

Shutdown in Spain as virus spreads

More countries impose lockdowns and close borders; the worst is ahead of us, says U.S. doctor

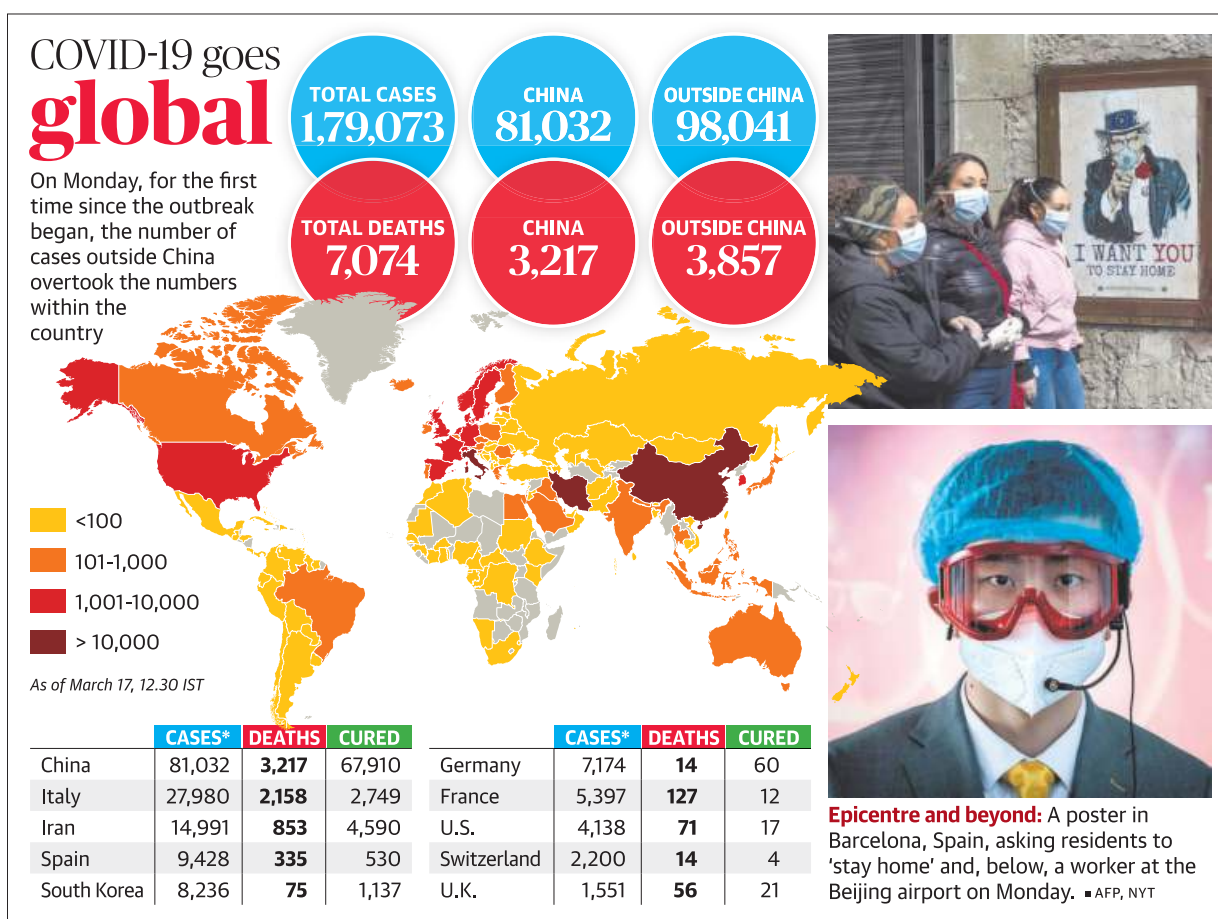
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
REUTERS
MADRID/NEW YORK

Spain moved to close its land borders as the number of infections inched ever closer to 10,000 despite a nationwide lockdown that officials said would likely extend beyond a fortnight.

