expected to disrupt rail services for four weeks around Christmas," The Guardian reports. A 72-hour strike set from December 16-18 by baggage handlers

working for 10 airlines at London's Heathrow Airport have been called off at the last minute, but industrial action scheduled to begin on December 29 remains in place pending the outcome of the negotiations in a dispute over wages. If agreement isn't reached, it will affect passengers flying with a number of major airlines including Air Canada, American Airlines, Austrian Airlines, Egyptair, Finnair, Lufthansa, Qantas, Swiss and TAP Portugal. The UK rail workers have also kicked off a month of strikes over pay and conditions already causing major disturbances that have been aggravated by heavy snow disruptions.

The UK's largest rail union, RMT, has announced industrial actions involving about 40,000 members starting this week until January 8 for both Network Rail and the 14 train-operating companies under the UK's Department of Transport and including the Gatwick Express. Strikes are planned for December 16 and 17, as well as January 2, 4, 6 and 7. RMT has also announced that workers will walk out from 6 pm on December 24 until December 27. "People have been urged to only attempt travel if absolutely necessary on the last full weekend before Christmas, with only a skeleton service running and all train journeys ending by early evening," The Guardian reports.

More than 60% of France's TGV fast trains and Intercity trains were canceled early in the week due to a strike by national rail (SNCF) workers and unions have warned passengers of further cancellations for the Christmas and New Year's weekends. "The almost 10,000 SNCF conductors, of which nearly 3,000 work on the TGV and Intercity trains, work to maintain traffic and passenger safety. Trains cannot run without them," Euronews writes. Train conductors and ticket collectors have filed notice threatening to strike from December 23-26 and December 30 to January 2. Negotiations are continuing until December 22. Sud-Rail union has also filed for nationwide strikes from December 15-19 after pay negotiations with SNCF broke down. The walkout is set to start just one day before the school holidays begin in France. Cabin crew for Air France have also issued a provisional notice for strikes between December 22 and January 2. Pay negotiations are also in process. After strikes by TAP Portugal cabin crew took place on December 8 and 9 leading to 360 canceled flights, more are now planned over the Christmas period.

Study Predicts Mass Extinction by 2050

PARIS (AFP) -- Climate change and habitat degradation will cause extinctions that cascade through communities of animals and plants and drive dramatic biodiversity loss, according to new research published Saturday.

The study, in the journal Science Advances, found that chain-reaction extinctions are unavoidable and predicted Earth's ecosystems will see average biodiversity loss of between six and 10 percent by 2050, depending on different carbon emissions scenarios. By 2100, losses of animals and plants could rise to as much as 27 percent, they found in their research that used virtual Earths to map out thousands of food webs.

The authors said their modeling suggested that the biggest changes will come before mid-century, predicting "the bleakest time for natural communities might be imminent and that the

next few decades will be decisive for the future of global biodiversity".

With life on Earth under threat from human destruction, overexploitation and pollution, scientists have warned that a million species are facing extinction in what many fear heralds the planet's sixth mass extinction event.

Climate change is expected to dramatically accelerate the losses, with impacts of warming ranging from the effects of extreme weather, to changes in behavior and habitat.

But authors of the new study said previous modeling has not included estimates for co-extinctions, based on the "cascading effect" of losses on interdependent species.

The researchers in Australia and Europe built hundreds of virtual Earths each populated with more than 33,000 vertebrate species in thousands of food webs across the planet --

"massive computer latticeworks of 'who eats whom'," said co-author Corey Bradshaw, a professor at Flinders University.

The virtual worlds allowed researchers to watch as species moved around and adapted to new environmental conditions and the implications of individual extinctions across food webs.

They found that climate change would be responsible for the greatest proportion of extinction events.

"If you look out your window in 87 years, on average you'll see nearly 30 percent fewer animal species than you do today based on the business-as-usual climate scenario," Bradshaw told AFP.

The study found the greatest threat was in places with the greatest biodiversity -- 36 highly-vulnerable areas containing the most unique species.

"This is because the erosion of species-rich food webs makes

biological communities more susceptible to future shocks," said Bradshaw, adding it was "a case of the rich losing their riches the fastest."

The research comes as a UN summit in Montreal attempts to seal a historic "peace pact with nature" and end the rampant destruction.

Global efforts to curb global warming have often eclipsed efforts to tackle the devastation being wrought on nature, but experts have increasingly warned that the two crises are inextricably linked.

"In many ways, biodiversity loss from climate change is far more serious than what climate change will do to human societies, because biodiversity is the very fabric of the Earth's life-support system that makes our lives possible," said Bradshaw. "The imperative of massive and rapid emissions-reduction policies is made much more urgent knowing this."