

WHO warns of overseas virus spread

Cases outside China could be the tip of the iceberg, the agency warns as the death toll rises to 908

REUTERS BEIJING
People across China trickled back work on Monday after an extended Lunar New Year holiday as the government eased restrictions imposed to counter the coronavirus, but the World Health Organization (WHO) said the number of cases outside China could be just "the tip of the iceberg".

The death toll from the epidemic rose to 908, all but two in mainland China, on Sunday as 97 more fatalities were recorded – the largest number in a single day since the virus was detected in the city of Wuhan in December.

Across mainland China, 3,062 new infections were confirmed on Sunday, bringing the total number to 40,171, according to the National Health Commission (NHC). An advance team of international WHO experts was en route to Beijing to investigate the outbreak.

Wu Fan, vice-dean of Shanghai Fudan University Medical school, said there was hope the spread might soon reach a turning point. "The situation is stabilising," she told a briefing when asked about the spread in Shanghai, which has had nearly 300 cases and one death.

Global spread
But WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said there had been "concerning instances" of transmission from people who had not been to China.

"The detection of a small number of cases may indicate more widespread transmission in other countries; in short, we may only be seeing the tip of the iceberg," he said in Geneva.

The virus has spread to at least 27 countries and terri-

ories, according to a Reuters count based on official reports, infecting more than 330 people. The two deaths outside mainland China were in Hong Kong and the Philippines. The death toll from the outbreak has now surpassed that of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which killed hundreds worldwide in 2002-03.

'We will beat the virus'
Usually teeming cities have become virtual ghost towns after Communist Party rulers ordered lockdowns, cancelled flights and closed factories and schools.

Ten extra days had been added to the Lunar New Year holidays that had been due to finish at the end of January. But even on Monday, many workplaces remained closed and many people worked from home.

One Beijing government official, Zhang Gewho, said it would be harder to curb the spread of the virus as people returned to work. "The capacity of communities and flow of people will greatly increase and the difficulty of virus prevention and control will further rise," he said.

President Xi Jinping, who has largely kept out of the spotlight, leaving Premier Li Keqiang to take the public lead in government efforts to control the outbreak, said on Monday the government will prevent large-scale layoffs, Chinese state television reported.

Mr. Xi, who was shown on television inspecting the work of community leaders in Beijing, and wearing a mask as he had his temperature taken, also said China will strive to meet economic and social targets for the year.

He reiterated that China would beat the virus.



Reassuring residents: Chinese President Xi Jinping speaking to residents while inspecting work aimed at gaining control over coronavirus in Beijing on Monday. • AP

65 more cases confirmed on Japan ship

REUTERS TOKYO

Passenger tests aboard the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship in Japan confirmed at least 65 more cases of coronavirus on Monday, according to the vessel's captain. The figure takes the tally on board to 135, showing a rapid rise in the outbreak on the ship docked in the port of Yokohama.

Among the new cases are 45 Japanese and 11 Americans, the ship's operator, Princess Cruises, said.

The captain's remarks formed part of an audio recording about the 66 new cases posted on Twitter by Yardley Wong, a passenger documenting the experience on the ship.

U.K. medical centre closes over case

REUTERS LONDON

The County Oak Medical Centre has been temporarily closed down, the BBC said. It did not cite sources.

Last week, health officials said a case of coronavirus had been identified in Brighton and they were working to prevent any further spread.

A message left at the medical centre's phone says: "Unfortunately, the building has had to close due to an urgent operational health and safety reason."

A British man, who has not been identified, tested positive for coronavirus in Brighton on February 6 after travelling to Singapore.

EU to host emergency meeting

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BRUSSELS

The European Union (EU) will host an extraordinary meeting of Health Ministers on Thursday, along with a World Health Organization (WHO) envoy, to discuss the novel coronavirus outbreak.

So far, around 30 cases of the new strain have been detected in Europe. "Now is the time to join forces to stop this epidemic," said European Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarcic.

The EU Ministers will discuss ways to prevent the virus' spread and "adopt conclusions in relation to the EU response to the novel coronavirus outbreak".

