

Pezeshkian lauds Lebanese unity as army chief assumes presidency

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed confidence that the unity of the Lebanese and solidification of their resilience would counter the aggressive ambitions of Israel towards the country's territory as he felicitated Joseph Aoun on his election as Lebanon's new president.

"Strengthening resilience and unity will doubtless thwart the Zionist enemy's avarice towards the Lebanese territory," Pezeshkian wrote in his congratulatory message on Friday, a day after Aoun secured the majority of votes in the Lebanese parliament. The Iranian president voiced Tehran's readiness to further enhance cooperation in "all fields" with Beirut, president.ir reported.

"The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran expresses its readiness to

further enhance bilateral cooperation in all fields during your presidency," he said.

The Iranian president also hoped that the election will bring "political stability, continuous economic growth, and peace and comfort to the dear people of Lebanon."

Aoun secured 99 votes from the 128-seat parliament to win the presidency in a second round of voting on Thursday afternoon.

"A new phase in the history of Lebanon begins today," sixty-year-old Aoun told the chamber after he was sworn in.

Aoun's victory, which saw members of parliament erupting in celebration as he reached the required threshold of 86 votes, came on the legislature's 13th attempt to find a successor for Michel Aoun – not related – whose term ended in October 2022.

On Thursday, the Iranian Embassy in



Lebanese lawmakers applaud the newly-elected Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, standing at the top, as he gives his first speech at Parliament after being sworn in as president in Beirut, Lebanon, on Jan. 9, 2025.

● HUSSEIN MALLA/AP



Lebanon congratulated the Lebanese nation and Aoun on election results, hoping for strengthened relations between the two states that would "serve the mutual interests of our two countries and promote stability and prosperity in the region."

Following his election, Aoun who had served as the 14th commander of the Lebanese armed forces since 2017, formally stepped down from his military role. He entered the parliament to take the oath of office as he was dressed in civilian attire.

Aoun will need to oversee the imple-

mentation of a cease-fire between Israel and Lebanon and forming a new

cabinet capable of addressing post-war reconstruction.

California's raging fires reminiscent of Israeli savagery in Gaza: Zarif

Iran's vice president for strategic affairs has compared the devastation caused by the "wrath of nature" in the form of raging fires in California to the destruction brought by the "savagery of Israel" in the Gaza Strip after a 15-month Western-backed aggression on the besieged Palestinian territory.

Mohammad Javad Zarif, the former Iranian foreign minister, expressed sympathy with Californians in a post on his X account on Friday after an ongoing series of multiple catastrophic wildfires have affected the Los Angeles metropolitan area and surrounding regions, Press TV reported.

"Grim footage out of California is reminiscent of ravaged homes, schools and hospitals in Gaza," Zarif wrote.

"It's only human to sympathize with Californians who've lost everything to wrath of nature—particularly as many there have stood with Gazans who lost everything to savagery of Israel." Since Tuesday, the fires, engulfing iconic Los Angeles neighborhoods and tearing through the Hollywood Hills, have so far killed 10



people and destroyed nearly 10,000 structures, Reuters reported.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said late on Thursday he expected the death toll to grow.

As of early Friday, five fires were still burning. They have consumed more than 34,000 acres and turned entire neighborhoods to ash. Zarif's post comes as the Israel has since October last year killed at least 46,006 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 109,378 others, in Gaza after razing almost the entire



A man looks for belongings in the remains of his home after being burned down by wildfires in the Los Angeles area, at the Eaton Fire in Altadena, California, US, on January 9, 2025.

● RINGO CHIU/REUTERS

besieged territory to the ground.

Washington, Israel's biggest ally and weapons supplier, has repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council resolutions on a cease-fire in Gaza and has since provided the regime with unstinting intelligence, financial and logistical support.

Suicide drones unveiled on last day of IRGC military drills



National Desk

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force unveiled its advanced defensive systems, including new types of suicide drones Rezvan and Meraj 521, as the military unit continues to upgrade its cutting-edge warfare technology.

On Thursday, during the final day of Great Prophet 19 military drills in western Iran, the loitering drone named "Rezvan" was operationalized, with a range of 20 kilometers and a 20-minute flight endurance, IRNA reported.

The suicide drone is equipped with a camera mounted on the front that sends images after being launched from its cylindrical launcher, allowing the operator to select, lock on and attack a target.

The warhead weight of the Meraj 521 drone, which entered into service during the drills, is available in three classes, including 500 grams, 700 grams, and 1,000 grams.

The drone has a flight endurance of 5 to 15 minutes and a range of up to 5 kilometers, Tasnim reported.

Owing to their versatility and rapid deployment, the loitering UAVs provide the IRGC Ground Force's rapid response units with new capabilities to combat terrorist groups, not least in complex mountainous geography, Press TV reported.

Loitering munitions refer to a group of weapons that, after being launched, are guided towards the target by optical and thermal systems, and detect and destroy the target by crashing into it.

Iran backs domestic, int'l initiatives of Iraq for regional peace: FM

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi emphasized that the Islamic Republic supports Iraq's internal decisions and international initiatives to resolve regional issues.

Simultaneous with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani's visit to Tehran on Wednesday, Araghchi said in a brief interview with Iraq's Al-Ahd network that the Sudanese government is pursuing its relationships in the region through effective, positive, and stable diplomacy. "Iraq is a powerful country, and its decisions are significant, and other countries pay attention to Iraq's initiatives."

He also said that during the Iraqi prime minister's visit to Tehran, critical discussion on various political and security issues were held between the two nations.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Lebanon's Aoun expected ...

On Thursday, before the final vote, lawmakers representing Hezbollah and Amal held positive talks with Aoun. However, during his inaugural speech in the Lebanese parliament, the Amal and Hezbollah MPs refrained from applauding him, especially when he vowed that weapons should be exclusively in the hands of the state. In his speech, Aoun emphasized that Lebanon would "get rid of the Israeli occupation."

The election of Lebanon's new president comes on the heels of major developments in Lebanon and the Middle East. It follows the Israel-Hezbollah war and the cease-fire deal, the assassination of Hezbollah's Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah

and his successor Hashem Safieddine and the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria, which was a key player in Lebanon's politics. Furthermore, the event takes place as Iran and Saudi Arabia, two rival actors in Lebanon, have resumed diplomatic relations. The resolution of the presidential stalemate would have been unlikely if Tehran and Riyadh had remained at odds.

Aoun's election as the fourth army commander to become Lebanon's president in the last 27 years highlights the deep-rooted bonds between politics and the military in Lebanon. His successful tenure as army chief, particularly his efforts to combat corruption within the military, earned him the support of local media. During

his command, he held a non-political and uncontroversial profile, avoiding opposition to Hezbollah being armed while maintaining a relatively neutral stance, despite attempts by adversaries to create divisions between the army and the resistance group.

Aoun is expected to keep his centrist positions during his presidency, engaging with all domestic parties and external actors.

Like any politician, he will likely work through the complexities facing Lebanon both at home and abroad. He is neither seen as a supporter of Hezbollah nor as its opponent. Instead, it appears the general will respond to the influence of the Resistance within Lebanon's political and social arenas, when he acknowledges its importance.