

Virus toll soars in Italy; U.S. cases double

Deaths rise by a quarter to 631 in Italy; New York deploys National Guard as the situation worsens

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ROME

Italians braced for a second day of national lockdown on Wednesday after a sharp spike in coronavirus-related deaths, as New York deployed the National Guard to contain a disease that has sown worldwide panic.

Europe's hardest-hit country said the death toll from COVID-19 had risen on Tuesday by a third to 631, with the surging epidemic playing havoc with global sporting, cultural and political events.

While authorities in China, where the outbreak began, have declared it "basically curbed", cases are multiplying around the world, sparking panic buying in shops, and wild swings on financial markets.

Its seemingly relentless march has now claimed its first victim in Central America, with a 64-year-old man dying in Panama on Tuesday. Indonesia also reported its first death.

China remains the hardest-hit overall with more than 80,000 cases and



Fighting spirit: A couple placing a banner that reads "everything will be fine" outside their house in Turin on Wednesday after Italy ordered a nationwide lockdown. • REUTERS

3,000 deaths, out of a global total of 1,17,339 cases and 4,251 fatalities in 107 countries and territories, according to an AFP tally.

Beijing reported an increase in imported cases Wednesday.

Nevertheless, some companies in Wuhan, the Chinese city where the virus emerged late last year, are to be allowed to return to work.

Coronavirus is infecting

all walks of life, including politics, with U.S. Democratic presidential hopefuls Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden both cancelling rallies.

And amid criticism of the U.S. authorities' response, New York deployed the National Guard for the first time during the crisis to help contain the spread of the disease from an infection-hit suburb.

"It is a dramatic action, but it is the largest cluster in the country. This is literally a matter of life and death," said State Governor Andrew Cuomo. At least 28 people have died in the U.S. with 1,025 infected - nearly double the 550 total confirmed cases the day before.

Meanwhile, Iran reported 63 new deaths, the highest single-day toll in the three weeks since the Islamic republic announced the first deaths from the outbreak.

70% of Germans at risk: Merkel

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BERLIN

Chancellor Angela Merkel, citing expert estimates, said that up to 70% of German population could be infected by SARS-CoV-2. Germany had confirmed some 1,300 infections, with two deaths. The government has recommended the cancellation of all events with over 1,000 people.

Kuwait to halt all flights

REUTERS
DUBAI

Kuwait has announced a halt to all commercial flights to and from Kuwait City International Airport starting Friday and until further notice. A public holiday has been declared from March 12 to March 26, with work resuming on March 29.

Weinstein sentenced to 23 years in jail for rape, assault

Over 100 women had accused him of predatory behaviour

REUTERS
NEW YORK

Former movie producer Harvey Weinstein was sentenced on Wednesday to 23 years in prison for sexual assault and rape after giving a rambling court statement sympathising with men accused of sexual misconduct during the #MeToo era.

The sentence was handed down in Manhattan criminal court by Justice James Burke, who presided over Weinstein's trial. A jury on February 24 found Weinstein, 67, guilty of sexually assaulting a former production assistant and raping a former aspiring actress.

"I feel remorse for all of the men who are going through this fight," Weinstein told the court before he was sentenced, sounding unrepentant.

Weinstein said he was worried about the "thousands of men who are losing due process" during the #MeToo movement just as people in the past had their



Harvey Weinstein

careers destroyed when they were accused of being communists. "I think that's what's happening now all over this country," he said.

During the sentencing hearing, prosecutor Joan Illuzzi asked Justice Burke to impose 25 years or "near" 25 years in prison for his conviction on a charge of criminal sexual act in the first degree involving the production assistant and to impose a consecutive sentence for the third-degree rape conviction involving the aspiring actress.

In an emotional state-

ment in court, one of the victims spoke of the trauma she had endured since the attack, saying, "It scarred me deeply, mentally and emotionally, perhaps irreparably, perhaps forever."

