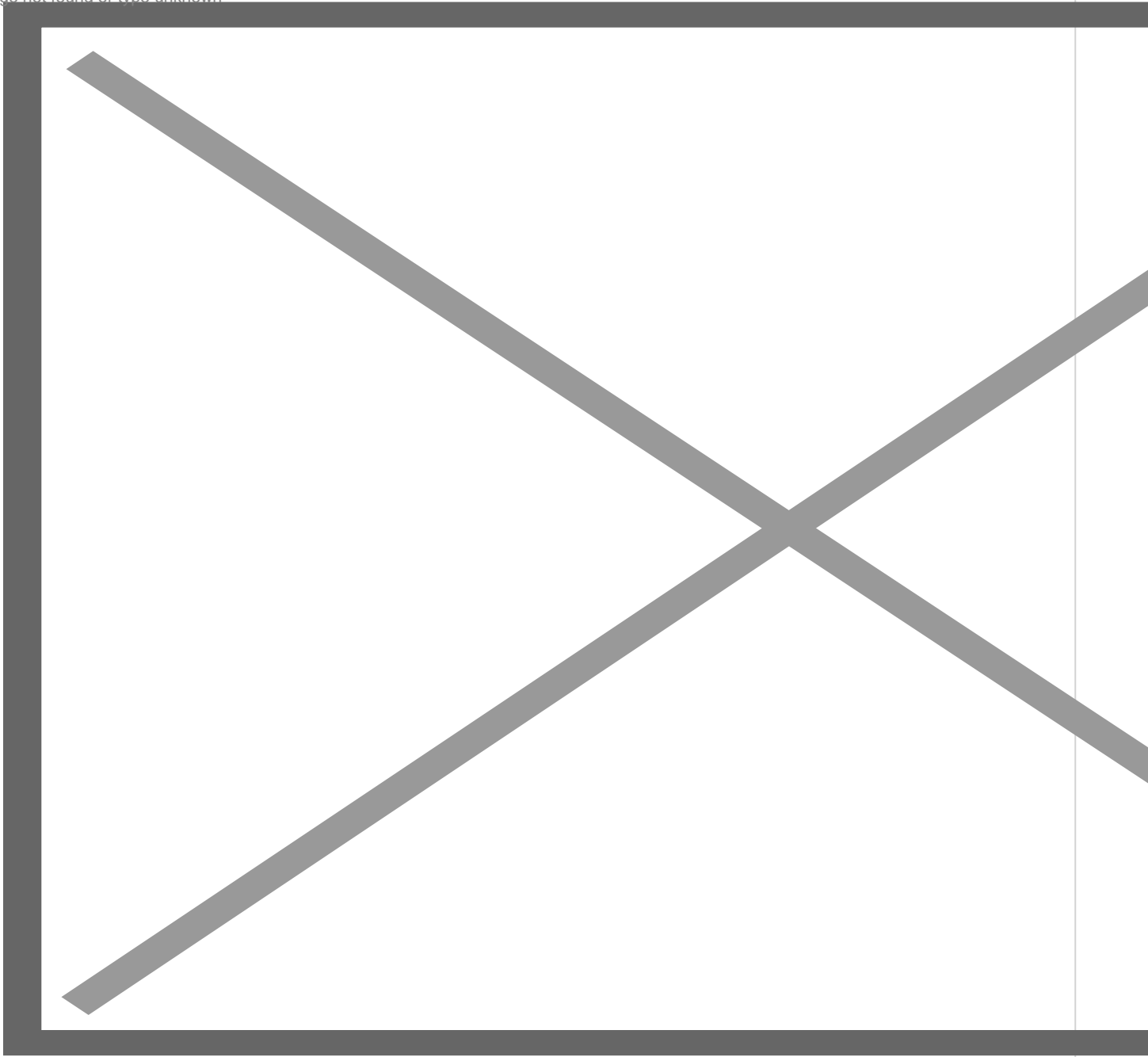


*Iranians mourn President Raisi
martyrdom as funeral ceremonies
begin*

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Mourners gathered in Valiasr Square in central Tehran on Monday. Atta Kenare/AFP/Getty Images

Tehran, May 21 (RHC)-- Millions of people have taken part in a massive funeral procession for Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his companions who were martyred in a helicopter crash in a remote, mountainous area of Iran's northwestern province of East Azarbaijan.

The funeral ceremony started on Tuesday morning and drew a massive crowd. The mourners marched alongside the coffins, draped with the national Iranian flag, in the northwestern Iranian city of Tabriz.

The participants shouted slogans to pledge allegiance with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei as well as the principles of the Islamic Revolution, and vowed to stand firm against enemies.

The mourners in the ceremony are converging on Tabriz's Imam Khomeini Mosalla (prayer grounds).

Speaking at the ceremony in Tabriz, Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahdidi said that Iran is mourning the loss of a beloved, popular, and humble president.

The Iranian nation is also saddened by the death of a foreign minister who left active diplomacy in the critical moments of the resistance as his legacy, Vahidi added. He also praised the constructive efforts of the late governor of East Azarbaijan province and the province's Friday prayers leader.

“We had a bad landing in this matter, but we will have a brilliant rise,” Vahidi stressed.

Another funeral procession for President Raisi and his companions is scheduled to be held in Iran's north-central city of Qom, which hosts the holy shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (AS), on Tuesday evening.

The bodies will then be transferred to the capital Tehran for a funeral on Wednesday.

According to reports, the body of Friday prayers leader of Tabriz Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Al-e-Hashem will be laid to rest in Tabriz on Thursday, while that of Governor of East Azarbaijan Malek Rahmati will be buried in Maragheh city on the same day.

The helicopter carrying Raisi and his entourage crashed around afternoon on Sunday as it was on its way to Tabriz, the capital of Iran's East Azerbaijan province, from a location on the border with the Republic of Azerbaijan where the Iranian president had opened a major dam project.

Rescuers found the wreckage of the helicopter early on Monday after hours of extensive search which involved more than 70 teams.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and two senior provincial officials along with crew members and bodyguards also died as a result of the crash.

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