The move came after Spain imposed a string of unprecedented restrictions, ordering its 46 million population to stay home, shuttering everything except food shops, chemists and petrol stations. But by 2.30 p.m. on Monday, the Health Ministry had counted 9,191 cases and 309 deaths, prompting the government to announce the closure of its land borders.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said the closure would come into effect at midnight, with only Spanish citizens, residents or accredited diplomatic personnel allowed in, and any cases of force majeure.

In the worst-case scenario, infections were likely to “continue rising for at least



*THE 10 COUNTRIES WITH MOST CASES | SOURCE: JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, GRAPHIC NEWS

China to withdraw medical staff from Wuhan

Outbreak 'has almost seen an end' there

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BEIJING

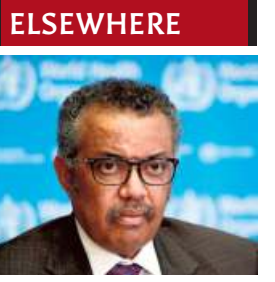
China on Monday announced plans for an orderly withdrawal of thousands of medical staff deployed in Wuhan as a top medical expert said the COVID-19 outbreak has “almost seen its end” in the country but a final judgment would be made after a month.

A leading Chinese official group, headed by Premier Li Keqiang, suggested orderly withdrawal of the medical staff supporting virus-hit Hubei province for which Wuhan is the capital, where the virus first emerged in December last year.

China deployed over

30,000 medical personnel and built 14 makeshift hospitals at the height of the outbreak in January. The makeshift hospitals have been dismantled. The leading group asked officials to ensure high-level treatment of severe COVID-19 patients in Wuhan while withdrawing the supporting teams, state-run *China Daily* reported.

The National Health Commission (NHC) said on Monday that the imported cases climbed to 123 after 12 new infections were reported, prompting Beijing to make 14-day quarantine in special facilities compulsory for foreigners arriving in the country.



Test every suspected case of COVID-19: WHO

GENEVA
The World Health Organization (WHO) called on Monday for countries to test every suspected case of COVID-19, as the rest of the world registered more cases and deaths in the pandemic than China. “You cannot fight a fire blindfolded,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters in a virtual press conference from WHO headquarters in Geneva. The WHO, he said, was urging countries to “Test, test, test. Test every suspected case.” AFP

Sri Lanka Opposition parties ask President to postpone election

Parliamentary poll is scheduled to be held on April 25

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Many Opposition parties in Sri Lanka have called for postponing the general election scheduled for April 25, in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country. Their request comes a day after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa told SAARC leaders that Sri Lanka’s parliamentary election will be held as scheduled.

Prominent Opposition politician Sajith Premadasa, who now leads an alliance of a faction of the United National Party (UNP), and its allies, urged the government to utilise funds allocated for polls to step up Sri Lanka’s response to the virus.

Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has urged the President to con-

vene an all-parties meeting to discuss ways to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and possibly postpone poll in the wake of such a health crisis, the *Daily FT* newspaper here reported.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) on Monday said it was concerned about the possible spread of COVID-19 and noted that the safety of the public is “our paramount concern”. “For this reason, and for the reason that all democratic aspects cannot be properly adhered to in this abnormal situation, we request the postponement of the general election due to be held on 25th of April 2020,” its spokesman M.A. Sumanthiran said in a statement.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) took a similar

position. “This is a big public health concern and as a country we must focus on preventing it from further spreading,” said Bimal Rathnayake, who represented the party in Parliament in the last session. On March 3, President Rajapaksa dissolved Parliament and announced polls on April 25.

“In the current situation, you can’t campaign or hold rallies and that affects the Opposition parties the most, because government still has state media and even some private media to put out its messages. This situation gives the incumbent government an unfair advantage,” he told *The Hindu*.

The Tamil Progressive Alliance, a grouping of Malayala [hill country] Tamils, also sought a postponement.

COVID-19

another 10 days,” said Fernando Simon, the Health Ministry’s emergencies coordinator.

Across the world, bars, restaurants, cinemas and schools were shutting down from New York and Los Angeles to Paris and Dubai in a worldwide effort to combat the pandemic.

Germans were asked to cancel all vacations as Canada and other countries closed their borders to all visitors. Airlines slashed flights, shed jobs and asked governments for billions of dollars in loans and grants.

In contrast to much of the world, Mexico and Brazil still

held large political rallies and the United Kingdom kept its schools open.

