

# Iran expands ties with neighboring countries to bolster environmental diplomacy

## Social Desk

The Vice President and head of Iran's Department of the Environment (DoE) Ali Salajegheh emphasized the country's commitment to strengthening environmental diplomacy with friendly, neighboring, and Muslim nations during a meeting with the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Iran on Tuesday. Salajegheh highlighted the shared cultural and religious ties between Iran and Kazakhstan, expressing hope for the expansion of their relationship across various sectors, IRNA reported. He further underscored the importance of the Tehran Convention, a joint agreement for the protection of the Caspian Sea environment, despite its lack of tangible achievements to date.

The vice president voiced concern over the deteriorating conditions of the Caspian Sea, noting a decrease in water flow and an increase in pollutant concentration. He stressed the need for cooperative management among the coastal countries to address these issues.

Salajegheh also referred to Iran's role as host of the 7th COP summit and the anniversary of the Tehran Convention, expressing optimism for swift resolution of outstanding issues from the 6th COP summit.

In light of global climate change and its repercussions, Salajegheh identified dust storms as a significant consequence requiring international attention and joint agreements. He recalled a regional meeting of environment ministers hosted by Iran on July 12,

2022, which led to the United Nations General Assembly designating July 12 as International Day of Combating Sand and Dust Storms. The head of DoE announced that Iran will host an international conference on dust management on September 9-10, 2023, expecting the participation of at least 60 high-ranking officials from around the world. He extended an invitation to the Minister of Environment and the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to attend the conference.

Kazakhstan's ambassador to Iran, Askhat Orazbay, acknowledged the dust problem as a challenge in Kazakhstan as well and viewed the upcoming conference as an opportunity to explore management solutions. Orazbay also recognized the Caspian Sea as a shared heritage and stressed the



Head of Iran's Department of the Environment Ali Salajegheh (r) meets Kazakhstan's Ambassador Askhat Orazbay in Iran on July 25, 2023.  
● IRNA

need for cooperation among Tehran Convention member states to address its environmental challenges.

Orazbay affirmed the strong relations between Iran and Kazakhstan across all fields, including environmental cooperation.

## End of public mask mandate in Iran

## Social Desk

The Public Relations and Information Center of Iran's Ministry of Health, in an announcement based on the opinion of the National Scientific Committee on COVID-19, has declared the end of the COVID-19 emergency and provided new guidelines regarding the use

of masks.

The National Scientific Committee on COVID-19 has stated that it is no longer necessary for all members of society to wear masks, according to IRNA.

The committee's opinion is based on the current stable conditions and the cessation of the COVID-19 emergency. Instead of recommending the use of masks for the entire population, the committee emphasizes that only individuals with specific risk factors should continue to use

masks. These risk factors include old age, underlying diseases, immune deficiency, and conditions related to the kidneys, heart, lungs, and liver. Additionally, individuals who have been in direct contact with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases are also advised to use masks.

In healthcare centers situated in areas where general or cluster transmission of COVID-19 has been reported, it is recommended that masks be worn by all individuals, including employees and

clients. However, in areas where there are isolated cases of definite transmission, mask usage is advised solely for employees who come into contact with patients. In recent weeks, Iran has witnessed days without any deaths attributed to COVID-19.

Regarding the vaccination campaign, the Ministry of Health has disclosed the latest figures. To date, 65,237,012 individuals have received the first dose of the vaccine, while 58,632,705 people have completed the recommend-

ed two doses. Furthermore, 31,731,549 individuals have received three doses or more, signifying the administration of a booster shot. Cumulatively, the total number of vaccine doses administered in the country has reached 155,601,266.

With these developments, the Public Relations and Information Center of the Ministry of Health aims to provide the public with updated guidance in line with the evolving situation surrounding the pandemic.



● IRNA

## 'Love of the hero of Alqama made me perform ta'zieh'



By Mahdieh Qazvinian  
Staff writer

He was a 4-year-old boy when he saw, for the first time, the ta'zieh of Abbas ibn Ali (brother of Imam Hussein) in the main Hosseiniyeh of Damavand city. He stood alone in a corner of the Hosseiniyeh under a big black flag, staring at the arena where ta'zieh was performed. He remembers that ta'zieh artists, in their special clothes, helmets and armor, were performing the scene of Abbas ibn Ali's martyrdom – the moment when the enemy cut off the blessed hand of Abbas with a sword. "For several days, I asked my parents why they cut off his hand. Why did they shoot him in the

eye with an arrow? Who was Abbas ibn Ali," recalls Amir Masoud Alijani, a 36-year-old ta'zieh performer.

He has played the role of Abbas ibn Ali many times since then – the same hero engraved in his mind as a child. Recalling those early memories, Amir Masoud says, "In response to my questions about Hazrat-e Abbas's bravery, my father explained that he was the son of Imam Ali and Umm al-Banin – a hero who inherited courage from his father." Amir Masoud goes on with his narrative, saying, "After the martyrdom of all Imam Hussein's companions and family, when Abbas became thirsty, he asked the Imam for permission to fight, saying 'Brother! My chest is tight and I am tired of life. Let me take revenge on these hypo-

crites.' Imam Hussein said 'The children are thirsty. Let's go to the Euphrates together – maybe we can bring some water to the tents. Then you may go to battle.' This was when the children's cries of thirst were loud, and Abbas could hear them."

When Abbas ibn Ali reached the Euphrates, he filled his waterskin but did not drink a single drop, intending to bring it back for the thirsty children. On his way back, he battled the enemy troops besieging the river. In the attack, they cut off first his right hand, then his left.

Amir Masoud says, "From my father's stories, I fell in love with ta'zieh and the Ahl al-Bayt. My love for the hero of Alqama made me become a ta'zieh performer myself."

But later, when he became a performer, he was drawn to the role of Hurr ibn Yazid, who had been part of the forces sent to confront Imam Hussein but later repented and joined the Imam's side. Of Hurr, Amir Masoud says, "When Hurr saw Imam Hussein, he pledged allegiance to him. Out of shame, he hung a boot around his neck as a sign of repentance, and fought sincerely for the Imam at Karbala. He is one of the great figures of Shia Islam."

Amir Masoud continues, "Ta'zieh conveys many messages, most importantly the repentance and redemption of Hurr, Hazrat-e Abbas's selflessness at the Euphra-

tes, and Imam Hussein's sacrifice of his own children to preserve Islam."

"When the ta'zieh begins and I see the mourners for Imam Hussein, I feel a sense of excitement and pride that this tradition lives on and the flag of Hussein's remembrance still flies," says Amir Masoud.

He believes ta'zieh plays a vital role in preserving Iranian culture and religion. As a dramatic form established in Iran since the Safavid era, incorporating all musical instruments and performed live without cuts, it deserves to be valued and supported so future generations may continue to experience this art.

Ta'zieh is Amir Masoud's life priority. Through it he has found his humanity, and he treasures the memories – of the audiences, the performances, all of it. A bank clerk in Damavand, Amir Masoud believes Ta'zieh should not be a source of income, as that could diminish its spirit of mourning and sacrifice.

Above all, Amir Masoud strives to emulate Imam Hussein's morals and behavior, remembering

the Ahl al-Bayt and preserving the ancient art of ta'zieh that keeps their memory alive.



● COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

