Virus inflicts growing toll on health workers

1,716 of them have been infected and six have died in China even as the total number of infections rose to 63,851

REUTERS
BEIJING

The new coronavirus has taken a growing toll of Chinese health workers on the front line of the fight to stop it, a top official said on Friday, as authorities reported more than 5,000 new cases, including more than 120 deaths.

China's National Health Commission said it had recorded 121 new deaths and 5,090 new coronavirus cases on the mainland on Thursday, taking the total number of infected to 63,851.

Some 55,748 people are being treated, while 1,380 people have died of the virus that emerged in December in Wuhan, capital of the central province of Hubei.

The latest toll takes account of some deaths that had been double counted in Hubei, the commission said.

The Chinese Health Commission Vice-Minister, Zeng Yixin, said 1,716 health workers had been infected and six had died as of Tuesday, with the number of infected staff rising.

"The duties of medical workers at the front are indeed extremely heavy; their working and resting circumstances are limited, the psychological pressures are great, and the risk of infection is high," Mr. Zeng told a news conference.

Chinese officials and hospitals have repeatedly spoken of a shortage of protective equipment, including face masks.

The new figures for total infections gave no sign the outbreak was nearing a peak, said Adam Kamradt-Scott, an infectious diseases expert at the Centre for International Security Studies at the University of Sydney.

Marriage story: A couple posing with their marriage certificates at a registry office on the occassion of Valentine's Day in Shanghai on Friday. ▪ REUTERS

Drastic measures

"While the Chinese authorities are doing their best to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the fairly drastic measures they have implemented to date would appear to have been too little, too late," he said.

Chinese scientists are testing two antiviral drugs and preliminary results are due in weeks, while the head of a Wuhan hospital said plasma infusions from recovered patients had shown some encouraging preliminary results.

While the vast majority of infections and deaths have been in China, in particular Hubei, there have been nearly 450 cases in some 24 countries and territories outside mainland China, and three deaths. Japan confirmed its first coronavirus death on Thursday. One person has died in Hong Kong and one in the Philippines.

The biggest cluster of infections outside China has been on a cruise liner quarantined in a Japanese port, with 218 people on board confirmed as infected and taken off to hospital.

On Friday, some of the ship's passengers were allowed to disembark – with priority for older passengers confined to windowless cabins – and complete their quarantine on shore.

There was good news for passengers on another cruise ship that was finally allowed to dock in Cambodia after being rejected by five countries over fears of the virus, even though no cases were reported on board.

The MS Westerdam, carrying 1,455 passengers and 802 crew, docked in Sihanoukville port late on Thursday. It had anchored offshore earlier to allow Cambodian officials to board and collect samples from passengers with any signs of illness.

Third Indian on ship infected

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
TOKYO

A third Indian crew on board the cruise ship Diamond Princess, off the Japanese coast, has tested positive for the novel coronavirus, the Indian Embassy in Japan said on Friday. Officials also confirmed that 218 people on the quarantined ship have been infected.

Egypt reports Africa's first case

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CAIRO

Egypt's Health Ministry on Friday confirmed its first case of the novel coronavirus, making it the first in Africa. The nationality of the person was not given in the joint statement, which added that they had shown no "symptoms". The patient has been put into isolation in a hospital.

U.S. refuses entry to Sri Lankan Army chief

Move over 'war crimes' against Tamils

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The U.S. said on Friday it would refuse entry to Sri Lanka's Army chief over "credible" evidence of human rights violations in 2009 during the final phase of the country's civil war.

Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva, whose appointment last year drew wide international criticism, will be ineligible to visit the U.S., as will his immediate family, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

"The allegations of gross human rights violations against Shavendra Silva, documented by the UN and other organisations, are serious and credible," Mr. Pompeo said in a statement.

"We urge the Sri Lankan government to promote human rights, hold accountable individuals responsible for war crimes and human rights violations, advance security sector reform, and uphold its other commitments to pursue justice and reconciliation," he said.

Gen. Silva was the commanding officer of an Army division in the island's northern war-zone in the final months of the military offensive against Tamil Tiger rebels in 2009.

Gen. Shavendra Silva

Rights groups say some 40,000 ethnic Tamils were killed in mass atrocities as government forces seized Sri Lanka's predominantly Tamil north.

The UN, in a report into the allegations, said Gen. Silva played a major role in orchestrating war crimes.

Mr. Pompeo nonetheless said that the United States hoped to maintain security cooperation with Sri Lanka, which last year was rocked by Easter Sunday bombings by Islamist extremists.

