

EU raises alert as virus toll crosses 3,000

Nine times more new COVID-19 cases outside China than inside: WHO; Italy toll rises to 52

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRUSSELS

The death toll from COVID-19 outbreak surpassed 3,000 on Monday as more people died in China, Iran and the U.S. and Europe raised its state of alert.

The new coronavirus, also called SARS-CoV-2, has now infected more than 89,000, spread to over 60 countries and threatens to cause a global economic slowdown — after first emerging in China late last year.

With fears of a pandemic on the rise, the World Health Organization urged all countries to stock up on critical care ventilators to treat patients with severe symptoms.

China reported 42 more deaths on Monday — all in central Hubei province. The death toll in China alone rose to 2,912, but it is also surging abroad.

The World Health Organization said on Monday that the number of new coronavirus cases registered in the past day in China was far lower than in the rest of the world.

“In the last 24 hours there were almost nine times more COVID-19 cases reported outside China than inside China,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told



Safe voting: People quarantined for coronavirus arriving to cast their votes in a specially made tent in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Monday. **AP**

reporters in Geneva.

In Brussels, EU president Ursula von der Leyen said the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) had increased its risk assessment for Europeans after Italy's outbreak doubled in 48 hours. Italy reported a jump in the death toll to 52, with more than 2,000 people infected, most in the country's northern Lombardy region.

EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said: “As of this morning, we have 2,100 confirmed cases in 18 EU member states and we have 38 citizens who have lost their lives.”

The virus has raised fears for the world economy, with the OECD lowering its global growth forecast by half a point to 2.4%, the worst performance since the 2008 crisis.

China's economy has ground to a halt with large swaths of the country under quarantine or measures to restrict travel.

Health officials monitoring the virus at the ECDC announced that it had increased its risk assessment to “moderate to high”.

‘Elderly are vulnerable’

In France, a woman, in her eighties, has died. The

Louvre — the world's most visited museum — closed on Monday after staff refused to work because of fears about the virus.

The WHO says the virus appears to particularly hit those over the age of 60 and people already weakened by other illness. It has a mortality rate of between 2-5%.

Saudi Arabia on Monday announced its first case of the virus, the Health Ministry said.

Iran reported 12 more deaths on Monday, raising the country's toll to 66, the second biggest after China.

South Korea, the biggest nest of infections outside

China, reported nearly 500 new cases on Monday, raising its total past 4,000. Four more people died, taking its toll to 22.

The leader of a secretive South Korean sect linked to more than half the cases apologised on Monday for the spread of the disease.

Shincheonji head Lee Man-hee's plea for forgiveness came after Seoul city authorities filed a murder complaint against him for failing to cooperate in containing the epidemic.

U.S. deaths

A second person died in the northwestern U.S. state of Washington as President Donald Trump, who has downplayed the risk of a major outbreak, faced criticism over his administration's preparedness.

After an increase on Sunday, China's National Health Commission reported 202 new infections on Monday, the lowest daily rise since late January, bringing the nationwide total over 80,000.

By contrast, Iran reported more than 500 new cases, raising its total number of infections to 1,501.

Israel, which has 10 confirmed cases, held its first election since the outbreak.

Sri Lankan President dissolves Parliament

Snap elections will be held on April 25

ASSOCIATED PRESS
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa dissolved Parliament ahead of schedule on Monday and set new elections for April, in which he aims to secure a strong majority that will enable him to push for constitutional changes to increase presidential powers.

The dissolution comes six months before the parliamentary term was scheduled to end. The decree signed by Mr. Rajapaksa said elections will be held on April 25.

Mr. Rajapaksa was elected to office last November but has said he cannot work freely because his presidential powers were reduced. He has also faced restrictions because the opposition commanded a majority in the 225-member Parliament.

The election campaign period will include the first anniversary of a series of Islamic State-inspired suicide bombings that killed more than 250 people in churches and tourist hotels on Easter Sunday last year.

Mr. Rajapaksa rode to power criticising the pre-



Gotabaya Rajapaksa

vious government of serious security and intelligence lapses that paved the way for the bombings, the worst incident of violence since the country's 26-year civil war ended in May 2009.