368 deaths in Italy

In Italy, there were 368 new deaths from the outbreak on Sunday, a daily toll more dire than even China was reporting at the peak of the outbreak that first hit its central city Wuhan.

“Many children think it is scary,” Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg told a news conference dedicated to answering children’s questions about the pandemic. “It is OK to be scared when so many things happen at the same time,” Ms. Solberg said.

U.S. States pleaded with

the Donald Trump administration on Monday to coordinate a national response to the outbreak, saying patchwork measures enacted by State and local authorities were insufficient to confront the coast-to-coast emergency that has killed at least 71 Americans. “This should be a reality where the United States is put on a war footing, where the federal government mobilises all the resources necessary – and it begins with testing,” New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio told MSNBC.

Without a coordinated federal response, the States of New Jersey, New York and Connecticut, home to more than 22 million people,

struck a regional agreement to shut all movie theatres, casinos and gyms on Monday night. Maryland and Washington State enacted similar restrictions.

Shutdowns in Dubai

The business and travel hub of Dubai said it was closing all bars and lounges until the end of March. Thailand plans to close schools, bars, movie theatres and popular cock-fighting arenas.

“The worst is yet ahead for us,” said Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious diseases expert in the United States, a warning echoed by officials in Switzerland, where 14 have died. Italy’s Prime Minister Giu-

seppe Conte told daily *Corriere della Sera* that the outbreak was still getting worse.

Britain has asked manufacturers including Ford Motor Co, Honda and Rolls Royce to help make health equipment, including ventilators to cope with the outbreak, and will look at using hotels as hospitals.

The International Olympic Committee will hold talks with heads of international sports organisations on Tuesday, a source said, amid doubts that the Tokyo 2020 Olympics set to start on July 24 can proceed.

The Jewish faithful should avoid kissing the Western Wall, the chief rabbi of the Jerusalem holy site said.

French priest jailed for child sex abuse

REUTERS
PARIS

A French court on Monday convicted a former Roman Catholic priest of sexually abusing children and sentenced him to five years in jail, his lawyer said.

Bernard Preynat was found guilty of abusing dozens of boy scouts in the 1980s and early 1990s. Prosecutors had portrayed the 74-year-old as a serial paedophile and said he preyed on children entrusted to his care by their parents.

Preynat told the court he had not understood how grave his acts were nor how traumatic the consequences would be for his victims.

Prosecutors had sought an eight-year jail term.

Gantz chosen to form Israel govt.

Former army chief won recommendations from 61 MPs

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JERUSALEM

Israel’s ex-military chief Benny Gantz was nominated on Monday to try to form a government but further talks were expected with his bitter rival, Premier Benjamin Netanyahu, on an emergency alliance to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Gantz, who heads the centrist Blue and White party, called for “unity” and urged Prime Minister Netanyahu to join him as Israel seeks to end a crippling political stalemate after three inconclusive elections in less than a year.

“We must not have a fourth election,” Mr. Gantz said, after he was formally nominated to attempt to form an administration by President Reuven Rivlin. “I’ll



Benny Gantz. *AFP

do everything to form in as few days as possible a national, patriotic and broad government.”

Call for unity

Mr. Gantz, 60, won recommendations on Sunday from 61 lawmakers, a razor thin majority in the 120-member Knesset, or Parliament. His backers did not include Mr. Netanyahu’s right-wing Li-

kud, but Mr. Rivlin has urged the two men to work together in an emergency unity government, in order to avoid a national policy vacuum in response to the pandemic.

“It is possible that forming a government quickly will require interim arrangements for the coming months”, Mr. Rivlin said on Monday.

Mr. Gantz’s path to a longer-term stable coalition is difficult given the deep divisions within the factions that backed him, which include the mainly Arab Joint List and the nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu.

Mr. Rivlin officially granted Gantz 28 days to try to form a government, a task which proved impossible for any candidate following the two elections last year.

Biden, Sanders hit out at Trump

Debate focusses on U.S. response to COVID-19 pandemic

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

White House hopefuls Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders launched a joint attack on President Donald Trump’s response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as they faced off in a high-stakes debate on Sunday, accusing the President of undermining his own scientists with misinformation.

