

Xi vows support for Lam despite setbacks

‘Govt. fully recognises courage & assumption of responsibility you displayed in these exceptional times’

REUTERS
HONG KONG

Chinese President Xi Jinping offered his support for Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam on Monday, praising her courage in governing the Chinese-ruled hub in these “most difficult times” after months of often violent anti-government protests.

His comments came after Hong Kong police fired tear gas in late night street clashes with anti-government protesters as the former British colony’s worst political crisis in decades shows no sign of resolution.

“The situation in Hong Kong in 2019 was the most complex and difficult since its return to the motherland,” Mr. Xi told local media in brief comments before a closed-door meeting with Ms. Lam in Beijing.

“The central government fully recognises the courage and assumption of responsi-



Full support: Carrie Lam says she feels encouraged by Xi Jinping’s recognition of her efforts. • REUTERS

bility you have displayed in these exceptional times in Hong Kong.”

Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997 with the promise of wide-ranging autonomy under a “one country, two systems” formula, including a free press and independent judiciary, which the protesters say is being eroded by Communist Party

port for Ms. Lam despite some previous media reports suggesting she might be replaced.

He added Beijing was “unwavering in supporting Hong Kong police in firmly upholding the law” and said Ms. Lam had continued to uphold the “one country, two systems” principle.

Mr. Xi said last month that China was “unwavering” in defending national security and sovereignty, implementing the “one country, two systems” policy and opposing foreign forces interfering in Hong Kong.

He stated on Monday that these were Beijing’s basic positions on Hong Kong affairs.

Ms. Lam earlier met Premier Li Keqiang, who said Hong Kong was not yet out of the “dilemma” facing the city’s ailing economy after months of sometimes violent protests.

Late on Sunday, groups of

Johnson set to welcome lawmakers, get Brexit rolling

Govt. plans to introduce the EU withdrawal Bill on Friday

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is ready to give a pep talk on Monday to a new group of Conservative Party lawmakers as he begins his push to secure parliamentary approval for his Brexit deal.

Mr. Johnson will welcome 109 newly elected colleagues, many of them coming from parts of the country that were once strongholds of the opposition Labour Party.

Buoyed by the Conservatives’ win in last week’s election, Mr. Johnson will move fast to deliver on his campaign mantra to “get Brexit done.” That means ensuring a Brexit withdrawal agreement Bill is passed in time for the U.K. to complete its historic departure from the



Boris Johnson

European Union by the current deadline of January 31.

Mr. Johnson’s spokesman James Slack said the government will introduce the EU withdrawal Bill on Friday. It will be up to the Speaker of the House of Commons to determine if Parliament will hold its first major vote on the Bill that same day or will wait until January after the Christmas recess.

The Brexit divorce Bill is

expected to receive strong support in Parliament, where Mr. Johnson’s Conservatives hold a strong majority. The party won 365 of the 650 seats in the House of Commons in Thursday’s landslide election.

If the Bill passes and Britain leaves the EU on time, the country will enter a transition period when EU rules and regulations would still apply in the country and people and goods would still be able to pass freely between the U.K. and the remaining EU members.

Negotiators for the government and the EU would start trade talks with an eye toward a post-Brexit agreement. Queen Elizabeth II will formally open Parliament on Thursday with a speech outlining legislative programme.

ELSEWHERE



U.S. says N. Korea-set deadline not acceptable

SEOUL

A senior U.S. diplomat said on Monday that Washington won’t accept a year-end deadline set by North Korea to make concessions in stalled nuclear talks. The U.S. special representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun urged Pyongyang to return to a negotiating table immediately. **AP**

N. Ireland parties revive power-sharing talks

BELFAST

Northern Ireland’s squabbling parties met on Monday in the hope of reviving their power-sharing regional government after three years. The power-sharing executive between the conservative DUP and left-wing Sinn Fein crumbled in a breakdown of trust following a misspending scandal. **APF**

Turkey deploys drone in northern Cyprus

ANKARA

Turkey has dispatched a surveillance drone to the northern Cyprus amid tensions over offshore oil and gas exploration. Kudret Ozersay, Foreign Minister of the self-declared Turkish Cypriot state, said it was an “unarmed drones”. **AP**

Jewellery worth \$64 mn stolen from British celeb

LONDON

Tamara Ecclestone, the daughter of former Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone, has had an estimated 50 million pounds (\$64 million)-worth of jewellery stolen from her home on a London street known as Billionaire Row. **REUTERS**

Colombo-based Swiss Embassy staffer arrested

Sri Lanka’s reputation as a constitutional state at stake: Bern



Swiss embassy staffer, in pink shawl, being escorted to a court in Colombo. • AP

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka police on Monday arrested a local employee of the Swiss Embassy in Colombo, who has been at the centre of a diplomatic controversy, for allegedly making a false accusation that she was detained and threatened.

