

Parliament backs Johnson’s Brexit deal

MPs vote by 358 to 234 to pass the second reading of the Bill, setting a speedy timetable for final ratification

REUTERS
LONDON
Prime Minister Boris Johnson won approval for his Brexit deal in Parliament on Friday, the first step towards fulfilling his election pledge to deliver Britain’s departure from the European Union by January 31 after his landslide victory.

Lawmakers voted by 358 to 234 – a majority of 124 – to pass the second reading of Withdrawal Agreement Bill, underlining Mr. Johnson’s large majority in Parliament that should ensure a smooth ratification of the divorce deal to implement Britain’s biggest policy shift in more than 40 years.

More than three years since Britain voted to exit the EU in a 2016 referendum, the deep uncertainty over Brexit has now been replaced by the firm deadline of the end of January. Only after that will the Prime Minister face talks to secure a trade deal with the bloc by the end of next year.

Getting “the Brexit vote



Crucial vote: Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaking in the House of Commons in London on Friday. ■AFP

wrapped up for Christmas” was the main aim for Mr. Johnson showing that, unlike his predecessor Theresa May, he now had free reign to drive Brexit forward despite continued criticism from opposition lawmakers.

Time to act
“This is the time when we move on and discard the old labels of ‘leave’ and ‘remain’... now is the time to act together as one reinvigorated nation, one United

Kingdom,” Mr. Johnson told Parliament before the vote. “Now is the moment to come together and write a new and exciting chapter in our national story, to forge a new partnership with our European friends, to stand tall in the world, to begin the healing for which the whole people of this country yearn.”

The final stages of ratification will take place after Christmas, with the lower house of Parliament having

until January 9 to approve the legislation, giving it just over three weeks to then pass through the upper house and receive Royal Assent.

After leaving, Britain will need to secure new trading arrangements with the EU – a future friendship, the Prime Minister said, that would see the country agree a trade deal with no alignment with the bloc’s rules.

In a few changes to the so-called Withdrawal Agreement Bill, Mr. Johnson seeks to make sure that there can be no legal chance of extending those talks beyond the end of next year.

But while Mr. Johnson has the support of his 365 Conservative lawmakers in the 650-seat Parliament, some opposition lawmakers criticised him for removing the opportunity for Parliament to have oversight over his negotiating priorities in the next phase of talks, and for getting rid of workers’ protections.

Opposition Labour leader

Jeremy Corbyn, who is stepping down in the wake of the election defeat, described it as “terrible” and said his party would not be supporting the Bill.

Opposition cries foul
“This deal does not bring certainty for communities or for business or for the workforce, in fact it does the opposite and hardwires the risk of a no-deal Brexit next year,” Mr. Corbyn said.

Just a week after he won the largest Conservative majority since Margaret Thatcher in 1987, Mr. Johnson has set out an ambitious programme, with securing Brexit at the top of his agenda to repay the trust of voters.

Hoping to satisfy the demands of voters in northern and central England, who broke their tradition of backing Labour Party to support him, he has also pledged more funding to the state health service, education and policing. “Next year will be a great year for our country,” he said before the vote.

Trump seeks immediate trial in Senate after impeachment

Mitch McConnell accuses Democrats of a ‘partisan crusade’

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON
U.S. President Donald Trump pressed his Republican allies on Thursday to exert rigid control of his Senate trial and ensure a swift exoneration, a day after he was impeached in a historic rebuke by the House of Representatives.

A bitter fight looms over the coming trial, expected to begin as early as the second week of January, with Senate leaders already drawing battle lines over the evidence that will be allowed.

But its fate was left in limbo late on Thursday when the Senate’s powerful majority leader, Mitch McConnell signalled the standoff with Democrats over trial particulars would continue into the new year.

“We remain at an impasse on these logistics,” Mr. McConnell said on the floor, as he announced the Senate had completed its business



Donald Trump

until January.

Mr. Trump seized on the uncertainty to attack House Democrats for seeking to demand key witnesses or dictate how Mr. McConnell should run the process.

“I want an immediate trial!” he boomed on Twitter.

Mr. Trump is charged with abuse of office and obstruction of Congress but Democrats, who led the three-month House investigation, are threatening to delay sending the articles of impeachment to the Senate

until they are reassured the process will be fair.

Mr. Trump, the third president in U.S. history to be impeached, suggested that the Democrats would “lose by default” if they decided not to show up at a date determined by the Senate.

