

Pezeshkian congratulates pope on birth anniversary of Jesus Christ

President meets with families of Iranian Christian martyrs



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (2nd R) meets with the families of two Iranian Christian martyrs on the Christmas Eve in Tehran, Iran on December 24, 2024.
● president.ir

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in a message to Pope Francis on Wednesday extended his congratulations on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ (PBUH). "Commemorating this significant event serves as a spiritual foundation for recalling divine commandments and the teachings of all prophets aimed at achieving justice, peace and freedom," Pezeshkian was quoted as saying by IRNA. As the New Year approaches, Pezeshkian expressed hope for effective actions toward peace, security, and freedom for oppressed nations, particularly the Palestinian people. In his Christmas address on Wednes-

day, Pope Francis condemned the "extremely grave" humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, where more than 45,300 Palestinians have been killed in more than 14 months of Israeli aggression.

The leader of the Catholic Church further urged the delivery of aid "to the people worn out by hunger and by war" in Gaza, as well as the release of Israeli captives held in the territory. On Christmas Eve, the Iranian president also met with the families of two Christian soldiers who fell during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s to honor their sacrifices and express gratitude for their steadfastness. Pezeshkian praised the two martyrs who defended their homeland along with their countrymen and "brought

pride and honor for Iran" through their resilience and determination.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry also extended Christmas and New Year greetings to Christians around the globe, including "fellow Christian compatriots" in Iran, emphasizing that the occasion served as a reminder of Jesus Christ's teachings of justice, peace and love. "Merry Christmas and happy New Year to all Christians across the world, and to our fellow Christian compatriots in Iran," Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said in a post on his X account on Wednesday. "Christmas is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the lofty teachings of Prophet Jesus Christ calling for justice, peace, love and compassion," Baghaei added.

Iranian FM: 'Too early' to predict Syria's future

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said it was "too early" to make any predictions for Syria's future as there were a multitude of developments in the Arab country following the ouster of former president Bashar al-Assad's government. "I think it's too early to make judgments now, both for us and for others who think that they have achieved victories there," Araghchi told Iranian TV late Tuesday.

He pointed out that numerous factors would shape Syria's "highly uncertain" future. Militants, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group, took control of Damascus on December 8 and declared an end to Assad's rule in a surprise offensive that was launched from their stronghold in northwestern Syria, reaching the capital in less than two weeks.

The HTS militant group, supported by the US and its regional allies, has promised to form an inclusive government but the United Nations says the situation remains "fluid."

Araghchi's remarks came a day after Fatemeh Mohajerani, the Iranian government spokeswoman, stressed the importance of a Syrian government based on the popular vote of its citizens, describing it as a key concern for Iran.

Another critical concern, she noted, was preventing the rise and expansion of terrorism, as it significantly would impact both



Syria and the entire region. Syria's stability and future are threatened by various factors, including Israel's occupation of the Syrian territory and the presence of many other militant groups. Meanwhile, Syria's newly appointed Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani warned Iran Tuesday over "spreading chaos in Syria" and urged Tehran to "respect the will of the Syrian people and the country's sovereignty."

During a weekly press briefing in Tehran on Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaee emphasized the Islamic Republic's unwavering commitment to preserve Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

He asserted that the Syrian people hold the exclusive right to decide their fate free from foreign interference. Iran helped former Syrian government to eradicate terrorist groups in the country during 13-year of foreign-backed conflict in the country.

However, following the ouster of Assad, Iran pulled out its military advisors from the country.

At least 32 survive Azerbaijan Airlines plane crash

An Azerbaijani airliner with 67 people onboard crashed Wednesday near the Kazakhstani city of Aktau, leaving at least 32 survivors, according to officials. More than 30 people may be dead.

The plane was en route from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry said in a Telegram statement that those on board included five crew. A total of 29 survivors, including two children, have been hospitalized, the ministry told Russia's state news agency, RIA Novosti. The Embraer 190 aircraft made an emergency landing 3 km from the city, Azerbai-

jan Airlines said earlier.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry initially said 25 people survived the crash, later revising that number to 27, 28, and then 29 as the search and rescue operation continued at the site of the crash, bringing the supposed death toll down.

The Prosecutor General's Office in Azerbaijan later reported that at least 32 people survived the crash, adding that the number wasn't final. Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that some of them were in critical condition.

