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Coronavirus

Package with petrol and bullet found in Italian bank branch

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MILAN, April 20 (Reuters) - A package containing a petrol tank and a bullet was found inside a Sardinian branch of Italian bank Intesa Sanpaolo on Monday, police said, an incident that a leading union linked to tensions over business requests for COVID-19 crisis loans.

"The parcel did not have a fuse and couldn't have detonated but it was a clear threat against the bank," local police commander Pietro Barrel told Reuters.

The main trade union for banking staff, FABI, linked the incident to tensions between customers and bank workers over requests for loans guaranteed by the state under a liquidity package the government approved earlier this month.

Police said all possibilities were being considered and it was too early to say if the episode was connected to the coronavirus emergency.

Monday was the first day on which Italian businesses could apply for loans worth up to 25,000 euros (\$27,000) which carry a 100% state guarantee.

FABI said there had been "waves" of requests from businesses for such loans.

"There have been numerous moments of tension between customers asking for liquidity and bank staff," FABI said, adding the package in the Intesa branch was among the most concerning examples of the unrest.

A spokesman for Intesa, Italy's largest retail bank, confirmed a parcel had been found, adding that the branch would open as usual on Tuesday.

Italian banks, which have shuttered branches and cut opening hours to limit contagion risks for their staff, have been tasked by the government with funnelling to cash-starved firms up to 750 billion euros in possible new loans guaranteed by the state.

Italy's third-largest bank Banco BPM, the first lender to report figures, said there had been 8,000 requests for loans of up to 25,000 euros on Monday, totalling 140 million euros in aggregate.