

Massive blast hits key port in southern Iran



National Desk

A massive explosion and fire at Iran's largest commercial port in southern country has killed at least five people and injured more than 500 others. Social media videos showed black billowing smoke after the blast at

the Shahid Rajaei port in Hormozgan Province. Others showed glass blown out of buildings kilometers away from the epicenter of the explosion. State media footage showed the injured crowding into at least one hospital, with ambulances arriving as medics rushed one person by on a stretcher.

The blast shattered windows within a radius of several kilometers and was heard in Qeshm, an island 26 kilometers south of the port. At least 516 have been injured in the blast at the port just outside of Bandar Abbas, a major facility for container shipments for Iran that handles



People transport an injured man along a devastated boulevard following an explosion at the Shahid Rajaei port dock southwest of Bandar Abbas in the Iranian province of Hormozgan on April 26, 2025.

● IRNA

some 80 million tons of goods a year. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed sympathy for the victims of the deadly blast, adding he had "issued an order to investigate the situation and the causes", dispatching Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni to the area to look into the incident.

The Interior Ministry said it launched an investigation into the incident. Although the cause of the blast was not immediately clear, the customs office at the port said in a statement carried by state TV that it probably resulted from a fire that broke out at the hazmat and chemical materials storage depot.

Hossein Zafari, a spokesperson for Iran's crisis management organization, appeared to blame the explosion on poor storage of chemicals in containers at Shahid Rajaei.

"The cause of the explosion was the chemicals inside the containers," he told Iran's ILNA news agency. "Previously, the Director General of Crisis Management had given warnings to this port during their visits and had pointed out the possibility of danger," Zafari said.

An Iranian government spokesperson, however, said that although chemicals had likely caused the blast, it was not yet possible to determine the exact reason.

Oil facilities were not affected by the blast on Saturday, authorities said. The National Iranian Petroleum Refining and Distribution Company said in a statement that it had "no connection to refineries, fuel tanks, distribution complexes and oil pipelines." Shahid Rajaei, more than 1,000 kilometers south of the capital Tehran, is the most advanced container port in Iran.

The rare explosion came several months after one of Iran's deadliest work accidents in years. The coal mine blast in September, caused by a gas leak, killed more than 50 people in Tabas in Iran's east.

Pezeshkian urges joint effort to fight terrorism in calls with Modi, Sharif



International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday called for regional cooperation to root out terrorism as he spoke with Indian and Pakistani leaders following a deadly attack by gunmen in Indian-run Kashmir. India blamed Pakistan for the April 22 attack on tourists in Pahalgam which left 26 civilians dead. However, Islamabad has denied involvement and expressed readiness for a neutral probe into the incident. Speaking with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Pezeshkian "strongly" condemned the "inhuman" act of terror, IRNA reported. "Such bitter incidents double the

shared responsibility of all regional countries... to help to eradicate the roots of terrorism," he told Modi on the phone. He urged New Delhi to continue to follow in the footsteps of its prominent national figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, "who were the messengers of peace." Modi, for his part, echoed Pezeshkian's calls for a collective approach to the fight against terrorism, saying regional countries needed "unity and all-out cooperation" to address the issue. The Iranian president also phoned Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to highlight the need for

"greater cooperation" among regional nations to "combat the sinister phenomenon of terrorism" and "destroy the financial and military infrastructure of terrorist groups." "Such terrorist acts... lead to new conflicts and tensions among regional countries," he warned. Sharif described Pakistan a victim of terrorism and said Islamabad was open to cooperate for a "comprehensive and transparent inquiry" into the recent incident. Pezeshkian invited both leaders to visit Iran. The two also offered their condolences over a deadly explosion that ripped through a key port in the southern Iranian city of Bandar Abbas on Saturday.

World bids farewell to Pope Francis



Italian cardinal Giovanni Battista Re (3rd R) officiates the mass in front of the coffin of late Pope Francis, during the funeral ceremony at St Peter's Square at the Vatican on April 26, 2025.

● TIZIANA FABI/AFP

Presidents, royalty and simple mourners bade farewell to Pope Francis on Saturday at a solemn funeral ceremony, where a cardinal appealed for the pontiff's legacy of caring for migrants, the downtrodden and the environment to be kept alive.

The Argentine pope, who reigned for 12 years, died at the age of 88 on Monday after suffering a stroke, Reuters reported.

"Rich in human warmth and deeply sensitive to today's challenges, Pope Francis truly shared the anxieties, sufferings and hopes of this time," said Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, who presided over the funeral Mass. In spiritual language, the 91-year-old Re gave a simple message: there was no going back. The first pontiff from Latin America had been "attentive to the signs of the times and what the Holy Spirit was awakening in the Church," he said.

Applause rang out as Francis' coffin, in-laid with a large cross, was brought out of the basilica and into the sun-filled square by 14 white-gloved pallbearers at the start of the Mass.

The Vatican estimated more than 250,000 people attended the ceremony, cramming the square and the roads around.

The crowds clapped loudly again at the end of the service when the ushers picked up the casket and tilted it slightly so more people could see.

Aerial views of the Vatican showed a patchwork of colors - black from the dark garb of the world's leaders, red from the vestments of some 250 cardinals, the purple worn by some of the 400 bishops and the white worn by 4,000 attending priests.

After the funeral, as the great bells of St. Peter's pealed in mourning, the coffin was placed on an open-topped popemobile and driven through the heart of Rome to St. Mary Major Basilica.

Francis, who shunned much of the pomp and privilege of the papacy, had asked to be buried there rather than in St. Peter's -- the first time a pope had been laid to rest outside the Vatican in more than a century.

The burial itself was conducted in private.

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi also attended the funeral ceremony in Rome. Francis' death ushered in a meticulously planned period of transition, marked by ancient ritual, pomp and mourning. Over the past three days, around 250,000 people filed past his open coffin, laid out before the altar of the cavernous basilica.

Francis, the first non-European pope for almost 13 centuries, battled to reshape the Church, siding with the poor and marginalized, while challenging wealthy nations to help migrants and reverse climate change.

Iran-US talks grow ...

"The atmosphere was quite serious," Araghchi told Iranian TV after the meeting, adding that the two sides moved away from broader topics.

"This does not mean our differences have been resolved. There are still disagreements on both major issues and on the details," he pointed out. The top diplomat added that the delegations would go back to their capitals for "further review" of the issues raised in order to "narrow down differences" and would reconvene probably next Saturday in a venue to be determined later.

Cautious optimism

He expressed "extremely cautious optimism" about progress in the talks as there were issues over which "general understandings" needed to be achieved before any

discussion on their details. Araghchi said he was "satisfied" with the pace and course of the negotiations though there were "some very serious disagreements" on certain issued which "would defiantly take time" to be resolved.

"I believe that there is willpower in the opposing side. We definitely have willpower, but whether an agreement can be reached is uncertain. I am optimistic, but very cautious."

The Iranian negotiating team for this round included economic experts and specialists from the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran are expected to join the talks next week, according to Araghchi.

The Iranian minister reiterated that the talks had so far focused on nuclear-related matters and "no other issues" had been touched on in the

course of the meetings.

Iran has time and again said that its defense capabilities including its ballistic missile program is not up for negotiations.

"Our topic is solely nuclear which means trust-building over Iran's nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions," he said.

A senior US administration official hailed the talks with Iran as "positive and productive," and said the two sides had agreed to meet again soon in Europe.

"This latest round of direct and indirect discussions lasted over four hours. There is still much to do, but further progress was made on getting to a deal," the official said on condition of anonymity.

"We agreed to meet again soon, in Europe, and we thank our Omani partners for facilitating these talks."