

Iran: Syria's future should be decided only by Syrians

Syrian Foreign Ministry hails 'new chapter' in country's history

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry in a statement reacted to the fall of the Syrian government on Sunday, saying that Syria's future should be decided only by its people and without "foreign imposition or destructive intervention." The statement came after militant groups led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) captured the capital Damascus after days of advance against government forces, which led to the fall of President Bashar al-Assad's government. "In light of the recent developments in Syria, Iran's Foreign Ministry, while recalling Iran's principled stance on respecting the unity, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Syria, emphasizes that determining the fate and making decisions about the future of Syria is solely the responsibility of the people of this country, without destructive interference or foreign imposition," the statement said.

National dialogue

"In order to achieve this important [issue], it is necessary to end military conflicts as soon as possible, prevent terrorist acts, and initiate national dialogue with the participation of all segments of Syrian society to form an inclusive government that represents all Syrian people," it said. Pointing to deep-rooted and cordial relations between the Iranian and Syrian people, it is expected that the two countries will pursue a wise and far-sighted approach to maintain mutual ties based on

common interests, the statement said.

The statement said Iran reiterates the status of Syria as an "important and influential" country in the West Asia region and will spare no effort to help the country establish security and stability. "The Islamic Republic of Iran closely monitors developments in Syria and the region and will adopt appropriate approaches and positions while taking into account the behavior and performance of influential players in the Syrian political and security scene," it said.

'A new chapter' in Syria's history

Syria's Foreign Ministry issued its first statement following the collapse of the government, declaring a "new chapter" in the nation's history while urging unity and continued public service.

Syria's Foreign Ministry stated on Sunday that a new page in the country's history has begun.

The ministry emphasized the formation of a "national pact" to unite Syrians during this critical period. "We must strive to build a nation where justice and equality prevail, and where everyone fulfills their rights and duties," the statement read.

The ministry assured citizens that it, along with its diplomatic missions abroad, remains committed to serving the public and managing their affairs.

"Our continued responsibilities are grounded in the trust placed in us to ensure the supremacy of our homeland," the statement added.

Syrians poured into streets echoing with celebratory gunfire on Sunday after a stunning militant advance reached the capital, putting an end to the Assad family's 53-year rule.

Assad, who had not spoken in public since the sudden militant advance a week ago, flew out of Damascus for an unknown destination earlier on Sunday, two senior army officers told Reuters. His whereabouts now – and those of his wife Asma and their two children – were unknown.

Russia, a close ally, said Assad left the country after negotiations with militant groups and had given instructions to transfer power peacefully.

Transfer of power

The Syrian militant coalition said it was continuing work to complete the transfer of power in the country to a transitional governing body with full executive powers. Hours after the capture of the capital by militants, Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali in a statement called for free elections.

Jalali also said he had been in contact with leader of militants Abu Mohammed al-Julani to discuss managing the transitional period, marking a notable development in efforts to shape Syria's political future.

Iraq urges respect for 'free will of all Syrians'

Iraq's government spokesman Basim Alawadi in a statement urged respect for the "free will" of all Syrians and the country's territo-

Syrian militants celebrate in the central city of Homs on December 8, 2024, after they entered Syria's third city overnight. **MUHAMMAD HAJ KADOUR/AFP**



rial integrity.

"Iraq reaffirms the necessity of respecting the free will of all Syrians and emphasizes that the security, territorial integrity and independence of Syria are of paramount importance," the statement said.

Turkey, which has been supporting opposition forces since the beginning of war in Syria in 2011, said on Sunday it wants to help "guarantee security" in Syria.

"Turkey is ready to take responsibility for all that is necessary to heal Syria's wounds and guarantee its unity, integrity and security," Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said in a post on X.

"We will intensify our work on this matter with countries in the region and with international actors in the coming days."

Fidan added that he hoped the "millions of Syrians who had to leave their homes will be able to return to their homeland."

He said earlier, after meeting on Saturday with his Russian and Iranian counterparts, that international and regional actors should ensure a smooth transition from the Assad government.

