

U.S. envoy admits Ukraine quid pro quo

In an updated testimony, Sondland says aid was tied to Kiev launching probes into Trump's rivals

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON DC

In a significant development in the Trump impeachment inquiry, the U.S.'s EU Ambassador, Gordon Sondland, has said he had told a Ukrainian official that military assistance to the country was tied to a commitment to open certain investigations at President Donald Trump's behest, against his political rivals. Mr. Sondland had testified on October 19 that he did not believe there was a quid pro quo for the aid to Ukraine.



Making a U-turn: U.S. Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland, centre, in Washington. •AP/FILE

The reversal in position came via a sworn statement Mr. Sondland had submitted to House of Representatives investigators, which was released on Tuesday. The Trump donor-turned Ambassador had said the testimonies of other witnesses had "refreshed my recollection about certain conversations".

Mr. Sondland said he had a conversation with a Ukrainian official about the deal. "I said that resumption of the U.S. aid would likely not occur until Ukraine provided the public anti-corruption statement that we had been discussing for many weeks," the statement said, about that conversation which occurred in Warsaw. House investigators also released

hundreds of pages from Mr. Sondland's original testimony from last month as well as the one by the U.S.'s special Ukraine envoy, Kurt Volker.

The transcripts point to the central role of the President's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, in orchestrating a back-channel for U.S.-Ukraine diplomatic relations. Mr. Sondland testified that he had discussed Mr. Guiliani's role with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who "rolled his eyes", saying it was something they had to deal with.

The impeachment inquiry is looking into whether Mr. Trump violated his oath of office by pressuring the Ukrainian government to investigate Joe Biden, currently the frontrunner for the Democratic ticket to the 2020 Presidential race and his son, Hunter Biden, who was a director at Ukrainian gas company Burisma. They are also investigating any alleged interference by Ukraine in the 2016 election.

Impeachment sham
The White House dismissed Tuesday's transcript release. "Both transcripts released today show there is even less evidence for this illegitimate impeachment sham than previously thought," Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham said in a statement.

"Ambassador Sondland squarely states that he 'did not know, (and still does not know) when, why or by whom the aid was suspended.' He also said he 'presumed' there was a link to the aid - but cannot identify any solid source for that assumption. By contrast, Volker's testimony confirms there could not have been a quid pro quo because the Ukrainians did not know about the military aid hold at the time," the statement said. "No amount of salacious media-biased headlines, which are clearly designed to influence the narrative, change the fact that the president has done nothing wrong," Ms. Grisham said.

White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney has been invited to testify before the House investigators on Friday, a request Mr. Mulvaney is unlikely to comply with.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron declared on Wednesday that the Paris climate pact was "irreversible", showing a united front after Washington formally withdrew from the accord this week.

The joint declaration came at the end of Mr. Macron's second visit to China, which started on Monday in Shanghai and included talks on trade and the Iranian nuclear issue.

The French leader also said he told Mr. Xi there was a need for dialogue to resolve months of unrest in Hong Kong - ignoring Beijing's prior warning that such sensitive topics should not be on the agenda. But Mr. Xi and Mr. Macron

Xi, Macron call climate pact 'irreversible' after U.S. pullout

'Paris accord a compass for strong action on climate'

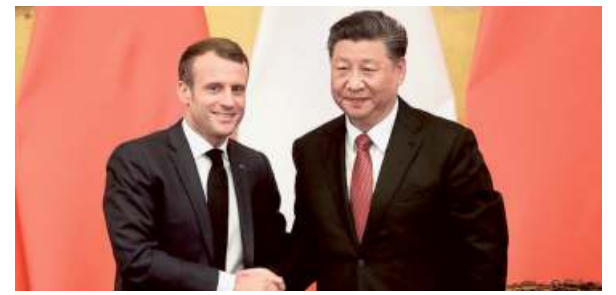
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

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But Mr. Xi and Mr. Macron



Emmanuel Macron with Xi Jinping, right, in Beijing. •REUTERS

found common ground on climate change.

Major powers expressed regret and concern after U.S. President Donald Trump went ahead with the pullout from the Paris accord despite mounting evidence of the reality and impact of climate change.

