

Italy quarantines 16 million in northern regions

Chaos reigns as southern regions warn people who emigrated to the north not to return home; WHO praises Rome's decision

ASSOCIATED PRESS
REUTERS
MILAN

Italy announced a sweeping quarantine on Sunday for its northern regions, igniting travel chaos as it restricted the movements of 16 million people – more than one quarter of its population – in a bid to halt the relentless march of the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) across Europe.

Confusion reigned from Milan to Venice as residents and tourists tried to figure out exactly when and how the new rules were coming into effect. Travellers rushed to train stations and crammed aboard standing-room only trains.

PM signs decree

After Italy saw its biggest one-day jump in infections on Saturday, Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte signed a quarantine decree overnight for the country's prosperous north. On Sunday, death toll rose by 133 to 366, the se-



Nobody to cheer: A view of the empty San Siro stadium in Milan on Sunday during the Serie A soccer match between AC Milan and Genoa. • REUTERS

cond-highest in the world. The number of infections went up by a single-day record of 1,492 to hit 7,375.

"There will be a ban for everybody to move in and out of these territories and also within the same territory," Mr. Conte said. "Exceptions will be allowed only for

proven professional needs, exceptional cases and health issues."

The fate of foreign visitors stuck in Italy's new quarantine zones was not immediately clear.

While the Vatican wasn't directly affected by the lockdown, Pope Francis, who

has been ill, held his Sunday blessing by video instead of in person. He said he felt like he was "in a cage."

Italy's southern regions warned hundreds of thousands of people who emigrated to the wealthy north of the country not to return home, amid fears of an exo-

odus from a no-go zone set up to halt an outbreak of COVID-19.

The unprecedented lockdown was announced by the government overnight and will affect some 16 million inhabitants in the wealthy region of Lombardy, centred on the financial capital Milan, and 14 provinces also in the north.

An estimated two million people have left the underdeveloped south in the past 15 years in search of work and hundreds of thousands of them have settled in the north. With a four-week shutdown looming, many of them are expected to try to return to their old family homes to sit out the contagion.

However, the Governor of Puglia, the heel of Italy's boot, made an impassioned plea on Facebook for them to remain in the north, the epicentre of Europe's worst coronavirus outbreak.

"I speak to you as if you were my children, my broth-

ers, my nephews and nieces: stop and go back," said Michele Emiliano. "Get off at the first train station, do not catch planes... turn your cars around, get off your buses. Do not bring the Lombard, Veneto and Emilia epidemic to Puglia."

The northern regions of Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto represent 85% of all the 5,883 confirmed cases to date and 92% of the 233 recorded deaths.

"The government must block an exodus to Calabria, which risks triggering a disastrous bomb," said Jole Santelli, the President of Calabria, the impoverished toe of Italy.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation (WHO) praised Italy's decision. "The government & the people of Italy are taking bold, courageous steps aimed at slowing the spread of the #coronavirus & protecting their country & world," WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a tweet.

Trump refuses to halt rallies as cases surge

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PALM BEACH

U.S. President Donald Trump signalled on Saturday that he has no intention of halting campaign rallies despite surging COVID-19 cases.

"We will have tremendous rallies and we're doing very well, and we've done a fantastic job with respect to that subject," Mr. Trump responded when asked if his "Keep America Great" campaign events would continue.

Mr. Trump's remarks came as the number of cas-

es confirmed across the United States leapt past 400, with 19 deaths confirmed so far, mainly in the west coast state of Washington.

Meanwhile, health authorities announced the first confirmed case in the nation's capital – a Washington DC resident in his 50s with no history of international travel and no close contacts with anyone known to be infected. Asked if he was concerned that the virus had spread to within a few miles of the White House, he replied: "No, I'm not concerned at all."

Ten dead, 23 trapped at collapsed China hotel

REUTERS
SHANGHAI/BEIJING

Ten people have died and 23 remain trapped after the collapse of a hotel that was being used to quarantine people with COVID-19 under observation in the Chinese city of Quanzhou, authorities said on Sunday.

More than 70 people were believed to have been initially trapped in the seven-storey building, which collapsed on Saturday evening. On Sunday, authorities retrieved 48 individuals from the site of the collapse, with 38 of them sent to hos-

pitals, the Ministry of Emergency Management said. Of the 71 people inside the hotel at the time of the collapse, 58 had been under quarantine, they added.

News of the collapse comes as the spread of COVID-19 continues to slow in China.

According to data from the National Health Commission, cases fell by roughly one half on Saturday from the day prior. The agency confirmed 44 new cases of COVID-19 at the end of March 7, a decline from 99 the previous day.

Saudi Arabia cordons off Shiite-majority region

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RIYADH

Saudi Arabian authorities have cordoned off the eastern Qatif region, a stronghold of the Kingdom's Shiite minority, in a bid to contain the fast-spreading coronavirus, the Interior Ministry said on Sunday.

