

Indonesia calls for Saudi decision on Mecca pilgrimage



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Jakarta

Indonesia on Tuesday called for Saudi Arabia to decide if it will allow the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, after the coronavirus pandemic plunged the ritual into doubt.

Last year around 2.5 million faithful travelled to Saudi Arabia from across the world to take part in the "hajj", which all Muslims must perform at least once in their lives if able.

The year-round "umrah" pilgrimage was suspended in March, while Saudi Arabia asked Muslims to temporarily defer preparations during the COVID-19 outbreak.

But Saudi authorities have yet to announce whether they will proceed with this year's hajj, which takes place at the end of July.

Indonesia's religious affairs ministry said a decision should be made before the fasting month of Ramadan ends this weekend.

"We hope the official decision on whether hajj will go ahead or be cancelled will be announced soon," ministry spokesman Oman Fathurahman told AFP Tuesday.

Indonesia is the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation and at least 231,000 of its citizens were registered to take part in this year's pilgrimage -- the largest contingent of any nation.

But Indonesia has held off confirming housing, transportation and other contracts with Saudi travel authorities, Fathurahman said.

"Until now the Ministry of Religious Affairs has yet to sign any contracts or pay the down payment for hajj services in Saudi Arabia," he added.

The pilgrimage is a key revenue earner for the kingdom but risks becoming a major source of contagion if pilgrims flock to Mecca's religious sites.

India to help migrant workers leave cities

Reuters | New Delhi/Bhubaneswar

India will run more special trains and buses to allow millions of distressed migrant workers to leave big cities, the federal government said yesterday, as concerns grew in some states over rising infections from those returning home.

Workers are walking long distances to their homes in the countryside ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi imposed a vast lockdown in March to control the spread of coronavirus, shutting down all public transport.

After initially trying to keep them in their cities of employment, authorities are now helping them get home.

The federal home ministry said it was working with states to run special trains and buses, and set up rest stops for those on foot.

The move came as India's confirmed cases surged past 100,000 on Tuesday, outstripping China, where the virus emerged late last year.

The concern is that migrants, who are leaving coronavirus hotspots such as Mumbai, New Delhi and Ahmedabad, could be carrying the virus into the hinterland.

Since early May, around



Migrant workers walk on a flyover as they look for transport to return to their home state of northern Uttar Pradesh in Ahmedabad

70 per cent of all coronavirus cases in the densely populated eastern state of Bihar have been linked to migrant workers, the state's top health official, Sanjay Kumar, said.

"The top priority is the people who are coming from Delhi because they have the highest percentage of positive cases," Kumar told Reuters.

In Odisha, also in the east, 851 out of 978 confirmed cases till Tuesday were returnees, mostly migrant workers, according to state data.

In the state's Ganjam district, more than 53,000 migrants have been screened and quarantined since early March, and another 200,000 are expected later this month, a health official said.

The official said managing such numbers was a challenge.



Mao Yin had a tearful reunion with his birth parents who had never given up the search for their missing son

A tearful reunion

Man abducted as child in China reunited with parents after 32 years

AFP | Beijing

A Chinese man kidnapped as a toddler 32 years ago has been reunited with his biological parents, after police used facial recognition technology to help track him down.

Mao Yin was just two when he was snatched outside a hotel in Xi'an in central Shaanxi province in 1988 and sold to a childless couple in neighbouring Sichuan province who raised him as their own son, Xi'an's public security bureau said in a statement.

Police "aged" one of Mao's childhood photos, according to state broadcaster CCTV, and used the model to scan the national database and find close matches.

They were acting on a tipoff that a person in a certain area of Sichuan had bought a child in the late 80's.

On Monday, the now 34-year-old had a tearful reunion with his birth parents who had never given up the search for their missing boy.

Mao's mother Li Jingzhi told CCTV that after he was taken, she quit her job and sent over 100,000 flyers to officials and appeared on several TV channels to appeal

for his return.

Over the past three decades, Li had followed 300 false leads to see if they were her missing son.

But in late April, police in Xi'an were tipped off that a man in Sichuan province had bought a child from Shaanxi in the late 1980s, according to the statement from Xi'an officials.

Police tracked down Mao and later confirmed he was the abducted son of Li Jingzhi after a DNA test.

Mao's adoptive parents had renamed him Gu Ningning, and he grew up without any knowledge of his birth parents or that he had been abducted.

At the reunion event, organised by Xi'an police, Mao emerged from a side door to a conference room and ran into his mother's arms.

"I don't want him to leave me anymore. I won't let him leave me anymore," Li said as she held onto her son's hand.

Mao, who runs a home decoration business in Sichuan, told CCTV he would move to Xi'an to live with his birth parents.

There are no official statistics on the number of children who disappear every year in China, but a system was estab-



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lished in 2016 to send alerts about missing children through social media and mobile phone texts.

Police have helped more than 6,300 abducted children to reunite with their families over the past decade through the DNA matching system, official news agency Xinhua reported.

Kidnapping and child trafficking became widespread in China from the 1980s, when the draconian one-child rule was enforced, with a cultural obsession with sons also fuelling demand for kidnapped babies.

Global CO2 emissions could fall by up to 7pc this year amid pandemic - research

Reuters | London

Global carbon dioxide emissions could fall by up to 7 per cent this year, depending on ongoing restrictions and social distancing measures during the coronavirus pandemic, research published in the journal Nature Climate Change showed yesterday.

The study, by a group of scientists from institutions in Europe, the United States and Australia, analysed daily CO2 emissions across 69 countries, 50 US states, 30 Chinese provinces, six economic sectors, and three levels of confinement, using data from daily electricity use and mobility tracking services.

In 2019, the world emitted

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In early April 2020, emissions fell to 83 million tonnes per day, a drop of 17pc, and some countries' emissions dropped by as much as 26pc on average during the peak of the confinement.

If pre-pandemic conditions

return by mid-June, then 2020 emissions could decline by 4pc compared to 2019 but if restrictions remain worldwide until the end of the year, then emissions could drop by 7pc, the report added.

This would be the largest single annual decrease in absolute emissions since the end of World War II.

A UN report last year said emissions needed to drop by 2.7pc a year keep warming well below 2 degrees Celsius, and 7.6pc a year to keep below 1.5C.

"Population confinement has led to drastic changes in energy use and CO2 emissions," said lead author Corinne Le Quéré at the University of East Anglia. "These extreme decreases are

likely to be temporary, however, as they do not reflect structural changes in the economic, transport, or energy systems," she added.

China saw the largest drop in emissions in April, followed by the United States, Europe and India.

In the countries with the strictest lockdown restrictions, emissions from aviation plunged 75pc in early April, while emissions from land transport fell by 50pc and from power generation by 15pc.

Emissions from industry declined by around 35pc, with a lack of data causing some uncertainty. Emissions from residential buildings, however, increased by 5pc, the study said.