The Sri Lankan national, working at the visa section of the Embassy, was reportedly abducted and sexually harassed on November 25, a day after a top Sri Lankan police officer, who had been probing cases involving the Rajapaksa family, sought asylum in Switzerland.

On Monday, she was arrested following Attorney-

General Dappula de Livera’s advice to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to name her as a suspect, “for exciting disaffection against the government and fabricating false evidence”, the public prosecutor’s coordinating officer Nishara Jayaratne told *The Hindu*.

The tension between Bern and Colombo – over contradicting claims over the incident – could further escalate with the staffer’s arrest, with Switzerland criticising the “lack of due process”.

“Sri Lanka’s reputation as a constitutional State is at stake in this exemplary case,” Switzerland said in a statement issued Monday night. The Federal Depart-

ment of Foreign Affairs in Bern said it was “concerned” about the arrest and that it “expects” the Sri Lankan judiciary to comply with its “own legal requirements, international standards” and to protect personal rights “better than before”.

‘Abduction fabricated’

Meanwhile, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa told local media heads on Monday that

available evidence showed the “abduction” of the staffer was “fabricated”, his office said in a media release. “The Embassy official must have been compelled by some interested parties to bring myself and my government into disrepute,” he was quoted as saying.

In a separate statement, the President’s media division said Hanspeter Mock, Ambassador of Switzerland in Sri Lanka, called on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Monday morning and “assured continuous support” to Sri Lanka. President Rajapaksa “requested the Ambassador to cooperate with the government to conduct the investigation”, the statement added.

In an apparently different reading of the meeting, the FDFA said it “repeatedly

told” Sri Lankan authorities that it is looking for a “common and constructive way” to resolve the “security incident”. “The Swiss Ambassador to Colombo underlined this in a direct conversation with Sri Lanka’s President Gotabaya Rajapaksa,” the statement from Bern said.

‘Testified to CID’

Though the Swiss authorities had maintained that the Embassy staffer was unable to testify in person due to “deteriorating health”, following a Colombo court’s order last week, the employee has been testifying to the CID for several hours, in addition to presenting herself for medical examination.

The Swiss FDFA “criticised” the 30-hour interrogation of its employee over three days “despite poor

health” and the public statements by senior Sri Lankan officials questioning her account before the investigation is completed.

Over the last fortnight, Bern and Colombo put out contradictory claims over the alleged abduction, making their disagreement clear.

While the Swiss Foreign Ministry said the employee had been “detained against her will on the street and threatened at length” by unidentified men, who “forced her to disclose Embassy-related information”, Sri Lanka’s Foreign Ministry sought to question the account, citing “evidence” that contradicted the staffer’s claims.

The Secretary to Sri Lanka’s Ministry of Defence called it a “big-time drama”. Bern has stood by its initial statement.

U.K. PM clears report on Russian role

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has cleared for publication a parliamentary report into alleged Russia interference in British politics, his spokesman said on Monday, but no date has been set for its release.

The 50-page report into Russian activity in the U.K., including possible meddling in the 2016 Brexit vote, was written by Parliament’s intelligence and security committee earlier this year.

It also referenced the poisoning of former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, which London has blamed on Moscow.

Qatar hopeful of ending rift with Saudi Arabia

Riyadh sought shutting of Al Jazeera

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DOHA

Qatar’s Foreign Minister has voiced optimism over ending a bitter rift with Riyadh, saying early talks broke a “stalemate” but stressed Doha’s unwillingness to downgrade ties with Turkey as a pre-condition.

Saudi Arabia along with its allies the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut all diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar in June 2017.

The four nations accused Doha of backing radical Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and seeking closer ties with Saudi arch

rival Tehran – allegations Qatar vehemently denies.

“There (is) some progress... We have broken the stalemate of non-communication to starting communication with the Saudis,” Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said.