Kurdish separatists

Fidan said Ankara would work to prevent Kurdish separatists from extending their influence in Syria. Qatar's Foreign Ministry also warned Syria must not be allowed to slide into chaos.

The Persian Gulf emirate said it was "closely monitoring the developments in Syria," and emphasized "the necessity of preserving

national institutions and the unity of the state to prevent it from descending into chaos."

Qatar – which gave early support to the militants following the war in Syria, has remained a fierce critic of the Syrian leader.

"The ministry calls upon all parties to engage in dialogue to safeguard the lives of the citizens," the statement said, voicing Qatar's "unwavering support for the Syrian people and their choices."

The EU's top diplomat Kaja Kallas said the EU's priority is to "ensure security" in the region and pledged to work with "all the constructive partners" in Syria and more broadly across the area. Germany and France also welcomed the fall of Syrian government.

Iran decries attack on embassy after Damascus falls to militants



Iran condemned the attack by militants, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), on its embassy in the Syrian capital Damascus following the fall of the government of Presi-

dent Bashar al-Assad. Videos circulated online Sunday showed the militants tearing down the poster that depicted martyred Iranian anti-terror commander General

Qassem Soleimani and Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, at the diplomatic mission's exterior. They also broke the windows of the embassy and looted its offices, Press TV reported. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei later on Sunday said it is a fundamental principle of international law to protect the security and safety of diplomatic and consular premises and missions under any circumstances.

He added that all neces-

sary strategies have been taken to ensure the security and safety of the staff of the Iranian embassy in Damascus.

The Iranian spokesperson noted that Iran's ambassador to Damascus and the embassy's staff "are in complete health."

"In contact with the influential parties in the developments in Syria, the Islamic Republic of Iran has warned about this issue and called for preventing the repetition of such attacks," Baghaei said.

Senior UAE official urges talks with Iran on regional developments

A senior diplomatic advisor to the president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) called for talks with Iran on regional developments following the fall of Syrian government.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Manama Security Dialogue in Bahrain on Sunday, Anwar Gargash said Iran is an important party in the region and talks should be held with Tehran over the regional developments, IRNA reported.

He expressed concern over the situation in Syria following the fall of the government of President Bashar al-Assad, saying that the main concern is over terrorism and extremism.

The Emirati official also said that the cur-

rent political vacuum in Syria should not be misused, adding that defense and military issues must not be under control of armed groups.

"We have to wait and see what will happen in Syria," he said, noting that the only way is for a reliable government to take office. The main concern now is the integrity of Syrian territory, which is under threat, Gargash stressed.

He also said that he did not know whether or not Bashar al-Assad was in the UAE.

The Syrian army command announced the fall of the Assad government early on Sunday after armed groups led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) entered the capital Damascus.



Hamas orders data gathering on captives prior to cease-fire deal

Sources within Palestinian resistance groups in Gaza said Sunday that Hamas had told them to compile information on the hostages they hold in preparation for a cease-fire and hostage-release deal with Israel. Hamas told factions including Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front and the Popular Resistance Committees to prepare information such as whether their captives were alive or dead, the sources told AFP. During Hamas's surprise October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, the resistance group and its allies took 251 people captive. A total of 96 remain in Gaza, includ-

ing 34 the Israeli military has confirmed are dead.

A one-week truce in November 2023 saw dozens of captives exchanged for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, but since then negotiations have failed to make a breakthrough. Qatar's prime minister said on Saturday there was renewed "momentum" for a cease-fire and hostage release deal following the election of Donald Trump in the United States.

A Hamas source told AFP there had been "intensified contacts" recently between Hamas and Qatari, Egyptian and Turkish mediators, and that the group expected a new round of talks

in Cairo "will begin in the coming days."

The same source called on Israel to halt the war, saying the presence of its forces made it "difficult to reach all the captive groups to know the details of the living and dead prisoners."

The October 7 attack resulted in the deaths of 1,208 people, according to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures, and sparked the war in Gaza.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has also killed 44,708 people in Gaza, the majority civilians, according to figures from the territory's health ministry which the UN considers reliable.

