

Rajapaksa pitches brother for President

Country has asked for him: Mahinda Rajapaksa

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO
Leader of Opposition and former President Mahinda Rajapaksa on Sunday named his brother and controversial figure Gotabaya Rajapaksa as presidential candidate of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP or People's Front).
Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa also officially took charge as leader of the less-than-four-year-old party, that his loyalists founded in 2016, breaking away from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

Presidential elections are due before the end of the year and the incumbent United National Party (UNP) is yet to announce its candidate, amid apparent disagreements between its leader Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the party's deputy leader Sajith Premadasa. President Maithripala Sirisena who leads the SLFP-remnant is likely to support Mr. Rajapaksa, according to political sources.

Making the announcement at Sugathadasa stadium that was packed with Rajapaksa supporters, the former President said: "I am not the one choosing him. You have already chosen



Brothers in arms: Sri Lanka's former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa (R) with his brother and former president Mahinda Rajapaksa in Colombo on Sunday. ■ REUTERS

him. The country has asked for him." Mr. Rajapaksa, who held office for a decade from 2005, cannot run for Presidency due to a 2015 legislation that places a two-term limit. However, in a recent media interview, he has said he would be the party's prime ministerial candidate in the general elections scheduled next year.

Mr. Gotabaya, 70, rose to prominence during Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa's presidency, when he was appointed defence secretary. While supporters hail him as a "hero", for his crucial role in

ending the war that the armed forces fought with the rebel Tigers critics and victims, especially among the Tamil minority, accuse him of committing war crimes and fiercely oppose him. He is linked to Sri Lanka's infamous "white-van abductions" targeting dissidents. In the post-war years, he was accused of backing reactionary Sinhala Buddhist groups notorious for inciting violence against minority Muslims. Even as he faces trial for financial fraud and murder, Mr.

Gotabaya has denied all al-

legations and maintained that they are politically motivated falsehoods.

Addressing supporters on Sunday, Mr. Gotabaya recalled the praise he received from a senior military colleague who called him "an officer who takes initiative over and above the normal call of duty". "It was that quality that helped me end 30 years of terrorism, in just three and a half years," he said. Further he vowed he "will never allow extremist terrorism" in the country and pledged to enhance national security, apparently refer-

ring to fears that gripped the country after the Easter terror attacks in April. He would safeguard the country's sovereignty and protect it from "external forces' interference," he said.

One of the early reactions from the Rajapaksa's political rivals came from Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera Sunday evening. "The barbarians are at the gate!" he tweeted, adding: "The symbol of white van terror of the Rajapakse era, the 'ugly American', has today launched his campaign for the presidency. Do #SriLankans want to return to the isolation and darkness of the past? #lka

Meanwhile, Mr. Gotabaya's candidacy is also being challenged by sections that have questions about his citizenship. A dual citizen of Sri Lanka and the United States, Mr. Gotabaya has said that he has renounced his American citizenship, as Sri Lankan law prohibits dual citizens form contesting for the highest office.

However, the State-run *Sunday Observer* on Sunday reported that a couple of police complaints made by civil society activists on alleged irregularities in his Sri Lankan citizenship, passports and electoral registration could potentially pose a threat to his candidacy.

'We're still here': Hong Kong protesters return to streets

Police counter stone-pelting with teargas shells

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HONG KONG

Thousands of pro-democracy protesters hit the streets of Hong Kong for a tenth weekend in a row on Sunday, defying police who fired volleys of tear gas at several locations.

The protests followed a night of "hit-and-run" rallies across the city and came after Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam insisted she would not meet the demands of demonstrators.

Early Sunday afternoon, thousands of protesters met in the city's Victoria Park, braving hot and humid conditions and a police ban on the gathering.

"The police should try their best to maintain public security instead of rejecting our request to march," said a 25-year-old protester who gave only her family name, Wong.

"We're still here... We won't worry that much about illegal assembly. We still have our rights," she told AFP.

Police also denied the protesters a permit for a second rally in the city's working class Sham Shui Po neighbourhood.



