

# Mahinda sworn in as Sri Lanka PM

Ex-President, elder brother of newly-elected President Gotabaya, will be PM till elections next year

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COLOMBO

Less than a week after his election win, Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa swore in his elder brother, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, as Prime Minister on Thursday.

Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, 74, replaces Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who quit following his party candidate Sajith Premadasa's poll defeat despite having a parliamentary majority. Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa will be the premier in a caretaker government until general elections due next year.

## Modi reaches out

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was quick to wish his new Sri Lankan counterpart. "Congratulations and best wishes to Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. I look forward to working closely with him for further strengthen-



**Dual power:** Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, right, greeting his brother Mahinda after he was sworn in as PM. •AP

ing fraternal India-Sri Lanka ties," he said in a tweet, soon after Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa took oaths. "Thank you Prime Minister @narendramodi. Let us continue to promote our shared partnership for peace and prosperity for both our countries and the region," Prime Minister Rajapaksa replied in a tweet.

Other regional leaders too

wished Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa on his new role. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan telephoned him, while Nepal PM K.P. Sharma Oli tweeted his wishes. Speaker and former Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed tweeted: "Delighted to see my old friend @PresRajapaksa sworn in as Sri Lanka's new PM. Look forward to

working with you again!"

Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, 70, won the November 16 presidential election with a clear majority. The former military man-turned bureaucrat's ascent to the country's most powerful office marked the return of the Rajapaksa to the helm, five years after Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa was defeated in the 2015 presidential election. However, as the seventh Executive President of Sri Lanka, Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa will have to share power with the Prime Minister, due to a 2015 legislation – the 19th Amendment – that clipped presidential powers and empowered Parliament, effectively creating two power centres.

In a statement following his brother's poll victory, Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa said this presidential election differed from previous polls, citing "the complications in the

system of governance" brought about by the 19th Amendment. "We will be studying the provisions of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution and planning our immediate programme of action accordingly," he said.

## UNP in disarray

Meanwhile Mr. Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) found itself in disarray as members in two camps – backing Mr. Wickremesinghe and Mr. Premadasa – clashed on the choice of Leader of Opposition from the party. UNP sources told *The Hindu* that General Secretary Akila Viraj Kariyawasam wrote to the Speaker, requesting him to name Mr. Wickremesinghe as Opposition Leader, while over 40 MPs backing Mr. Premadasa wrote to the Speaker, asking him to appoint Mr. Premadasa to the post.

# Netanyahu indicted for fraud, bribery and breach of trust

The Prime Minister is under no legal obligation to resign

REUTERS  
JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was indicted on corruption charges on Thursday, heightening uncertainty over who will ultimately lead a country deep in political disarray after two inconclusive elections this year.

The decision announced by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit was the first of its kind against a serving Israeli Prime Minister and represented Mr. Netanyahu's gravest crisis of his lengthy political career.

He was charged with breach of trust and fraud in all three corruption cases against him, as well as bribery in one of the investigations, according to a charge sheet released by the Justice Ministry.

Mr. Netanyahu, in power since 2009, has dominated Israeli politics for a generation and is the country's longest-serving leader.

## Denies wrongdoing

He has denied wrongdoing in the three corruption cases, saying he is the victim of a political witch hunt.

Mr. Netanyahu, 70, is under no legal obligation to resign after being charged.

The opening of a trial could be delayed for months by a new election and any moves by the right-wing Prime Minister to seek parliamentary immunity from prosecution.

Earlier, during one of the most unusual days in Israeli political history, the country's President told lawmakers to name a candidate to form a new government after right-winger Netanyahu



**In the hook:** Benjamin Netanyahu at a meeting of the right-wing bloc at the Knesset in Jerusalem. •AFP

and centrist challenger Benny Gantz both failed, a development that probably sets the stage for a third election within a year.

"These are harsh dark days in the annals of the State of Israel," President Reuven Rivlin said as he announced that Mr. Gantz had not mustered enough support for a stable coalition.