Merkel's heir quits in row over cooperation with far right party

Kramp-Karrenbauer will not run for Chancellor next year

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE BERLIN

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's party and her plans to stay on until 2021 were slung into disarray on Monday, after her heir-apparent gave up her leadership ambitions in a deepening crisis over ties between the centre and far right.

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, the leader of the centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), opted out barely a year in the post – a period marked by internal battles over whether to cooperate with the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD). She announced that she was standing down as CDU leader and would not seek to be the party's candidate for Chancellor in next year's general elections.

'Unresolved ties'
AKK, as Ms. Kramp-Karrenbauer is popularly known, blamed the "unresolved relationship of parts of the CDU with the (far-right) AfD and (far-left) Left party" for her decision, said a party



Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer.

source. "This is an unusually serious situation for the CDU," said close Merkel ally and Economy Minister Peter Altmaier. "This is about our future as a modern people's party of the centre."

While the party has a policy of no cooperation with either far left or far right at a national level, regional CDU lawmakers last week went rogue and voted with MPs from the AfD to oust a far-left State Premier in tiny central Thuringia.

The breach in the political dam towards the AfD in Thuringia prompted Ms. Merkel's junior partners in the national government,

the Social Democratic Party (SPD), to call urgent talks at the weekend about the partnership's future.

AKK's departure, the most prominent political head to roll after the Thuringia crisis, was "unsettling," SPD board member Michael Roth tweeted on Monday. It remains uncertain "whether decent democrats stand together in the battle for democracy and against nationalism," he added.

With the race to the chancellery wide open again, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* said the aftershocks could be huge. "It's very possible that the Chancellor's exit is coming closer," it wrote.

Voting alongside the far right breaches one of the fundamental taboos of post-Second World War German politics – the refusal of mainstream parties to work with the extremes.

Germany's next national elections must take place by autumn next year, although the fractious coalition between the CDU, its Bavarian CSU allies and the centre-left SPD may not hold until then.

Chinese officials charged over Equifax hack

KATIE BENNER WASHINGTON

The Justice Department announced charges on Monday against four members of China's military on suspicion of hacking into Equifax, the credit reporting agency, in 2017 and stealing trade secrets and the personal data of about 145 million Americans.

"This was a deliberate and sweeping intrusion into the private information of

the American people," Attorney General William Barr said. Hackers stole names, birth dates and Social Security numbers of millions of Americans – data that can be used to access information like medical histories and bank accounts.

"This data has economic value, and these thefts can feed China's development of artificial intelligence tools," Mr. Barr said in announcing the charges on Monday at

the Justice Department.

The nine-count indictment accused the Chinese military of hacking into the company's networks, maintaining unauthorised access to them and stealing sensitive, personally identifiable information about Americans. China has "pioneered an expansive approach to stealing innovation," Christopher A. Wray, Director of the FBI, said on Friday at a conference. NY TIMES

ELSEWHERE



'Scotland taking steps to hold referendum'

BRUSSELS
Scotland is already taking steps to hold a referendum on independence and believes it is a matter of when rather than if the country separates from the rest of Britain, Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said on Monday. REUTERS

'Soleimani sought to bring stability to region'

DUBAI
Qassem Soleimani, the Iranian commander killed in a U.S. strike on January 3, had sought to bring stability to the region, President Hassan Rouhani said on Monday in a speech broadcast on state television. REUTERS

'Palestinian detainees were tortured by Israel'

They were taken into custody last year

ASSOCIATED PRESS RAMALLAH

One of the men was hospitalised with kidney failure and 11 broken ribs. Another was nearly unrecognisable to his wife when he was wheeled into a courtroom. A third was stitched up after being attacked by a security dog.

Then the three Palestinians were returned to their Israeli interrogators. They had been swept up in a sprawling manhunt launched after a roadside bomb killed a 17-year-old Israeli girl and wounded her father and brother as they hiked down to a spring last August in the occupied West Bank. Israeli and Palestinian rights groups say there is



A demonstration in Gaza City on Monday. • AFP

strong evidence that Israeli interrogators tortured several detainees in violation of Israeli and international law.

The allegations against Israel are the most serious to come to light in years, and the rights groups say they point to a loosening of constraints two decades after Israeli Supreme Court outlawed most forms of torture.