Prosecutors in court filings last week said the sentence should reflect not only the crimes of which he was convicted, but a "lifetime of abuse towards others."

More than 100 women, including famous actresses, have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct stretching back decades, fueling the #MeToo movement against sexual abuse and harassment.

The jury of seven men and five women acquitted Weinstein on the most serious charges, a single count of first-degree rape as well as two counts of predatory sexual assault, which carried a potential life sentence. Those charges relied on testimony by another actress, who said Weinstein raped her in the early 1990s.

Sri Lanka calls for cooperation after tourist guide gets infected

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka on Wednesday urged the public to cooperate with the government to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the island nation, after a local tourist guide tested positive for the new coronavirus.

The 52-year-old tourist guide was on Tuesday found to be the first Sri Lankan to be infected by the virus, according to the Director Gen-

eral of Health Dr. Anil Jasinghe. The patient has been sent to the infectious diseases hospital, a press release from the President's Media Division said.

Primary contacts

Authorities are checking on the people who may have come into contact with the patient.

Earlier, a Chinese tourist visiting Sri Lanka tested positive for COVID 19, and she

returned to China in February, following treatment in quarantine.

Further, from Tuesday onwards, the Sri Lankan government has enforced mandatory quarantine of all passengers arriving from countries, including Iran, Italy and South Korea.

Meanwhile, the Government Information Department has said that Sri Lanka has suspended visa on arrival until further notice.

U.K. Health Minister tests positive for coronavirus

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

A former British government Minister on Wednesday called for Parliament to be suspended after a parliamentarian was infected.

Rory Stewart, a former Conservative MP who is now running to be Mayor of London, said the lower House of Commons "should cease to meet in person" to avoid any further spread.

His comments came after Nadine Dorries, Junior



Nadine Dorries

Health Minister, revealed late on Tuesday that she had been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Parliament passes amendment allowing Putin to stay in power

REUTERS
MOSCOW

Constitutional changes allowing Vladimir Putin to run for President again in 2024 sailed through Russia's lower house of Parliament on Wednesday, opening the way for him to potentially stay in power until 2036.

Mr. Putin, a former KGB officer, is currently required by the Constitution to step down in 2024 when his second sequential and fourth

presidential term ends. But the amendment would formally reset his presidential term tally to zero.

The 450-seat State Duma, the lower house of Parliament, on Wednesday voted in favour of the change, along with other amendments to the Constitution, by 383 votes. Nobody voted against, but 43 lawmakers abstained. Twenty-four lawmakers were absent.

If, as Mr. Putin critics ex-

pect, the constitutional court now gives its blessing to the amendment and it is backed in a nationwide vote on April 22, Mr. Putin would have the option to run again for President in 2024.

Kremlin critic and opposition politician Alexei Navalny has said he believes Mr. Putin will now try to become President for life.

Two people staged lone pickets outside the State Duma on Wednesday.

Biden widens lead over Sanders with wins

Former Vice-President takes four States in primaries, appeals for unity in party

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

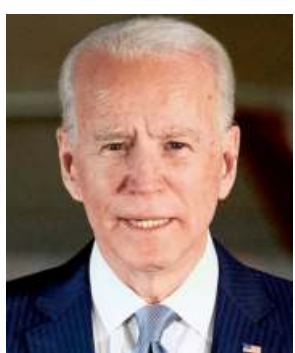
If 'Super Tuesday' last week made former U.S. Vice-President Joseph R. Biden Jr. the frontrunner in the Democratic primaries, then this Tuesday confirmed it in a big way with wins in four States, with support from African American, suburban and rural voters.

The biggest prize for the night was Mr. Biden's decisive victory against his opponent, progressive candidate Senator Bernie Sanders, in Michigan - a State Donald Trump had flipped in 2016 from Democrats and which Mr. Sanders himself had won in the primary that year against Hillary Clinton. While

there were questions on Tuesday night about Mr. Sanders's continuation in the primaries, the Vermont Senator announced on Wednesday afternoon that he would stay in the race and debate Mr. Biden on Sunday.

