

# ifpnews.com

An English-language Iranian news site aimed at foreigners. The site purports to be independent but parrots the Iranian government's claims and has published false information about COVID-19 and other topics.



Proceed with caution: This website fails to meet several basic standards of credibility and transparency.

Score: 52/100

## Ownership and Financing

IFP News states on its About Us page that it is owned by the privately held Iran Front Page Media Group, also known as Safhe-ye Avval Media Group. The site is officially licensed by the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, although it describes itself as “one of the only private and independent Iranian news websites with English-speaking audiences.”

The site runs advertisements.

## Content

IFP News publishes news with a focus on Iran. The site states on the About Us page that its goals are “to make its visitors familiar with different aspects of the Iranian people’s social life” and “to highlight the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of Iranian people who are heirs to one of the oldest civilizations in the world.”

Site sections include Iran News, Foreign Policy, Security, Science, Tourism, Human Rights, Women, and Architecture. Articles about Iran often spotlight the government’s achievements or uplifting stories involving Iranian citizens. Typical articles have appeared under headlines such as “Iran Says US Can’t Veto Its IMF Loan Request,” “Iran’s Strategic Information Power Elevated by New Satellite, Commander Says,” and “Bedridden Iranian Teacher Hailed for Teaching Students Online.”

The site also features a daily roundup of the front pages of numerous Iranian newspapers.

## Credibility

News articles on IFP News are often based entirely on official Iranian government pronouncements, including



Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)



Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)



Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)



Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)



Avoids deceptive headlines (10)



Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)



Clearly labels advertising (7.5)



Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)



The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

from President Hassan Rouhani, Ayatollah Khamenei, diplomats, government ministers, and military leaders. The site also frequently runs stories with unclear sourcing, including stories including false and misleading claims

For example, in March 2020, the site published an article titled “Coronavirus May Have Been Developed by US or Israel: Report.” The article stated that there has been “considerable speculation that the Coronavirus did not occur naturally through mutation but rather was produced in a laboratory, possibly as a biological warfare agent.” The article went on to cite unspecified “reports” and “theories” holding that “there are components of the virus that are related to HIV that could not have occurred naturally” and that “Washington has created and unleashed the virus in a bid to bring Beijing’s growing economy and military might down a few notches.”

There is no evidence supporting the claim that the COVID-19 virus was created or altered in a laboratory. In April 2020, the U.S. Intelligence Community concluded that there is no evidence that the virus was “manmade or genetically modified.” A March 2020 study in the journal *Nature Medicine* concluded that the COVID-19 virus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” The *Financial Times* reported in February 2020 that “The most likely scenario, based on genetic analysis, was that the virus was transmitted by a bat to another mammal between 20-70 years ago. This intermediary animal — not yet identified — passed it on to its first human host in the city of Wuhan in late November or early December.”

Another March 2020 article, titled “COVID-19 May Be Result of Biological Terror: Iran’s Health Ministry,” reported on a claim made by Iranian Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi that “the theory of biological terror cannot be ruled out for the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus given the US-China hostilities.” Harirchi did

not provide any evidence supporting the claim, which the site reported without noting any of the evidence contradicting this theory.

Asked about the site's COVID-19 coverage, IFP News Managing Editor Reza Khaasteh told NewsGuard in an email: "On the issue of Coronavirus, our reporting has to be confined to the government's claims and statements, because the country's fight against coronavirus is handled by the government, as it is the case in other countries.... We have reported what the Iranian Leader and IRGC said about the 'possibility' that coronavirus has been produced as a biological warfare. HOWEVER, we have later quoted a military official in the country as saying that it is not easy to attribute the virus to bio-terrorism."

A February 2020 article, "2 Herbal Teas to Protect Yourself against Coronavirus," reported on two recipes that an Iranian Health Ministry official had announced could boost the immune system and "strengthen the body's defence amid the outbreak of COVID-19." The article prescribed drinking the teas, which are made with saffron and liquorice, two to three times a day.

There is no evidence that specific herbs can "boost" the human immune system. The Harvard Medical School website states on its "How to boost your immune system" page, that "thus far there is no evidence that [supplements and herbs] actually bolster immunity to the point where you are better protected against infection and disease." Harvard Medical School professor Shiv Pillai told The Washington Post in March 2020, "I actually do not think there is any strong scientific evidence for any specific type of food being linked to better immune function, and certainly there is no serious work on the area that I am aware of."

