

Over 100 killed as twin bombs hit Gen. Soleimani's memorial in Kerman

Two terrorist blasts in Iran's southeastern city of Kerman have left at least 103 people dead and 188 more injured during a ceremony marking the fourth martyrdom anniversary of General Qassem Soleimani, according to Iran's Emergency Organization. Today, a national mourning was declared. The security deputy of the Kerman governor verified the terrorist nature of the explosions. Babak Yektaparast, deputy head of the organization, said that some of the injured were in critical condition.

The explosions occurred near the burial site of martyred Soleimani, where people had flocked to mark the fourth martyrdom anniversary, Press TV reported. According to IRNA, the first explosion occurred some 700 meters from the grave of General Soleimani, and the second one about one kilometer away.

Tasnim news agency cited unnamed sources as saying that two suitcases loaded with explosives, which were remotely detonated, caused the explosions.

The first explosion occurred at 14:50 local time, and the second took place 15 minutes later. Some people were injured during a crowd crush following the first explosion. Officials say all the injured have been transferred to hospitals and the situation is under control.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by then-US president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

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

In less than a week after the attack, Iraqi lawmakers approved a bill that required the government to expel all US-led foreign forces from the country.

The IRGC also targeted the US-run Ain al-Asad base in Iraq's western province of Anbar with a wave of missile attacks in retaliation for the assassination of General Soleimani.



● TASNIM



◀ Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei meets with a group of religious eulogists and elegists in Tehran on January 3, 2024.
● IRNA

'Hostile' efforts suppressing voter turnout should be confronted: *Leader*

National Desk

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on Wednesday warned against "hostile" efforts aimed at dissuading voters from the ballot box ahead of two looming elections.

Iranians will head to the polls on March 1 to elect new lawmakers as well as members of the Assembly of Experts, a top clerical body that is tasked to choose Iran's leader and oversee his performance.

"Some seek to depress turnout in the elections, which are a testament to the realization of religious democracy, in order to undermine them," Ayatollah Khamenei told a gathering in Tehran. The Leader called for the realities to be reflected by what he called "fight-

ers of enlightenment," urging them to "stand up against this hostile move."

"[Voting in] elections is a duty, and whoever opposes the elections is opposed to the Islamic Republic and Islam," he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei said the border of the Muslim world is in Gaza today; the Palestinians there are standing against arrogance and the United States.

"The border of the Muslim world today is in Gaza, the pulse of the Muslim world beats in Gaza today, and the Palestinians there are standing against the world of disbelief, tyranny, arrogance and the United States," the Leader stated.

The Israeli regime has been waging a devastating war on the Gaza Strip since October, killing at least 22,000

people, most of them children and women. More than 57,000 others have also been wounded.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader said that soft power is more effective than hard power, as the latter has immediate effects, but wanes.

Over the past 44 years, he noted, the Islamic Republic has relied on soft power more than hard power.

"Of course, you know that I believe and follow up on ... advanced weapons that match the capabilities of the enemies. In my opinion, however, intellectual, linguistic and other strong weapons should pervade among us along with hard power."

Ayatollah Khamenei also said world powers such as the United States have atomic bombs and all kinds of advanced arms, but they make in-

vestments in the arts, cinema, and advertising as soft power, Press TV reported.

"Hard power means that the US comes and stays in Afghanistan for 20 years and spends billions. In the end, it is forced to flee from Afghanistan due to the people's hatred [towards it]," he added.

"Hard power means that the US comes and takes over the entire country of Iraq with equipment. It overthrows the Iraqi government and sits in its place. After about 20 years, the most hated government in Iraq is the American government."

The Leader noted that Palestinians have no weapons to defend themselves, but they have today attracted public attention through their patience, innocence and resilience.

Raisi due in Ankara today, regional issues on agenda

National Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi is scheduled to visit Ankara today at the invitation of his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in a bid to address pressing regional issues.

While the meeting is expected to

focus on various matters, the war in Gaza remains a key agenda item, reflecting the shared concerns of both nations, hurriyetdailynews.com reported.

The discussions are also anticipated to touch upon the South Caucasus Regional Cooperation Platform. The international body's first foreign

ministerial-level meeting, held in Tehran last October, saw the participation of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia, alongside the host, Iran. The next meeting is slated to take place in Turkey this year.

As the neighboring nations share a 560-kilometer border, Turkey is set to reiterate its expectation for Iran

to actively engage in the joint fight against terrorist organizations.

In addition, the eighth meeting of the high-level cooperation council between the two countries is scheduled. The council, established in 2014, last convened in Tehran on July 19, 2022, and aims to enhance collaboration across various sectors.

Offshore rial to be launched in months: *CBI*

Offshore rial will become operational within the next few months to help economic activists to do their transactions with any country in the national currency, announced the deputy governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) for international relations affairs.

The offshore rial will be launched in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan due to the extensive social relations and also the Russian Federation due to the finalization of a bilateral

monetary pact, Mohsen Karimi said, reported Tasnim News Agency.

Since Iran has extensive trade and social relations with Iraq and Afghanistan, the Central Bank of Iran has designed a new mechanism for enhancing bilateral trade and economic activity, he added.

The offshore rial will facilitate the trade exchanges for domestic traders and businesspersons, Karimi emphasized, noting that both importers and exporters

will exchange their products in rial.

The feasibility studies for the launch of this plan started six months ago and it is hoped that this comprehensive plan will become operational within the next few months, the deputy CBI said.

Earlier, CBI Governor Mohammadreza Farzin had said that the country is scheduled to finalize a plan for using offshore rial in exchanges with several neighboring countries by the end of the

current Iranian calendar year (to end March 20, 2024).

Farzin said that this mechanism has been devised for the settlement of exchanges of goods and services which will facilitate trade with countries like Afghanistan and Iraq.

The CBI chief added that offshore currencies are among the tools used by some countries to give a boost to the use of their national currencies in trade and help manage their forex reserves.



Envoy asks Armenia to cut tariffs for Iranian trucks

Zeroing of tolls plays a huge role for truckers to use the territory of Armenia to reach Georgia and the Black Sea, said Iran's ambassador to Armenia Mehdi Sobhan.

Speaking in an interview with the Public Television of Armenia, the diplomat added that it is very important for Iranian

trucks at what price they can transport their cargo to the Black Sea.

According to him, some of the Iranian truckers tends to use Azerbaijan's relatively longer route to reach Georgia and the Black Sea because its tolls and fuel prices are more affordable. "The route passing through

Armenia is shorter. And if we can reduce the customs duties and tolls and come to an understanding on these issues facing [truck] drivers, truck traffic through this route will increase dramatically, Armenia's revenues will increase, and Armenia will become a regional transportation hub.

Iran's eight-month export of aquatics surges 14%

Iran exported 132,000 tons of aquatics in the first eight months of the current Iranian year (from March 21 to November 22, 2023), registering a 14 percent hike compared to the same period last year.

The country exported 116,000 tons of aquatic products over-

seas from March 21 to November 22, 2022, IRNA reported. The report put the value of fisheries exported from the country in the eight-month period at \$235 million, showing a six percent hike compared to last year's corresponding period.

Iran imported \$40 million

worth of aquatics in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year.

According to the statistics, 70 percent of Iran's fishery products were exported to Iraq (39,000 tons), China (22,000 tons), the United Arab Emirates (21,000 tons) and Russia (10,000 tons).