The Saudi-led bloc made 13 key demands, including shutting down broadcaster Al Jazeera, downgrading ties with Iran and closing a Turkish military base on its territory, to resolve the dispute. But the UAE has sought to downplay the reconciliation effort.

Democrats bolster case against Trump, say he betrayed nation

Report spelling out rationale behind impeachment released

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

Bolstering its case for impeaching President Donald Trump, a House panel released a report on Monday detailing its rationale for the charges and accusing Mr. Trump of betraying the nation for his own political gain.

Mr. Trump faces two articles of impeachment by House Democrats – abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. They point to Mr. Trump pressuring Ukraine to investigate his political



Donald Trump

rival Joe Biden while withholding as leverage military aid the country relies to counter Russia as well as his efforts to block the House investigation.

The House will vote on Wednesday on the impeachment articles approved last week by the House Judiciary panel. The vote is all but certain to result in Mr. Trump’s impeachment, though he’s expected to be acquitted in a Senate trial.

Detailing its case against the 45th President, the Judiciary panel released a report after midnight. It said Mr. Trump “betrayed the nation by abusing his high office to enlist a foreign power in corrupting democratic elections.”

Won’t let militants take country hostage: Imran

Pak. mourns victims of Peshawar attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PESHAWAR/ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s top leadership on Monday pledged to not allow militants with “bigoted vision” to take the country hostage as the nation mourned the 5th anniversary of massacre of 149 people, including 132 students, at a School in Peshawar.

In one of the most gruesome attacks on children anywhere in the world, suicide attackers wearing paramilitary Frontier Corps uniforms on December 16, 2014 entered Peshawar’s Army Public School and went from classroom-to-class-

room shooting indiscriminately, killing 149 people including 132 students.

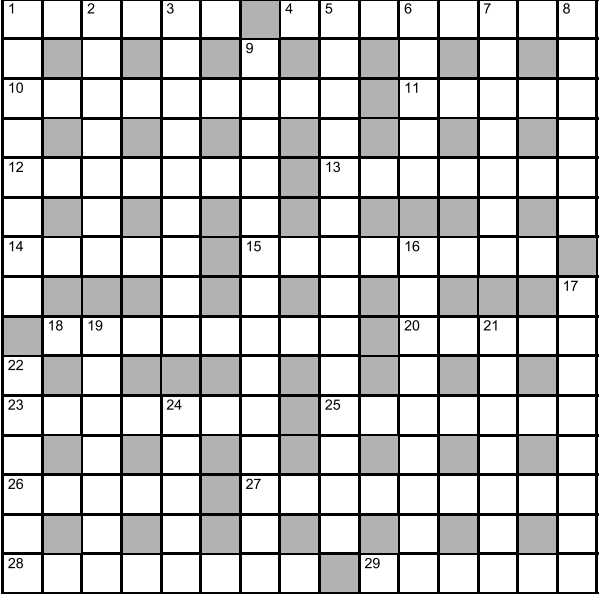
Following the incident, Pakistan has hanged four men linked to the massacre, the BBC reported.

Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the militant mindset would not be allowed to take over the country. “We pledge on this day that the militants will not be allowed to make the nation hostage to its bigoted vision,” he said.

Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa said that the carnage will never be forgotten.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12808

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



To play an interactive version of this crossword online, scan the QR code

■ ACROSS

- 1 Preserve jam (6)
- 4 Married criminal reaches jail with everyone evacuated (8)
- 10 Left that old, boring, extremely tiresome game (6-3)
- 11 Jack escaped from work using influence (5)

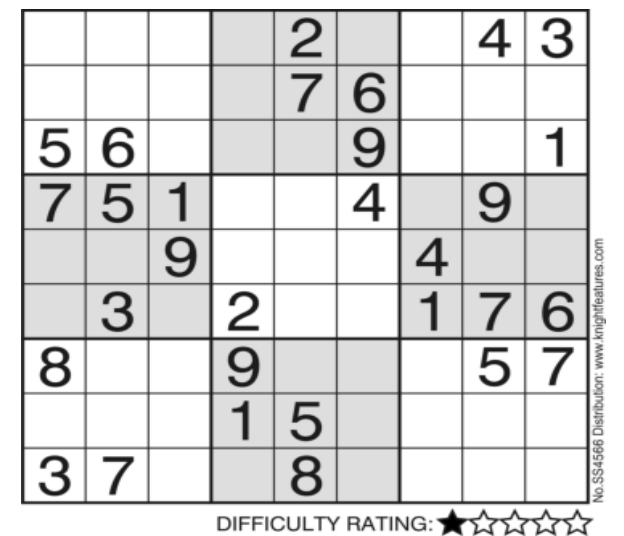
■ DOWN

- 1 After work is over, proposes drinks (8)

