

# U.S. backs Saudi's 'right to defend itself'

Iranian regime's threatening behaviour will not be tolerated, says Secretary of State Pompeo

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
DUBAI

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Thursday that America backs Saudi Arabia's "right to defend itself" after a weekend attack targeted the heart of its oil industry, comments coming after he described the assault as an "act of war".

The attacks have reignited fears over a wider conflagration in the region, as tensions remain high over Iran's collapsing nuclear deal with world powers.

Mr. Pompeo's comments on Twitter came as he was in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, after meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Kingdom's Defense Minister. The Saudis on Wednesday displayed missile and drone wreckage at a press conference, and cited other evidence they alleged shows the raid was "unquestionably sponsored by Iran".



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo being greeted by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah. ■ AFP

Iran, which has denied involvement in the attack, warned the U.S. it will retaliate immediately if it is targeted. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif separately accused U.S. allies and officials of trying to "deceive" President Donald Trump into entering a war against Tehran.

Mr. Pompeo wrote his tweet early Thursday after his meeting with Prince Mo-

ammed over Saturday's drone and cruise missile attack on a crucial oil processing facility and oil field. Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels have claimed the attack, but the U.S. alleges Iran carried out the assault.

Mr. Pompeo called the attacks "unprecedented." "The U.S. stands with Saudi Arabia and supports its right to defend itself," Mr. Pompeo said. "The Iranian

regime's threatening behaviour will not be tolerated."

President Donald Trump has been noncommittal on whether he would order U.S. military retaliation. He separately said on Wednesday that he is moving to increase financial sanctions on Tehran over the attack, without elaborating. Iran already is subject to a crushing American sanctions program targeting its crucial oil industry.

The UAE announced on Thursday it had joined a U.S.-led coalition to protect waterways across the Mideast after an attack on Saudi oil installations.

The state-run WAM news agency quoted Salem al-Zaabi of the Emirati Foreign Ministry as saying the UAE joined the coalition to "ensure global energy security." Saudi Arabia joined the coalition on Wednesday. Australia, Bahrain and the U.K. are also taking part.

## Attack will trigger all-out war: Iran

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TEHRAN

Iran's Foreign Minister has said a military strike on Iran would trigger "all-out war", as the U.S. and its Gulf allies accuse Iran of being behind attacks on Saudi oil facilities.

Asked about the consequence of "an American or Saudi military strike on Iran" in an interview with CNN aired on Thursday, Mohammad Javad Zarif responded: "An all-out war."

"We don't want war, we don't want to engage in a military confrontation," he said, warning it would lead to "a lot of casualties". "But we won't blink to defend our territory."

# Is the reign of 'King Bibi' over?

Deadlock continues as main parties fail to reach consensus

STANLEY JOHNY

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suffered a major political setback on Tuesday when results of parliamentary election were out. Mr. Netanyahu, Israel's longest serving Prime Minister who was in power for 10 consecutive years and was hoping to win a fifth term in office, failed to win a majority in the 120-member Knesset.

When almost all of the votes were counted, Mr. Netanyahu's right-religious coalition won 55 seats, six short of majority. His Likud party's performance was worse than the last election. The Likud won 31 seats, down from 35 in April. The Likud's main rival, the Blue and White, led by former army chief Benny Gantz, emerged as the single largest party with 33 seats. Mr. Gantz's centrist coalition has 44 seats.

Does it mean the reign of Mr. Netanyahu, who is called "King Bibi" by his supporters, finally over? It's too early to reach any such conclusion. Based on the results, there are different possibilities. For now, no coalition has majority. And it's not clear who President Reuven Rivlin will call to form the government. Mr. Netanyahu hopes that he will get the first-mover advantage as his coalition has 55 seats. But Blue and White is the largest party, and if the Joint List, the Arab parties' alliance that has won 13 seats, backs Mr. Gantz, his bloc will have 57 MPs.

### The king-maker

While both main parties are in a deadlock, Avigdor Lieberman, whose right-wing secular party Yisrael Beiteinu has won eight seats, has emerged as the king-maker. Mr. Lieberman, a former al-



Political gridlock: Benjamin Netanyahu. ■ REUTERS

ly-turned-rival of Mr. Netanyahu, is not part of any coalition. After the April election, he refused to back Mr. Netanyahu, forcing the Prime Minister to recommend the second poll. If Mr. Lieberman backs the Likud now, Mr. Netanyahu could

### NEWS ANALYSIS

return to power. But it looks impossible as he has ruled out any tie-up with Mr. Netanyahu's religious allies such as the Shas and the United Torah Judaism (UTJ), which have won nine and eight seats, respectively. Mr. Lieberman wants to end orthodox Jewish parties' influence over the government and promote secular legislation. Mr. Netanyahu, on Wednesday evening, met his allies and assured them that he won't abandon them for a new coalition.

