

Hong Kong protesters make daring campus breakout

Beijing will not sit back if protests continue, warns China envoy

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HONG KONG
Dozens of Hong Kong protesters escaped a two-day police siege on a campus late on Monday by shimmying down a rope from a bridge to awaiting motorbikes in a dramatic and perilous breakout that followed a renewed warning by Beijing of a possible intervention to end the crisis engulfing the city.



No let-up: Protesters taking cover from tear gas canisters in Kowloon area of Hong Kong on Monday. • AP

Clashes rumbled throughout the day between protesters and the police who had threatened to use deadly force to dislodge activists holed-up in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU). The university siege has become a battle of wills between Hong Kong's stretched police force and the constantly-innovating protest movement.

Late on Monday, dozens of black-clad protesters used a rope to slither down several metres on to a motorway below where they were picked up by waiting motorbike riders.

In an apparently co-ordinated effort, thousands of Hong Kongers streamed towards the PolyU campus to break the siege, as clashes simultaneously raged with the

Court rules ban on face masks unconstitutional

HONG KONG
Hong Kong's High Court ruled on Monday that a British colonial-era emergency law revived by the government to ban protesters wearing face masks was unconstitutional. It said the law was "incompatible with the Basic Law", the mini-constitution under which Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997. **REUTERS**

police nearby in Kowloon. It was not immediately clear how many protesters remained inside PolyU.

China has refused to budge on any of the protesters' demands, and warned it will not tolerate dissent in the semi-autonomous city. China's Ambassador to

Britain upped the ante on Monday. "The Hong Kong government is trying very hard to put the situation under control," Liu Xiaoming said. "But if the situation becomes uncontrollable, the Central government would certainly not sit on our hands and watch. We have enough resolution and power to end the unrest."

Earlier, the police made dozens of arrests as protesters made a dash for it – sometimes beating people with batons as they held them on the ground.

"Other than coming out to surrender I don't see any viable option for them," Cheuk Hau-yip, Police Commander of Kowloon West, told a press conference, before the daring breakout.

Join me in building Sri Lanka: Gotabaya

New President appeals to minority Tamils and Muslims to work with him after being sworn in

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's new President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has urged minorities – who emphatically voted against him in the recent election – to work with him to build the country.

Mr. Gotabaya was sworn in on Monday, following a huge win in the November 16 presidential poll, with 52.25% votes.

Beating his main challenger Sajith Premadasa by a margin of more than 13 lakh votes, he paved the way for his family's return to power, five years after his brother and former President Mahinda Rajapaksa was dislodged from office.

Mr. Gotabaya succeeds President Maithripala Sirisena, who did not seek re-election.

"The main message of the election is that it was the Sinhala majority vote that allowed me to win the presidency," the former Defence Secretary said. "I knew that I could win with only the



Centre of attraction: President Gotabaya Rajapaksa greeting people after the swearing-in ceremony at the Ruwanwelisaya Buddhist shrine in Anuradhapura on Monday. • AP

votes of the Sinhala majority. But I asked Tamils and Muslims to be a part of my success. Their response was not what I expected. However, I urge them to join me to build one Sri Lanka," he said in a televised speech.

Emphasising national security as a top priority, the 70-year-old President vowed to rebuild the state security structure. Speaking of a non-aligned foreign policy approach, Mr. Gotabaya said: "We will remain neutral in

our foreign relations and stay out of any conflict of world powers."

Fielded by the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP or People's Party), Mr. Gotabaya campaigned on a plank of enhanced national security – a dominant concern for many citizens after the Easter terror attacks in April – development, and prosperity for citizens. He beat the incumbent United National Party's Mr. Premadasa with a decisive mandate, mostly

from the country's Sinhala-majority areas.

Symbolic start

On Monday, he was sworn in near the Ruwanwelisaya, a Buddhist shrine in the historic city of Anuradhapura in the island's North Central Province. The symbolism was hard to miss.

Considered a sacred site by Buddhists, the shrine was reputedly built by Sinhalese King Dutugemunu. According to popular legend, Dutu-

gemunu defeated Elara – a Tamil prince from the Chola kingdom – more than 2,000 years ago, and reigned as the king of entire Lanka. The site has remained symbolic in the stage of Sinhala-Buddhist political history, according to Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, a historian at the University of Colombo. "There are many mythical constructs around Dutugemunu that some historians are sceptical of," he told *The Hindu*.