(set by KrisKross)

- 12 War cries from rebellious Nazi base, mostly (7)
- 13 Support provided by fine dog (7)
- 14 English ruler struggling to make supplies last (5)
- 15 The Don is temporarily protecting a pleasure-seeker (8)
- 18 Paul came around offering an apology (3,5)
- 20 Study short, lively dance (5)
- 23 Many English men put out (7)
- 25 Working in public transport systems yields extra benefits (7)
- 26 Planet very close to earth, orbiting sun (5)
- 27 At the banks of Danube, setter participated in match and had a fun time (4,5)
- 28 Precipitation – a drop of rain – remains on head (8)
- 29 Groom stole away to get married, essentially (6)
- 2 City is nice, and mostly hot – melting! (7)
- 3 Dull love-life’s starting to suffer? Charge it! (9)
- 5 I won’t allow this location of funeral service? (4,2,4,4)
- 6 Shocks student in BITS (5)
- 7 Craze over containers for miscellaneous items (7)
- 8 Termination of a fly in motion (6)
- 9 Famous people in institutions, about to apply control over North America (9,5)
- 16 Familiar addresses to steal by illegal means (9)
- 17 Pessimist wasted many years losing money (8)
- 19 Old pots containing many balloons (7)
- 21 A breathtaking passage (7)
- 22 Queen, say, makes a shrill sound (6)
- 24 A bit of smog possibly seen around German city (5)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12807								
A	B	S	E	N	T	J	U	S
S	O	L	I	O	S	I	S	T
T	E	L	L	T	E	E	A	H
R	A	T	E	S	A	S	R	E
A	I	I	N	A	E	Y	H	
C	O	M	M	A	N	D		
T	E	O						
P	G	A	E	E	G	E	C	K
E	X	A	M	P	A	P	E	R
S	R	A	M	P	A	P	E	R
H	Y	D	R	A				
W	E	N	V	N	Z	R	E	
A	S	N	E	E	D	P	E	N

Solution to yesterday’s Sudoku								
1	9	3	5	8	6	2	4	7
4	6	7	3	2	9	1	5	8
8	2	5	4	1	7	9	3	6
9	4	6	8	7	2	3	1	5
5	7	1	6	4	3	8	2	9
3	8	2	1	9	5	6	7	4
2	3	8	9	5	4	7	6	1
7	5	9	2	6	1	4	8	3
6	1	4	7	3	8	5	9	2

FAITH

Mahavishnu’s patience

Once rishis who were performing yagas wanted to know to which god they should offer havis. It was decided that the one with the most sattvic qualities should be the one to receive havis, said V.S. Karunakarachariar in a discourse. Sage Bhrigu was assigned the task of determining which of the gods was the most tolerant and not prone to anger, for tolerance and patience come from sattva guna.

Bhrigu first visited Satyaloka, the abode of Brahma. Brahma was not pleased with the sudden entry of Bhrigu. Angered by Brahma’s attitude, Bhrigu cursed him and said that henceforth no one would build temples for Brahma. Bhrigu’s next stop was Lord Siva’s abode. Although Nandi tried to stop the sage, he paid no heed to Nandi. In Kailasa too, Bhrigu did not get the welcome he had expected. Angered, he next went to the milky ocean, in which Lord Vishnu reclined. He aimed a kick at Vishnu’s chest, and Vishnu got up and apologised to the sage! He said that by kicking Him, the sage’s foot might have been hurt. He washed the sage’s foot with water. He further said that He would proudly protect the bruise on His chest, caused by the sage’s kick. Astounded by this reception to a sinful act, the sage concluded that no god could be as forgiving and patient as Vishnu. So, he went back to the other sages and told them that havis should be offered to Vishnu.

In any case, it is Vishnu who resides inside everyone, and so even if havis is offered to some other devata, it reaches the Lord. There is a Subhasita, which says – AkAsAt patitam tOyam yathA gachhati sAgaram/ sarva deva namaskArah Kesavam prati gacchati. This means all the rain water ultimately reaches the ocean. Likewise, no matter to whom a prayer is offered, it ultimately reaches Lord Kesava.