The two rivals also sparred about their record, taking advantage of the first one-on-one format of the marathon campaign to engage in extended – though civil – policy clashes on everything from universal healthcare and climate change to deportations and foreign policy. But with Mr. Biden appearing to have a



Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders in Washington on Sunday. *REUTERS

good night, riding high as the frontrunner following three weeks of strong performances in multiple primaries, he made a splash by saying he will “commit” to picking a woman running mate if he is the Democratic nominee.

Mr. Sanders said he would

“in all likelihood” do the same, following the most diverse nomination contest in U.S. history that saw no fewer than six women in the running to take on Mr. Trump in November.

Mr. Sanders took a stinging shot at the President, accusing him of fomenting confusion and eroding public trust in a time of crisis.

Mr. Biden essentially agreed, saying: “the existential threat to the United States of America is Donald Trump.”

With the debate overshadowed by the fast-moving health crisis, Mr. Biden and Mr. Sanders spent the first half-hour on how to address the pandemic which has already caused almost 70 deaths and more than 3,600 COVID-19 cases nationwide.

Japan knife attacker gets death sentence

REUTERS
YOKOHAMA

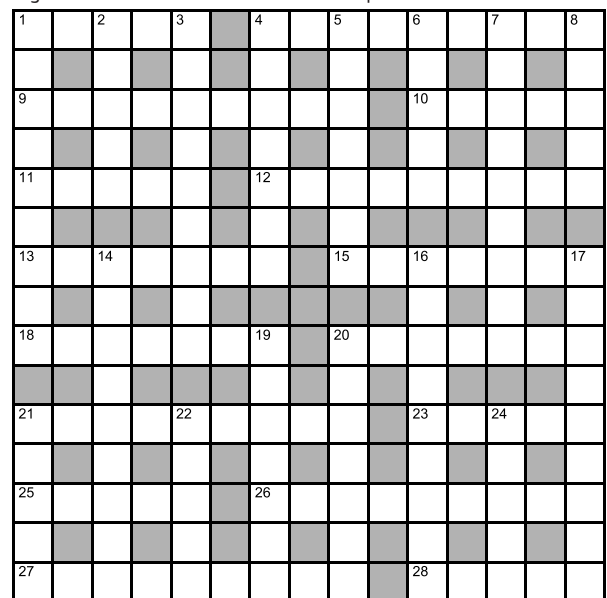
A Japanese man was sentenced to death on Monday for killing 19 disabled people in a knife-wielding rampage in 2016 that was one of post-war Japan’s worst mass killings.

Satoshi Uematsu, 30, had admitted to stabbing to death or injuring the victims at a care centre for people with mental disabilities where he had once worked in Sagami-hara, southwest of Tokyo. Twenty-six others were wounded. Many of the victims were stabbed as they slept.

The carnage sent a shockwave through the nation, where violent crime is rare due to strict gun control.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12885

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles

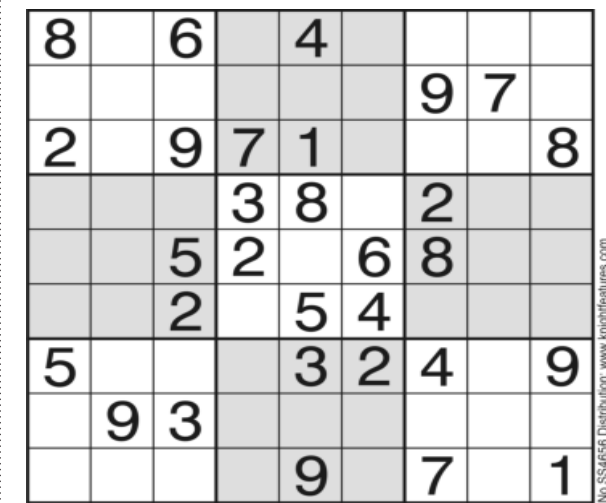


(set by Karaoke)