Asked about this article, Khaasteh said that "there is conflict of opinion between scientists around the world. Traditional medicine in China, India, Iran, etc. have their own proponents, but they might be criticized by doctors and modern medicine scientists. The official who made those remarks about herbal tea is a doctor himself, and

is a Health official. So we cannot say only what the FDA or Harvard doctors say is true. We can report what other scientists and physicians say as well. The audience reads and judges about the claims [...] we don't quote and report comments not approved or licensed by healthcare officials. Whether we like it or not, the government's Health Ministry is the top scientific authority in the country."

A January 2020 article, titled "At Least 70 Americans Killed in Iran Missile Attack: Senior General," reported claims by a former Iranian defense minister that a missile strike retaliating against the U.S. for its targeting killing of General Qasem Soleimani "killed at least 70 American forces and injured 200 others." The site did not provide any substantiation for the claim that 70 Americans had been killed, noting only that "official aerial images" (which it did not publish) indicated that "the injured troops and possibly the dead bodies had been airlifted from Baghdad to Germany."

There is no evidence that any Americans were killed in the Iranian attack. The U.S. government reported that it suffered no deaths in the strikes, although officials later confirmed that more than 100 U.S. personnel were injured. There have been no credible press reports or reports from international agencies confirming the Iranian claim. Shortly after the strikes, Reuters and CNN quoted unnamed U.S. and EU government sources who said that the Iranian strikes were deliberately carried out in such a manner that they would minimize casualties. The Washington Post and CBS News reported that the U.S. had advance warning of the attack, which allowed personnel time to shelter in bunkers.

Asked about this article, Khaasteh said: "Regarding the alleged deaths of American troops at Ain al-Assad base, we deemed it unnecessary to repeat what the US says about the issue. We reported the Iranian side for the audiences who have already read about US statements. This is how Reuters, for example, reports the latest news and comments in most of its stories: it

only tells the 'news', and doesn't provide background and context. We tried to be a first-hand source from Iran for other news agencies and audiences across the world. However, we agree it'd be better to cover both sides in some cases, even if it seems overly-repetitive. We'll try to change our style in certain articles from now on."

Because the site has published false health claims and often publishes false and misleading government claims without providing context or information that calls those claims into question, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not gather and present information responsibly.

Asked about the site's general editorial standards, Khaasteh sent NewsGuard a detailed written response, the full body of which is published on NewsGuard's website. An abbreviated version of Khaasteh's response follows:

"As the name of our website suggests (Iran Front Page), we are trying to be the 'front page' of Iran, especially its media outlets... One of the most important things we do in IFP News is to reflect what Iranian media say. Sometimes, the claims made by these media outlets can be untrue or controversial, and the responsibility for the claims lies with the media outlet. In Iran, we both have pro- and anti-government media outlets, and in the coverage of their reports, we don't discriminate against any of them, as we are independent of any political party. However, media outlets in Iran have to work within the framework of the ESTABLISHMENT's regulations. So by 'anti-government', we don't mean dissidents' and counterrevolutionary positions.

"You are right about the need for adding counter-claims to articles," he continued. "Up until now, we were trying to remain faithful to the original articles, as part of our efforts to be a mirror of what Persian-speaking media in Iran say. But we try to give a clearer and accurate image of the developments by adding to those articles, especially when they raise unsubstantiated claims."

Headlines generally represent the content of the articles and are not misleading.

IFPNews.com states that it “provides its audiences with the latest news and views about Iran, the Middle East, and the entire world.” The site features a “Views” section, which publishes a mix of opinion and non-opinion content.

However, the site does not disclose its pro-Iranian regime perspective, stating on its About Us page that IFP Media Group “belongs to the private sector and works independently from all political parties and movements.” Nevertheless, articles throughout the site — and outside the Views section — routinely feature opinionated statements, which are often supportive of the Iranian government and disparaging of its opponents.

For example, an April 2020 news article, “Tehran, Moscow Must Boost Ties Amid US Provocative Moves in Region: President Rouhani,” began as a news report but then veered off into opinion. The story reported that Iranian President Rouhani had encouraged cooperation between Russia and Iran, in the face of what the article called “the US’ move to impose cruel and illegal sanctions on Iran in the current difficult conditions and put pressure on the International Monetary Fund for blocking a loan for Iran.”

