

ELSEWHERE



Zuckerberg calls for new big-tech regulator for EU

Facebook head Mark Zuckerberg called for a new type of big tech regulator as he lobbied the EU officials who have become the world's top enforcers on Silicon Valley. He emphasised the importance of better controlling hate speech and disinformation on platforms — all without muzzling free speech. Facebook stressed that the way to limit unwanted speech was to make sure that platforms put the right systems in place, not by holding them liable for the speech itself. AFP

Woman drops charge against Nepal ex-Speaker

Nepal's former Parliament Speaker, who quit his job over attempted rape allegations, was on Monday found not guilty after the victim retracted her testimony. Krishna Bahadur Mahara, a senior member of the ruling Nepal Communist Party, has been in detention since October after a woman employee in the Assembly accused him of trying to rape her. His lawyer said the victim had "accepted" the ex-Speaker's statements denying his involvement. AFP

14 children among 22 killed in Cameroon: UN

Armed men massacred 22 villagers, including 14 children, in an anglophone region of Cameroon, according to the United Nations, with the opposition blaming the killings on government troops. The bloodshed occurred on Friday in the Northwest region of Cameroon, James Nunan, a local official with UN humanitarian coordination agency OCHA, said. AFP

# China virus cases cross 70,000

Hundreds of Americans flown home from cruise ship in Japan, 14 with COVID-19

REUTERS  
AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
SHANGHAI/GENEVA

More than 300 American cruise liner passengers, including 14 who were diagnosed with COVID-19, were flown home to military bases in the U.S., after two weeks under quarantine off Japan. The cruise ship *Diamond Princess*, with more than 400 cases, has become the biggest test so far of other countries' ability to contain an outbreak that has killed 1,770 people in China and five elsewhere.

Although U.S. officials said passengers with virus symptoms would not be taken, 14 passengers found at the last minute to have tested positive were permitted to board the planes. The U.S. State Department said they were kept in isolation on the flights.

Across mainland China, officials said the total number of cases rose by 2,048 to 70,548. That was slightly more new cases than were reported on Sunday, but hundreds fewer than reported on Saturday. Chinese authorities say the stabilisation in the number of new cases is a sign that measures taken to halt the spread of the disease are having an effect. However, epidemiologists say it is still too early to say how well the outbreak is being contained within China and its Hubei province, where the virus first appeared.

Cruise ships

Around half of all known cases of the virus outside China have been found aboard the *Diamond Princess*, where around 400 people have tested positive since the vessel was ordered to stay under quarantine off Japan on February 3. Several other countries have announced



Taking a breather: Medical personnel chatting with a patient diagnosed with COVID-19 at the Wuhan Red Cross Hospital in China. AFP

## Chinese doctors using 'plasma therapy'

Chinese health officials on Monday urged patients who have recovered from COVID-19 to donate blood so that plasma can be extracted to treat others who are critically ill.

Plasma from patients who have recovered from a spell of pneumonia triggered by the virus contains antibodies that can help

reduce the virus load in critically ill patients, said Guo Yanhong, who heads the National Health Commission's medical administration department

Eleven patients at a hospital in Wuhan received plasma infusions last week, said Sun Yanrong, of the Biological Center at the Ministry of Science and Technology. "One patient (among them) has already

been discharged, one is able to get off the bed and walk and the others are all recovering," she said.

The call comes days after state-owned medical products maker reported successful results from its trial at Wuhan hospital. China National Biotec Group Co. said that severely ill patients receiving plasma infusions "improved within 24 hours".

plans to follow the U.S. in bringing passengers home.

Authorities around the world were also trying to track down passengers from another cruise liner, the *Westerdam*, which was turned away from ports across Southeast Asia for two weeks before docking in Cambodia on Thursday. One American passenger who disembarked in Cambodia tested positive for the virus in Malaysia on Saturday.

Carnival Corp., which operates both cruise liners, said it was cooperating with authorities in trying to trace other passengers. None of the other 1,454 passengers

and 802 crew had reported any symptoms, it said.

