

Iranian official reveals more details of Raisi's copter crash

IRNA, Tehran

Iran's presidential chief of staff has revealed more details about a helicopter crash in northwest of the country over the weekend which led to the martyrdom of president Ebrahim Raisi, foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and two top local officials in the province of East Azerbaijan.

Gholamhossein Esmaili said on Monday in an interview with the state TV that weather conditions in Iran's Varzaqan region, where president Raisi's copter crashed, was perfect at the start and during most of the flight that took place a day earlier.

Esmaili was in one of the three helicopters that were returning from a dam inauguration ceremony on Iran's border with the Republic of Azerbaijan.

He said the helicopters had taken off at around



1:00 pm local time on May 19 while weather condition in the area was normal.

After 45 minutes into the flight, the pilot of president Raisi's helicopter, ordered other helicopters to increase altitude to avoid a nearby cloud.

However, the president's helicopter, which was flying between the two others, suddenly disappeared.

"After 30 seconds of flying over the clouds, our pilot noticed that the helicopter in the middle had disappeared," said Esmaili, adding that the pilot decided to circle and return to search for the president's helicopter.

Esmaili said after several attempts to contact president's helicopter through radio devices, and while it was unable to decrease altitude because of clouds, their helicopter continued its flight and landed at a copper mine.

He said Amirabdollahian and head of president's protection unit didn't respond to calls afterwards.

The official said, however, that pilots of the two other helicopters had contacted Captain Mostafavi, who was in charge of the president's helicopter, but the one who took the call was Friday prayer leader Mohammad Ali Ale-Hashem, whose situation was not good but said the copter had crashed into a valley.



PHOTO: AFP

Smoke billows from burning tyres amid clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli forces conducting a raid in Jenin in the occupied West Bank yesterday. The Israeli military has approved permission for Israelis to return to three former West Bank settlements -- Sa-nur, Ganim and Kadim -- they had been banned from entering since an evacuation ordered in 2005, the defence ministry said yesterday.

North Gaza hospitals barely operational

Say medics, WHO as Israeli forces fire on the facilities

AFP, Rafah

North Gaza's last two functioning hospitals, Al-Awda and Kamal Adwan, are barely operational, doctors and the World Health Organization said Tuesday with the Israel's offensive in Gaza now in its eighth month.

Hospital officials said Israeli forces had fired on the facilities and that snipers had been deployed near one of them.

"Today marks the third day of the siege on Al-Awda Hospital

"148 hospital staff, 22 patients and their companions are trapped inside" Al-Awda Hospital.

Says WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

in northern Gaza," the hospital's acting director Dr Mohammad Saleh told AFP.

He reported that Israeli forces had been "firing at the hospital buildings" and that "snipers" have taken up position in nearby houses.

Dr Saleh said the "southern wall" of the hospital "has been destroyed" and "all medical staff and patients" are inside the hospital wards. Moving around the hospital was "extremely difficult", he said.

But staff still had to transfer



water "from the second building to the first one because the occupation (Israeli) forces hit the first building with a shell on the fifth floor yesterday (Monday), destroying the water tanks".

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a press conference in Geneva that "148 hospital staff, 22 patients and their companions are trapped inside" the hospital.

The WHO regularly visited Al-Awda in April to deliver medical supplies and fuel, but Ghebreyesus also reported snipers aiming at the building and artillery hitting the fifth floor.

Dounia Dekhili, emergency coordinator for Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Gaza, said "nothing is coming in or out" of the hospital because of fears of sniper fire.

"Our operating theatre supervisor has been hiding for a few days, he can hear gunshots,"

Dekhili told AFP after speaking to the man inside Al-Awda.

Dr Saleh did not report any casualties, but said the episode was reminiscent of the last Israeli military operation in the area of the northern Gaza hospital, which is located next to the Jabalia refugee camp.

In December, Israeli forces besieged Al-Awda for days, killing two staff and detaining others, MSF reported at the time.

Despite AFP requests, the Israeli military has yet to comment on the operation in Al-Awda. Tuesday also saw patients and staff being evacuated from another north Gaza hospital, Kamal Adwan, its director Dr Hossam Abu Safia told AFP.

"Currently, the hospital is being evacuated of the wounded, patients, and medical staff," he said, adding that "there are several patients that the medical teams have not been able to evacuate".

China announces sanctions on US defence firms

AFP, Beijing

China said yesterday it would impose sanctions on a number of US defence firms and several executives over Washington's "economic coercion" against Chinese companies and its sales of arms to Taiwan.

Beijing has bristled in recent days over the warm ties between Washington and Taipei, where Lai Ching-te was sworn in on Monday as the self-ruled island's new president.

China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has branded Lai a "dangerous separatist" who will bring "war and decline" to the island.

The day of Lai's inauguration also saw China announce sanctions on three US defence firms for their arms sales to Taipei.