Constitutional changes initiated by Mr. Rajapaksa's predecessor, Maithripala Sirisena, reduced presidential powers and gave them to the Parliament and to independent commissions.

The change virtually created two political power centers — the President and the Prime Minister, with the PM in charge of Parliament and government Ministers.

Mr. Rajapaksa needs two-thirds parliamentary support to pass changes to the constitution.

Taliban ends partial truce in Afghanistan

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

A deadly blast shattered a period of relative calm in Afghanistan on Monday, as the Taliban told fighters to resume operations against Afghan security forces — just days after signing a peace deal.

The blast at a football ground in Khost occurred at around the same time the Taliban ordered fighters to start attacks against Afghan Army and police forces, bringing to an apparent end the “reduction in violence” period that had seen a dramatic drop in bloodshed. Three brothers were killed in the blast.

The partial truce between the U.S., the Taliban and Afghan security forces lasted for the week running up to the signing of an accord between the U.S. and the insurgents in Doha on Saturday. “The reduction in violence... has ended now and our operations will continue,” Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said. “As per the (U.S.-Taliban) agreement, our mujahideen will not attack foreign forces but our operations will continue against the Kabul administration forces.”

Ex-guard frees hostages in Manila mall, arrested

He was disgruntled after being fired



Police take hostage taker Archie Paray into custody at the V-Mall in Manila, Philippines, on Monday. **AP**

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MANILA

A recently dismissed security guard freed his hostages and walked out of a shopping mall in the Philippine capital on Monday, ending a daylong hostage crisis in an upscale commercial district, officials said.

The former guard at the commercial complex, identified as Archie Paray, left the V-Mall in San Juan city in Manila with his hostages, who were secured by police.

The suspect was allowed to speak before reporters to describe his grievances against his superiors, whom he accused of corruption and abuse, before police approached and subdued him.

“I'm very thankful that everything ended up peacefully,” said San Juan Mayor Francis Zamora, who nego-

tiated with the hostage-taker. About 60 to 70 people were held hostage by Paray, he said.

Mr. Zamora said the suspect, who was armed with a pistol and possibly grenades, shot one person at the V-Mall before he rushed to the second floor and took hostages in an administration office. The victim is stable, a health official said.

“He felt bad because he was removed as a guard,” Mr. Zamora told reporters. In a bid to appease the hostage taker, six officers in charge of overseeing the mall's security apologised to the suspect.

“I'm asking for his forgiveness, and because of this, I'll resign from my job so this crisis will come to an end,” said Oscar Hernandez, a security officer.

Child dies as migrants' boat capsizes on way to Greece

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ANKARA

A young boy died when a makeshift boat packed with dozens of migrants capsized off the coast of Lesbos, the Greek port police said, as the number of people attempting to cross into Europe from Turkey surges.

Two children were found “unconscious” after the vessel overturned around 08:30

a.m. local time in the Aegean Sea. One of them could not be revived, while the other was taken to hospital, a spokeswoman said.

A further “46 people are safe” following the accident, the official said. No details were given on the nationality or age of the child.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned on Monday that

“millions” of migrants will soon head for Europe as he mounted pressure on Western countries to give Turkey more assistance with the Syrian conflict.

Mr. Erdogan also said he hoped to reach a deal on a ceasefire in Syria when he meets his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin later in the week following intense fighting in the last rebel hol-

dout of Idlib.

He warned Europe that it will have to shoulder its part of the refugee crisis triggered by violence in the region. “After we opened the doors, there were multiple calls saying ‘close the doors’. I told them ‘it's done. It's finished. The doors are now open. Now, you will have to take your share of the burden,’” he said.



Humanitarian crisis: Migrants arriving at Skala Sikaminias, on the Greek island of Lesbos, after crossing the Aegean sea. **AP**

Crisis in Iraq as PM-designate steps down

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BAGHDAD

Protest-torn Iraq on Monday faced more political gridlock after Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Allawi withdrew overnight, accusing lawmakers of obstructing his attempt to form a government.

Iraq has for five months been rocked by a wave of protests, seeking the ouster of Iraq's entire political elite, which they accuse of being inept, corrupt and beholden to powerful neighbour Iran.

