

Pope warns world headed to bigger war



Pope Francis
Vatican

Pope Francis made one of his most emotional anti-war addresses yesterday, saying during a visit to a US military cemetery that the world seemed to be headed into war perhaps bigger than any before.

Francis said a Mass for several thousand people at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in the town of Nettuno, south of the Italian capital, on the day Roman Catholics commemorate their dead.

The burial ground is the final resting place for 7,860 American soldiers who died in the liberation of southern Italy and Rome in 1943 and 1944.

He walked slowly and alone amid the rows of low white

headstones in the shape of crosses and Stars of David, gently resting a white rose on about a dozen and stopping to pray silently before saying the Mass.

"Please Lord, stop. No more wars. No more of these useless massacres," he said, speaking in hushed tones in an improvised homily.

Francis said that remembering the many young people who died in second world war was even more important "today that the world once more is at war and is preparing to go even more forcefully into war."

He did not elaborate but appeared to be referring to the possibility of nuclear war. *(Reuters)*

Syria forces near capture of Deir Ezzor city from IS

Damascus

Syrian government troops and allied fighters captured some of the last parts of Deir Ezzor city from the Islamic State group yesterday, state media and a monitor said.

Syria's army has been battling inside the city since September, when it broke a jihadist siege of nearly three years on government-held parts of the provincial capital.

Syrian state media said Thursday that the army and allied fighters had captured three neighbourhoods in the city, and "tightened the siege" on IS fighters in several remaining districts.

State news agency SANA said IS fighters were using loudspeakers to urge remaining members of the group "not to run away from the fighting, and to kill any member who tried to escape or surrender".

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor also reported the regime advances in the city, provincial capital of surrounding Deir Ezzor, on Syria's eastern border with Iraq.

The monitor said IS fighters held less than five percent of the city, and government forces



Representative image

were advancing as ally Russia carried out heavy air strikes in support of the offensive.

"If the regime's forces succeed in continuing this offensive, they could bring an end to IS's presence (in the city) in hours or days," the Observatory said.

IS once held large sections of Deir Ezzor city, and for nearly

three years laid siege to other parts of it that remained under government control.

In early September, advancing government forces broke the siege, and they have been working since to expel the jihadists from the rest of the city.

Oil-rich Deir Ezzor province was once an IS stronghold, but

the jihadist group now faces twin assaults there, from the regime and the US-backed Kurdish-Arab Syrian Democratic Forces.

The jihadists have already been expelled from neighbouring Raqa province, and are now confined to just a few pockets of territory in Deir Ezzor. *(AFP)*

Khamenei says U.S. is Iran's 'number one enemy'

Ankara

The United States is Iran's "number one enemy" and Tehran will never succumb to Washington's pressure over a multinational nuclear deal, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech yesterday.

U.S. President Donald Trump broke ranks with other major powers last month by refusing to formally certify Iran's compliance with the nuclear deal. Under that deal, most sanctions on Iran were lifted in exchange for Tehran curbing its nuclear work.

"The American president's foolish remarks against our people show the depth of America's hostility towards the entire Iranian nation," Iran's top authority Khamenei told a

group of students.

"America is the number one enemy of our nation."

Since the deal was reached in 2015, Khamenei has continued to denounce the United States publicly, suggesting that antagonism between the two countries since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Tehran would not abate because of the accord.

Iran and the United States severed diplomatic ties shortly after the revolution, when hardline students took 52 Americans hostage for 444 days. Iran will mark the anniversary of the American embassy seizure on Saturday.

Trump has called the nuclear agreement, which was reached under his predecessor Barack Obama, "the worst deal ever

negotiated" and has adopted a harsh approach to Iran over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

Washington has imposed new sanctions on Iran over its missile activity, calling on Tehran not to develop missiles capable of delivering nuclear bombs. Iran says it has no such plans and its missile program is solely for defence purposes.

The deal's other signatories, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China, and the European Union say Washington cannot unilaterally cancel an international accord enshrined by a U.N. resolution.

Iranian officials have repeatedly said that Tehran would stick to the nuclear accord as long as the other

signatories respected it. But it has warned about the consequences if the deal falls apart.

"We will never accept their bullying over the nuclear deal ... Americans are using all the wickedness to damage the result of the nuclear talks," Khamenei said to chants of "Death to America" by students.

"Any retreat by Iran will make America more blatant and impudent ... Resistance is the only option."

Trump also accuses Iran of supporting terrorism in the Middle East. Iran rejects that and in turn blames the growth of militant groups such as Islamic State on the policies of the United States and its regional allies. *(Reuters)*



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei waves as he arrives to deliver a speech in Tehran, Iran