**What are the possibilities?** Mr. Lieberman wants a unity government between the Blue and White and the Likud led by Mr. Gantz that would sideline both the Jewish religious parties and the Arab parties. That will mean the Netanyahu era is over. More troubles are awaiting the Prime Minister as he could be indicted for corruption in the coming weeks.

But Mr. Netanyahu hasn't conceded defeat. He has al-

so called for a unity government - he wants the Blue and White to join his right-religious coalition, not him joining a Blue and White-Yisrael Beiteinu alliance. On Thursday, leaders of all the parties in his right-religious bloc have signed a document backing Mr. Netanyahu for Prime Minister. But Mr. Gantz has ruled out any alliance with the religious parties. There are three in Mr. Netanyahu's bloc - the ultra-orthodox UTJ and Shas and the religious nationalist Yamina. If either of the two leaders changes their stance, a unity government is possible. Otherwise, the deadlock will continue.

Another possibility is of Mr. Gantz forming the government with support from the Yisrael Beiteinu and the Joint List (Arab parties). But Mr. Lieberman has said he won't sit in a government with the Arab parties ("not in this universe and not in a parallel universe"), while Ayman Odeh, leader of the Joint List, has said he's looking to become the first Arab opposition leader in the Knesset. Despite their initial protestations, a Blue and White-Labour-Yisrael Beiteinu government with outside support from the Joint List can't be ruled out.

And if no leader manages to form a coalition, there will be a third election.

# U.S. drone strike kills 30, injures 40 in Afghanistan

Attack aimed at IS hits farm workers



Villagers carrying the coffin of one of the victims after a drone strike in Khogyani district on Thursday. ■ REUTERS

REUTERS  
JALALABAD/ KABUL

A U.S. drone strike intended to hit an Islamic State (IS) hideout in Afghanistan killed at least 30 civilians resting after a day's labour in the fields, officials said on Thursday.

The attack on Wednesday night also injured another 40 people after accidentally targeting farmers and labourers who had just finished collecting pine nuts at Wazir Tangi in eastern Nangarhar province, three Afghan officials told Reuters.

"The workers had lit a bonfire and were sitting together when a drone targeted them," tribal elder Malik Rahat Gul said.

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry and a senior U.S. official in Kabul confirmed the drone strike, but did not share details of civilian casualties. "U.S. forces conducted a drone strike against Da'esh (IS) terrorists in Nangarhar," said Colonel Sonny Leggett, a spokesman for U.S. forces. "We are aware of allegations of the death of non-combatants and are working with offi-

cials to determine the facts." About 14,000 U.S. troops are in Afghanistan, training and advising Afghan security forces and conducting counter-insurgency operations against insurgents.

Attallah Khogyani, a spokesman for the provincial governor of Nangarhar, said at least nine bodies had been collected from the site. Haidar Khan, who owns the pine nut fields, said about 150 workers were there for harvesting, with some still missing as well as the confirmed dead and injured.

**Taliban attack** Meanwhile, a Taliban mini-truck bomb killed at least 20 people and wounded 95 when it exploded near a hospital in southern Afghanistan on Thursday, a provincial official said, with casualties expected to rise.

The militants wanted to target a training base for Afghanistan's powerful National Directorate of Security, but parked the vehicle laden with explosives outside a hospital gate nearby, said another defence ministry source.

# Gantz says he should be PM

He refuses Netanyahu's call for support to form a unity govt.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TEL AVIV

Benny Gantz, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's main opponent in the country's general election, said on Thursday he should be Prime Minister in a unity government.

Mr. Gantz spoke to journalists after Mr. Netanyahu called for them to join together in a unity government as results from Tuesday's vote showed neither with an obvious path to form a majority coalition.

Mr. Gantz's centrist Blue and White is nevertheless two seats ahead of Mr. Netanyahu's right-wing Likud, ac-



Benny Gantz

ording to results published by Israeli media with 97% of the vote counted.

The ex-military chief said his alliance had the most seats and he should lead the next government.

"The public voted clearly in favour of unity," Mr. Gantz said.

"Blue and White has at the time I am speaking won 33 seats, while Mr. Netanyahu has not obtained a sufficient majority to form a coalition as he hoped."

He went on to say that "we will listen to everyone, but we will not accept mandates imposed on us."

Mr. Netanyahu has been seeking to find a way to remain in office and continue his reign as Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister.

He also faces the possibility of corruption charges in the weeks ahead.

# Abolish executive presidency: Ranil backers

The proposal, made by the Prime Minister's allies, did not find many takers at Cabinet meeting

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

Backers of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on Thursday proposed abolishing the country's highly-controversial executive presidency, but with few takers in the Cabinet it was thwarted, according to those present at the discussion. The move comes a day after Sri Lanka's Election Commission announced that presidential poll will be held on November 16.

President Maithripala Sirisena convened an "emergency Cabinet meeting" at the Presidential Secretariat on Thursday afternoon, where Minister Rajitha Senarathne and Ravi Karunanayake, both known to be supporting

Mr. Wickremesinghe's candidacy, made a case for abolishing executive presidency, sources told *The Hindu*.

However, other Cabinet ministers, including Mangala Samaraweera, Kabir Hashim and Mano Ganesan, have opposed the idea, arguing that it was not the right time for such a move, given that the poll date has been announced. "Several of us voiced the opinion that this must not be done now, it will seem like we are afraid to contest the polls," Mr. Mano Ganesan told *The Hindu*.

The issue of executive presidency has dominated Sri Lankan elections since 1994 with several candidates campaigning on the platform for abolishing it, but none keep-

ing the promise. The leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) representing minority Tamils have consistently demanded the abolition. Mr. Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) in 2014 adopted a motion to abolish executive presidency.

**More leverage** However, other minority parties argue that an executive presidency gives minority communities more leverage in influencing national policy. Thursday's development comes in the wake of a heightening clash within the UNP on the candidate for the presidential race. Party leader and Prime Minister Wick-

remesinghe, deputy leader and Minister Sajith Premadasa, and Speaker Karu Jayasuriya are contenders.

Many of the Ministers who opposed the proposal on Thursday are known to be backing UNP deputy leader Sajith Premadasa for candidacy. Mr. Jayasuriya recently announced that his candidacy was contingent on possible support from progressive forces for the abolition of executive presidency, while Mr. Premadasa has said there has been no "scientific survey" confirming that the people of the country were for abolition.

TNA spokesman M.A. Sumanthiran tweeted on Thursday: "Disappointed with the 'Yahapalanayas"

[good governance, as the ruling coalition pitched itself in 2015] who oppose the move to abolish EP. Selfishness and opportunism at its worst. Abandoning your promises and mandates got over quarter of a century? @TNA-mediaoffice will support abolition at whatever time based on policy and not expediency."

Sri Lanka will go to polls in less than two months. The controversial former Defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, brother of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, is contesting from the SLPP, and the JVP is fielding its leader Anura Kumara Disanayake. All eyes are on the UNP for its choice of candidate.

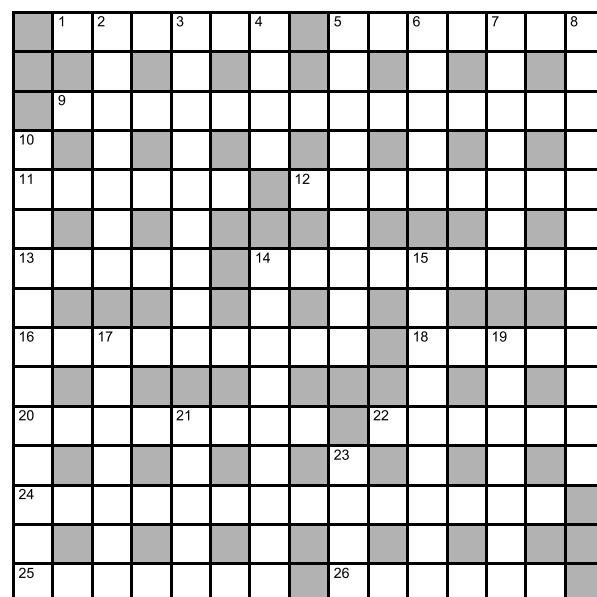
### ELSEWHERE



#### Tunisia's ex-president Ben Ali dies in exile

TUNIS Tunisia's Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, whose overthrow in a 2011 uprising triggered the "Arab Spring" revolutions, died in exile in Saudi Arabia on Thursday, days after a free presidential vote in his homeland. His funeral will take place on Friday in Saudi Arabia. A former security chief, Mr. Ben Ali had run Tunisia for 23 years, taking power when, as Prime Minister in 1987, he declared President-for-life Habib Bourguiba medically unfit to rule. Tunisians rose up against him in a revolution that inspired other uprisings in the West Asia. ■ REUTERS

## THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12735



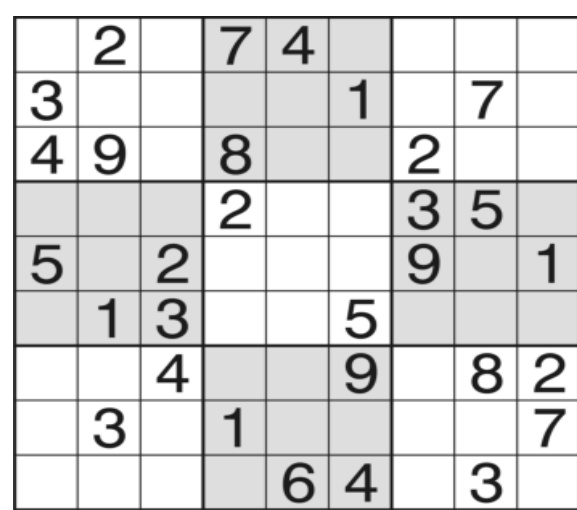
### ACROSS

- 1 Opposed beating of thug (6)
- 5 Critically examine young man about offence (7)
- 9 Fear of cast was noticeable around director (2,2,1,4,5)
- 11 Who oversees world peace or wrecks? (6)
- 12 Bury conflict in and unite (8)

(set by Buzzer)

- 13 End of prayer period to reflect on (5)
- 14 Hope Dylan made megabucks (1,3,2,3)
- 16 One recounting going round area in RV as tourist (9)
- 18 Fight chills and fever getting better in the end (5)
- 20 Seeing score after 12 came off over, it's all right (8)
- 22 Station say, one in Madras as an alternative/second to Central (6)
- 24 Apology from one opposed to rich player? (4,10)
- 25 Small feeds Times editor posted (7)
- 26 Revising any clue endlessly is madness (6)
- DOWN
- 2 Outstanding bowling unit of proper quality (7)
- 3 Drink American soldier and general ordered (6,3)
- 4 Caught a cold sharing foodstuff (4)
- 5 Majesty's special grant for us (9)
- 6 Burning gas, good going for sun? (5)
- 7 Moulded institute into training cadets (3-4)
- 8 Say a more blunt knife? (6,6)
- 10 Quiz pretentious man wearing tee shirts upside-down (3,2,3,4)
- 14 City of UP had a ball hosting mela ultimately (9)
- 15 Ape is a nut running after fruit mostly (9)
- 17 Breathtaking day when storm set off at regular intervals (7)
- 19 Knowing song scales, a habitual thing (7)
- 21 Cricket for one shedding conservative image (5)
- 23 Rest behind wheels (2,2)

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

### Solution to puzzle 12734

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

### Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

## FAITH

### Value of Guru

Among the many ways by which human beings strive to get rid of their sins, the sacred and holy Ganga is considered most effective and auspicious. In a discourse, Swami Paramasukananda drew attention to the purifying effects of the Ganga that make it symbolic with Jnana. But though Ganga purifies, one cannot approach her without guidance. Her flow is wild and unruly and Siva is the Adi Guru who tames her and allows her to flow on earth in such a way that she can be used by people to attain salvation. There are Ghats where people can have a dip and have contact with the sacred waters. Realised souls are like the Ghats in the course of the river with whose grace one can seek enlightenment.

The Upanishad story of Satyakama Jabali highlights the value of Guru's teaching. The boy approaches Gautama for instruction on Brahma Jnana. The sage gives the boy some four hundred lean and sickly cattle and asks the boy to take good care of these. The boy leads them to the forest and tends them until they had increased to a thousand cattle. Then the boy is asked to go back to the master.

On the way back the boy is instructed by the bull, fire, the swan, a loon and so on. When he gets back, the master sees the boy aglow with enlightenment. He asks the boy who taught him all this knowledge. The boy says that he was taught by beings other than men.

But the boy wants to be instructed by the Guru. He says only that knowledge imparted by the guru will lead to supreme good.

The Gita states that Jnana alone can lead the aspirant towards a state of clarity of perception. A jnani remains unaffected by the glitter of Maya that generally immerses even the most strong willed into the pool of ignorance.