"Given that all 11 recorded positive cases of the new coronavirus are from Qatif... it has been decided... to temporarily suspend entry and exit from Qatif," the Ministry said.

Saudi Arabia has expressed alarm over the

spread of the disease across the Gulf region, which has confirmed more than 230 COVID-19 cases – most of them people returning from religious pilgrimages to Shiite-majority Iran.

Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province – which includes Qatif – has seen bouts of unrest since 2011 when protesters emboldened by the Arab Spring uprisings took to the streets. Demonstrators have long demanded an end to what they say is discrimination by the Sunni-dominated government, a charge Riyadh denies.

3 Saudi princes arrested over 'plot' to unseat Crown Prince

Pictures of King released to quell rumours about his health

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI

Saudi Arabia released images of King Salman carrying out his royal duties on Sunday, after a stunning purge of at least two princes, including his brother and nephew for allegedly plotting a coup.

Saudi royal guards on Friday detained the trio in a move that signals Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's tightening grip on power.

Tightening grip

The detentions also raised speculation about the health of the 84-year-old King and



A handout picture showing Saudi Arabia's King Salman meeting a diplomat. • AP

whether Prince Mohammed's succession to the throne was imminent. But the official Saudi Press Agency posted photos of the King presiding over the swearing-

in ceremony of newly appointed Saudi Ambassadors to Ukraine and Uruguay.

A source close to the Saudi leadership said the Crown Prince was "in control".

The purge was carried out "after an accumulation of negative behaviour by the two princes," the source added without elaborating.

Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, a brother of King Salman, and the monarch's nephew Prince Mohammed bin Nayef were detained after they were accused of plotting a palace coup aimed at unseating the Crown Prince, heir to the Saudi throne, sources said.

Backlash over Women's Day rally in Pak.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISLAMABAD

Tempers flared in Islamabad on Sunday as protesters marched to celebrate International Women's Day in an ultra-conservative society where females are still put to death under ancient "honour" codes.

In Islamabad, tensions rose when about 1,000 women and men gathered to call for greater reproductive and other rights. The march ended at a park alongside a separate "anti-feminist" Islamist rally.

Islamist protesters hurled sticks and stones at the demonstrators, causing injuries and forcing a crowd of people to seek cover before the police intervened.

Afghan political rivals to hold parallel swearing-in ceremonies

Abdullah contests Ghani's poll victory, says he will form govt.

REUTERS
KABUL

Abdullah Abdullah, the bitter rival of Afghanistan's president-elect Ashraf Ghani, has issued invitations to a parallel swearing-in ceremony due next week, his spokesman said on Saturday.

"We've sent the invitation to all national and international organisations and all necessary preparations have been taken," Fraidoon Khwazoon, Mr. Abdullah's spokesman said on Saturday, referring to invitations to an inauguration ceremony due to take place in Kabul on Monday morning at a similar time to Mr. Ghani's.

A political impasse and threat of parallel governments jeopardise a nascent peace process in the nation, as the U.S. tries to push the Afghan government toward talks with the Taliban.

In February, Afghanistan's Electoral Commission announced Mr. Ghani as the winner of September's presidential election, but Mr. Abdullah claimed that he and his allies had won the polls and insisted that he would form a government.

Sediqi Sediqi, a spokesman for Mr. Ghani, emphasised that his side was the recognised winner of last year's polls.

"The election season is over and President-elect Ghani was given the winner's certificate by the independent Election Commission based on the outcome of the election and country's constitution," Mr. Sediqi said on Saturday.

Diplomatic sources have said the U.S. and other international players in Afghanistan are nervous of the prospect of parallel inauguration ceremonies. The U.S. has previously asked that both parties delay them.

Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah are old rivals, who both held roles in the previous government.

ELSEWHERE



Syria road crash kills 32, including Iraqis

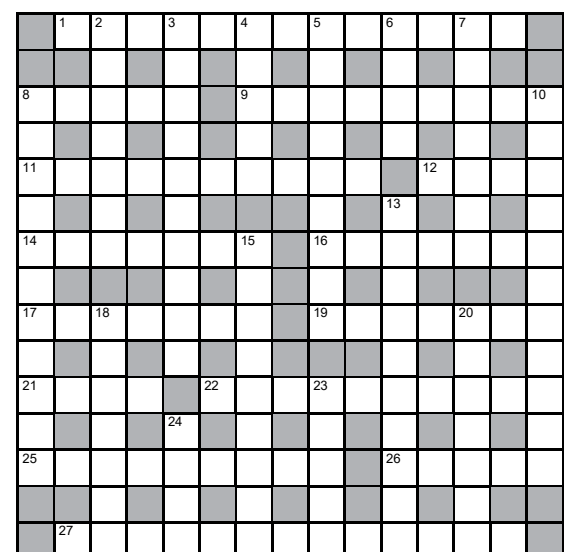
DAMASCUS
At least 32 people died on Saturday after a fuel tanker crashed into two buses and several other vehicles on a road connecting the Syrian capital to Homs province. A brake failure caused the tanker to crash into 15 vehicles and two buses. AFP