'No blanket measures'

The World Health Organization (WHO) warned against "blanket measures" over the outbreak, pointing out that the epidemic outside of China was only affecting a "tiny" proportion of the population.

WHO also said that — with a mortality rate of around 2% — COVID-19 was "less deadly" than other coronaviruses such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) or the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Officials rejected the

suggestion that all cruises should be halted to avoid risking a new nest of infection like the one on the *Diamond Princess*.

"Measures should be taken proportional to the situation. Blanket measures may not help," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters in Geneva.

A WHO team earlier held discussions with Beijing health authorities on the outbreak. The team visited the main infectious disease facility, Ditan Hospital, and the Anzhen community centre and health clinic, and held talks with the China Centre for Disease Control.

# No let-up in Taliban attacks as fresh orders awaited over deal

'Leadership hasn't conveyed any message about a ceasefire'

REUTERS  
KABUL

Taliban fighters attacked Afghan government forces overnight, and militant commanders said on Monday insurgency operations would go ahead until they receive fresh instructions based on a deal with the U.S. to reduce violence in the country.

Last week, a senior U.S. administration official said negotiations with Taliban representatives in Qatar had resulted in an agreement in principle for a week-long reduction of violence, but the seven-day period had not commenced. The official said the agreement covered all Afghan forces, and would be closely monitored.

Our leadership hasn't conveyed any message about a ceasefire to us, said a Taliban commander in Helmand, a southern province that has seen some of the fiercest fighting.

Commanders in Paktika and Nangarhar — two other provinces regarded as strongholds for the Taliban — also said they would continue their attacks as planned.



U.S. soldiers keeping watch in Nerkh district of Wardak province, in this file photo.

down in Nimroz province, but an official there said the helicopter made an emergency landing and had not been attacked.

Peace accord

Despite the violence on the ground, a senior Taliban leader in Doha confirmed a deal with the U.S. is set to be signed by the end of February in a "signing ceremony" in Doha.

Leaders of the United Nations, European Union and Islamic nations would be invited to the attend, Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, deputy chief of the Taliban's Doha office, was quoted as saying by Nunn Asia — a pro-Taliban website with strong links to the group's leadership.

"Soon after signing the peace accord, the U.S. will release 5,000 of our prisoners and we will free 1,000 of theirs," Mr. Hanafi said.

Successful implementation of the deal would move the U.S. closer to a further drawdown of troop levels in Afghanistan.

On Sunday night, Taliban fighters attacked Afghan government forces manning a checkpoint in the northern province of Kunduz. According to a statement by Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid, they killed 19 security personnel.

The Afghan Defence Ministry confirmed the attack in a statement but put the death toll at five. It also said retaliatory air strikes were conducted against the militants.

A Taliban spokesman also issued a statement on Monday saying a Afghan military helicopter had been shot

## Gunmen kill 24 in Burkina Faso

REUTERS  
OUAGADOUGOU

Gunmen killed twenty-four people, including a pastor, in an attack on a church during Sunday mass in north-western Burkina Faso, security sources said on Monday.

It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the attack, which comes as jihadist groups with links to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State seek to gain control over once peaceful rural Burkina Faso, fuelling ethnic and

religious conflict. The timing of the shooting, during a church service in the village of Pansi in the Yagha region, mirrors that of other attacks on Christians in the past year, including church attacks and assassinations of pastors and priests.

The violence threatens to

upend traditionally peaceful relations between the majority Muslim community and Christians, who represent up to a quarter of the population.

Armed assailants "attacked the peaceful residents of this area after identifying them and separating them from non-residents", the government said. It said 18 people were also injured in the attack and an unknown number were kidnapped.

Many Muslims have also been killed by armed groups over the past year. Last October, gunmen stormed a mosque during Friday prayers and killed 15 people.

# Trump calls for Russia to stop backing Syrian 'atrocities'

U.S. President expresses concern over violence in Idlib

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has called for Russia to end its support for the Syrian regime's "atrocities" as he expressed U.S. concern over violence in the Idlib region, the White House said on Sunday.