## Three cases

Police recommended in February that Mr. Mandelblit file criminal charges against Mr. Netanyahu in the long-running investigations dubbed Cases 1000, 2000 and 4000.

Mr. Netanyahu is suspected of wrongfully accepting \$264,000 worth of gifts, which prosecutors said included cigars and champagne, from tycoons and of dispensing favours in alleged bids for improved coverage by Israel's biggest selling newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, and the Walla website.

Mr. Netanyahu could face up to 10 years in prison if convicted of bribery and a maximum 3-year term for fraud and breach of trust.

Even though he was un-

der suspicion, that was not enough to dissuade most of his traditional allies from sticking with him in coalition negotiations, effectively blocking Mr. Gantz's path to the premiership.

But the two elections that neither Mr. Netanyahu nor Mr. Gantz won exposed a rare political vulnerability in the Prime Minister after a decade in office.

The prolonged political stalemate comes at a tricky time for Israel and its most prominent statesman on the domestic and international fronts.

## Conflict with Iran

Its conflict with arch-foe Iran has deepened – Israeli warplanes hit Iranian targets in Syria on Wednesday after rockets were fired toward Israel – while fighting with Palestinian militants in Gaza flared last week.

The introduction of criminal charges could further complicate the eventual rollout of the U.S. administration's long-delayed Middle East peace plan by imperilling the political future of one of the key players whose support is needed.

# China releases U.K. embassy worker's video

Cheng says he made filmed confession to 'soliciting prostitution' under pressure

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
BEIJING

China's ruling Communist Party's newspaper published surveillance videos on Thursday which it said prove the guilt and voluntary confession of a former British Consulate employee in Hong Kong, who was detained for 15 days on a charge of soliciting prostitution.

The *People's Daily* report follows a detailed online account on Wednesday from the staffer, Simon Cheng, who said he was tortured, questioned about pro-democracy protests in Hong



**Under surveillance:** A supporter holding up a poster of Simon Cheng outside the U.K. Consulate in Hong Kong. •AP

Kong and forced to confess during his detention in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen.

"There was no forced confession through torture," the newspaper said.

It said the police released

the videos, which show Mr. Cheng visiting what appears to be a massage salon and allegedly speaking to interrogators. The videos do not offer concrete evidence that Mr. Cheng solicited prostitution, nor do they prove that he was not tortured.

Mr. Cheng has acknowledged that he got a massage on his business trip. In his statement on Facebook, he wrote that he allowed police to record him confessing to the charge because they suggested he could be handed harsher sentences related to national security if he didn't cooperate.

# 6 environment activists given jail term in Iran

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TEHRAN

Six environmental conservationists accused of "spying" on Iranian military sites have received sentences of up to 10 years in prison, according to state news agency IRNA and *Shargh* daily.

The defendants were among conservationists working with the environmental group Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation.

They were arrested in 2018 over allegations of espionage. The death row charge was dropped last month.

## ELSEWHERE



### 'U.S. Bill seeks to destroy Hong Kong'

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Thursday condemned the passage of a U.S. bill lauding pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong, saying it "indulges violent criminals" and aims to "muddle or even destroy Hong Kong". •AFP

### Kim rejects invitation to South Korea summit

Blaming its rival for a recent chill in relations, North Korea on Thursday said its leader Kim Jong-un has turned down an invitation by South Korean President Moon Jae-in to participate in a regional summit next week. •AP

# Stop spreading falsehood, witness tells Republicans

Fiona Hill testifies before House panel

REUTERS  
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump's former Russia adviser Fiona Hill urged lawmakers in the House of Representatives impeachment inquiry on Thursday not to promote "politically driven falsehoods" that cast doubt on Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. election.

In her testimony, Ms. Hill said some Republican members of the House Intelligence Committee, based on their questions and statements, appear to believe that Russia did not conduct a campaign against the U.S. during the 2016 presidential race and that perhaps Ukraine did.

