

Virus leaves 290 mn students out of school

UNESCO says the outbreak's global scale and speed of educational disruption is unparalleled

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ROME

Almost 300 million students worldwide faced weeks at home with Italy and India the latest to shut schools over COVID-19 outbreak, as the IMF urged an all-out global offensive against the epidemic.

More than 95,000 people have been infected and over 3,200 have died worldwide from the virus, which by Thursday had reached more than 80 countries and territories.

The U.S. State of California declared an emergency following its first fatality - raising the U.S. death toll to 11 - and a cruise ship was kept offshore after passengers and crew members developed symptoms.

Switzerland reported its first death from the outbreak on Thursday, while Bosnia and South Africa confirmed their first cases and Greece's cases surged after 21 travellers recently returned from a bus trip to Israel and Egypt



Education at risk: Officials checking the temperature of students before letting them enter a school in Tangerang, Indonesia, on Thursday. AFP

tested positive for the virus.

Most deaths and infections are in China, where the virus first emerged late last year, prompting the country to quarantine entire cities, temporarily shut factories and close schools indefinitely.

But it has quickly spread beyond China's borders.

Several countries have implemented extraordinary measures, with UNESCO say-

ing on Wednesday that school closures in more than a dozen countries have affected 290.5 million children.

In India, all primary schools in New Delhi will remain closed until the end of March to prevent the virus from spreading.

While temporary school closures during crises are not new, UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay said "the global

scale and speed of the current educational disruption is unparalleled and, if prolonged, could threaten the right to education".

Italy on Wednesday ordered schools and universities shut until March 15, ramping up its response as national fatalities rose to 148.

South Korea - second to China in terms of infections with cases jumping past 6,000 on Thursday - has

postponed the start of the next term until March 23.

In Japan, nearly all schools are closed after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for classes to be cancelled until early April.

Schools have also shut in Iran, where 107 people have died from the disease - alongside Italy, the deadliest outbreak outside China.

Beijing is now concerned about importing cases, with 20 infections brought from abroad so far.

No kissing

Saudi Arabia has suspended the year-round Islamic "umrah" pilgrimage, an unprecedented move that raises fresh uncertainty over the annual hajj.

New measures in Italy - where 11 towns with 50,000 have been under quarantine - include a month-long nationwide ban on fan attendance at sports events, and advising people to avoid greetings like kissing on the cheek or shaking hands.

Warren ends presidential bid, says not endorsing anyone yet

She says will take more time to decide whom to back

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, once a frontrunner in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, ended her campaign on Thursday, setting up a two-man duel between former Vice-President Joe Biden and Senator Bernie Sanders.

"I'm suspending our campaign for President," the 70-year-old progressive lawmaker said in remarks to her campaign staff.

"I may not be in the race for President in 2020, but this fight - our fight - is not over," Ms. Warren said. "And our place in this fight has not ended."



Elizabeth Warren

Ms. Warren said she was not ready, as of now, to endorse either fellow progressive Mr. Sanders or the moderate Mr. Biden. "Not today," Ms. Warren told reporters outside her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

"We don't have to decide that this minute," she said. "I

want to take a little time to think a little more."

Mr. Trump responded to Ms. Warren's withdrawal with a tweet mocking her and Michael Bloomberg, who quit on Wednesday after a disappointing Super Tuesday performance and endorsed Mr. Biden.

"Elizabeth 'Pocahontas' Warren, who was going nowhere except into Mini Mike's head, just dropped out of the Democrat Primary...THREE DAYS TOO LATE," Mr. Trump said.

"She cost Crazy Bernie, at least, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Texas," the President said of three of the States at stake on Super Tuesday.

U.K. airline Flybe shuts as demand drops over virus

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

The struggling British airline Flybe collapsed on Thursday amid drops in demand caused by the COVID-19 epidemic, leaving passengers stranded and threatening the viability of regional airports across the country.

Flybe's fall highlights the damage that the outbreak has had on the airline industry, which has cut back on flights as people avoid flying out of precaution.

The British regional airline narrowly avoided bankruptcy in January but had continued to lose money. Unions and the opposition attacked both the airline's owners and Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government for failing to act to save it.

"We're all a bit gutted - Flybe is a household name, we've been flying with them for 40 years and we really tried to do everything we could back at the turn of the year," Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said.

15 new deaths in Iran raise toll to 107

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

Iran on Thursday reported 15 new deaths, raising the national toll to 107, and said it would keep schools and universities closed until early April.

Data gathered by the agency from medical universities across Iran as of Wednesday night show at least 126 have died, as it lists the toll in Tehran and Gilan - two of the worst-hit provinces - as "unknown".

Japan to isolate Chinese, South Korean visitors

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

Japan will quarantine people coming from China and South Korea for two weeks on arrival to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, the country's Prime Minister said on Thursday.

"We will strengthen immigration quarantines on people from the two countries," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a Cabinet-level taskforce meeting. "We will ask them to stay in designat-

ed areas for two weeks and not to use public transport in the country," Mr. Abe added, saying the measures would come into force from March 9.