Mr. Sanders won North Dakota and led in the second most delegate rich State for the night - Washington. With delegates still being counted, Mr. Sanders had won a total of 110 on Tuesday (684 cumulatively), but that was still not enough to keep up with Mr. Biden's 176 (846 cumulatively).

Mr. Biden's won by huge margins among African American voters across States - for instance, 87% in



Joe Biden

Mississippi versus Mr. Sanders's 10% in that State, as per exit polls conducted by Edison Media Research and analysed by the *Washington Post*. However, he also won the white vote - by narrower margins - in Michigan, Missouri and Mississippi.

In Michigan, Mr. Biden won the African American vote by 53% against Mr. San-

ders's 37%. Significantly, the very voters - rural and suburban whites - who had handed Mr. Sanders a victory against Hillary Clinton in the Michigan primary in 2016 were now part of the reason for Mr. Biden's victory in the State. Mr. Sanders won among Latinos and younger people - those under 45, and he won strongly in the 18-29 age group.

Voter turnout

Mr. Sanders's campaign has banked on their ability to motivate a higher voter turnout but preliminary results from Tuesday suggest that they did not pull this off.

On Tuesday night, Mr. Biden spoke of unity in Philadelphia. "I want to thank Bernie Sanders and his supporters for their tireless energy and their passion,"

he said. "We share a common goal. Together, we will defeat Donald Trump. We will defeat him together."

Mr. Sanders was the leading candidate at the end of February after coming second in Iowa in terms of delegates, first in Nevada by a large margin and tied for delegates with former candidate and Southbend Mayor Pete Buttigieg. Mr. Biden's crucial February 29 victory in South Carolina, which hinged on support from African Americans brought the former Vice-President back into the race and gave him the momentum to go into Super Tuesday (March 3). Also crucial to his performance last Tuesday was getting endorsed by former rivals, Mr. Buttigieg and Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, who dropped out of the race.

ELSEWHERE



Taliban rejects offer to free 1,500 prisoners

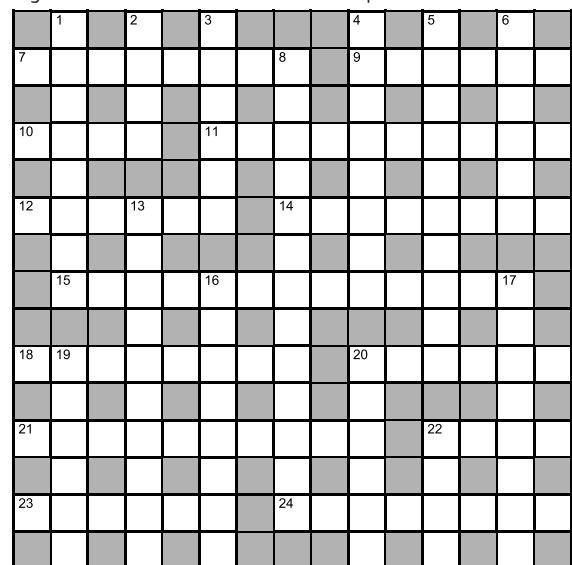
KABUL
Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Wednesday promised an initial release of 1,500 Taliban prisoners as a "goodwill gesture". The Taliban rejected the offer and sought the release of all 5,000 prisoners at once. AFP

Palestinian teen shot dead by Israeli forces

NABLUS
A Palestinian teenager was allegedly shot dead by Israeli forces during clashes in the occupied West Bank. Mohammed Hamayel, 15, "died as a result of being shot in the face, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12881

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



(set by Hypatia)

