

Virus-hit Iran warns of using force to halt travel

The virus has killed 124 people and infected 4,747 in the Islamic Republic; Foreign Minister's adviser is among those dead

ASSOCIATED PRESS
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

Iran said on Friday that the COVID-19 epidemic has killed 124 people amid 4,747 confirmed cases as authorities warned they may use "force" to limit travel between cities.

The threat may be to stop people from using the closed schools and universities as an excuse to go to the Caspian Sea and other Iranian vacation spots. Semi-official news agencies in Iran posted images of long lines of traffic of people trying to reach the Caspian coast from Tehran on Friday despite the authorities earlier telling people to remain in their cities.

Iran on Thursday announced it would put checkpoints in place to limit travel between major cities, hoping to stem the spread of the virus.

Iran cancelled Friday

prayers across its major cities. Elsewhere in the region, Iraq cancelled Friday prayers in Karbala, where a weekly sermon is delivered on behalf of the country's top Shia cleric. Authorities in the United Arab Emirates, meanwhile, limited prayers to two verses of the Quran so they lasted no longer than 10 minutes, over concerns about the virus.

17 more deaths

On Friday, the Iran government announced 17 more deaths from the virus, as the overall number of cases soared. "We have confirmed 1,234 new cases, which is a record in the past few days," Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told a news conference, raising the total number of infections to 4,747.

The new cases "are probably those who had been infected with the virus two



Germproof: Firefighters disinfecting a shopping centre to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, in northern Tehran on Friday. • AP

weeks ago and... just came to us with symptoms," he added.

Iran has been scrambling to contain the rapid spread of coronavirus, which has in-

fecting people in all 31 of its provinces.

The official said Tehran has 1,413 confirmed cases so far, which is the highest among all provinces and

makes it an "epicentre" for the virus.

In Tehran, firefighters sprayed disinfectant on an 18-km length of famous Vahd Avenue, some from fire-

trucks and others walking along its sidewalks, spraying ATMs and storefronts.

Adviser to FM dies

An adviser to Iran's Foreign Minister has died from coronavirus, the official IRNA news agency reported. Hossein Sheikholeslam, "a veteran and revolutionary diplomat" died late on Thursday, IRNA said.

Six of those who died from coronavirus are politicians or government officials. A former Ambassador to Syria, he also served as Deputy Foreign Minister from 1981 to 1997. He was also one of the students involved in the 1979 Iran hostage crisis.

The coronavirus has also claimed the lives of other high-profile Iranian officials, including Mohammad Mir-mohammadi of the Expediency Council which advises supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

27 dead in Kabul attack, IS claims responsibility

Abdullah Abdullah escapes unharmed



An injured man being carried in a stretcher after the attack in Kabul on Friday. • AP

REUTERS
KABUL

Gunmen attacked a ceremony in Kabul on Friday, killing at least 27 people in the first major attack on the Afghan capital since the U.S. reached an agreement with the Taliban to withdraw U.S. troops.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, the group's Amaq news agency reported on Friday on its telegram channel.

A top Afghan political leader, Abdullah Abdullah, was present at the event but escaped unharmed.

55 wounded

Fifty-five people were wounded, according to the Afghan Ministry of Health.

"The attack started with a boom, apparently a rocket landed in the area, Abdullah and some other politicians... escaped the attack unhurt," Mr. Abdullah's spokesman, Fraidoon Kwazon, who was also present, told Reuters by telephone.

Broadcaster Tolo News showed live footage of people running for cover as gunfire was heard.

A Health Ministry spokesman said the casualty toll could rise. Dead and wounded were being ferried from the site by ambulance.

A NATO source said that

the death toll was slightly higher: more than 30 killed, with 42 wounded, 20 of whom were in a serious condition.

3 gunmen killed

Afghan defence forces continued to fight gunmen throughout the day, finally securing the area by killing about three gunmen in the late afternoon, according to Ministry of Interior spokesman Nasrat Rahimi.