Mr. Abe said the measures were aimed at "relieving people's concerns" and preventing a further spread of the virus. The government has urged tourists from China and South Korea to put off travel to Japan and that it will cancel visas for travellers from the two countries.

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

In a sudden burst of changed momentum, former U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden converted his strong victory in the South Carolina primary into a launching pad for successes in States that voted on "Super Tuesday".

Helped by a string of endorsements from withdrawn centrist candidates such as Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar and Beto O'Rourke, besides Democrat elders such as former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Mr. Biden managed to consolidate the hitherto divided support for the moderates and notched a series of impressive victories in the southern States and surprisingly even in liberal Massachusetts, Maine and Minnesota.

In more good tidings for Mr. Biden's candidacy, billionaire candidate Michael Bloomberg withdrew from the race and endorsed him.

With the Democratic party establishment firmly putting in its weight behind Mr. Biden and the Vice-President managing to draw support from the same coalition that catapulted Hillary Clinton as the Democratic nominee in 2016 - African Americans, elderly citizens (above the age of 60), college educated white voters, a clear pathway seems to have emerged for the veteran politician who had failed in his previous two attempts for the nomination in 1988 and 2008. Meanwhile, with wins only in four States - importantly in the delegate-rich California - Senator Bernie Sanders could not carry forward the momentum he had gained after the victory in the Nevada caucus and is now relegated to an underdog rather than an insurgent frontrunner.



Bernie Sanders

which suggests that a section of the electorate who favour this economic agenda have voted for Mr. Biden.

Battle against Trump

This is likely due to concerns about Mr. Sanders' ability to win over the support of moderates and independents beyond Democrats in the electoral battle against President Donald Trump and here's where the weight of the party establishment and the multiple endorsements helped Mr. Biden's case. Polls show that undecided voters shifted onto the Biden bandwagon in large numbers not just on Super Tuesday but even in South Carolina.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sanders' trump card - his steady base and support among the youth has not really given him the advantage he has sought despite their ability to raise funds and volunteers quickly, as actual turnout numbers from this section have remained relatively tepid.

If in the coming weeks, Mr. Sanders brings forth his contrast with Mr. Biden, who despite his experience has shown an increasing penchant for gaffes and rambling speeches on the campaign trail and during debates, he does stand a chance in reversing the momentum yet again. Voters in States like Arizona, Florida, Illinois (who get to vote on March 17) and New York and Pennsylvania (April 28) will get to answer the question on who poses the strongest challenge to the prospects of a return of the Trump presidency.

The battle for the Democratic presidential ticket between the two septuagenarians is far from over.

ELSEWHERE



Dubai ruler abducted daughters: U.K. court

Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum ordered the abduction of two of his daughters and orchestrated a campaign of intimidation against his former wife, Princess Haya bint al-Hussein, a U.K. judge has ruled. REUTERS

Pakistan building collapse kills at least 11

At least 11 people, including seven women and three children, were killed and 22 others wounded when a five-storey residential complex collapsed in Karachi on Thursday, leaving many trapped in the rubble. AFP

Afghan war crimes probe to go on: ICC

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
THE HAGUE

Prosecutors at the International Criminal Court will investigate whether war crimes were committed in Afghanistan by the Taliban, Afghan military and U.S. forces after an appeals panel said on Thursday the "truth-seeking" inquiry should go ahead.

The ICC decision, which came days after the U.S.

agreed to pull its troops from the long-running conflict, opens the way for prosecutors to launch a full investigation, despite U.S. government opposition.

"The appeals chamber considers it appropriate to...authorise the investigation," presiding Judge Piotr Hofmanski said at the court in The Hague. He said prosecutors' preliminary examination in 2017 had found rea-

sonable grounds to believe war crimes were committed in Afghanistan and that the ICC has jurisdiction.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo quickly condemned the decision as "a truly breathtaking action by an unaccountable political institution, masquerading as a legal body."

"It is all the more reckless for this ruling to come just days after the U.S. signed a

historic peace deal on Afghanistan the best chance for peace in a generation."

Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda wants to investigate possible crimes committed between 2003 and 2014, including alleged mass killings of civilians by the Taliban, as well as the alleged torture of prisoners by Afghan authorities and to a lesser extent by U.S. forces and the CIA.

Turkey, Russia agree on ceasefire in Idlib

REUTERS
MOSCOW

Turkey and Russia agreed a ceasefire deal on Thursday in Syria's Idlib region, their two leaders said after lengthy talks in Moscow to contain a conflict, which has displaced nearly a million people in three months.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan agreed to establish a secure corridor near the M4 highway, which runs east to west through Idlib, and hold joint patrols along the road from March 15.