However, the king "defeating" the Tamil prince became a "paradigmatic" event in popular Sinhala-Buddhist perception and "whoever is trying to defeat a perceived enemy is seen by some as a reincarnation of the king," he said. "The image was invoked when they [Rajapaksa administration] defeated Prabhakaran [LTTE] too."

The choice of venue and the symbolism around it, Mr. Dewasiri said, went in line with Mr. Gotabaya's vote base this election, which was "overwhelmingly" Sinhala-Buddhist.

U.S. tells Gotabaya to uphold human rights commitments

Ready to work with him, says Secretary of State

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

The U.S. has called upon Sri Lanka's new President, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to uphold Sri Lanka's commitments to human rights and non-recurrence of violence, saying it stands ready to work with him.

"The United States congratulates the people of Sri Lanka on their democratic election and stands ready to work with Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the new President of Sri Lanka," a statement from Secretary of State Michael Pompeo on Monday, released to *The Hindu*, said.

"We call on President Rajapaksa to uphold Sri Lanka's commitments to security sector reform, accountability, respect for human rights, and non-recurrence of violence. Sri Lanka continued to show the strength and resiliency of its democracy with a free, fair, and transparent presidential election befitting Asia's oldest democracy," the statement said.

Mr. Gotabaya has a reputation for ruthlessness – he is accused of war crimes for his role during the civil war in Sri Lanka. The new President has cases against him in the U.S., including for torture.

Mr. Gotabaya's own human rights record is not the only cause for Washington's



Michael Pompeo

wariness of the new government in Colombo.

China's influence

The U.S.-Sri Lanka relationship has been challenging, with China making inroads into the country during the 2005-2015 term of Mahinda Rajapaksa, Mr. Gotabaya's brother, when Sri Lanka drifted towards Beijing rather than New Delhi or Washington.

Specifically, the U.S. has been concerned about some countries in the Indo-Pacific region accumulating unsustainable debt and getting into 'debt traps' with China's infrastructure and development projects as part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Beijing has pumped billions of dollars into infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka – most notably the Hambantota Port.

"Sri Lanka is a valued partner, and we want to work with the government and people of Sri Lanka to advance cooperation on bilateral and regional issues, including fostering a free and open Indo-Pacific re-

gion where all countries can prosper, deepening good governance, and promoting justice, reconciliation, and human rights," Mr. Pompeo's statement said.

The return of the Rajapaksa clan could pose a challenge for the U.S.'s "free and open" Indo-Pacific policy.

A case in point is the proposed rollout of development projects funded by a \$480 loan from U.S. aid body the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). The MCC funding has been projected, turning it into an election issue. Buddhist monks, who have strongly supported the Rajapaksa brothers, are among those who have been in opposition to the MCC.

With Mr. Gotabaya now in the President's seat, the rollout of the MCC project may be all the more challenging.

"The U.S. will worry about two issues: human rights and governance and ties with China. The Rajapaksas have claimed they have learned from the past about over reliance on China but their track record is uninspiring. There is little reason to expect any positive movement on human rights or reconciliation," Paul Staniland, a South Asia specialist and academic at the University of Chicago told *The Hindu*. "But American interests in competing with China may limit Washington's interest in pushing too hard on human rights, especially in a Trump administration," he added.

'Unfair to attribute racist dimension to Tamil vote'

People's choice must be accepted, says Sampanthan

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

It is unfair to attribute a "racist" dimension to the Tamil vote in Sri Lanka's presidential election, according to senior Tamil leader R. Sampanthan.

His remark comes a day after the election results were declared. The winner – newly elected President Gotabaya Rajapaksa – garnered his 52.25% vote share almost entirely from areas where the majority Sinhalese community is concentrated. On the other hand, Sajith Premadasa – who was defeated – drew huge support in the north, east and central parts of the country that his home to Tamils and Muslims.

All the same, the question of a vote on "racial lines" does not arise, said Mr. Sampanthan, who leads the Tamil National Alliance that endorsed Mr. Premadasa this election. "Both Gotabaya and Sajith are Sinhala-Buddhists. On economic matters, they are probably on the same page, but in regard to minority issues, Sajith was more forthcoming in this campaign," he said.