Another April 2020 article, titled “Iran, India Discuss US Unlawful Sanctions amid COVID-19 Pandemic,” stated that “Iranian Foreign Minister and his Indian counterpart have talked about the United States’ unlawful and unilateral sanctions against the Iranian people.”

A third April 2020 article, headlined, “US Finger-Pointing at Iran Knows No Bounds: Iran UN Envoy,” stated that “The US’ psychological war against the Islamic Republic comes as the country is fighting against the novel coronavirus under the cruel sanctions imposed by the United States.”

Because IFPNews.com identifies itself as a news site but mixes opinionated statements into its articles without disclosing its agenda, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

Asked about these opinionated articles, Khaasteh told NewsGuard that “the part you quoted from Rouhani-Putin article [sic] was fully expressed by the Iranian president, not IFP News.... Maybe it was better to put it in quotation marks, but in most cases, the entire article was a translation of the original versions. We barely added anything to them. Again in other articles you mentioned, we didn’t add anything to what the officials said. All of them were direct quotes; but you’re right, we could have added the quotation marks. We will try to specify direct quotes more clearly from now on.”

IFPNews.com does not articulate a corrections policy, and NewsGuard did not find corrections on the site.

Khaasteh told NewsGuard in his email that “Regarding the Correction policy, we do correct our articles on a regular basis, if we find any new development or counter-claim which totally nullifies the previous report. But we usually change the article without mentioning that it has been updated.” Khaasteh provided an example in which IFP News initially reported that an Iranian scientist had developed a COVID-19 drug, but later changed the article to report instead that the scientist had denied this claim. The revised article did not disclose that it had been revised, instead stating that “Earlier, Fars News Agency has quoted [the scientist] as claiming that he has developed the medicine for coronavirus.”

This approach does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for publishing corrections in a transparent manner.

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Transparency

IFP News states on its About Us page that the website “is run by the Iran Front Page Media Group” and that “This media group belongs to the private sector.” That

page, as well as the Contact Us page, provide the address and phone number for “Iran Front Page (Safhe-ye Avval) Media Group.”

The About Us page and IFP Editorial Staff pages identify the site’s editors and provide their email addresses.

Articles on IFP News do not identify the writer. Instead, articles are credited to “IFP Editorial Staff,” and link to the IFP Editorial Staff page and a statement reading: “The IFP Editorial Staff is composed of dozens of skilled journalists, news-writers, and analysts whose works are edited and published by experienced editors specialized in Iran News. The editor of each IFP Service is responsible for the report published by the Iran Front Page (IFP) news website, and can be contacted through the ways mentioned in the ‘IFP Editorial Staff’ section.”

However, because the site does not identify the dozens of journalists it states are producing its content, NewsGuard has determined that IFP News does not disclose information about its content creators.

Asked about the lack of identification for content creators, Khaasteh told NewsGuard: “We often publish articles written by contributors and sent to our Editorial Staff; in these cases, we mention the name and publish a biography of the author at the end or top of the article [...] We also have reporters on the ground who write for us, and we publish their articles with their names. But in the majority of cases, we are translating and creating news using the original Persian content. In these cases, we cannot introduce the original creator of the Persian content as its corresponding author, because there might be errors and mistakes in the English version, for which we are responsible.

“However,” he continued, “the IFP Editorial Staff which is responsible for the majority of articles is composed of a small but smart team of journalists. From now on,



we'll try to specify which one of us is responsible for every single article, so as to improve our accountability rating.”

Advertisements are distinguishable from editorial content.

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## History

The site states that IFP News launched in 1991 as a monthly print magazine named Front Page, which collected articles from global media and presented them in Farsi. The magazine gradually shifted online, and after a brief period publishing as a quarterly, became online only in 2014.

*Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on May 13, 2020, to incorporate comments from IFP News. To see the full text of the site's reply, click on the publisher feedback link below..*

Written by: [Bron Maher](#)

Edited by: [Eric Effron](#)

See feedback from this website:[Click Here](#)

Send feedback to NewsGuard:[Click Here](#)

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