Mr. Allawi's departure leaves President Barham Saleh 15 days to propose a new candidate, likely to be intelligence chief Mustafa al-Kazimi, sources said.

Pete Buttigieg quits presidential race

The openly gay candidate failed to draw a diverse coalition of voters to back him

REID J. EPSTEIN
TRIP GABRIEL
SOUTH BEND

Pete Buttigieg, a former Indiana Mayor and first openly gay major presidential candidate, said on Sunday night he was dropping out of the Democratic race, following a crushing loss in the South Carolina primary, where his poor performance with black Democrats signalled an inability to build a broad coalition of voters.

The decision comes just 48 hours before the biggest voting day of the primary, Super Tuesday, when 15 States and territories will allot a third of the delegates overall. The results were widely expected to show him finishing far behind Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders.



Pete Buttigieg

Mr. Buttigieg cancelled plans for a Sunday night rally in Dallas and a Monday morning fundraiser in Austin, Texas, to return to South Bend. “Sometimes the longest way around really is the shortest way home,” he told supporters to loud cheers.

“The truth is that the path has narrowed to a close, for

Amy Klobuchar ends bid

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

Democrat Amy Klobuchar is ending her bid for the Democratic presidential nomination and endorsing rival Joe Biden, her campaign confirmed on Monday.

our candidacy if not for our cause,” he said, adding, “Tonight I am making the difficult decision to suspend my campaign for the presidency.”

Invoking his experience as a two-term Mayor of South Bend, he said his candidacy caught on not despite that experience but because

Ms. Klobuchar, a moderate who failed to build momentum during the campaigning, will try to throw her support behind Mr. Biden in a bid to consolidate the moderate vote and stop liberal U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders.

of it. America, he said, was “eager to get Washington to start running like our best run communities.”

It is unclear if Mr. Buttigieg, a relative moderate, will endorse another candidate. He and Mr. Biden have exchanged voice messages, one of Mr. Biden's campaign officials said. **NY TIMES**

ELSEWHERE



Pak. to request U.K. govt. to deport Nawaz Sharif

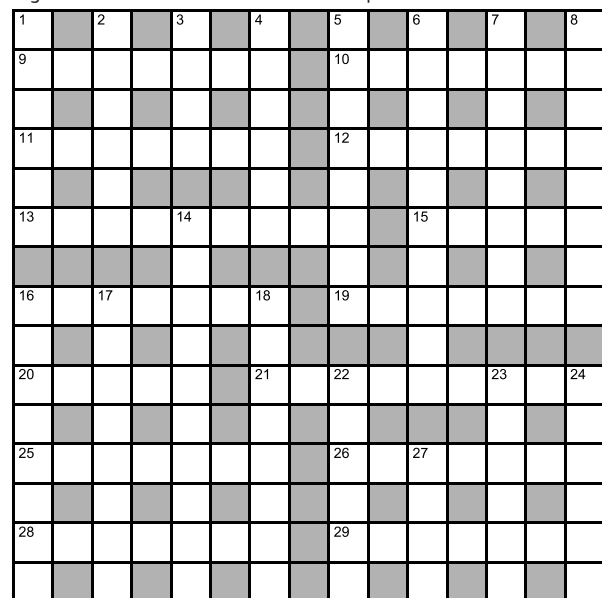
LAHORE
Pakistan will request the U.K. government to deport Nawaz Sharif, a special assistant to Prime Minister Imran Khan said. Firdous Ashiq Awan alleged that the former PM was playing a “fixed match” regarding his illness while in London. **PTI**

Doctor who helped nab Osama on hunger strike

ISLAMABAD
Pakistani doctor Shakeel Afridi, whose fake vaccination programme helped the CIA track and kill al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, has begun a hunger strike from his prison cell over “inhumane” treatment, his lawyer said. **AFP**