Since the time Sri Lanka's poll outcome emerged on Sunday, many social media users shared a map of the island, colour-coded to distinguish the regions that voted for Mr. Rajapaksa and Mr. Premadasa. Some commen-



R. Sampanthan

tators pointed to an "ethnic divide" in the mandate, or called it a "polarised verdict". Others went a step further and accused the Tamils of having voted on "racial lines" by rejecting popular candidate Mr. Rajapaksa.

"If the Tamil people had wanted to vote on racial lines, wouldn't they have voted for Tamil candidate M.K. Shivajilingam who, it may be argued, had racist overtones in his manifesto? Instead, they voted in large numbers for Sajith Premadasa."

Various factors

It is also important not to reduce Mr. Gotabaya's mandate to a vote on racist lines, Mr. Sampanthan argued. "Many people who voted for him have done so because of their disappointment with the performance of this government. The non-delivery on various fundamental issues like costs of living, corruption, fertiliser [subsidy], and employment," he said, emphasising there were "various factors".

"People are entitled to make their democratic choice and as long as their vote has been validly cast, it must be accepted."

IN BRIEF



Will consider testifying, says Donald Trump

WASHINGTON
President Donald Trump said on Monday he is "strongly" considering accepting a challenge from Opposition Democrats to testify in his own impeachment investigation. After the Speaker of the lower house, Nancy Pelosi, upped the ante by suggesting that Mr. Trump come forward to tell the "truth," the President said he was keen. "Even though I did nothing wrong, and don't like giving credibility to this No Due Process Hoax, I like the idea & will, in order to get Congress focused again, strongly consider it!" **AFP**

Pak. successfully tests nuclear-capable missile

ISLAMABAD
Pakistan on Monday successfully test-fired a nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile which can strike targets up to 650 km. According to a press release issued by the media wing of the Pakistani military, the launch of the Shaheen-I missile was held as part of a training exercise "aimed at testing the operational readiness of Army Strategic Forces Command". **PTI**

Three dead in shooting at Walmart store in U.S.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Three people were killed in a shooting early on Monday at a Walmart store in Duncan, Oklahoma, local media reported citing the State's highway patrol and the local police.

According to reports, Duncan Police chief Danny Ford said the shooting took place in a parking lot in front of the store and the suspect is one of those killed.

Schools in the area had been placed on lockdown temporarily before being gi-

ven an "all clear" by the police, according to a Facebook statement from Duncan Public Schools.

The shooting took place shortly before 10 a.m. on Monday, the police said. They said two men and a woman died in the incident.

The incident comes in the wake of another shooting that took place in Fresno, California, on Sunday. The police said four people were shot dead and six others wounded on Sunday during a shooting at a gathering in a backyard to watch a football game.

Iran's Guards warn of action if unrest continues

REUTERS
DUBAI

Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards warned anti-government protesters on Monday of "decisive" action if the unrest over gasoline price hikes does not cease, state media said, in a hint that a harsh security crackdown could be on the cards.

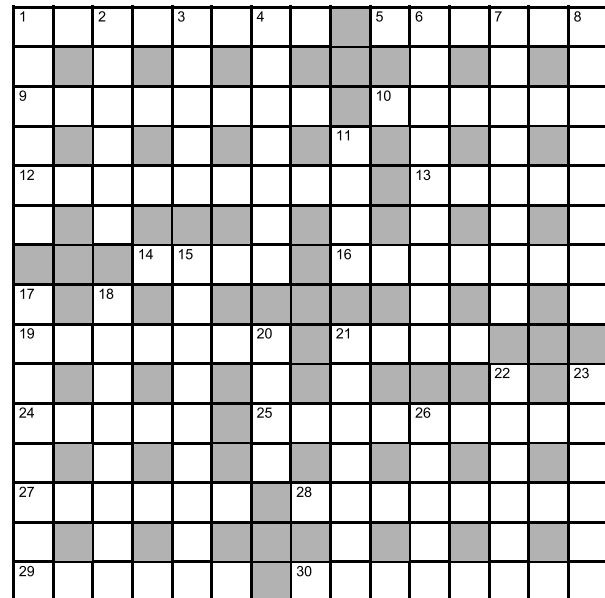
The protests have spread across the Islamic Republic since Friday, turning political with demonstrators de-

manding that top clerical leaders step down. At least 100 banks and dozens of buildings and cars have been torched.

