

*Rescue teams recover bodies from
crash site where Iran's president
was killed*



A search and rescue team carries a recovered body in Varzaqan, East Azerbaijan province, Iran. [WANA via Reuters]

Tehran, May 20 (RHC)-- Iranians are in mourning after President Ebrahim Raisi was confirmed dead on Monday when search and rescue teams found his crashed helicopter in a fog-shrouded western mountain region.

Iranian authorities first raised the alarm on Sunday afternoon when they lost contact with Raisi's helicopter as it flew through the mountain area of the Jolfa region of East Azerbaijan province.

Raisi had earlier met Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev on the two country's border to inaugurate a dam project. On the return trip, only two of the three helicopters in his convoy landed in the city of Tabriz, setting off a massive search and rescue effort, with multiple foreign governments soon offering help.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi at first spoke of a "hard landing" and urged citizens to ignore hostile foreign media channels and get their information "only from state television." The army, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the police joined the search as Red Crescent teams walked up a hill in the fog and rain while rows of emergency services vehicles waited nearby.

As the sun rose on Monday, rescue crews said they had located the destroyed aircraft with nine people on board.

Killed alongside Raisi were Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and seven others, including the pilot, bodyguards and political and religious officials.

State television IRIB reported online that the helicopter had "hit a mountain and disintegrated" on impact.

Iran's Red Crescent chief Pirhossein Koolivand confirmed that its staff were "transferring the bodies of the martyrs to Tabriz" and that "the search operations have come to an end".

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