

## INTERNATIONAL

## Pope Francis's funeral today

AFP, Vatican City

Tens of thousands of people flocked to the Vatican yesterday for a last glimpse of Pope Francis's open coffin, as world leaders and other guests began arriving for his funeral.

Around 150,000 people had paid their last respects to the Argentine pontiff by midday, seven hours before the end of three days of lying in state at St Peter's Basilica, the Vatican said.

More than 50 heads of state and 10 monarchs are expected to attend today's funeral, alongside around 200,000 mourners.

Italian and Vatican authorities have placed the area around St Peter's under tight security with drones blocked, snipers on roofs and fighter jets on standby.

Further checkpoints will be activated on Friday night, police said.

The Catholic Church's first Latin American pope died on Monday aged 88, less than a month after spending weeks in hospital fighting severe pneumonia.

The Argentine pontiff, who had long suffered failing health, defied doctors' orders by making a public appearance on Easter Sunday, the most important moment in the Catholic calendar.

Condolences have flooded in from around the world for the Jesuit, an energetic reformer who championed those on the fringes of society in his 12 years as head of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.



Faithful queue to enter St Peter's Basilica to pay respects as Pope Francis lies in state, as seen from Rome, Italy, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS