

# U.S. troops set to leave northern Syria

Turkish offensive is likely to extend further, making situation ‘untenable’ for U.S. forces, says Esper

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

Hundreds of Islamic State supporters escaped from a holding camp in northern Syria on Sunday amid heavy clashes between invading Turkish-led forces and Kurdish fighters, and President Donald Trump ordered all U.S. troops to withdraw from the north to avoid getting caught in the fighting.

The twin developments reflected the rapidly growing chaos in Syria in the week since Mr. Trump ordered American forces in the region to step aside, leaving the U.S.-allied Kurds wide open to attack from Turkey. “We have American forces likely caught between two opposing advancing armies, and it’s a very untenable situation,” U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on CBS’ “Face the Nation”. He did



**Intensifying offensive:** Smoke billowing out after Turkish shelling on the Syrian border town of Ras al Ain. • AP

not say how many would withdraw but that they represent most of the 1,000 troops in Syria.

The danger to American forces was illustrated on Friday, when a small number of U.S. troops came under Turkish artillery fire at an observation post in the north. No Americans were hurt. Mr.

Esper said it was unclear whether that was an accident.

Mr. Trump, in a tweet, said, “Very smart not to be involved in the intense fighting along the Turkish Border, for a change. Those that mistakenly got us into the Middle East Wars are still pushing to fight. They have no

idea what a bad decision they have made.”

Meanwhile, the U.S. also has come to believe that the Kurds are attempting to “cut a deal” with the Syrian army and Russia to counter the invading Turks, Mr. Esper said.

On Sunday, heavy fighting reached a displaced-persons camp in Ein Eissa, some 35 km south of the border, that is home to some 12,000 people, including around 1,000 wives and widows of Islamic State fighters and their children, held in a special detention area.

### IS supporters escape

The Kurdish-led administration in northern Syria said in a statement that 950 IS supporters escaped after attacking guards and storming the gates. It was not immediately possible to confirm that figure.

Jelal Ayaf, a senior official at the camp, told local media that 859 people broke out from the section housing foreign IS supporters. He described the situation as “very volatile.”

Mr. Esper said he was aware of the reports of escapes and of atrocities committed against the Kurds in the fighting. “It gets worse by the hour,” Mr. Esper said. “These are all the exact things” that U.S. officials warned Mr. Erdogan would probably happen in urging him not to invade.

Turkey said 440 Kurdish fighters have been killed since the operation began Wednesday. The SDF said 56 of its fighters have died.

Meanwhile, the Syrian Army is moving troops to the north to confront Turkish offensive, the state news agency SANA said on Sunday.

# Typhoon Hagibis batters Japan, leaves over 33 dead

Troops, rescue workers deployed to save stranded residents

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
TOKYO

Helicopters, boats and thousands of troops were deployed across Japan to rescue people stranded in flooded homes on Sunday, as the death toll from a ferocious typhoon climbed to as high as 33.

Typhoon Hagibis made landfall south of Tokyo on Saturday evening and battered central and northern Japan with torrents of rain and powerful gusts of wind. The typhoon was downgraded to a tropical storm on Sunday.

Public broadcaster NHK said 14 rivers across the nation had flooded, some spilling out in more than one spot.



**Flooded streets:** Vehicles partially submerged after Typhoon Hagibis battered parts of Sano, Japan, on Sunday. • AP

The Tokyo Fire Department said a woman in her 70s fell to her death as she was being placed inside a rescue helicopter in Iwaki city in Fukushima prefecture. Kyodo News agency reported that 33 people died

and 19 were missing. Several train services in the Tokyo area resumed early in the morning, while others restarted later.

The Rugby World Cup match between Namibia and Canada was cancelled.

## ‘Significant work to do, but Brexit deal possible’

Prepare for Oct. 31 exit, PM tells Cabinet

REUTERS  
LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told his Cabinet on Sunday that a Brexit deal was still possible but that there was significant work to be done to reach one, a spokeswoman from his office said in a statement.

“The Prime Minister updated Cabinet on the current progress being made in ongoing Brexit negotiations, reiterating that a pathway to a deal could be seen but that there is still a significant amount of work to get there and we must remain prepared to leave on October



Boris Johnson

31,” the spokeswoman said. Meanwhile, British and EU negotiators are working through the weekend to see if they can turn Mr. Johnson’s proposals, which were initially rejected by the EU, into a deal that works.

## ‘Flashmob’ protests rock Hong Kong

Police use tear gas, deny using excessive force; protesters target businesses

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
HONG KONG

Riot police clashed with anti-government protesters across Hong Kong on Sunday as masked activists vandalised businesses deemed sympathetic to Beijing in another weekend of chaos in the financial hub.

Rallies erupted in multiple neighbourhoods, with some protesters blocking roads, sabotaging train tracks, and trashing pro-China businesses.

Police arrested dozens of protesters, and said they used “minimum force”.

Police said an officer was taken to hospital after his



**Chaos returns:** An anti-government protester is being detained by the police in Hong Kong on Sunday. • AP

neck was slashed. Local television networks also broadcast footage of a man beaten bloody by protesters after they found a baton in his bag

and suspected him of being an undercover officer.

In Mongkok, a bustling shopping district on the Kowloon peninsula, officers

burst from an unmarked van over a blockade of bamboo scaffolding and quickly chased down multiple protesters.

Later, protesters beat a woman accused of helping police clear barricades. She was struck with fists and umbrellas, and also had her face smeared with mud.

Protests and clashes were reported in half a dozen neighbourhoods, with police saying they fired tear gas during two incidents.

While the crowds were thinner, the flashmob tactics stretched police resources and still brought chaos to parts of the city.

### ELSEWHERE



#### Imran Khan offers to ‘facilitate’ Iran-Saudi talks

TEHRAN  
Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Iran on Sunday on a mission to act as a “facilitator” between Tehran and Riyadh and try to defuse rising tensions in the Gulf. “The reason for this trip is that we do not want a conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran,” Mr. Khan said at a joint presser. AFP

#### Gotabaya vows to bolster intelligence

COLOMBO  
Sri Lanka’s presidential hopeful Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Sunday said that he would empower the intelligence sector with necessary legal cover to help secure the country in the aftermath of Easter attacks. AP

## ‘No outsider will interfere in Sri Lanka polls this time’

Basil Rajapaksa says country needs India for security, China for economic matters

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

No international actor will try to interfere in Sri Lanka’s approaching presidential election, said Basil Rajapaksa, chief strategist of his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s presidential bid.

“Ethically, that is how it should be,” he told *The Hindu* in an interview, alluding to a shift in the international community’s “role” in Sri Lanka’s national politics.

His comments, coming a month before the November 16 presidential election, revealed a more obvious shift in the Rajapaksa’s thinking.

After being unseated from office in 2015, his other brother Mahinda Rajapaksa accused India’s Research and Analysis Wing, among others, of backing regime

change, because of his perceived “China-tilt”. Taking a different line, Mr. Basil said: “Personally I have no evidence that India or any other country supported them [the opposition coalition].” But now “we have very well understood” what went wrong, he said, adding: “If they had worked to change our government earlier, we have corrected the situation [now].”

“India is our number one friend and neighbour so we have to always go with India, in political and security matters, but in economic and other matters you can’t forget China,” he said.

A powerful Minister in the Rajapaksa government, Mr. Basil faces charges of large-scale corruption. After he was briefly arrested in 2015

and later released on bail, he wasted no time in beginning the ground work for their fight back after the 2015 defeat. He not only set up the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (People’s Party or SLPP) in 2016 as their new vehicle, but also crafted a sharp campaign ahead of the 2018 local authority elections.

The SLPP won over 40 % of the vote, pushing the ruling United National Party to a second spot, and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) to the third place. Their big win signalled the electoral resurgence of the Rajapaksa camp, even as it heralded the fall of the SLFP, where the Rajapaksa built their political careers.

### Numbers matter

The SLPP headquarters located near the Sri Lankan Parliament was teeming with young volunteers on Friday. At Mr. Basil’s office was a dig-



Basil Rajapaksa

ital monitor facing him. It displayed a map of Sri Lanka, with many red dots flashing. “This is an app that we have developed especially for this election, to monitor canvassing activity at each district in real time,” he said.

Asked how the numbers looked, Mr. Basil Rajapaksa said: “We are addressing human beings, it is important to connect with people on the ground. Numbers are only for targets.”

Sri Lanka has some 15.99 million registered voters. If

about 80% poll like last time, it would translate to approximately 12 million valid votes, in his reading. “Our target is 6.5 million votes,” he said, confident of getting past the 50% mark that is necessary to win.

He knows that is not easy. “40% was enough for a local poll but won’t do for a national election.” That is why the SLFP’s support – recently declared – is crucial, in his view. As are the votes of minority communities. Sections remain averse to the SLPP candidate Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, a former Defence Secretary linked to several war-time killings, enforced disappearances and later, to groups behind anti-Muslim violence.

### Tamils issue

But their vote is “very important”, Mr. Basil admitted. Tamils “cannot forget what happened” but people of

both communities “should forgive each other.” However, Mr. Basil seemed wary of committing to a constitutional settlement to the national question. The Sri Lankan Parliament, including MPs aligned to Mr. Mahinda, unanimously voted for a new Constitution in 2015, but he deemed a referendum necessary. “Let people decide if we need a new Constitution,” he said, adding that the party was “committed to maximum devolution” – a failed promise familiar to the Tamil electorate.

Asked how his party viewed the presidency now – significantly weakened after a 2015 – Mr. Basil said: “No matter who our candidate or President is, our leader [Mahinda Rajapaksa] will be the head of the government (as PM). So, this arrangement suits us well. He is our leader, and he is the spiritual leader of our country.”

## Four activists escape death penalty in Iran

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TEHRAN

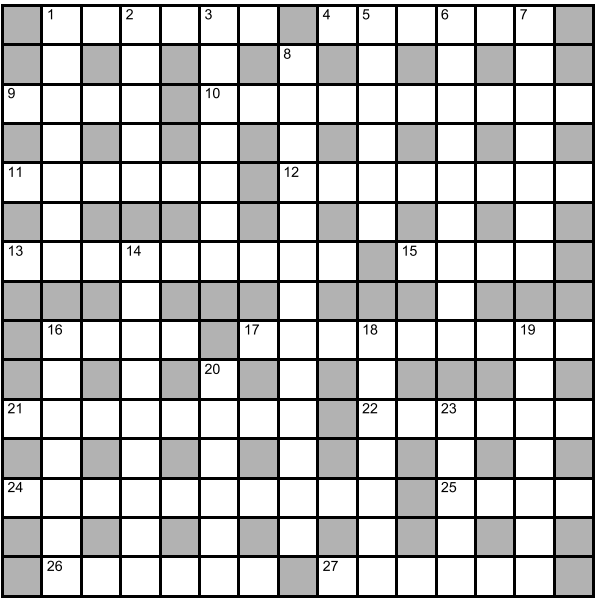
Four detained Iranian environmental activists have been cleared of a charge that could carry the death penalty, state news agency IRNA reported on Sunday.

“The charge of ‘corruption on earth’ was dropped in recent days for four detained environmentalists,” said Mohammad Hossein Aghasi, a lawyer who represents some of the activists.

“Of course their other charges still remain,” he was quoted as saying.

The four were initially accused of “spying” on military bases but their indictments changed in October 2018 to spreading “corruption on earth” – one of the most severe charges under Iran’s Islamic law.

### THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12754



The crossword is also available online at [crossword.thehindu.com](http://crossword.thehindu.com)

#### ■ ACROSS

- 1 When a blessing protects further (6)
- 4 Connect a music player working without speaker (6)
- 9 Associate Russian with one animal (4)
- 10 Go untie criminal charged with sick, gruesome execution (10)
- 11 Time of gold rush (6)

- 12 Spooner chooses bags for what athletes’ sport? (3-5)
- 13 High jump for kids (9)
- 15 Patient sort (4)
- 16 Discover one becoming closer to you is back (4)
- 17 Insect set in, set out, fully wasting every second (6,3)
- 21 Picture love between two gods (8)
- 22 Demon king abducting one, left Ashram’s entrance, at Eastern valley (6)
- 24 I step into a manufacturing plant (10)
- 25 Cold, obliterating black hole (4)
- 26 It’s hard to find or trace artist regularly showcased (6)
- 27 Rig Veda focusing on mind before attack (6)

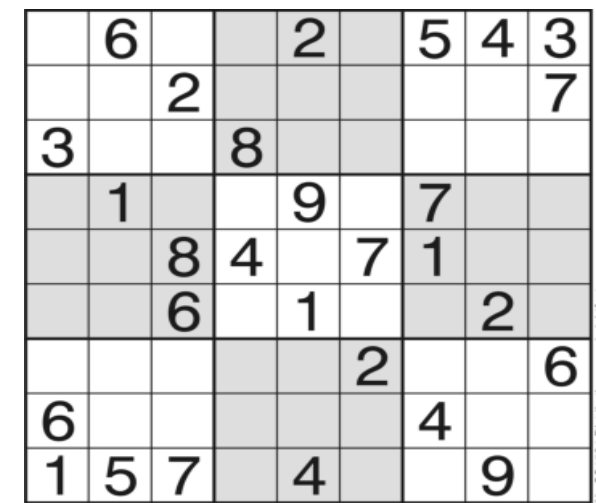
#### ■ DOWN

- 1 One subdues very loud member blocked by EU earlier (7)

(set by Hypatia)

- 2 Depart drunk in Golden farewell (5)
- 3 Say, Arsonist is more flimsy (7)
- 5 Rich French couple had left Europe (6)
- 6 Remains in a corset, worn separate (9)
- 7 Initially naughty son cracked joke on one that doesn’t let it slide (3-4)
- 8 On occasion, athletic celebrity crossing beach area meets tourists on vacation (4,3,6)
- 14 Rewind breaking news broadcast over red wine, say (9)
- 16 Hint student is covered by aid (7)
- 18 Ground water is lower by 40% ahead of shower (7)
- 19 Race track? (7)
- 20 Delta evacuated boarding after raising alarm (6)
- 23 House 65050, first in Avenue (5)

### SUDOKU



#### Solution to puzzle 12753

ROCKFISH BENDER  
EOLIA XO  
MULTIPLY STALLS  
JOE IIRPT  
SQUIRRELS OTHER  
SRIJNTVUI  
HEIPADPT  
CAMSTERNUM  
EIBROAIDET  
MAIZEINTERVIEW  
JINSTMOWVE  
SUISSENEGATION  
TSEASDIT  
SAMOSA FLATTERY

#### Solution to yesterday’s Sudoku

758631249  
361924857  
294785316  
476392185  
129857463  
835146972  
987513624  
543268791  
612479538

### FAITH

## Moksha for Jatayu

Mortally wounded Jatayu tells Rama who the abductor of Sita is. When Jatayu breathes his last, Rama is sorrowful. He blames Himself for what has happened. Rama laments: “This bird which had nothing to fear and lived in the forest is now dead because of me. He tried to rescue Sita and lost his life because of that. Even the loss of Sita does not disturb me as much as the loss of Jatayu. He was as worthy of respect as my father Dasaratha.” Rama then performs the last rites for Jatayu, and grants him moksha.

Usually, a question is raised here. Rama Himself says He is human. He never claims at any time that He is God. So, how can He grant moksha to anyone? This question was raised centuries ago and answered too, said Akkarakkani Srinidhi, in a discourse. Naduvil Thiruveedhi Pillai, who lived in Srirangam, was a little envious of Nampillai’s popularity as an Acharya. One day, Naduvil Thiruveedhi Pillai went to meet the king. On the way, he happened to meet a disciple of Nampillai, called Pinbazhagiya Perumal Jeer. The king asked a question to Naduvil Thiruveedhi Pillai, which left him stumped. The king wanted to know how Rama could have granted moksha to Jatayu, when He Himself had said He was human and not God. Naduvil Thiruveedhi Pillai consulted Pinbazhagiya Perumal Jeer. The latter said this question had been raised in a discourse of Nampillai, and the latter had answered it convincingly.

The answer is there in Valmiki Ramayana itself. Valmiki says “SatyEna IOkAn jayati” – Rama conquered all the worlds through satya. If He conquered all the worlds, He conquered Sri Vaikuntha also. So, although Rama claimed He was human, He could send Jatayu to Sri Vaikuntha, because He had conquered it by His adherence to Truth.