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12873

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



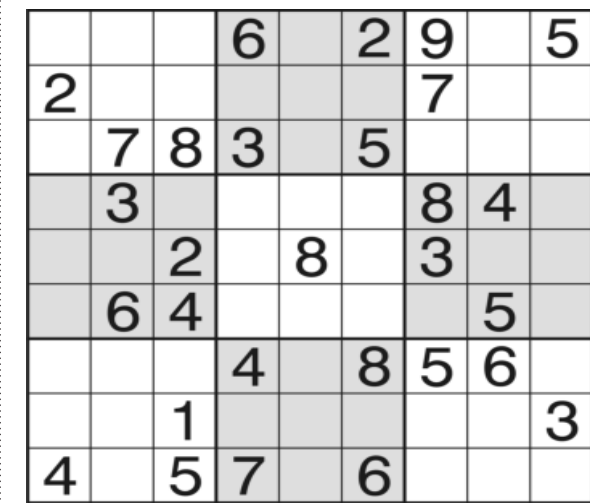
(set by Afterdark)

- 15 Spin taking wickets in rough? Likely to start with (5)
- 16 A copper being on trial is most serious (7)
- 19 Note to general hospital; Tally often stringently (7)
- 20 Dance is strange, gets to a bad start; atrocious primarily (5)
- 21 Cattle survives today, by break of day will be taken by heartless cook (9)
- 25 Soup is broth boiled without some salt and clove (7)
- 26 Partying? Take a drink first in vehicle, say (7)
- 28 White amongst coloured is culpable in a way to give up power (3,4)
- 29 I am entering new casino in European city (7)

- 5 Perhaps a regulation to have silver? Over time to keep fifty ingots primarily (3,5)
- 6 Saw a sign held by worker inside school mentioning good points (10)
- 7 Hefner starting to distribute editions barring one Playboy, say (8)
- 8 Advantageously America caught Laden; top enemy confined fifty years (8)
- 14 Order to hit detailed. Time to take bridge front to back and pound (10)
- 16 Exercise a right with internal energy, only with pen and words finally (8)
- 17 Breakfast food given to royal (Keto without egg) taken by high-income consumers (8)
- 18 I puked little spurious beer; Obvious (8)
- 22 6100 peacekeepers to catch an animal (6)
- 23 Over time, internet operating system gets erratic primarily and becomes ineffective (6)
- 24 Duffel with Reverend for part of mountaineering (3,3)
- 27 Playful child is seen on a road (4)

- ACROSS**
- 9 Guts people have to follow a second class party (7)
- 10 Commercial goods kept outside; middlemen taking time using small gimmicks (7)
- 11 Aunts dance without hesitation on seasons (7)
- 12 Start deal (4,3)
- 13 Creature is warm; hotter when exposed timelessly (9)
- DOWN**
- 1 Man has dues. Get some capital (6)
- 2 Boss in news having wrong diet? It's shown first on recipe (6)
- 3 Religious leader will reveal his heart on Monday morning (4)
- 4 Somehow no clues on money spent in world body (6)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to puzzle 12872

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Safe and sure refuge

The path to salvation is demanding and requires long and arduous practice. At the end of many births perhaps one among countless jivatmas may become a jnani, says Krishna in the Gita. The Vishnu Purana also echoes the same fact when it states that in the course of different births it is likely that one attains Him. Still, every jivatma wishes to lead a comfortable life free of problems, enjoy good health, and also attain salvation by the grace of the Lord, pointed out Mukkur Sri Srinivasan in a discourse.

But the practice of karma, jnana and bhakti by many in Kali Yuga remains unsatisfactory and imperfect as the mind is filled with doubt, confusion, uncertainty, and so on. Being misled by the material world and sense objects, a major part of one's lifetime is spent in fulfilling worldly attainments. As a result it becomes difficult to control the mind and only few are able to clear their sins by merits gained by performance of good and virtuous acts and good conduct through many births. In such a situation, chanting the innumerable auspicious names of the Lord can confer untold benefits on jivatmas, says Bhishma when he instructs the Vishnu Sahasranama to Yudhishtira and others in the presence of Krishna. That jivatma who makes it the practice to think of His greatness and to sing His glories at all times has no need to worry about practice of jnana, karma or bhakti yogas.

The fruits of all these are automatically gained by chanting His names. The Lord is ever present in all objects and beings as the indwelling essence and is the only refuge and the safest as well. He guides the welfare of those who place their trust in Him and grants what is beneficial to each one impartially. In fact there is nothing that is unattainable, worldly or spiritual, by chanting the names of the Lord.