- Overweight playboy suppresses illegal ties (7)
- Garden of fruit trees or leaf beet? (7)
- Abstains from key heartless Hebrews (7)
- Demolish criminal’s hideout stuffed with money (7)
- Found growing mammals in troubled isle of Hungary (9)
- Batsmen regularly follow United Kingdom or Russian Rule (5)
- Gravedigger’s heart-rending song (5)
- Modern art by Paul on stylish canvas (9)
- Fool into power pressure to sort out papers (9)
- Senior comes back during Red Letter Day (5)
- Material partly gutted around corridor (7)
- One in France/Germany therefore gets experience (7)
- Training includes jog to get shape (5)
- Loosely interact with some inferiority complex (9)
- Abstinent swallowed small comment on social network (5)
- Ace setter designed additional things (9)
- Commission of clues, not a difficulty (9)
- Head of correction centre gone underground! (9)
- Trick to break into pieces without proton (7)
- Free chat rooms (not in the morning) for groups (7)
- Arrive at last state (3,2)
- It prevents words in objectionable episodes (5)
- We aren’t allowed to freehold property (5)

- ACROSS**
- Spar with selfless ghost! (5)
 - Advantage not to mention. (4,5)
 - Single murder in a mystery? (9)
 - Release by the BBC perhaps excludes Austria (5)
 - Spanish wine from port of Jamaica! (5)
 - Shoplifter damaged clarinets (9)
- DOWN**
- The situation to return when your efforts fail (6,3)
 - Strong punch with peculiar smell? (5)
 - Avert ideas (4,5)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to puzzle 12884					Solution to yesterday’s Sudoku																	
E	X	C	L	A	I	M	I	N	E	R	T	I	A									
M	O	H	A	N	D	A	S															
P	E	R	C	E	I	V	E	D	G	A	W	A	S	4	2	9	8	1	7	3	6	5
O	P	A	N	E	E	N	U							1	5	6	4	3	2	8	7	9
R	E	O	R	D	E	R	I	N	G	M	Y	N	A	9	1	5	3	4	8	6	2	7
I	R	E	I	T	F	H	A	N	D					6	7	8	2	5	9	1	3	4
A	D	E	Q	A	C	Y	H	A	N	D	L			3	4	2	1	7	6	9	5	8
A	A	R	K	B	Z	I	A							3	4	2	1	7	6	9	5	8
A	S	L	E	E	P	R	E	V	E	R	S	A	L	6	7	8	2	5	9	1	3	4
G	A	N	D	O	R	H	A	L						5	3	1	9	6	4	7	8	2
I	T	E	M	C	E	N	S	O	R	I	O	U	S	8	9	4	7	2	3	5	1	6
T	M	H	G	T	O	N	T							8	9	4	7	2	3	5	1	6
A	R	O	M	A	C	E	T	Y	L	E	N			2	6	7	5	8	1	4	9	3
T	J	L	T	A	A	S	E	N						2	6	7	5	8	1	4	9	3
E	P	I	T	O	M	E	D	I	L	L	U	T	E	S								

FAITH

Basis of esoteric quest

The Svetasvatara Upanishad teaches disciple to look at the oneness in creation that unites the individual being, the world and the Supreme Reality, pointed out Swami Nirvisheshananda in a discourse. The rishis in this Upanishad are engaged in the enquiry into the First cause of this entire universe. How is this universe born? By what is life sustained and on what are all beings established? What is the cause of experience of joy and sorrow in all beings?

The rishis undertake ‘dhyana yoga,’ the practice of sincere and undistracted contemplation and meditation to find answers to these doubts. They then realise the presence of a Divine Power hidden in all aspects of this entire universe. It then becomes clear to them that the manifest Nature is not independent and that it is totally dependent on the ‘Deva atma shakti,’ the power of the Divine Self, also known as Maya Shakti. This power is inseparable from the Supreme Lord. They are hence able to experience oneness with the Brahman, that is, they have the vision that their individual consciousness is no different from the universal consciousness which is the very Brahman. This is the ‘Brahmatma Ekatva bodha,’ the awareness of the truth of Brahman from the standpoint of the impersonal Self.

No rishi could have asserted this truth with so much assurance had he not been totally engaged in this experiment of discovering the First Cause through meditation on the variety of experiences that the manifested world offers to all. The rishi states with confidence: “I know the Supreme Brahman of sunlight lustre beyond darkness. By knowing Him one passes over death. There is no other path for going there.” These words transcend the personal identity of the speaker though he expresses a subjective experience.