Democratic rivals rip into each other

Buttigieg has claimed most delegates; Sanders retains leads in New Hampshire

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN WASHINGTON

Rifts between Democrat candidates were on full display over the weekend as the presidential hopefuls criticised each other during a weekend of campaigning in freezing temperatures across New Hampshire, before the State's primary elections on Tuesday.

Candidates campaigned against the backdrop of confusion over and a delay in results from the crucial Iowa Caucuses held last week – in which centrist Pete Buttigieg has claimed most delegates and progressive candidate, independent Senator from Vermont Bernie Sanders's campaign has said it will ask for some of the votes to be recanvassed (votes rechecked against paper bal-

lots). Several news outlets, including the Associated Press, which has traditionally had a prominent role in calling U.S. races, refrained from doing so.

Weekend polls showed that Mr. Sanders continued to hold on to his significant lead going into the state's primaries.

A Boston Globe/Suffolk poll put Mr. Sanders at 27%, followed by centrists Mr. Buttigieg at 19%. Senator from Minnesota, centrist Amy Klobuchar, was third at 14%. Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, who is also running on a progressive platform like Mr. Sanders, came in at 12%, tied with former Vice-President Joseph R. Biden.

Mr. Sanders and Mr. Buttigieg took aim at each other's



Senator Bernie Sanders in Manchester, New Hampshire, on Monday. • REUTERS

campaign financing.

"Our views are different," Mr. Sanders said over the weekend. "Pete has raised campaign contributions from over 40 billionaires."

Mr. Buttigieg – like his competitor for the centrist vote, Mr. Biden – criticised Mr. Sanders for his Medicare-for-all policy without

details about how it would be funded. He also suggested Mr. Sanders was not the one to unite a highly polarised country.

"I respect Senator Sanders, but when I hear this message go out that you're either for revolution or you've got to be for the status quo, that's a vision of the country that doesn't have room for most of us," Mr. Buttigieg said on Sunday, as per the *Washington Post*.

Mr. Biden is still leading in national polls. *The Economist/YouGov* poll of February 2-4, where he was at 24% followed by Mr. Sanders at 19% and then Ms. Warren at 18%. Mr. Biden is also expected to win in South Carolina on February 29, where the African American vote is strongly represented.

5 Turkish soldiers dead in Syria firing

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE ANKARA

Five Turkish soldiers were killed on Monday by Syrian regime artillery fire in the northwestern province of Idlib, Turkey's Defence Ministry said.

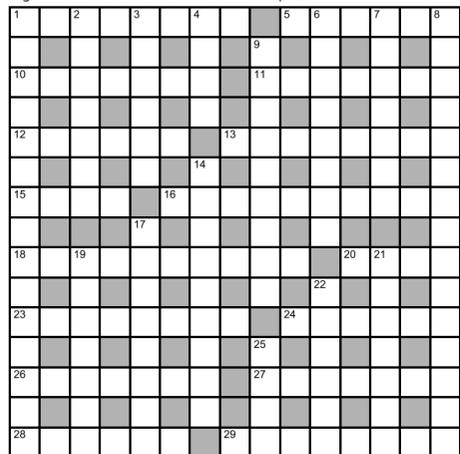
Another five soldiers were wounded in the "intense assault that targeted our elements sent as reinforcement to the region with an aim to prevent clashes in Idlib, ensure our border security and stop migration and human tragedy," said the Ministry.

The Turkish Army retaliated, it added, "destroying targets."

"The developments are closely watched and the necessary measures are being taken," it added.