The gathering had marked the anniversary of the death of Abdul Ali Mazari, an ethnic Hazara leader who was killed in 1995 after being taken prisoner by the Taliban. Several people were killed in a similar attack on the same commemoration last year, which Islamic State said was carried out by its militants.

President Ashraf Ghani tweeted that the attack was "a crime against humanity and against the national unity of Afghanistan".

Mr. Abdullah, who escaped, was runner-up in the last three Afghan presidential elections, each of which he disputed. He has served as Chief Executive of a coalition government since 2014 and is also a former foreign minister. The attack was one of the largest on civilians in Afghanistan in a year.

Make containment highest priority: WHO

REUTERS
GENEVA/LONDON

All countries should make containing the outbreak of COVID-19 their top priority, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday, pointing to Iran "national action plan" to combat one of the world's worst outbreaks after a slow start.

The UN agency stressed that slowing down the epidemic allowed hospitals to prepare and save lives, while warning that there was no evidence that spread would wane during the approaching summer months in the northern hemisphere.

"We are now on the verge of reaching 1,00,000 confirmed cases," WHO director general Tedros Adhanom



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, D-G, WHO

Ghebreyesus told a daily news briefing. "(The epidemic) is geographically expanding and deeply concerning."

"We are continuing to recommend that all countries make containment their

highest priority," he added. "In a globalised world, the only option is to stand together."

In fact, the tally of cases has already surpassed 1,00,000 – as the WHO's figures have generally slightly lagged behind tallies others. As of Friday, more than 1,00,300 people had been infected globally, according to a Reuters tally based on statements from Health Ministries and government officials.

Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of WHO's emergencies programme, said when asked about Iran's mushrooming outbreak that it resembled China and South Korea, which quickly uncovered more cases as they be-

gan to do active disease surveillance. "It is much better that we understand the extent of the problem. So we commend the move towards more aggressive, targeted surveillance."

Mr. Ryan, asked about the virus' behaviour in Europe's warm summer months, said: "We do not know yet what the behaviour of this virus will be in different climatic conditions. We have to assume that the virus will continue to have the capacity to spread."

He added: "It is a false hope to say yes it will just disappear in summertime, like influenza virus... There is no evidence right now to suggest that that will happen."

Trump approves \$8.3 bn to fight COVID-19 in U.S.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump on Friday signed an \$8.3 billion measure to help tackle the outbreak that has killed 12 people in the U.S. and infected more than 200.

The legislation provides federal public health agencies with money for vaccines, tests and potential treatments and helps state and local governments prepare and respond to the threat.

The rapid spread of the virus has rocked financial markets, interrupted travel and threatens to affect everyday life in the U.S.

Mr. Trump had planned

to sign the Bill during a visit to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. But he told reporters on Friday that concerns were raised about "one person who was potentially infected" who worked at the CDC.

He said the person had since tested negative for the virus and that he still hopes to visit the agency again.

The Senate passed the measure to help tackle the outbreak in hopes of reassuring the public and accelerating the government's response to the virus. Its rapid spread is threatening to upend everyday life in the U.S. and across the globe.

ELSEWHERE



French cardinal quits for failing to report 'abuser'

LYON Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Archbishop of Lyon Philippe Barbarin for failing to report an alleged paedophile priest. He has long been accused of turning a blind eye to decades of child abuse in his diocese that blighted many lives. AFP

Navalny takes Russia to European court

MOSCOW Russian politician Alexei Navalny has filed a complaint at the European Court of Human Rights against a money laundering probe that Moscow launched to "curb his political activities". REUTERS

Syria ceasefire takes hold, but residents are cynical

Deal seeks to end Moscow-backed offensive on Idlib

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
IDLIB

A new ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey took hold on Friday in northwestern Syria, but after years of failed truces some residents say they are not holding their breath.

The deal intends to stop a deadly Moscow-backed regime offensive since December against the country's last major rebel bastion of Idlib, which has displaced almost a million people from their homes and shelters.

