

Wreckage retrieved

When hours of anxiety, rigorous efforts end in tears

National Desk

Just a few hours after a helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi took off from the venue of an official ceremony held to inaugurate a dam on the Aras River in East Azarbaijan Province on Sunday, the flight vanished from radar screen and prompted rescue teams to start their search operations.

Onboard the chopper also were Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Iran's East Azerbaijan Province Governor Malek Rahmati, and Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Ale-Hashem, the representative of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, as well as three crew members.

Two other helicopters carrying a number of ministers and officials accompanying Raisi in the inauguration ceremony of the dam reached the destination safely.

Initial reports showed that the helicopter had encountered difficulties and was forced to make a "hard landing" at Dizmar forest, between the cities of Varzaqan and Jolfa.

The Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) said that 65 emergency relief teams from six provinces of Tehran, Alborz, Ardabil, Zanjan, East Azarbaijan, and West Azarbaijan, have been deployed to the site of the incident and are currently searching the area.

Fifteen Red Crescent K-9 teams (sniffer dogs) along with two Red Crescent drones were searching the area for any trace of the helicopter carrying the Iranian President.

Due to the adverse weather



conditions and severe fog in the area, the Red Crescent's rescue helicopters were unable to fly, and the teams were conducting a ground search of the mountainous area.

Emergency medical teams, including technicians and doctors, were dispatched to the site immediately after the incident and an emergency helicopter was also deployed to provide assistance, but was forced to return as it was unable to land due to heavy fog.

Apart from the popular rescue teams, the Iranian Army, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and the Police Command mobilized all their resources and

capabilities, including drones, to assist in the search and rescue operations.

The 65th Airborne Special Forces Brigade, known for their expertise in jungle warfare, was also deployed near the site of the helicopter accident between Varzaqan and Jolfa.

Despite strenuous efforts by the entire teams, Iranian government spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi said in a post on X that given the location of the crash and the weather conditions, there is still "no new information" available and "in these moments, patience, prayer, and trust in the rescue teams are the way forward." Iranian people in mosques and



Rescue team members work at the crash site of a helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Varzaqan, in northwestern Iran, on May 20, 2024.
● AZIN HAGHIGHI/MOJ NEWS AGENCY

holy shrines across the country, particularly the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), the eighth Shia Imam, in the northeastern city of Mashhad started praying for the health of Raisi and his accompanying delegation.

The wreckage of the chopper was finally discovered by emergency rescue teams in the wee hours of Monday morning after an extensive night-long search operation in the dense Dizmar forest, with Pir-Hossein Koulivand, head of the IRCS, announcing in televised remarks that no sign of life was found on the crashed chopper, ending all hopes of survivors.

The whole country plunged in a cloud of sorrow after the death of the popular and diligent president was officially confirmed by his administration and Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei expressed his condolences over the tragic loss.

"With deep sorrow and regret, I have received the bitter news of the martyrdom-like death of the people's President, the competent, hard-working servant of Imam Reza (PBUH), Sayyid Ebrahim Raisi and his esteemed entourage (may God be pleased with them)," the Leader said. "This bitter tragedy took place



while he was serving the people. The entire period that this great, self-sacrificing person held various responsibilities, both during his brief presidency and before that, he was totally dedicated to serving the people, the country, and Islam nonstop," he added.

Stressing that Raisi worked tirelessly, Ayatollah Khamenei said the Iranian nation lost a "devoted, sincere, valuable individual who served their country."

Following the tragic incident, the world leaders and presidents as well as international figures and personalities voiced their sorrow over the loss of Raisi and his entourage.



Rescuers retrieve bodies at the crash site of a helicopter transporting Iran's President, his Foreign Minister, and others in a fog-covered mountainous area of Varzaqan in northwestern Iran on May 20, 2024.
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First VP Mokhber appointed as acting president

National Desk

Iran's first Vice President Mohammad Mokhber was appointed as acting president of the Islamic Republic on Monday after the passing away of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in the country's northwest.

Mokhber, 68, is expected to serve as caretaker president until a snap election will be held on June 28,

2024. The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei approved Mokhber's accession to the role.

Mokhber held an extraordinary meeting with judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the parliament speaker, on Monday morning. "We will follow the path of Raisi in doing the duties entrusted without

any disruptions," Mokhber was quoted as saying by state media.

Iran's veteran nuclear negotiator Ali Baqeri was also named acting foreign minister to replace the top diplomat Amir-Abdollahian killed in the helicopter crash.

Baqeri, 56, had served as deputy to the foreign minister of Iran, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

Baqeri worked in the foreign ministry in the 1990s.