"This is a fictional narra-

tive that has been perpetrated and propagated by the Russian security services themselves," said Ms. Hill, who until July served as the director for European and Russian affairs at the White House National Security Council.

David Holmes, a staffer at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, testified about a July 26 call, in which he said he overheard Mr. Trump ask Gordon Sondland, U.S. Ambassador to the EU, about the status of the investigations. "So, he's gonna do the investigation?" Mr. Trump asked Mr. Sondland, referring to Ukraine President Zelensky, Mr. Holmes said. "He's gonna do it," replied Sondland, he said.

# Democratic candidates stand united on Trump impeachment

In debate, contenders were divided over healthcare, taxation

REUTERS  
ATLANTA

Democratic White House contenders united in supporting the impeachment inquiry against Republican President Donald Trump at a debate on Wednesday.

During the fifth debate in the Democratic race to pick a challenger to Mr. Trump in the November 2020 election, the 10 candidates aired differences on healthcare and taxing the wealthy, but kept the exchanges largely polite and instead heaped criticism on Mr. Trump.

U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, the progressive who has pushed ambitious plans to tax wealth and

create a government-run healthcare plan, and Pete Buttigieg, the 37-year-old Mayor of South Bend, Indiana, who has been rising in the polls, escaped sustained criticism from their rivals.

Mr. Buttigieg, running to be the first openly gay President, was pressed on his failure to make inroads with African-Americans – a key Democratic constituency – and drew a parallel to his experience being gay.

"I do not have the experience of ever being discriminated against because of the colour of my skin," Mr. Buttigieg said.

"I do have the experience of feeling like a stranger in

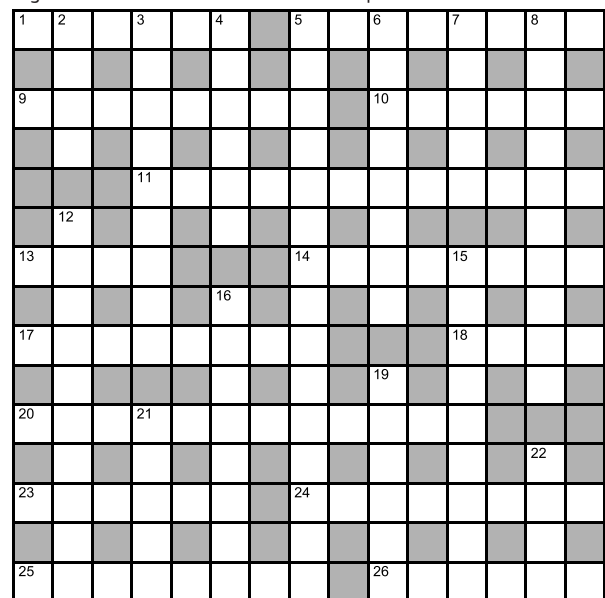
my own country, turning on the news and seeing my own rights coming up for debate."

Hours after the fourth day of public impeachment hearings in Congress, the candidates repeatedly blasted Mr. Trump and said the President's efforts to press Ukraine to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden, a leading Democratic presidential contender, were an example of the administration's corruption.

Ms. Warren, who is campaigning on the platform of getting money out of politics, also said that no donor would be appointed Ambassador under her presidency.

## THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12787

Log on to [crossword.thehindu.com](http://crossword.thehindu.com) for more puzzles



(set by Avtaar)

- 13 Paint lady from Zagreb right away (4)
- 14 Sweet woman finally dumps a dreamer (8)
- 17 Avtaar ran away from Bahrain and Dubai travelling to this capital (3,5)
- 18 Lose game having rallied for long periods of time (4)
- 20 He painted chemical gel on building after crossing chimney's top (12)
- 23 Marry again? Indeed! (6)
- 24 Swimmers from Spooner's water body... a regular feature on breakfast menus (8)
- 25 Like a man taking staff to a well-known embarkment? (5,3)
- 26 It is not possible to prove a murder with this menial (6)