"The regime and Russia always play this game," said 26-year-old Fadi, who has been displaced from second

city Aleppo and now lives in Idlib. "They gain control over new areas and then they agree on a truce, then months later they start a huge military operation all over again and take some more."

Damascus forces have clawed back a sizeable chunk of Idlib province from jihadists and allied rebels in the past years, in bursts of fighting punctuated by failed truces.

The government has retaken large swathes of Syria with help from its Russian ally since 2015, through a combination of deadly military assaults and Russian-bro-

kered surrender deals.

The Idlib bastion, one of the last regions to hold out on the Turkish border, is dominated by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate but Turkey-backed rebels are also present.

Many among the region's three million residents – half of whom fled from other parts of Syria – have little faith in promises made by Damascus or Moscow.

Abu Saeed, 24, his wife and little boy, came to live in Idlib after fleeing the Damascus suburbs in 2018. "I'm not optimistic about this deal, and I don't expect anything from it," he said.

Blast near U.S. Embassy in Tunisia

REUTERS
TUNIS

Two militants on a motorbike blew themselves up outside the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia on Friday, killing a policeman and injuring several others in the country's most serious attack in months.

The explosion took place near the Embassy's main gate, where a Reuters journalist saw a scorched, damaged motorbike and a damaged police vehicle lying amid debris as police gathered around and a helicopter whirled overhead.

The Interior Ministry said two militants were killed carrying out the attack and five police officers were injured.

Pakistan against any security role for India in Afghanistan

Foreign Minister says Delhi plays the role of a 'spoiler'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has said Pakistan does not want any security role for India in Afghanistan as he accused New Delhi of playing the role of a "spoiler" in the war-torn country, according to a media report.

Addressing the Senate on Wednesday, Mr. Qureshi said that Pakistan neither desires any security role for India in Afghanistan nor wants the presence of militant organisations – al-Qaeda and the ISIS – in the landlocked country, *The Nation* reported.



Shah Mahmood Qureshi

ghanistan, who want to get their own objectives," Mr. Qureshi said.

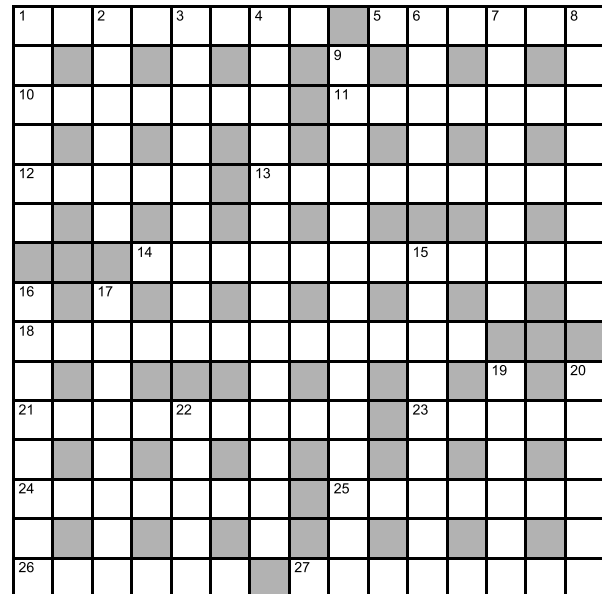
India has been a key stakeholder in Afghanistan as it has already spent around \$2 billion in reconstruction of the war-ravaged country.

Ahead of a peace deal between the U.S. and the Taliban, India conveyed to the U.S. that pressure on Pakistan to crack down on terror networks operating from its soil must be kept up though Islamabad's cooperation for peace in Afghanistan is crucial.