Police crackdown: Teargas shells being fired towards protesters in Wan Chai district of Hong Kong on Sunday. ■ AFP

But the pro-democracy activists, whose protests are now in their third month, defied authorities in both locations, and staged additional protests in several other parts of the city.

Persistent protests

Sunday's protests come after a night of cat-and-mouse demonstrations around the city, with protesters taking their mantra of flexible action - "Be Water" - to new heights. And while riot police fired tear gas and arrested 16 people, the two sides avoided the lengthy pitched battles that have been seen in recent weeks.

"Our aim is no injuries, no bleeding and not getting arrested," said a 17-year-old student protester who gave his family name as Chan.

"I think our previous tactics of staying in one place led to many arrests and injuries... We need to 'be water' to avoid injuries," he told AFP at the Victoria Park gathering on Sunday.

The demonstrations that began more than two months ago in opposition to a contentious bill allowing extraditions to mainland China have morphed into a broader bid to reverse a slide in democratic freedoms in the city.

IN BRIEF



Brazilian judge orders release of Batista

RIO DE JANEIRO
A Brazilian judge ordered the release of ex-billionaire Eike Batista early on Sunday after he was detained for violating his house arrest. The judge ruled that the detention of the magnate, once Brazil's richest man, "violated the Constitution". ■ AFP

Statue of Ranjit Singh vandalised in Pakistan

LAHORE
A statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who ruled over Punjab for close to 40 years in the early 19th century, was vandalised by two men here on Saturday. Both were arrested on Sunday under blasphemy laws. ■ PTI

Israel police, Palestinians clash at holy site

JERUSALEM
Israeli security forces and Palestinian worshippers clashed at a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site on Sunday as overlapping Jewish and Muslim holidays led to tensions, wounding dozens of Palestinians and four policemen. Police fired sound grenades as Palestinian protests intensified at the highly sensitive Al-Aqsa mosque compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount. ■ AFP

Saudi alliance strikes after Aden 'coup'

Around 40 people died in the flare-up

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ADEN (YEMEN)

A Saudi-led coalition on Sunday launched a strike against Yemen's southern separatists after they seized the presidential palace in second city Aden in deadly fighting that threatened to push the war-ravaged nation deeper into turmoil.

The seizure, decried by the Riyadh-backed Yemeni government as a UAE-supported coup, reflects deep divisions between secessionists and loyalist forces, both of whom have fought Shiite Huthi rebels.

"The coalition targeted an area that poses a direct threat to one of the important sites of the legitimate government," a statement said, calling on the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) to withdraw from positions seized in Aden or face further attacks. It did not specify the target but residents in Aden told AFP it was an air strike against separatist camps in the city.

Since the fighting flared on Thursday, around 40 people have been killed and 260 others including civilians wounded, according to the UN.



Firefighters extinguishing a blaze following clashes in Mansoura, Aden on Sunday.

"It is heart-breaking that during Eid-al-Adha, families are mourning the death of their loved ones instead of celebrating together in peace and harmony," said Lise Grande, United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen.

Riyadh-based Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi is backed by the coalition - led by Saudi Arabia and its ally the United Arab Emirates - that is battling the Iran-aligned Huthis.

But another force in the anti-Huthi coalition - the UAE-trained Security Belt Force - has since Wednesday been battling loyalists in Aden, the temporary base of Hadi's government.

Syria regime gains ground in Idlib push

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIRUT

Syrian regime forces seized a town on the edge of Idlib province on Sunday, a monitor said, their first ground advance since resuming an offensive on the jihadist-dominated enclave more than three months ago.

The region of northwestern Syria, which is home to an estimated three million civilians, has come under almost daily Syrian and Russian bombardment since late April.

The most recent fighting focused on an area straddling Idlib and Hama provinces, a monitor said, and claimed dozens of lives on both sides.

"Regime forces seized the town of Al-Habeet, in Idlib's southern countryside, at dawn," Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor, said.

The area has escaped the control of President Bashar al-Assad's regime since 2015 and is the last major bastion of opposition to his regime and its allies. The capture of Al-Habeet, a key strategic target for pro-regime forces, came after another night of deadly fighting, the war monitor said.