Washington presented its withdrawal letter to the United Nations on Monday, the first possible date under the

accord negotiated by Trump's predecessor Barack Obama, making the world's largest economy the sole major outlier from the agreement.

In a joint written statement, both leaders reaffirmed "their firm support for the Paris accord which they consider as an irreversible process and a compass for strong action on climate".

Democrats seize Virginia, claim win in Kentucky

REUTERS
VIRGINIA

U.S. Democrats claimed an upset win in Kentucky on Tuesday over a Republican Governor backed by President Donald Trump and seized control of the State legislature in Virginia, where anti-Trump sentiment in the suburbs remained a potent force.

The outcomes of Tuesday's elections in four States could offer clues to how next year's presidential election could unfold, when Mr. Trump will aim for a second four-year term.

In Kentucky, Democratic Attorney General Andy

Beshear scored a narrow victory over Governor Matt Bevin despite backing from Mr. Trump. While the result was a significant setback for Mr. Trump, who remains popular in Kentucky, it may have had more to do with Mr. Bevin's diminished standing in the State.

Meanwhile, Democrats wrestled both chambers of Virginia's legislature from narrow Republican majorities.

In Mississippi, Republican Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves won.

In New Jersey, Democrats were expected to maintain their majority.

Pinera says he will not resign over protests

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SANTIAGO

Chilean President Sebastian Pinera told BBC in an interview that he will not resign in the face of deadly protests over inequality and poor social conditions that have entered their third week.

Mr. Pinera said the government had "nothing to hide" concerning allegations that police killed, tortured and sexually assaulted civilians during protests. Prosecutors say five of the 20 deaths were suspected to have been at the hands of police.

'Sharp rise in H-1B denial for Indian firms under Trump'

It rose from 7% to 53% for Wipro and 2% to 45% for Infosys

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

As a result of the more restrictive policies under U.S. President Trump, denial rates for H-1B petitions have increased from just 6% in 2015 to 24% in the third quarter of the current fiscal, a study has shown.

The study by the National Foundation for American Policy also reflects that denial rate for H-1B visas is highest among major Indian IT companies, thus giving credence to charges that In-



The study was carried out by the National Foundation for American Policy.

dian companies are being unduly targeted by the current administration.

For instance, the denial

rate of H-1B petitions for initial employment for Amazon, Microsoft, Intel and Google in 2015 was just 1%. In 2019, the same increased to 6, 8, 7 and 3%, respectively.

The denial rate for Apple remained the same at 2%.

During the same period, the denial rate jumped from 4% to 41% for Tech Mahindra, from 6% to 34% for Tata Consultancy Services, from 7% to 53% for Wipro and from just 2% to 45% for Infosys, the study showed.

'Govt., Opposition should talk to end Pak. deadlock'

JUI-F is leading protests in Islamabad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan government should present its suggestions to the Opposition parties if it wants to find a middle ground and break the deadlock, firebrand cleric-politician Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who has been leading the 'Azadi March' demanding the ouster of Prime Minister Imran Khan, said on Wednesday.

The right-wing Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) leader is leading the massive protest, which entered the sixth day on Wednesday.

The opposition parties, including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People Party (PPP), have also thrown their weight behind the massive anti-government rally in Islamabad.

Mr. Rehman said if the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government wanted to find a middle ground, it should present its suggestions.

"Imran Khan is not a bigger man than Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, if he had re-elections why can't [Imran]? We don't want to drag in the establishment," he said.

Northern Tamils know who they don't want in power in Colombo

35 candidates are in the fray, but in the north, Premadasa has an upper hand

MEERA SRINIVASAN
MANNAR

As many as 35 candidates are running for President in Sri Lanka's November 16 election, but northern Tamils view it as a two-cornered fight between Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Sajith Premadasa. And they know who they don't want in power.

The incumbent government, formed in 2015 after Sri Lankans voted out Mahinda Rajapaksa, has not substantively altered northern Tamils' post-war realities. They are very disappointed with its failure to deliver on many promises. However, voters across the Northern Province dread the possible return of a Rajapaksa - this time the former President's

brother and a powerful wartime Defence Secretary - to the helm.