- 12 Ragged student initially having paid nothing for a pastime activity (6)
- 14 Players embrace that man, for each one cries (8)
- 15 Irritating person's reason to visit chiropractor (4,2,3,4)
- 18 Angry hermit controlling king regularly becoming stronger (8)
- 20 Go where you can see Boris Johnson, not having control (6)
- 21 Prank alert from Lamar (5,5)
- 22 Assist cool student inside (4)
- 23 Magic trick cutting three rings after five (6)
- 24 Massage knee soaking pink oil (8)
- 3 Cautiously avoiding wide and taking single casually (6)
- 4 Broadcast Elvis dancing in graphic shirt (8)
- 5 Recycled old document including PPTs circulated with emails (10)
- 6 Note picked up from cheese maker (6)
- 8 A warm trek on an entrenched peak (4-5,4)
- 13 Hope, maybe see one newlywed, Spooner said (6,4)
- 16 One hand bitten by a golden ape (8)
- 17 Exciting species, beside fish (8)
- 19 Independent, conservative having left-right aligned (2,1,3)
- 20 Look up to notice Hypatia quoting Indian Queen (6)
- 22 Hear that man's sound (4)

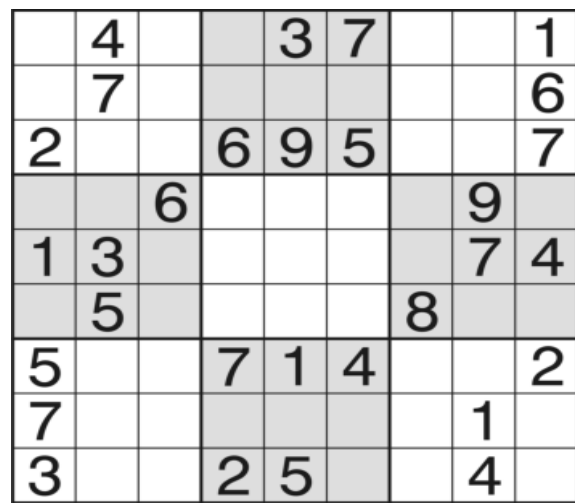
ACROSS

- 7 Hot seafood sandwiches at any time (8)
- 9 Fish eating servant rejected shiny coat (6)
- 10 Bite lip (4)
- 11 Becoming red, I entirely swallowed item (10)

DOWN

- 1 Two parts of the body assuming second position of importance (8)
- 2 Sheer time lost in tempo (4)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12879

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

Solution to Tuesday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

The names of Vishnu

The 59th name of Lord Mahavishnu in the Vishnu Sahasranama is LohitAksha. Parasara Bhatta, who wrote a commentary for the Vishnu Sahasranama, says the Lord is always happy because of His many leelas. And because of this joy, His eyes are red like lotuses. Hence the name LohitAksha (lohita - red in colour; aksha - eyes). Singing of the beauty of Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam, Thirupannazhvar talks of the beautiful red lines in Ranganatha's eyes.

The Lord is joyful, because He showers His devotees with His daya. This leads us to name number 138 in Parasara Bhatta's classification. The 138th name is krtAkrtaH. This means that He is the giver of everything. He gives worldly joys and moksha, explained V.S. Karunakarachariar in a discourse. Worldly joys are artificial (krta). It is in the nature of the atma to seek proximity to the Supreme One. So, to seek moksha is natural (akrta). But since we crave worldly joys, He gives us these too. Since He gives us krta and akrta, He is krtAkrtaH. Doing a japa of this name will bring us moksha.

Vishnu is also called ajah. It means He is not born like us. While we cannot choose our parents, the time of our birth or the form we will take, the Lord decides the place, time and manner of His birth. Particularly interesting is His Narasimha avatara. The name ajah occurs twice in the Vishnu Sahasranama. Name 206 - ajah - is explained by Parasara Bhatta with reference to the Narasimha avatara. He says that since Narasimha was born from a pillar, His arrival was most unusual! The 737th name is 'tat'. This is explained by Parasara Bhatta as 'He who expands, or magnifies.' What does He magnify? If we take one step towards Him, He multiplies that a hundredfold, and counts that one little step as hundred steps towards Him.