In addition to Taiwan, Beijing yesterday also cited US sanctions on Chinese entities for "so-called Russia-related factors" in its decision to impose the "countermeasures".

Beijing said sanctions would also be imposed on a slew of US defence firms and executives, including units and individuals under Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and General Dynamics.

BJP will win 305 seats

Claims US political scientist on India polls

NDTV ONLINE

The BJP will win 305 (+/- 10) seats in India's Lok Sabha election, American political scientist and global political risk consultant Ian Bremmer told NDTV Profit in an exclusive interview Tuesday.

Bremmer, the founder of the Eurasia Group, a risk and research consulting firm, also said the Indian general election, from a global political perspective, is "the only thing that looks stable and consistent...everything else (including the United States election due in November) is problematic".

"... We have an enormous amount of macro-level geopolitical uncertainty and the future of globalisation is not going the way companies want it to. Politics is inserting itself into the global marketplace... wars, US-China relations, and the US election are all a big part of that," he said.

"All of these not being managed well and these pressures are more negative. In fact, the only thing that looks stable and consistent, politically, is the India election. Everything else looks problematic."

Asked about his prediction for the Indian election, which is spread across seven phases and began on April 19, Bremmer said Eurasia Group research suggests the BJP will win 295-315 seats.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party, bidding for a third consecutive term, won the 2014 election with 282 seats (336 including its NDA partners) and the 2019 with 303 (353 with NDA allies).

Russia 'launched' space weapon in path of US satellite: Pentagon

AFP, Washington

Russia has launched a likely space weapon and deployed it in the same orbit as a US government satellite, the Pentagon said.

"Russia launched a satellite into low Earth orbit that we assess is likely a counter-space weapon presumably capable of attacking other satellites in low Earth orbit," Pentagon spokesman Air Force Major General Pat Ryder told a press briefing late Tuesday.

The Russian "counter-space weapon" launched on May 16 was deployed "into the same orbit as a US government satellite," he said.

Ryder added that Washington would continue to monitor the situation and was ready to protect its interests.

"We have a responsibility to be ready to protect and defend the domain, the space domain, and ensure continuous and uninterrupted support to the Joint and Combined Force," he said. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment when asked about reports that Moscow had launched a space weapon.

"I can't comment on this in any way. We act absolutely in accordance with international law, do not violate anything, and have repeatedly advocated banning any weapons in space," he told a regular press briefing in Moscow. "Unfortunately, these initiatives of ours were rejected, including by the USA."

Earlier Tuesday, Moscow accused the United States of seeking to weaponize space after Washington vetoed a Russian non-proliferation motion at the United Nations.



Nepal sherpa scales Everest for record 30th time

REUTERS, Kathmandu

A Nepali sherpa guide scaled the summit of Mount Everest for a record 30th time yesterday, an official said, while two climbers went missing while descending from the world's tallest peak.

Ordinary climbers are known to take several days to climb the summit of Everest, and it is very rare for mountaineers to make multiple ascents in a short time.

Kami Rita Sherpa, 54, reached the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) peak by the traditional southeast ridge route, Nepali tourism official Khim Lal Gautam said. Kami Rita had climbed the peak for the 29th time on May 12.

He "broke his own record ... this marks his 30th ascent to the top of the world," Gautam, chief of the expedition monitoring field office at the base camp, said in a post on X.

Nepal tourism officials said a British climber and a Nepali guide have been missing since Tuesday, after they slipped and fell near the South Summit in the mountain's "death zone" where oxygen is very sparse.

They were on the way down after having reached the summit. Kami Rita first climbed Everest in 1994, and has done so almost every year since, except for three years when authorities closed the mountain for various reasons.

Early yesterday, officials said they were waiting for more details of Kami Rita's climb. Another sherpa climber has climbed Everest 27 times, the most summits after Kami Rita.



Sham Lal Gandhi, an e-rickshaw driver and independent candidate from Amritsar parliamentary seat, carries his election symbol 'gas cylinder' during a door-to-door campaign in Amritsar, India yesterday amid ongoing general election.

PHOTO: AFP

S'PORE AIRLINES 20 people in ICU after turbulent flight

AFP, Bangkok

Twenty people were in intensive care in Bangkok hospitals yesterday after a terrifying high-altitude plunge on a flight from London during which an elderly passenger died and more than 100 were injured.

Singapore Airlines flight SQ321 hit "sudden extreme turbulence" over Myanmar 10 hours into its journey to Singapore on Tuesday, abruptly rising and plunging several times.

One passenger said people were thrown around the cabin so violently they put dents in the ceiling during the drama at 11,300 metres (37,000 feet), leaving dozens with head injuries.

Photos from inside the plane show the cabin in chaos, strewn with food, drinks bottles and luggage, and with oxygen masks dangling from the ceiling.