"I express hope that these

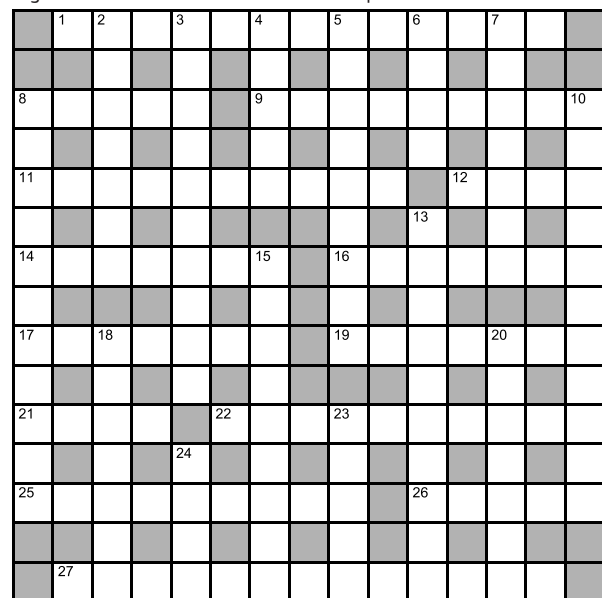
agreements will serve as a good basis for a cessation of military activity in the Idlib de-escalation zone (and) stop the suffering of the peaceful population and the growing humanitarian crisis," Mr. Putin said.

Mr. Erdogan told reporters the truce would come

into effect at midnight on Thursday. "We will work together to supply aid for the Syrians in need," he said, adding that Turkey retained the right "to respond to all (Syrian) regime attacks in the field." Russia and Turkey back opposing sides in Syria's conflict.

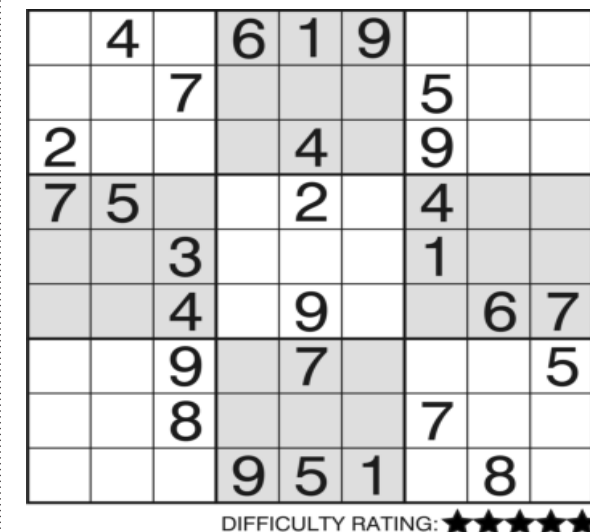
THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12876

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



- (set by Dr. X)
- 12 Straight trap to capture knight (4)
 - 14 Squealed about man heading for bawdy affair (7)
 - 16 Most marvellous lunch in retreat (7)
 - 17 Pasta smelt mostly foul, primarily inedible (7)
 - 19 Italian composer's most upset about wrong start to interlude (7)
 - 21 Concerning nationalist overwhelmed by rage (2,2)
 - 22 Slap cheek angrily after boy becomes a disgrace to family (5,5)
 - 25 Old-time soldiers improvised (9)
 - 26 Most knowledgeable daughter gets trophy (5)
 - 27 Fellow crossing limits is beginning to incite terrible disagreement (13)
 - 4 Mexican agave in woods is alluring (5)
 - 5 Where punished student might be standing, facing a difficult situation (2,1,6)
 - 6 Nasty politician finally abandons party (4)
 - 7 Newly born child found in shrine on a terrace (7)
 - 8 Facelift done to tackle largely delicate, inescapable truths (5,2,4)
 - 10 Drunk made up a story, keeping very quiet and secretive (11)
 - 13 Unsuccessful attempt to begin developing flatter ass (5, 5)
 - 15 Overwhelming diarrhoea? Essentially bad curry in restaurant (9)
 - 18 Musical passages producing titters (7)
 - 20 Where tipsy islander wanting last drop of Guinness might be? (7)
 - 23 Caught fish around river! Put in this? (5)
 - 24 American city in Iowa, mesmerizing (4)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12875

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

FAITH

Seeking the truth

Great masters go beyond their personality when they hit the highest point of self-realisation and enlightenment even as a river loses its individuality and gains totality when it merges with the ocean. Krishna, representing the Truth, transcends the historical present and the Gita teaching owes its profound level of perfection and relevance for all times to the fact that it is spoken from the standpoint of the Impersonal Supreme Brahman, pointed out Srimati Sunanda in a discourse. The instruction is for every being to raise oneself towards a higher level of realisation of truth.

God, a guru, or the sastras can show the way and it is for every being to make the effort to tread the spiritual path. The Supreme Brahman pervades the entire created universe and also protects it by His Divine Sankalpa. Brahman remains as the final destination for all as well. So, Brahman is the essential principle enabling consolidated activities and experiences in life. The sun, the moon, the stars, etc. owe their radiance and power to illumine to Brahman. So too is the brilliance and heat in fire and the potency in water. He is the Omkara in the Vedas, sound in space and the atma in beings endowing all created objects and beings with specific functions and faculties. This truth can be grasped by observing and meditating on the external universe and also by looking inwards into oneself.

Unity and diversity are derived from the Supreme Brahman. The Oneness is the Truth while the diversity is the manifestation and cannot be called an illusion. A bhakta visiting temples to seek God who resides there in the form of the deity also sees the same God as the essence in all creation, including his self. Seeking the truth of the atma leads one to a state when he is not affected by any sorrow of any kind.