ELSEWHERE

Erdogan raises Kashmir issue in Pak. Parliament

ISLAMABAD

Notwithstanding India's objection, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday raked up the Kashmir issue in Pakistan Parliament, vowing that Ankara will support Pakistan's stand. On an official visit to Pakistan, Mr. Erdogan said that Turkey will back Pakistan in its efforts to come out of the "grey list" of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). PTI

Biggest jump in world defence spending: study

MUNICH

Global spending on defence rose by four percent in 2019, the largest growth in 10 years, led by big increases in the U.S. and China, says the *Military Balance* report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Both the U.S. and China increased spending by 6.6%, the report said, to $684.6 billion and $181.1 billion respectively. AFP

48 Rohingya arrested off Myanmar coast

PATHEIN

Nearly 50 Rohingya Muslims have been detained at sea by Myanmar's Navy, the latest from the persecuted minority to be caught trying to flee camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar's restive Rakhine state. They were likely heading to Malaysia or Indonesia, predominantly Muslim countries. AFP

U.S. says Huawei stole trade secrets, concealed N. Korea links

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

The U.S. Justice Department has added new criminal charges against Chinese tech giant Huawei and several subsidiaries, accusing the company of a brazen scheme to steal trade secrets from competitors in America, federal prosecutors announced on Thursday.

The new indictment also alleges the company provided surveillance equipment to Iran that enabled the monitoring of protesters during 2009 anti-government demonstrations in Tehran, and that it sought to conceal business that it was doing in North Korea despite economic sanctions there.

The firm disputed the allegations. China's Foreign Ministry accused the U.S. government of "economic bullying" and improperly using security allegations to "oppress Chinese companies."

The superseding indictment, brought by federal prosecutors in Brooklyn, adds charges of racketeering and conspiracy to steal trade secrets to an existing criminal case in New York, where the company already faces charges of lying to banks about deals that violated economic sanctions against Iran.

Israeli strikes kill seven in Damascus

Three were Syrian soldiers and the rest were members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard

AGENCE FEANCE-PRESSE
BEIRUT

Israeli strikes on Damascus airport killed seven fighters, a war monitor said on Friday, the latest in a string of attacks targeting Iran's military presence in Syria.

Syrian State media said only that its air defences intercepted missiles over the capital overnight while Israel did not immediately comment on the strikes.

Israel routinely fires missiles at what it says are Iranian targets in Syria, where elite Iranian forces and allied militia play a key role.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the strikes launched late on Thursday hit military targets in the area of the international airport.

Rami Abdel Rahman, the director of the Britain-based Observatory, said the dead were three Syrian soldiers and four members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard.

"Our air defences intercepted hostile targets over the skies of Damascus," SANA said. It said the "missiles were launched from over the occupied Golan Heights".

Missiles intercepted

Several missiles were intercepted before they could reach their targets, said the agency, which rarely admits to casualties among Army or Iranian ranks.

The Observatory said the targets in the airport area, which has been repeatedly hit in similar strikes, included an arms depot.

The strikes on the airport came just after the arrival of a cargo plane, according to Abdel Rahman, who could not specify where the aircraft had flown in from.

Baby born on boat among 87 saved off Canary Islands

They were all migrants from Africa

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID

A baby born on a rickety boat bound for the Canary Islands was one of 87 migrants picked up by rescuers overnight, Spanish rescuers said on Friday.

The migrants, all of them from sub-Saharan Africa, were travelling on three boats which were picked up just south of the island of Gran Canaria, a spokeswoman for the Salvamento Maritimo rescue service said.

"A new-born baby was rescued and it seems that the mother gave birth in the boat just beforehand," she said, without specifying the sex of the infant but saying both mother and baby were "doing well".

There were 54 people in the first two boats which were picked up on Thursday evening about 60 nautical miles south of Gran Canaria, and rescuers came across another vessel carrying 33 people as they were just off the island, she said.

Among those rescued were 30 women, six babies and four other children, while the rest were men, with all taken to the southern port of Arguinerin, she said.

In early January, another baby born aboard a makeshift boat carrying 43 migrants did not survive the journey and was declared dead.

U.S., Taliban reach Afghanistan truce agreement, says official

The deal could lead to withdrawal of American troops

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MUNICH

A senior U.S. official said on Friday the U.S. and the Taliban have reached a truce agreement that will take effect "very soon" and could lead to withdrawals of American troops from Afghanistan.

The official said the agreement for a seven-day "reduction in violence" to be followed by the start of all-Afghan peace talks within 10 days is "very specific" and covers the entire country, including Afghan government forces.

There were indications a formal announcement could come as early as the weekend.

The official, who was not authorised to publicly discuss the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the Taliban had committed to a halt in roadside and suicide bombings as well as rocket attacks. The official said the U.S. would monitor the truce and determine if there were any violations.

'Reduction in violence'

Should the Taliban comply, the "reduction in violence" agreement would be followed by the signing of an agreement that would initiate peace negotiations that include all Afghan sides.

A Taliban official familiar with the deal said that the second agreement would be signed on February 29 and that the inter-Afghan dialogue would begin on March 10. The officials said Germany and Norway have offered to host the talks.

That Taliban official added that the withdrawal of foreign troops would start gradually and would be phased over 18 months.

President Donald Trump previously called off the peace talks because of an attack that killed two Americans.