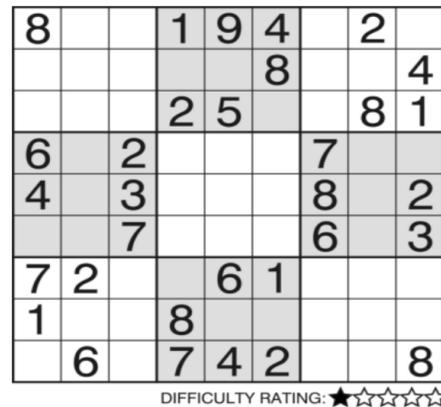
THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12855

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- (set by Gridman)
- Tax official finds fools very rude, to begin with (8)
 - Indian instrument you passed over end of line in artistic arrangement (7)
 - Abandons pages (6)
 - Affiliation with right bank (4)
 - Keen on kiss, I lean towards a drink that would make me heady (10)
 - Secret coteries disbanded (8)
 - Real as a shrunken body of water (4,3)
 - Assembly in guardroom? Not exactly! (8,7)
 - Copies prepared by friend for kind of church (9)
 - Worker runs off as these beasts appear (9)
 - Native Americans manage OK with canal examiner's tool (8)
 - Mournful as glee dissipates where fatality is (7)
 - Turn West to North and be whiny (6)
 - Untrue ally? (8)
 - With which saw ahead sad end of sightseers? (15)
 - 13 Tax official finds fools very rude, to begin with (8)
 - 15 At last, saag, kheer, thokku, kebab rustled up for food (4)
 - 16 Keen on kiss, I lean towards a drink that would make me heady (10)
 - 18 He kept Tara wrongfully – what should he do? (4,3,3)
 - 20 What the metal container has for applying on body (4)
 - 23 Spread rumour about backsliding Indian Railway in mockery (8)
 - 24 South Indian in relocated unit is undisturbed (2,4)
 - 26 Directions to Cole's relocated corral (7)
 - 27 Mournful as glee dissipates where fatality is (7)
 - 28 Turn West to North and be whiny (6)
 - 29 Untrue ally? (8)
 - 19 Indian spicy snack to Greek character in city in neighbouring country (7)
 - 21 Skill – skill has no limit! (7)
 - 22 Open University man finally gets to omit a point from unfair leave (6)
 - 25 Had the local roti finally in a food shop (4)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12854

H	I	T	I	O	F	F	I	M	P	A	L	E
Y	U	I	U	E	C	M						
P	A	R	A	D	I	G	M	B	L	O	C	P
H	G	E	U	S	O	E	P	A				
E	M	I	T	M	E	L	T	I	N	G	P	O
N	D			A			T	H				
		M	A	R	T	R	E	N	E	M		
U	B	O	A	T	O	V	E	R				
T	H	S	U	D	O							
T	R	O	P	S	H	I	P	S	S	L	O	E
E	R	O	I	R	U	S	D	A				
R	A	G	O		S	T	I	T	C	H	U	P
E	N	U			U	I	A					
D	E	T	E	S	T	S	P	I	R	I	T	E

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

The only true joy

To seek material possessions instead of the feet of God is like seeking the husk instead of the grain, says Saint Vallalar. God's feet have been praised by the scriptures, said M.A. Manickavelu, in a discourse.

Manickavachagar's verses in praise of Lord Siva's feet are moving.

Manickavachagar sang thus: "Praise to Namasivayah! Praise to His feet. Praise to the feet that do not exit my heart even for a second. Praise to the feet that became the Agama texts. Praise to the feet of the One, who is also many. Praise to the feet of the One, who set my mind at rest. Praise to the feet of the One, who puts an end to repeated births. Praise to the feet of the One, who keeps away from those who do not seek Him. Praise to the feet of the One, who delights in the company of those who worship Him. Praise to the anklets of the One, who blesses those that bow before Him. Praise to Eesan (Siva). Praise to my father. Praise to the feet of Lord Siva, my friend. Praise to His red hued feet. Praise to the feet of the blemishless One, who stands near me with love."

And yet there are many who, instead of seeking the feet of Lord Siva, waste their lives in worthless pursuits. The husk is part of the grain, until it is separated.

No matter how well you clean a copper utensil, a patina is soon formed on it. The Tamil work Sivagnanabodham says that like the husk of the grain and the patina of copper, anavam (ego), kanmam (karma) and maya (illusion) are always with the wicked. Seeking His mercy is the only true joy.

Appar sang that if one could see the curved eyebrow, the lips as red as the cocinea fruit, the matted locks, the coral colour body smeared with sacred ash, and the raised foot of Lord Siva, then birth in this world would become desirable.



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