The number of survivors could mean that over 30 people may be dead.

According to Kazakhstani officials, those aboard the



Emergency specialists work at the crash site of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger jet near the western Kazakh city of Aktau on December 25, 2024.
● ISSA TAZHENBAYEV/AFP

plane included 42 Azerbaijani citizens, 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhstani and three Kyrgyzstani citizens, it said.

RIA Novosti quoted Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, as saying that preliminary information showed that the pilot had chosen to

divert to Kazakhstan's Aktau after a bird strike on the aircraft led to "an emergency situation on board".

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian in a message to his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev expressed his condolences to the president and the people of Azerbaijan.

Iran condemns Israel's 'brazen admission' of assassinating Hamas ex-leader

International Desk

Iran on Tuesday denounced Israel's "brazen admission" of having killed former Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran earlier this year, accusing the regime of having carried out a "heinous crime" and defending its missile-strike response.

"This brazen admission marks the first time the Israeli regime has openly confessed to its responsibility for this heinous crime," said Iran's ambassador to the United Nations Amir Saeid Iravani in a letter addressed to the UN secretary-general.

On Monday, Israel's defense minister Israel Katz acknowledged the regime was responsible for the killing, the first time an official admission had been made.

Haniyeh, who was seen as leading Hamas's negotiation efforts for a cease-fire in Gaza, was assassinated in a guesthouse in Tehran on July 31.

Until Monday, Israel had never admitted to killing Haniyeh, but Iran and Hamas had attributed the Hamas political leader's death to the nation.

Iravani said that the regime of

Israel remains the most serious threat to regional and international peace and security.

He urged the UN Security Council to end the impunity of a regime that flagrantly defies international law and destabilizes the region. The Iranian envoy also warned that continued silence of the council would only embolden regime to commit more atrocious crimes.

"It also reaffirms the legitimacy and legality of Iran's defensive response on 1 October 2024," the Iranian diplomat said.

In October, Iran said it fired 200 missiles at Israel, a response to

the assassination of Haniyeh in Tehran.

"It also reaffirms the legitimacy and legality of Iran's defensive response on 1 October 2024, as well as Iran's consistent position that the occupying and terrorist regime of Israel remains the most serious threat to regional and international peace and security."

On September 27, Israel also killed Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah in a Beirut bombing, which was followed by the killing of Haniyeh's successor Yahya Sinwar on October 16 in Gaza.

East Euphrates crisis:

Kurdish-US cooperation in East Euphrates

Page 1 > Kurdish forces in the east of the Euphrates, particularly the YPG, serve as a key partner for the US in the region. Backed by American intelligence, weapons, and logistics, these forces aim to solidify their governance in the region through the establishment of quasi-state structures. This development poses direct implications for the security of Iran's borders.

Border threats to Iran: Scenario of a second Kurdistan

The experience of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region has shown that the empowerment of Kurdish groups in the region is closely linked to similar movements in Iran's border areas. Strengthening the Kurds east of the Euphrates could incite ethnic tensions within Iran. Consequently, Iran faces a multilayered threat: increased military activity along

its western borders on the one hand, and heightened ethnic and separatist sentiments within its borders on the other.

Turkey's role in East Euphrates developments

The fall of Assad's government will also activate Turkey as a key player in the developments east of the Euphrates. Ankara, viewing the Kurdish presence in northern Syria as an existential threat, is likely to launch ad-

ditional military operations in the region. Although Turkey's policies may appear aligned with US interests on the surface, deep-seated conflicts between these two actors could add further complexity to the regional dynamics.

Iran's strategy to manage crisis

Under these circumstances, Iran must adopt a multifaceted strategy to counter the expan-

sion of US influence east of the Euphrates. Iran's priority will be to strengthen local proxy forces and establish security networks in eastern Syria. Leveraging the capacities of Arab tribes and local communities dissatisfied with the US presence and the SDF's activities in these areas could form part of this strategy. Additionally, Russia, which shares common interests with Iran in curbing US influence, may continue some level of in-

telligence and military cooperation in Syria during the post-Assad era.

Ultimately, the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government will present a formidable challenge for the resistance axis, particularly Iran. The east of the Euphrates will emerge as the focal point of regional developments, and Iran must harness all its geopolitical and security tools to turn this crisis into an opportunity to reinvigorate its presence in Syria.