Less than a fortnight for the polls, "the white vans might come back" was a common refrain in Jaffna peninsula and the Vanni, the mainland area covering Mannar, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Kilinochchi districts, where former combatants and civilians abducted in white vans were never seen again. A decade after the civil war, their fear of the Rajapaksas - with whose administration they associate the war's brutal end in 2009 - is intact.

That explained the "silent wave for Sajith Premadasa" that a senior cooperative society leader spoke of, requesting anonymity. Refer-

ring to the LTTE's assassination of his father Ranasinghe Premadasa, he said: "Not everyone is comfortable with that. We feel it was carried out by someone with a motive and it ended up giving the Tigers a bad name."

'Choose prudently'
"We all know that the government [led by the United National Party to which Mr. Premadasa belongs] did not do much. But in the case of Gotabaya, families see him as the one who presided over their relatives' death or disappearance. They are terrified of those days," the community leader said, at his office in Kilinochchi. "They're [contestants] all chillies. The difference is in the degree of hotness, and we've to choose prudently." It is the fear and aversion



Call for justice: The relatives of missing people stage a protest during Gotabaya Rajapaksa's visit to Jaffna. •AFP

that he referred to that manifested in the overwhelming mandate that the Tamils gave the Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe combine in 2015. Nearly 80% of voters in the Northern Province backed their coalition, but the administration is not particularly popular either.

While the Tamil political leadership - the Tamil Na-

tional Alliance (TNA) - has often highlighted the government's failings in completing constitutional reform for power devolution and ensuring swift measures towards post-war accountability and reconciliation, the people emphasise a host of other concerns too, pertaining to lack of jobs, livelihoods, adequate income, housing

and household debt.

"We faced a huge destruction in Mullivaikkal [the final battle], lost so many of our people and our assets and belongings through the years of war. At least now can't we live in peace?" asked Santhan Stanis Rejidas, 34, a leader of a fishermen's federation in Anthoniyarpuram village in Mannar.

"There is a common perception that no Sinhalese leader can win a national election without minority votes. And yet, our own leadership is unable to use that bargaining power well for our rights," he said, voicing sharp criticism of the TNA whose MPs, he said, "rarely show up". "The voters are not waiting for the TNA to direct us now, we have already made up our mind. We don't want the white vans again."

The Ilankai Tamil Arasu

Katchi, the TNA's chief constituent, recently declared support for Mr. Premadasa, while Douglas Devananda of the Eelam People's Democratic Party - who has a base in the islands off Jaffna peninsula - has aligned with the Rajapaksa camp.

Not who, but what
The question should not be 'who should win', but 'what might change', according to Sanathani Mahendran, based in Thiruketheeswaram, Mannar. "Many in our village have only one good meal a day. This has to change," she said, pointing to Mr. Premadasa's manifesto that promises free mid-day meals in schools and housing for all.

"At least 100 families here returned from India, where they went as refugees. They have absolutely nothing as they try to rebuild their lives.

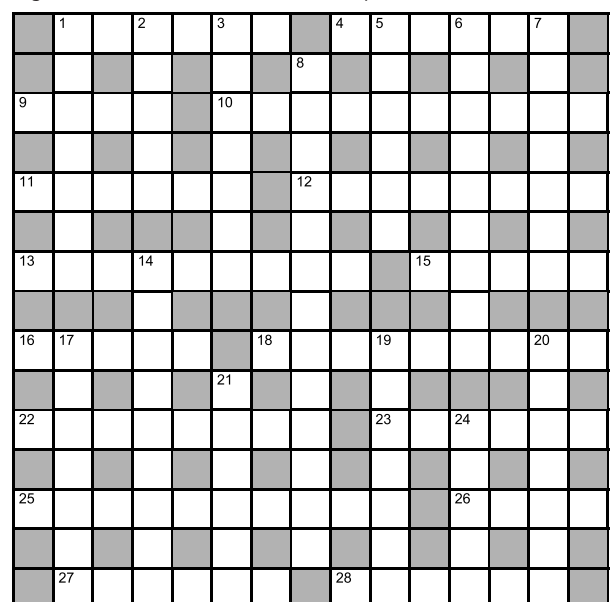
Most of us here survive on daily wage labour. We work so hard, all in the hope of a better life," said Sharmalita Sakthivel, a mother of two.