Bloomberg woos black vote in Democratic race

Former Mayor rallies supporters in Texas

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HOUSTON

U.S. billionaire Michael Bloomberg has launched a charm offensive to convince black voters, an important bloc in Democratic politics, that he is the right candidate to take on President Donald Trump in November.

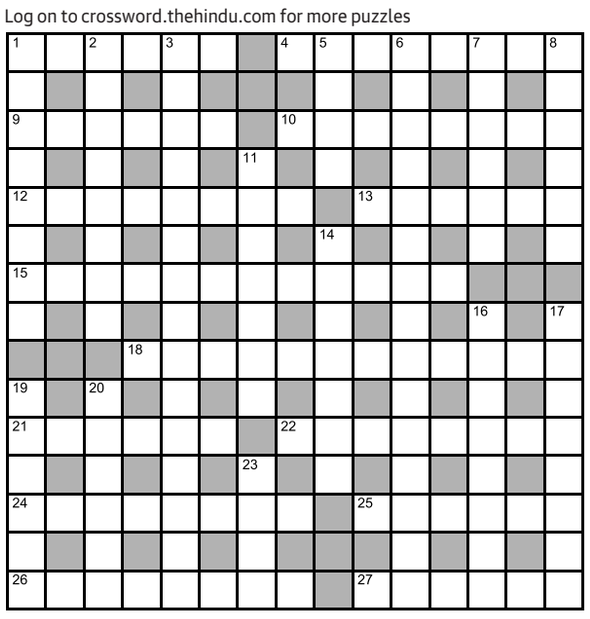
The former New York Mayor rallied supporters in Texas on Thursday, with his sights set on "Super Tuesday" on March 3, when voters in 16 States and territories will cast their ballots in the Democratic primary.

It is Mr. Bloomberg's sixth visit to the Lone Star state since he entered the race to be the party's presidential candidate. "This month, we look back and celebrate black history together because black history is American history," Mr. Bloomberg said at the Buffalo Soldiers museum, named after a Civil War regiment of African-American soldiers, where he kicked off his "Mike for Black America" campaign.

Michael Bloomberg

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12859

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



(set by Arden)

ACROSS

1 Warehouse – work in shift, perhaps (6)

4 Reason to lean over on the elevated road (8)

9 Divulge self admission by a character (6)

10 Soldiers on top of a defensive position – fire (8)

12 Viagra's ordered, takes time and some seriousness (8)

13 Siesta as Spain banks on deposit (6)

15 Not even first – it comes down to stuffing 8 in the cargo carrier (7,5)

18 Making a movie on a celebrity, a nightly feature (8,4)

21 Despicable characters, paid off by well known people (6)

22 Ale guzzling crazy fox (8)

24 After a drink at home, had something to contemplate (8)

25 In the game, no one is dealing (6)

26 Bedlamp inside is spoilt (8)

27 Egoist goes out in smoke (6)

DOWN

1 Coming on? On the contrary running away (5,3)

2 Starts picking red and violet, truly corrupt (8)

3 Branching them, we are off – not in the game (7,3,5)

5 Top copy by Times (4)

6 I think resolving makes him a shy person (9,6)

7 Deliberate on the need to be on top (6)

8 Chop fodder, it's all up to God (6)

11 Had painting of a flower all around by agreement (7)

14 Some are to be kept out on road, he decides (7)

16 Considering the boss is on the way out, day is lost (8)

17 Put off by an ace villain (8)

19 Everyone in India has, say a Beetle (6)

20 Old boys get the central ball pump unit (6)

23 Complaint left out of fashion (4)

To play an interactive version of this crossword online, scan the QR code

SUDOKU

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

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12858

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Patient like the earth

The earth supports every form of life, whether plant, animal or human, and sustains all life, and so it becomes a point of comparison for those who want to speak about the virtues of patience and forbearance. A patient man is compared to Goddess Earth, said Malayaman, in a discourse.

Thiruvalluvar says in verse 151 that to quietly bear criticism is to be like the earth. We dig the earth with sharp instruments. But does the earth retaliate? No, she continues to support us. Thiruvalluvar says a person who is charitable towards those who hurt him with their words is like the earth, which supports even those who hurt her. A commonly heard saying in Tamil is that a person who uselessly whiles away his time is a burden to the earth.

Thiruvalluvar also talks about those who burden the earth by their mere presence, in verse 570. Here, he talks about a ruthless ruler and his unscrupulous, uneducated ministers. Different commentators have interpreted this verse differently. Parimelazhagar says the uneducated ministers who advise the ruler are a burden to the earth. Another commentator, Pari Perumal, has a different take. He says the ruler who has chosen uneducated ministers to advise him is the one who burdens the earth.

Another commentator, called Paridhiyar, gives a detailed explanation of this verse. It is said that the earth has eight mountains and seven oceans. These are not burdensome to the earth. But the king who chooses unintelligent minsters is burdensome to the earth. In verse 572, Thiruvalluvar says that those without sympathy towards others are a burden to the earth. In verse 1003, Thiruvalluvar says that those who are keen to amass wealth, but are not interested in acquiring fame, are a burden to the earth.