Turkey's Foreign Minister also pressed his Russian counterpart over the attacks by Damascus on the last rebel-held bastion in the country.

Backed by Russian air power, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made fresh gains on Sunday as he intensified his assault on the



Donald Trump

see an end to Russia's support for the Assad regime's atrocities".

Turkey has 12 observation posts in Idlib as part of a 2018 deal reached between Ankara and Moscow to prevent a regime offensive, but Syrian regime forces have pressed ahead regardless.

"I stressed that the attacks in Idlib must stop and it was necessary to establish a lasting ceasefire that would not be violated," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told journalists at the Munich Security Conference, after he met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

## 8 killed in suicide attack in Quetta

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
QUETTA

At least eight people, including two police officers, were killed and several others wounded in a suicide blast on Monday in south-western Pakistan, officials said.

The suicide attack took place in Quetta in Balochistan province, which remains rife with insurgent activity.

The young suicide bomber was trying to enter a religious rally but the police intercepted him at a security barrier. "As police were searching him, he detonated his vest, resulting in the killing of eight people while injuring 23 others," a police officer said.

# Pak. no longer a terror 'safe haven': Imran

Prime Minister says his administration fully supports the Afghan peace process

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
ISLAMABAD

There are no "safe havens" for terror groups in Pakistan "right now", Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Monday while admitting publicly that it was possibly not the case under previous regimes.

Addressing an international conference marking 40 years of hosting Afghan refugees in the country, he said Pakistan seeks peace in Afghanistan and instability in the country was not in its interest.

Mr. Khan's assertion on terror safe havens came as the Financial Action Task Force, the global anti-money laundering watchdog, began a crucial meeting in Paris where Pakistan is trying to



Imran Khan

wriggle out of being black-listed.

"I can tell you that there are no safe havens here," he said. "Whatever the situation might have been in the past, right now, I can tell you... there is one thing we want: peace in Afghanistan."

He admitted that it was possible that such safe ha-

were operating in the country after 9/11 in the Afghan refugee camps, *The News* reported.

Mr. Khan's comments came after Sarwar Danish, Afghanistan's second Vice-President, accused Pakistan of allowing the Taliban to recruit new fighters from refugee camps.

Mr. Khan said that while Pakistan cannot fully guarantee that no Taliban militants are hiding among the huge number of Afghans living in the country, his government had done all it can to prevent attacks in Afghanistan, including by building a border fence.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who is on a three-day visit to Pakistan,

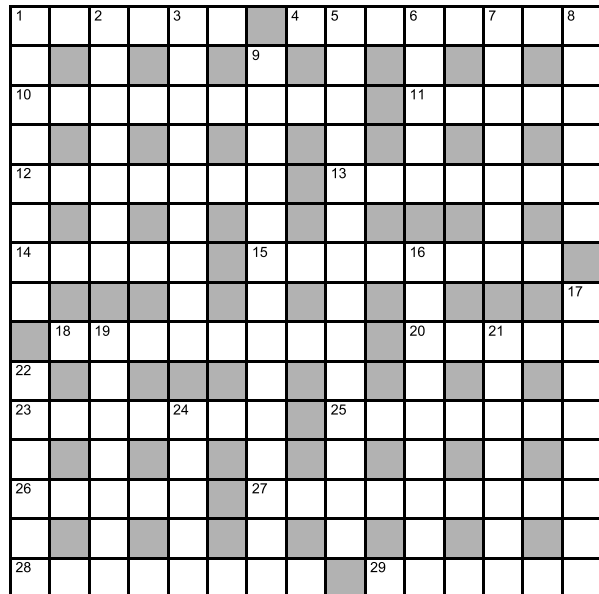
credited the nation for supporting Afghan refugees.

"For 40 years, the people of Afghanistan have faced successive crises, for 40 years, the people of Pakistan have responded with solidarity," Mr. Guterres said, while calling on the international community to do more.

