

positions, about 250 people voted," Mr. immune to such tensions.

Pope Leo to visit four African countries in April tour

BY REUTERS

VATICAN. Pope Leo will embark on a major tour of Africa from April 13-23, visiting four countries, the Vatican announced yesterday. The trip marks the pontiff's first significant overseas journey in 2026 to the continent where the Catholic Church is experiencing its fastest growth.

The pope will visit Algeria, Angola, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon, drawing large crowds and using the opportunity to encourage world leaders to support development in Africa, while also highlighting Catholic-Muslim dialogue initiatives.

In addition to the African tour, Pope Leo will make a one-day visit to Monaco on March 28 and travel to Spain from June 6-12. During the Spain visit, he is expected to include the Canary Islands, a key entry point for migrants heading to Europe.

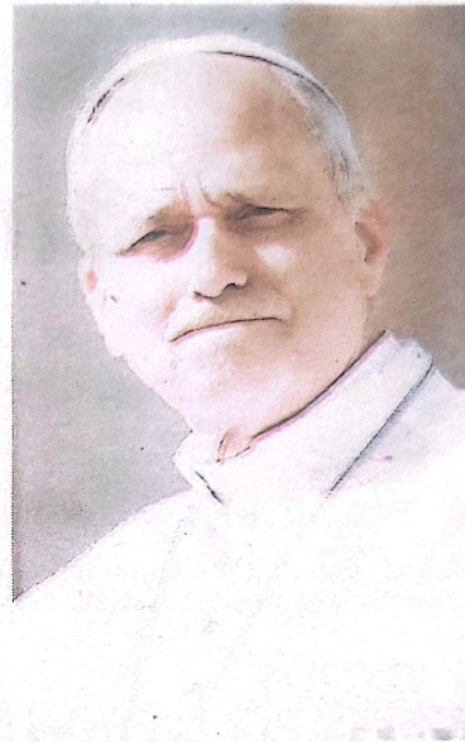
Elected in May last year to succeed

the late Pope Francis as head of the 1.4-billion-member Church, Pope Leo has so far made only one overseas trip, visiting Turkey and Lebanon in November and December, a journey initially planned for Francis. Vatican officials and African Church leaders say his upcoming visit underscores the importance the Church places on the continent.

"Pope Leo's visit will remind the world that Africa matters and that the vibrancy of the Church on the continent remains central to a thriving global Church," said Reverend Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, a Nigerian Jesuit who led Jesuit communities across Africa from 2017 to 2023.

According to Vatican statistics, around 20 percent of the world's Catholics reside in Africa, making it a key focus for the global Church.

The tour will be historically significant as Pope Leo will become



Pope Leo

the first pontiff to visit Algeria, an overwhelmingly Muslim country of about 47 million people, home to just a few thousand Catholics. Pope Leo, a member of the Augustinian order, has a special connection to the country: the fourth-century St Augustine of Hippo, a central figure in early Christianity, hailed from what is now Algeria.

Previous papal visits to the region include Pope Francis' 2023 trip to Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 visits to Angola and Cameroon, and John Paul II's 1982 visit to Equatorial Guinea.

"The tour will shine a spotlight on countries in Africa that have experienced significant religious growth but continue to face political and economic challenges," Orobator said, also noting the Church's role in promoting dialogue and peace.

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