

Protesting mothers blame Mafia as toxic rubbish spills over Naples

City plans to reopen poisoned landfill after three weeks of refuse piling up on the streets

by Tom Kington

Naples

THE TWO well-dressed mothers picking up their children from school do not look like hardened street protesters who have just climbed down off the barricades.

Assunta Di Fusco is helping Giorgia, eight, with her coat. But she then switches to discussing plans to be back barricading the old landfill site in Pianura, a suburb of Naples, if the government pushes ahead with reopening it to help clear the mountains of refuse accumulating on the city's streets.

Those drifts of rubbish, building for three weeks, are the consequence of a complex interaction of failures in the Italian social, political and judicial systems. Campania, the province of which Naples is the capital, is the industrial dumping ground of Italy and Europe. Much of it is illegal, toxic and unregulated and controlled by the Camorra, the Naples mafia.

Exacerbated by huge incompetence that has seen politicians fail to plan for rubbish disposal, on Boxing Day Naples declared its dumps were full – leaving mountains of refuse to accumulate on street corners, including one outside the school in Pianura and another by Di Fusco's house.

It is this that led to the plan to reopen Pianura and the beginning of protests by parents who blame the poisoned site for causing cancer and other diseases. 'We have already taken the kids down there in their face masks to protest, and we're on war footing until they drop plans for the reopening,' said Di Fusco, 35.

For Mariana Vetere, 29, who has just picked up her seven-year-old daughter Giorgia, the mothers are not just battling for a clean neighbourhood, but for their lives. 'We've had enough cancer round



here,' she said. 'We could not enter the school, and with the smell and the mice outside the front door, I kept Giorgia inside for a week.'

Feted locally for their stubborn resistance to reopening the dump, mothers such as Di Fusco and Vetere have been castigated in the regions now taking their rubbish as the ultimate not-in-my-backyarders, who deserve the piles on their streets.

But a leading Naples cancer specialist sympathises with their actions. 'For 20 years the Camorra has been mixing toxic waste with the regular city rubbish heading for city dumps,' said Antonio

'With the smell and the mice, I've kept my daughter Giorgia home'

Mariana Vetere, left



Marfella, who has studied tumour rates in the region and is now assisting the police. 'It's easy to do when you control the entire refuse transport business and when there is no real recycling, which makes it simple to hide toxic waste in the regular rubbish.'

In 2004, the medical journal *Lancet Oncology* called part of the Campania region 'the triangle of

death' because the air, soil and water are polluted by high levels of cancer-causing toxins believed to have come from waste.

Research released last year by Italy's National Research Council found that among people living closest to the least regulated waste-disposal sites – where rubbish is dumped in fields or burnt without controls – the mortality rate was 12 per cent higher than the norm for women and 9 per cent greater for men.

Pianura's dump, even though it closed 15 years ago, comes in that category of risk. With recycling hovering under 10 per cent and tonnes of illegal industrial waste added over the years, dumps have filled up fast in Naples. Last week in Pianura, despite the arrival of the Italian army to clear up, piles of plastic bags spilling old flip-flops, toy mobile phones, potato peel, coffee grounds and underwear still lurked on corners, surrounded



The rubbish crisis has led to bags piling up in towns and villages including Sant'Anastasia, left, and to gangs setting light to buses in Pianura, above. EPA, Rex

by patches of slippery, blackened waste pancaked into the stone-flagged streets.

A siege atmosphere remains after hooded gangs – who had mixed with the mothers at the landfill protest – clashed with police, burning buses and setting fire to a school, even as priests blessed the arriving soldiers.

Bullets were fired at the town hall in a suburb nearby and homemade bombs were lobbed at firemen trying to put out burning rubbish piles.

Di Fusco and Vetere teamed up with 100 other mothers to pay for an analysis of the mozzarella and vegetables arriving from the fields and farms around Naples.

Sheep with eyes staring out from below their mouths have been born in the fields near Caserta, north of Naples, and doctors are seeing girls menstruate at the age of seven. Government-run blood testing of residents for dioxin levels will start next month and now there are plans to do the same in the city, including Pianura.

'In Naples, we could stop the Camorra from putting poison into city dumps by simply recycling,' said Marfella. 'The Camorra is scared stiff of recycling.'

In Pianura, recycling suddenly looks appealing. 'We have to change. This has given us a push to finally get going on recycling,' said cleaner Antonio della Gatta.

Low-ranking Camorra mobsters might finally understand how they are destroying their backyard, said Marfella. 'I hear that lower-level *camorristi* are waking up to the danger and having doubts about dumping toxic waste. The bosses always knew, but the money was too good and they were saving up for their villas, far away in Tuscany.'

Hamas claims would-be bomber from Fatah planned to kill leader Haniyeh

by Rory McCarthy

Gaza City

THE ISLAMIST Hamas movement said yesterday its police had arrested a Palestinian man planning a suicide bomb attack on Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas blamed a leader in the rival political movement Fatah for plotting the attack and said the would-be bomber had confessed.

The claims, which were denied by Fatah, mark the latest flare-up in the dispute between the factions who spent several months last year

locked in a near civil war in Gaza. Said Siyam, a Hamas leader in charge of the movement's security forces in Gaza, said a video had been found when the suspect was arrested that showed him being trained.

'There was a plan by a suicide bomber wearing an explosives belt to assassinate Haniyeh as he prayed in the mosque. He was arrested and confessed,' said Siyam. He did not name the suspect.

Haniyeh, who was sacked as Palestinian Prime Minister last summer, has kept a low profile for several months but more out of fear of assassination by the Israeli military than

concern about attack by other Palestinians. However, since Hamas in effect defeated Fatah forces in Gaza last summer and seized full control of the strip, the factions have traded accusations. Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian President and Fatah leader, accused Hamas of plotting to assassinate him last year.

Israeli aircraft struck again in Gaza yesterday, killing two Hamas militants a day after Israel announced a full closure on crossings into Gaza.

The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for an immediate end to the renewed fighting in Gaza and for Israel to reopen the crossings.

WORLD BRIEFING

LEBANON

Hizbollah leader comes out of hiding

Hizbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah appeared in public for the first time in more than a year to take part in Shia Muslims' most important holiday, Ashura. Hizbollah's al-Manar TV station and other stations showed footage of Nasrallah, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people, taking part in Ashura commemorations in the Hizbollah stronghold of south Beirut. He was seen walking amid dozens of security men, waving to the crowds. Nasrallah, who was expected to address the crowds later, had been in hiding for fear of an Israeli assassination. AP

JAPAN

'Playboy' teenager runs into trouble

A Japanese teenager who posed as a wealthy playboy and went on a spending spree in a nightclub in Tokyo was arrested after trying to leave without paying his bill, police said.

The 16-year-old boy entered a hostess bar in Niiza City, near Tokyo, on Wednesday night and, over a period of six hours, managed to get away with ordering two bottles of Dom Perignon champagne, as well as some 60 glasses of whisky, beer and cocktails, said local police officer Hitoshi Morohashi. The teenager also sang karaoke songs with several hostesses, he added. AP

ANGOLA

At least 11 dead as plane smashes into mountain

A twin-engined plane slammed into a mountain during bad weather in Angola's central highlands yesterday, killing at least 11 people. Angolan National Radio said there were no survivors in the Beechcraft King Air B200 crash, which occurred just before 8am local time. The aircraft crashed near Huambo, a city 320 miles southeast of the capital, Luanda. An army team based nearby reached the crash site and reported that nobody had survived, according to the radio report. The propeller-driven plane, owned by private airline Gira Globo, had tried to land at two local airports during rain and fog before it crashed, the reports said. AP

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