Voters in the north may have strong criticism against the government, but "at least we breathed a little without the military watching us all the time," said H. Manohar, a pastor in Mannar town.

"We may be utterly disappointed with this government, and with good reason. But to say Gotabaya and Sajith are the same is rather simplistic. For those of us living here, the democratic space that opened up means a lot. We must vote to retain that." Nearly 8.5 lakh registered voters in the Northern Province will get to exercise their franchise on November 16. However, unlike in 2015, their vote will carry more scepticism than hope.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12774

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



■ ACROSS

- 1 Buoyant, consume after pub brawl (6)
- 4 Strain, it is said, of a bit of money (6)
- 9 Starts assuming she's in another continent (4)
- 10 In pit, throw piece of rubble into gem soup (10)

- 11 Torment Mark with initial remark (6)
- 12 Instrument the miner played (8)
- 13 Her curtailed nuclear explosion is powerful (9)
- 15 Spire destroyed at docks (5)
- 16 Landowner's den's opening door (5)
- 18 Signatories, losing margins, awkwardly emerge (9)
- 22 Freedom from demon's accord (8)
- 23 Carnivore, not even awry, left fort (6)
- 25 Temp, gutted, fated to confinement (10)
- 26 Adapted to returning flow (4)
- 27 On every other marsh, places resources (6)
- 28 Believes in cartels (6)

■ DOWN

- 1 Aloof odd ump on podium (7)
- 2 At first, brewers half-heartedly abandon new gross drink (5)

(set by Anon)

- 3 Endlessly respect oddly able commander (7)
- 5 Festival in little asteroid (6)
- 6 European wearing no fabrication (9)
- 7 Lankier than one arrested by commando (7)
- 8 Nihilism treaty, first off, composed in alliterations (7,6)
- 14 Accountant to call lots regularly at conveyor belts (9)
- 17 Valets overwhelmed by song of Asian country (7)
- 19 Mobster, loses direction, becomes comic writer (7)
- 20 Some respite introduced into subjects of torrid zones (7)
- 21 Symbol of alien on seal (6)
- 24 Thoughts tossed aside (5)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12773

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

FAITH

The sacred hill

Vedanta Desika praises the hill, known as Tirumala, which is the abode of Lord Srinivasa. He says this hill shows Him the Lord's feet. It gets rid of the two chains that keep us bound to samsara, namely punya and papa. You begin to think it is Sri Vaikuntha itself. It is a hill, where there are many water bodies with crystal clear water. It is a hill much sought after by everyone. It is a hill praised by the Vedas.

But what is the Vedic mantra which praises the sacred Tirumala hills? It is a mantra in the Rg Veda, elaborated V.S. Karunakarachariar in a discourse. The mantra calls out to us and asks, "Are you suffering because of poverty? It then asks, "Are you without sight?" Here the Veda is asking if one is without jnana. The mantra then asks, "Are you being burnt?" Here the reference is to the burdens of samsara. There are three heats - Apatraya. One is Adhyatmika. Problems that the body and mind suffer from fall in this category. Adhiboutika includes problems caused by human beings, animals, insects etc. Adhidevika means those calamities caused by Nature, like floods, hurricanes etc.

"Are you surrounded by evil forces?" asks the Veda mantra. Naturally, the answer of most of us will be yes to most of the questions, or at least to some of them. The mantra also offers us the solution for us. If we are tormented in life, then the place to go for respite is Srimibitha, says the mantra. Srimibitha is a variation of Sri Pitha, which is a reference to Tirumala. So, the Rg Vedic mantra is telling us to seek refuge in Tirumala. That is why Desika referred to Tirumala as the hill praised by the Vedas.

In Tirumala, Srinivasa asks Varaha for some land to do penance. The land where Srinivasa did tapas, is where we now see the Ananda Vimana.