"If necessary we will take decisive and revolutionary action against any continued moves to disturb the people's peace and security," the Revolutionary Guards, Iran's heavily armed main security force, said in a statement carried by state media.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12784

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles

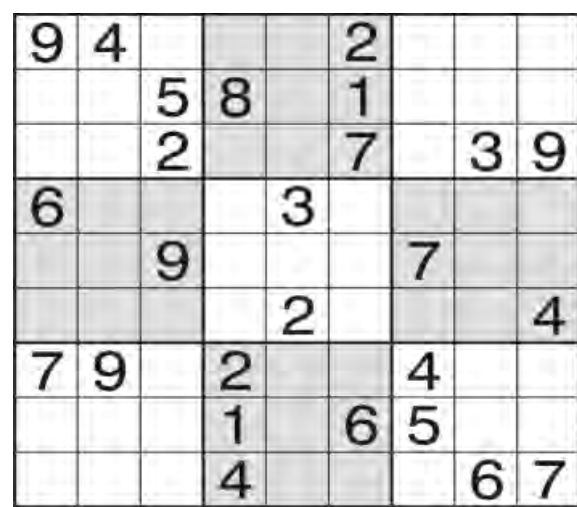


ACROSS

- Read one of the gospels as a farewell message (4,4)
- Entrance of sadly empty plant (6)
- Computer to be assembled during recess (8)
- Alert to look around for sustenance (6)

- (set by KrisKross)
- Mostly ride llama around ring – a tame animal (9)
 - Strange to exchange rook for knight, or another piece (5)
 - Home of the ape perhaps – man's original race (4)
 - Where you can see a matinee program at three (7)
 - Universities welcoming queen with money for key component of Manhattan project (7)
 - Punch bag (4)
 - One regularly beating up even elders, unfortunately (5)
 - He can recall everything in moments, surprisingly (9)
 - Private eye, when talking on the phone, pulled over (6)
 - Believe it or not, Bill heartily denounced a friend (8)
 - Slept off as agreed (6)
 - Daughter headed off outside, as mentioned (8)
- ### DOWN
- Study short story about canines, perhaps (6)
 - Sons and I somehow got lost in Rocky Mountains (US) this season (6)
 - One substituting nothing in work by editor, gets derided (5)
 - Buzz circulating over crazy old gangster (7)
 - Nobody quips about wearing crown (9)
 - Again chooses rock, pop etc. over core classical (8)
 - Used long pole's tip for support, finally (8)
 - Student going through note gets a shock (4)
 - Tore helter-skelter around burning English shrub (5,4)
 - Bottle with sticker on top: "Please turn it over" (8)
 - Permitted husband to lead, being worthy of respect (8)
 - Poem I made up describing an actor (4)
 - Hurt and angry without a piece of chocolate after dessert (7)
 - KrisKross will break iron bar to make a narrow strip (6)
 - Remained calm in discussion (6)
 - Cracked by you: "Love" cryptically means "egg" (5)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to puzzle 12783

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Amazing simplicity

Nammazhvar says that the Lord is accessible and easy to comprehend as far as His devotees are concerned. He can easily be won with our love, as seen in the case of His attitude towards Yasoda. When Yasoda wanted to punish Krishna, He yielded to her wish and allowed her to tie Him up. If one thinks of His immeasurable greatness, of His infinite auspicious qualities, one cannot help wondering at His simplicity. Yasoda was not a practitioner of any of the three types of yoga, which Krishna later recommended to Arjuna. But her love for Krishna was huge, and it was this love that bound Him, said Kidambi Narayanan in a discourse.

How great a matter this is can be seen if we pick up an example from life. Think of a temple elephant that is led to a river every day by its mahout. He scrubs its body and splashes water all over it, and the elephant enjoys the bath. But on its return to the temple, it picks up dust and sprinkles it over its body. Of course, the mahout, even if unhappy, cannot ask the elephant why it does so. Let us assume the elephant can answer. Then what will the elephant say? It will say that it likes putting sand all over its body, and it will do what it likes. If the mahout were to ask, "If so, then why did you bathe?" The elephant will then reply, "I allowed you to bathe me, because I also like baths."

So, in both cases, the elephant does only what it wants to do, and is not bound by what someone else wants. If an animal can have so much independence, then think of how much more independence the Supreme One will have. The Lord is described as an elephant by Thirumangai Azhvar. But whereas, a four-legged elephant does what it wants, the Supreme One as Krishna submitted Himself to Yasoda, so that she could tie Him up.