He also said that Pakistan wanted to resolve all issues with Afghanistan bilaterally.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12877

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



(set by Dr. X)

- 12 Money wasted! Experts in America making a bloomer (5)
- 13 Rise and unite to break barricade after force leaves (9)
- 14 Where money might be under one's control (2,4,6)
- 18 Essentially shady politician thrashed with fervour by soldiers in stadium (12)
- 21 Grave start to suspenseful novel! Hercule Poirot's debut (9)
- 23 Signal to the audience to stand in line (5)
- 24 I shout to rescue English female in steep part of glacier (7)
- 25 Simple man left grain for hermit (7)
- 26 Most artful fashion styles (6)
- 27 Retired groups tackling hunger pangs (8)

- 4 Online, a cheat slyly entraps man to get a hidden advantage (2,3,3,4)
- 6 Unhealthily thin person close to despair, overwhelmed by heroin (5)
- 7 Old nonconformists steal cocaine concealed in boxes (8)
- 8 Workforce involved in manufacture of steel components (8)
- 9 Where an attester might sign showing restraint (14)
- 15 When asked for, ace accepts a little risky mission (2,7)
- 16 Complains about idiot's drunken revelries (8)
- 17 Boy about to explode violently at last in extreme anger (8)
- 19 Unknown man climbing to rescue fool in peak (6)
- 20 Start to joust with slippery characters stealing wife's pearls (6)
- 22 Lots of fellows drinking alcohol heartily (5)

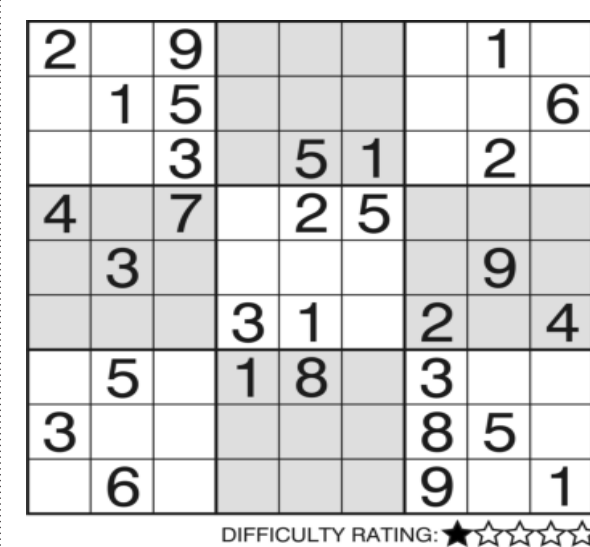
ACROSS

- 1 Cable in electric vehicle contains electronic part (8)
- 5 Practical union, long-lasting, needs time (6)
- 10 Prince involved in scrap with a model (7)
- 11 Rushed back with speed to report (7)

DOWN

- 1 Manage to protect husband in peril (6)
- 2 Slips in Singapore on vacation, overwhelmed by drinks (6)
- 3 Musical effects represented as sliding (9)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12876

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Distinct, yet responsible

In many sections of the Gita, the Lord shows how His presence can be recognised in each and every aspect of the universe, which has its very source in Him. Yet He remains distinct and beyond creation, though totally responsible for its upkeep at all levels, pointed out Srmati Sunanda in a discourse. This unique relationship between Brahman and creation is well illustrated in the analogy of the wonderful phenomenon in nature, the ocean.

There is constant activity in the ocean when the waves rise and fall in succession. The waves are of various kinds, high or low, blue or green in colour, clear or frothy in appearance and texture. But none of them can be what they are if there is no ocean. So too Brahman pervades the entire creation in its gross and subtle aspects in totality, but at the same time is not connected to any of these at any point of time. He remains distinct, endless, birthless, and the essence of eternal consciousness that causes all these multifarious activities in creation.

Brahman endows the five elements – akasa, wind, fire, water and earth – with their respective qualities: every kind of species in the world, mobile and immobile, animate and inanimate, with individual traits; every human being with the senses, mind and intelligence, intellect, and the physical entity that enables them to live and function. Likewise, when He says that he is in desire that is not contrary to dharma, an important feature of human nature is explained. Each one has desires of various kinds in the course of one's life. But God is present in human desire when one wishes to know the purpose of life and in one's intention to be a better human being. This is possible when one gains a mature outlook and sheds the desire for worldly attractions.