Heavy rains claim 23 lives in Pakistan

PESHAWAR
At least 23 people have been killed and 54 injured in rain-related incidents in Pakistan's northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province in the last five days, officials said on Sunday. AFP

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12878

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



ACROSS

- Worn out, overwhelmed by grind – plan escape or remain silent (4,4,5)
- Wife is hot! Great body (5)
- Miserly groups backing Government's last check for financial assistance (5,4)
- Prepare old Mafia boss for final conflict (10)

- (set by Dr. X)
- Fellow quits ecstasy permanently (4)
 - Orthodox Conservative presently in charge (7)
 - Were boy to run wild, this might be raised (7)
 - Characters around island following love birds (7)
 - Broadcast reviewing ebullient politician's cause for inflation? (3, 4)
 - Sock left in drain (4)
 - Mobs making noise around front of stage in impromptu musical event (3,7)
 - Bolster to support legs given by couple of partners (5,4)
 - Time to manage rebellious husband (5)
 - A great experience that Moby Dick had perhaps? (1,5,2,1,4)
 - DOWN
 - Supervisor is extremely abrupt in Gulf nation (7)
 - Meticulously raise cover, start to inspect in a gradual manner (10)
 - Revolting faculty head grabbing maiden identified (5)
 - Serial appears too outlandish – waste of time (4,5)
 - Give up cocaine! Quit for happiness (4)
 - Heartless captor about to pull out knife (7)
 - Look to protect impatient daughter dogged by ill luck (4-7)
 - Essentially alter impression about a president after quarrel and attack with fist (5,1,5)
 - Review way to limit dreadful rot (10)
 - Get rid of scoundrel controlling secret police before start of elections (4,5)
 - Sweating endlessly? Terribly agitated (2,1,4)
 - University rule about Indian female outfit (7)
 - Personality consuming heroin in bar (5)
 - Old ruler of Iran largely accepts single branch of Islam (4)

SUDOKU

9								
	4		8	9			5	3
				4				1
6		1		7		8		7
7	2			5		4		9
2				7	9			1
4		7	6					
								8

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to puzzle 12877									Solution to yesterday's Sudoku													
T	E	L	E	G	R	A	M	U	S	A	B	L	E	5	1	8	4	9	3	7	2	6
H	A	L	L	N	U	C	E	L	4	3	6	7	2	5	9	8	1					
R	E	P	L	I	C	A	N	A	R	R	A	T	E	7	9	2	1	8	6	5	3	4
E	S	S	C	O	D	A	T	M	3	7	4	9	6	1	2	5	8					
A	V	E	N	S	E	M	E	R	G	E	N	C	E	8	5	1	3	4	2	6	7	9
T	S	A	I	R	I	N			6	2	9	8	5	7	4	1	3					
I	N	O	N	E	S	P	O	C	K	E	T											
W	A	M	T	T	N	S			8	5	1	3	4	2	6	7	9					
A	M	P	H	I	T	H	E	A	T	R	E											
S	H	O	E	T	H	E	Z	J	6	2	9	8	5	7	4	1	3					
S	E	P	U	L	C	H	R	E	1	8	5	6	7	4	3	9	2					
A	L	L	O	O	M	U	N	U														
I	C	E	F	A	L	L	E	R	E	M	I	T	E	9	6	7	2	3	8	1	4	5
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S	L	V	E	S	T	I	T	C	H	E	S											

FAITH

Search for happiness

Interpretation of the Upanishad statements continues till date and offers new insights, though the texts belong to a time that goes far beyond what is available as recorded history. This is because they speak of matters relevant for all times and are storehouses of the awareness of eternal truth that the ancient sages steeped in meditation have discovered. Their discoveries have tried to fulfil the emotional, intelligent and intellectual requirement of the individual and society, fostering posterity's spiritual growth and civilization, said Swami Nirvisheshananda Tirtha in a discourse.

The subject matter of the Upanishads is human experience, and hence the validity of their study and observations can be established at the experiential rather than the rational level. For instance, the Upanishad seers, while observing the various phenomena in the external world, such as day and night or the seasons following one another, the birth, growth, decay and death of all living beings, etc, as characterised by constant change, also recognised the presence of something eternal behind all this ceaseless activity. Another important discovery is that in all beings there is the basic desire to remain happy. They have identified this yearning to be the result of an inherent lack or insufficiency or emotional gap. Ironically, when people in search of happiness are driven to look for it in the world around, this effort is sure to remain ever elusive. For, one may go on interacting with the world hoping he will somehow gain that happiness, only to be disappointed. Even if one possesses the whole world there is no guarantee that it will be his always. Moreover, fresh desires will arise. The seers have shown thus that the essence of happiness is within each one in the undying immortal self that has to be recognised.