North Korea: latest test was 'new weapon'

Saturday launch is DPRK's fifth test in two weeks

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a "new weapon" test, the state media reported on Sunday, the latest in a series of launches that U.S. President Donald Trump has played down as Washington seeks to restart nuclear talks with Pyongyang.

The report carried by the



In this television grab, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (right) watching the test-firing of a weapon system. ■ AP/KRT

Korean Central News Agency followed Mr. Trump's comments that Mr. Kim had expressed a willingness to

meet once the U.S.-South Korean exercises are over and apologised for the slew of missile tests.

Afghan leader rejects foreign interference

ASSOCIATED PRESS
KABUL

Afghanistan's President on Sunday rejected foreign interference as the United States and the Taliban appear to be closing in on a peace deal without the Afghan government at the table.

President Ashraf Ghani spoke during the Muslim holiday Eid-al-Adha and as U.S. and Taliban negotiators continue their work in the Gulf nation of Qatar, where the insurgents have a political office.

Speaking after the Eid prayers, Mr. Ghani said "Our

future cannot be decided outside, whether in the capital cities of our friends, neighbors or neighbors. The fate of Afghanistan will be decided here in this homeland," he said. "We don't want anyone to intervene in our affairs."

U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is seeking a peace deal by Sept. 1, weeks before the vote. The two sides are expected to agree on the withdrawal of some 20,000 U.S. and NATO troops in return for Taliban guarantees that Afghanistan would not be a base for other extremist groups.

Norway mosque shooting an 'attempted act of terror'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
OSLO

The shooting at a mosque near Oslo is being treated as an "attempted act of terrorism", Norwegian police said on Sunday.

"We are looking at an attempted act of terror," acting chief of the police operation Rune Skjold told a press conference.

Mr. Skjold said the investigation had shown that the man appeared to hold "far-right" and "anti-immigrant" views.

The suspect entered the al-Noor Islamic Centre on Saturday afternoon armed

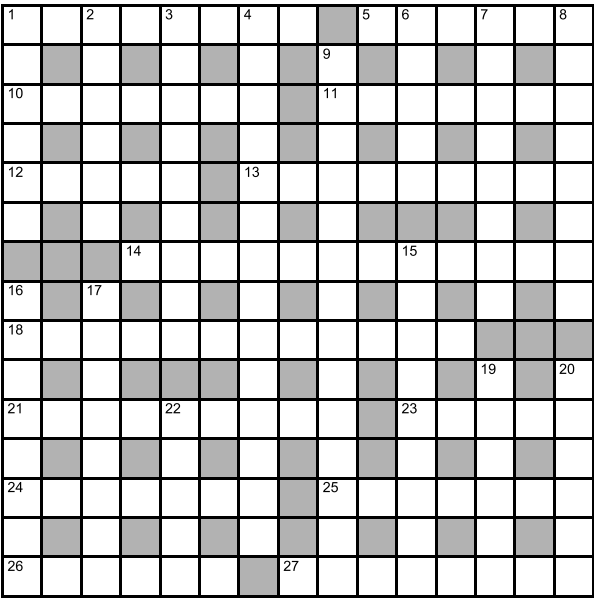
with multiple weapons and opened fire, before being overpowered by a man who suffered "minor injuries" in the process.

Only three people were inside the mosque at the time of the attack, and police said they recovered two firearms from the scene.

Hours after Saturday attack, the body of a woman linked to the suspect was found in a house in Baerum.