- 4 Missing currency at the opening, teller becomes whiter (6)
- 5 What Bond needs to put in to get the top job, say? (11,4)
- 6 Corner has to be designed for a computer (8)
- 7 Fantastic... essentially grand... blue moon-like (5)
- 8 Engineer drives around country that one often sees submerged (5,5)
- 12 British man, departing from metropolis, made masala movies (10)
- 15 "Depressed bowel movement" featured in a sticker (2,1,3,3)
- 16 Woman everyone ogled at is fierce (per Shakespeare) (4,4)
- 19 Battered boy's taken in (6)
- 21 Indian sweet woman and man exchanged for a game on board (5)
- 22 Small caps mostly plummeted (4)

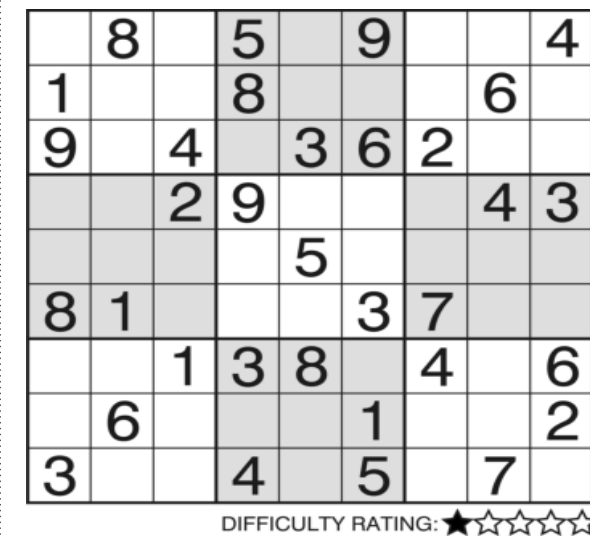
### ACROSS

- 1 Devil-like beast (6)
- 5 One who chronicles old coin series (8)
- 9 Stadium with fashionable address (8)
- 10 Insist on guests eating Chinese, perhaps? (6)
- 11 One could get advanced on this score, maybe? (6,6)

### DOWN

- 2 Controversial introductions to men of outstanding talent (4)
- 3 Retired sailor gave orders after steward's second goes missing (9)

## SUDOKU



**Solution to puzzle 12786**

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

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

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

## FAITH

### Undiminishing joy

One can have undiminishing joy by worshipping God, and yet there are people who seek fleeting pleasures, said M.A. Manickavelu in a discourse. Sivaprakasara in his Nanneri says that this is similar to the bee seeking the comfort of the neem flower to rest in and the crow seeking the bitterness of the neem fruit. To the bee, the flower is a bed, and that makes it desirable. But what pleasure can the crow derive from the bitter fruit? And yet, it is this unpalatable fruit that the crow seeks.

Likewise, when God is ready to offer us His protection, we hanker after trivial things in life. When sweet milk is available, will anyone want to consume dog's milk? Abhirami Bhattar, in his Abhirami Andadi, verse 64, says that he will not seek any other God, except the Goddess Abhirami. He will see nothing but Her effulgence on earth, in the sky and in all four directions. In verse 66, he says that he is not educated, and therefore, there may be mistakes and flaws in his verses. He begs Goddess Abhirami not to reject his verses because of these errors. He says even if the verses are not of a high literary standard, yet they should be acceptable to Her, for after all, they are nothing but praises of Her.

And yet, Abhirami Bhattar says right at the beginning of Abhirami Andadi, in verse three, that he has understood the marai (Vedas). How was this possible? He says that this knowledge came to him when he placed his head at the Goddess' feet. Her feet are holy and enlighten the ignorant. Seeking God's feet is the sole preoccupation of saintly persons, but the wicked let their thoughts go astray. They have the bad quality that a dog has of wandering aimlessly in the street. Their wicked qualities go forth to harm others, just as a tiger attacks other animals.