Mr. Guterres had earlier termed the improved security situation in Pakistan as "absolutely remarkable", *Dawn News* reported. "We are witnessing the state becoming present, both from the point of view of security [... and] basic service, development in an absolutely remarkable transformation," he said at a seminar at the National University of Sciences and Technology.

### THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12861

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



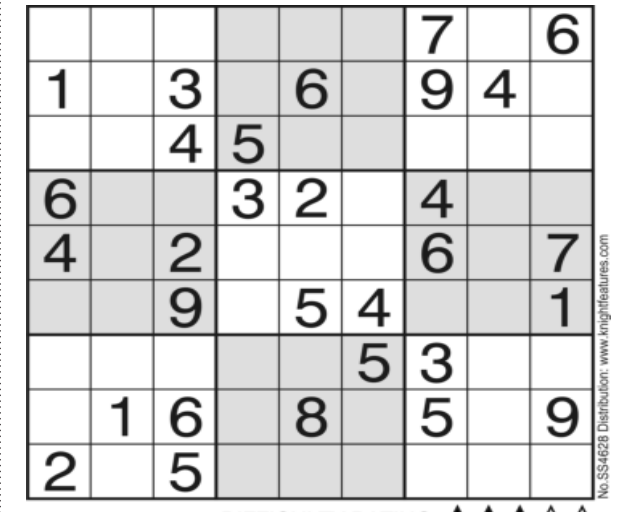
(set by Arden)

- 12 Studied country's extended borders (7)
- 13 Knowing finally the paint's to be mixed (7)
- 14 Because of a song only... (3,2)
- 15 ...soldiers and spies have reactionary tendencies (8)
- 18 Dear Mike's new profession (8)
- 20 Send back watch (5)
- 23 Not good to have set up the last fighting unit (7)
- 25 Two drinks over mid afternoon? There is mortification (7)
- 26 Posed say with French composer (5)
- 27 Happy to take on, dog's tail is stretched (9)
- 28 A flower takes form, it's of inferior quality (8)
- 29 Weighed down with last of the tomatoes rotten (6)
- 1 "Rue over etiquette", they say (7)
- 3 Trims down, unusually violent weather (9)
- 5 Shady character stole a fancy car (7,7)
- 6 Bulb lit up by accident (5)
- 7 Play's in American city, by the way (7)
- 8 Old king, one wearing something pretty (6)
- 9 Making friends with cricket players, part of children's code (7,7)
- 16 Alien entered England's borders, was no longer friendly (9)
- 17 Crime syndicates growing racket in the country (8)
- 19 Depoliticise conversion, losing sleep is stupid (7)
- 21 One writing in Tamil dealt with union affairs (7)
- 22 Rated a book as old (6)
- 1 Frank meddles regularly, causing flight (8)



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

### SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12860

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

### FAITH

## Word of God

The Padma Purana features a conversation between Lord Narayana and Lakshmi on the Bhagavad Gita. Siva quotes this to Parvati who wishes to know in detail the merits of this text spoken by the Lord Himself.

The Lord relates to Lakshmi the story of Susharma to illustrate the unseen benefits that chanting and listening to the Bhagavad Gita confers on people, pointed out Mukkur Sri Srinivasan in a discourse.

Susharma is born a brahmin but does not follow his swadharm that he has earned owing to his birth. He is wicked and sinful and when he dies, he is cast into naraka loka and suffers.

After this he is born again as a bull and serves a master who earns his livelihood by making the bull perform in the streets. The bull grows old and is abandoned by the master. It suffers pain and misery for many days and passers by pray to God to give it relief.

One day a prostitute comes that way and she too prays that in case she has any punya to her credit, it should go to help the bull. The bull dies and is taken to Yama loka. He is once again born a brahmin and in that birth, he remembers his past lives.

So he searches out for the prostitute and finds out what punya she had done that had saved him in his past birth. She says her only good act was listening to her pet parrot recite the first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita.

The parrot said that it had learnt it when it had a chance to be in an ashram with some rishis who had taught the first chapter to their disciples. So it is possible that by chanting Gita slokas one can get rid of the effects of papa and punya gained through various births and reach a pure state.