Norway was the scene of one of the worst-ever attacks by a right-wing extremist in July 2011, when 77 people were killed by Anders Behring Breivik.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12702



■ ACROSS

- 1 Bailiff has list of employees (8)
- 5 State to allow right to education for a group (6)
- 10 Language of money (7)
- 11 Put in place a glass to hold a flower... (7)
- 12 ...for a flower go to the plant (5)

(set by Arden)

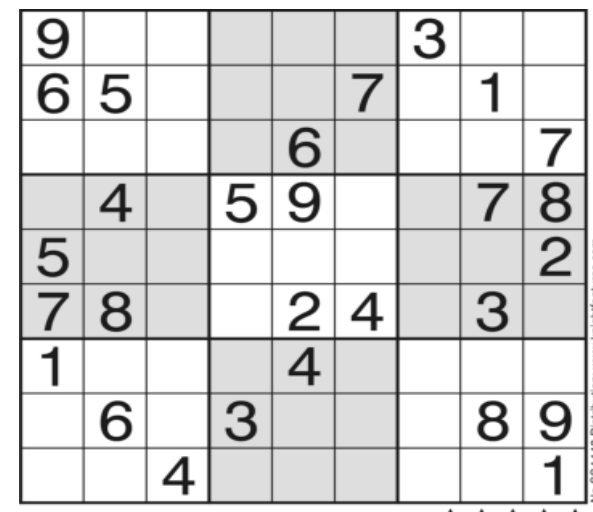
- 13 Will wine drinking teams refuse? (9)
- 14 Hijacked, needed right representation (12)
- 18 One allowed to enter country - it will make it null and void (12)
- 21 Girl gets a dog back, it's nothing much (9)
- 23 Cheese crates, sugar coated perhaps (5)
- 24 Reserved accommodation assumed backward (7)
- 25 Put off? Force hard into it being tense (7)
- 26 Glare is less after midnight (6)
- 27 Spoke about exotic island, and off to another fun place (3,5)

■ DOWN

- 1 Flower - first time girl wore a flower (6)
- 2 Materials extremely powerful, leading to disease (6)

- 3 Withstood a lot of wild growth, it's poisonous (9)
- 4 Red marigold, find it just about average (4,2,8)
- 6 First to go in the initial phase (5)
- 7 Ego, separately work on it - it will keep you well groomed (8)
- 8 Drug taking - a bird's freedom (8)
- 9 Not taking responsibility for money transaction (7,3,4)
- 15 Pulls billionaires together, named in parts (9)
- 16 Tasting rich perhaps beyond a point (8)
- 17 One against rise, rocky road for a scientist (8)
- 19 Enthusiastic to shoot, try to get his head (4,2)
- 20 Power - the French have some stakes (6)
- 22 Tantalise, like stop/start (5)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12701

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

What is Bakrid?

Id-ul-Azha is the commemoration of sacrifice by Prophet Hazrath Ibrahim celebrated the world over by the Muslims annually on the 10th of the Islamic month of Zilhaj.

One night Hazrath Ibrahim (Alaihisssalam or peace be upon him) saw in a vision that he was sacrificing his then only son Ismail (pbuh). It was a dream and in reality it was an order from the Omnipotent Allah which demanded sacrifice both from the father and the son. Hazrath Ibrahim consulted his son Hazrath Ismail, also a Prophet, who in turn readily consented. The rising sun of the 10th of Zilhaj saw the scene of a father preparing to sacrifice his son in implicit obedience to his Maker. Hazrath Ibrahim (pbuh) walked towards the hill of Marwa along with Ismail (pbuh). Ibrahim (pbuh) put his arm around Ismail (pbuh) and hugged him with tear-streaked face. He laid him down, blind-folded himself and got ready to perform the sacrifice.

Disappointment flooded through Ibrahim (pbuh) as the thoughts finally took shape. Surprise was in store for Ibrahim (pbuh) when he saw his son Ismail (pbuh) standing, his eyes sparkling with vitality and a smile on his tranquil face. Hazrath Ibrahim (pbuh) construed that his sacrifice had been rejected. Thereupon Allah said: "We called out to him 'O Abraham! Thou hast already fulfilled vision! - thus indeed Do we reward those who do right. For this was obviously a trial - And we ransomed him with a Great Sacrifice. And we left (This blessing) for him among generations (To come) in later times" (The Holy Qur'an: XXXVII-104 to 108). Allah requires our will and devotion (22:37) and sacrificing the goat is one of the rites of the Haj to be performed by every Muslim who can afford it.

Mir Mazher Hussain, Chennai