

President Raisi: A lifetime of service

National Desk

Elected as Iran's president in June 2021, Ebrahim Raisi assumed office on August 5, pledging to tackle the country's economic and bureaucratic corruption and address livelihood hardships that mainly stemmed from years-long draconian US sanctions.

Raisi, 63, was born on December 14, 1960, to a clerical family in the Noghan district of Mashhad in the northeast of Iran. His father died when he was five years old. Raisi started attending a seminary in the holy city of Qom at the age of 15. In 1975, he went to the Ayatollah Boroujerdi School in order to continue his education in Qom Seminary. He received a PHD degree in private law from the Shahid Motahari University.

During his early years of tutelage, he took part in mass protests and widespread rallies against the deposed Iranian ruler, Mohammad Reza Shah, who was eventually toppled in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

After the revolution, Raisi joined the Iranian Judiciary, serving as a prosecutor in several cities. He assumed several positions in the country's judicial system, including deputy chief justice (2004–2014), attorney general

(2014–2016), and head of the judiciary (2019–2021). he was also the prosecutor and deputy prosecutor of Tehran in the 1980s and 1990s.

Raisi was elected to be a member of the country's Assembly of Experts — the 88-member clerical body responsible for electing the next leader — for the first time in the 2006 election, running from South Khorasan Province.

For years, he was the custodian and chairman of Astan Quds Razavi from 2016 to 2019. The institution runs the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), the eighth Shia Imam, in the northeastern city of Mashhad as well as all various charities and organizations affiliated with it.

In 2017, Raisi ran for president, but Hassan Rouhani, a fellow cleric, won a second term by a landslide, receiving 57% of the vote. Raisi, who presented himself as an anti-corruption figure, came second with 38%.

In 2019, Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei appointed him to head the judiciary. A week later, he was also elected the deputy chairman of the Assembly of Experts.

As judiciary chief, Raisi implemented reforms that led to a reduction in the number of people sentenced to death for drug-related offenses in the country.

In 2021, Raisi ran again for the presidency. Announcing his candidacy for the presidential election, he stated that he had "stepped in as an independent to make changes in the executive management of the country and to fight poverty, corruption, humiliation, and discrimination". He went on to secure a victory, winning 62% of the vote in the first round.

Raisi took office on August 3, following an endorsement from the Leader. In his inaugural address, Raisi pledged to work towards lifting the US-imposed sanctions on Iran, emphasizing that foreign influence would not determine the country's economic policies.

He was sworn in before the Iranian Parliament on August 5, in a ceremony attended by 260 national and foreign officials. During his address, he placed a premium on Iran's role in the stability of the Middle East region and expressed his determination to resist foreign pressure while expanding external relations, particularly with Iran's neighbors.

Raisi pledged to support any diplomatic efforts to lift Western-led sanctions and reiterated that Iran's nuclear program was solely for peaceful purposes. Additionally, he vowed to enhance the quality of life for Iranians and uphold human rights.



Hossein Amir-Abdollahian: A diplomat of Resistance

National Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who died in a helicopter crash on Sunday alongside President Ebrahim Raisi, will be best remembered by his all-out efforts to safeguard the Palestinians' rights in the aftermath of the war in Gaza and establish peace and safety in the region.

In a Foreign Ministry statement on Monday, Amir-Abdollahian was hailed for playing a "historic, influential, and everlasting part in the Islamic Republic of Iran's politics and foreign relations for the past three years at the office."

"Improving Iran's status in the world order, consolidation of friendship and bond among the countries and nations in the region, formation of constructive relations in the international system, as well as advocating for justice on a global and regional level" were just a piece of tireless efforts made by the President and his foreign minister.

However, the three-year spell was only a small part of his rich career as a diplomat for more than two decades.

Born in 1964 in Damghan, some 320 kilometers north of Tehran, Amir-Abdollahian received a bachelor's degree in international relations from the School of International Relations in the Iranian Foreign Ministry in the early 90s and went on to obtain a master's degree in the same major from Faculty of Law and Political Sciences at the University of Tehran

as well as a PhD in the high-profile university.

He held numerous roles in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dating back to 1997, when he began his distinguished professional career as the deputy head and expert at the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad. He was also a deputy to Foreign Ministry's special envoy in Iraq affairs from 2003 through 2005.

The Iranian ambassador to Bahrain (2007-2008), the director general for the Persian Gulf and West Asia desk at the Foreign Ministry (2010-2011), and the deputy foreign minister for Arab and African Affairs (2011-2016) were also among his major roles.

The peak of his career came in August 2021, when he was appointed as the foreign minister by Raisi. Throughout his career, Amir-Abdollahian had strong ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and most significantly late Quds Force commander, Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by a US drone strike near Baghdad Airport in January 2020. Amir-Abdollahian always praised Soleimani's "strategic genius" and in a June 2020 interview called him a "true diplomat" for his negotiation skills.

"You should thank the Islamic Republic and Qassem Soleimani because Soleimani has contributed to world peace and security," Amir-Abdollahian once said. "If there was no Islamic Republic, your metro stations and gathering centers in Brussels, London and Paris would not be safe."

Amir-Abdollahian's time as Iran's top diplomat was marked by intense efforts aiming to end Iran's isolation and offset the impact of US sanctions over the country's peaceful nuclear program. He particularly sought to forge relations with the Islamic republic's Arab neighbors.

In a landmark Chinese-brokered deal in March 2023, Tehran and Riyadh agreed to restore ties and Amir-Abdollahian visited the kingdom as part of the plan to reopen the respective embassies after seven years of political rift between the two regional powerhouses.

Amir-Abdollahian was in charge of the Foreign Ministry when a 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and China – signed by his predecessor Mohammad-Javad Zarif – entered the implementation stage during his meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Wuxi – a strategic accord entailing economic, military and security cooperation between the two countries under different levels of United States sanctions.

Since the Israeli invasion of Gaza broke out last October, the Iranian top diplomat dedicated his time to advocating for innocent, war-ravaged Palestinians and stability in the Middle East, travelling across the region to coordinate with allies, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, while conveying Iran's stance on the matter to neighboring countries.

"Over the past months, the Security Council has held several meetings to deal with various types of

war crimes and genocide by the Israeli regime against Gaza, which have yielded no practical result, I repeat, no practical result despite the adoption of three resolutions and a statement and call for an immediate ceasefire, and extensive delivery of aid to the people," Amir-Abdollahian said in a speech at the UN Security Council in mid-April.

In his statement, the foreign minister condemned the Israeli airstrike on Iran's consulate in Damascus, which killed several IRGC members. "No member state would ever remain silent in the face of such a brazen and serious military attack on its Embassy, which is considered a symbol of its sovereignty as well as the killing of its officially-assigned diplomat agent."

Messages of consolation poured in following the devastating news on Monday morning.

Zarif, in a statement, praised his successor, calling him "a brother", and a war veteran, who suffered injuries during the Iraqi-imposed war on Iran in the 80s due to a chemical attack.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was also quick to pay his tribute to President Raisi and his foreign minister, as "true friends" of Moscow.

"In Russia, President Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian, were seen as true and reliable friends of our country," Lavrov said, describing them as "patriots... who firmly defended the interests of their State and gave their lives in selfless service to the Motherland."