The House voted along party lines on Wednesday to charge Mr. Trump with abuse of power for pressuring Ukraine’s President to investigate his potential White House challenger in 2020, the veteran Democrat Joe Biden.

In a floor speech on Thursday, Mr. McConnell ridiculed the witness demand and the evidence used as the basis for the impeachment articles.

He accused Democrats of a “partisan crusade” and said they had conducted the “most rushed, the least thorough and most unfair impeachment inquiry in modern history.”

ELSEWHERE



Saeed’s trial in terror financing case begins

LAHORE
The much-awaited trial of Mumbai terror attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed began here on Friday with a witness testifying against him in the anti-terrorism court, which also indicted the JuD chief in another case of terror financing, amidst international pressure on Pakistan to bring him to justice. The anti-terrorism court in Lahore had indicted Saeed and three of his top aides on terror financing charges on December 11. PTI

Australian PM ends holiday over fire crisis

SYDNEY
Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison issued a public apology on Friday and ended a Hawaiian vacation in response to public anger after two firefighters were killed battling bushfires sweeping the country’s east coast. Some areas of Sydney are set for “catastrophic” conditions on Saturday, and the fires are now spreading to other parts. REUTERS

‘More than 80 dead in latest Syria clashes’

BEIRUT
Clashes between Syrian regime forces and armed groups in the country’s last major opposition bastion have killed more than 80 on both sides in the past 24 hours, despite UN calls for de-escalation, U.K.-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. AFP

Afghanistan and Pakistan jolted by strong earthquake

Tremors were felt as far away as Delhi

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

A strong earthquake rattled Afghanistan and Pakistan on Friday afternoon, the U.S. Geological Survey said, forcing residents into the streets in Kabul and Islamabad.

The 6.1-magnitude quake hit around 50 km southwest of Jurm in northern Afghanistan and was over 200 km deep, the USGS said.

In both capital cities, residents felt two short tremors in quick succession, howev-

er there were no immediate reports of damage.

The quake could be felt as far away as Delhi, residents there reported, while in Lahore, panicked people came onto the streets and got out of their cars. The quake’s epicentre was in a sparsely populated, remote mountain area in Badakhshan province in Afghanistan.

The USGS estimated there would be few economic losses from the quake, with “a low likelihood of casualties and damage.”

Democratic candidates clash in presidential debate

Trump is running the most corrupt administration in the modern history of the U.S., says Sanders

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LOS ANGELES

White House candidates not only attacked President Donald Trump but also clashed sharply with one another during the Democratic debate, where a smaller field allowed lesser-known hopefuls to shine against the frontrunners.

One day after Mr. Trump’s ignominious impeachment, seven candidates united on Thursday to declare the President must be defeated at the 2020 ballot box.

“We need to restore the



Joe Biden, left, and Bernie Sanders during the debate. ■AFP

integrity of the presidency,” said frontrunner Joe Biden, who accused Mr. Trump of “dumbing down” the office “beyond what I even thought

he would do”.

Senator Bernie Sanders, who is second in the standings, blasted Mr. Trump as “running the most corrupt

administration in the modern history of this country”.

Fellow Senator Elizabeth Warren said the President ignores the poor, to do “everything he can for the wealthy and the well-connected”.

Moral leadership

But after calls for greater moral leadership from the White House and crisp back-and-forth about trade policy, health care and how to lift more Americans out of poverty, the debate took a more aggressive tone with a

series of heated clashes between candidates.

Ms. Warren launched her sharpest attacks yet on rival Pete Buttigieg, saying the 37-year-old Mayor of South Bend, Indiana, has been holding closed-door fundraisers for the wealthy, including at a billionaire-owned “wine cave” in California. The final prime-time debate of 2019 featured just seven of the 15 Democrats still in the contest six weeks before the first nomination ballots are cast in Iowa in February.

Central Park case looms over student’s murder

A 13-year-old boy is suspected to be involved in incident outside Manhattan’s Morningside Park

ASHLEY SOUTHALL
JIM DWYER
NEW YORK

Hours after an 18-year-old student at Barnard College was found stabbed and dying just outside Morningside Park in Manhattan, the Police Commissioner and two top chiefs gathered with detectives near the steep flights of stone steps where she had been attacked.

It was already clear that the killing of the student, Tessa Majors, in her first semester of college and new to New York City, was a heinous, high-profile crime that would demand the full resources of the police department.

And it was just as plain to



Probe begins: Policemen at the entrance of Morningside Park, New York, where a student was fatally stabbed on Dec. 11. ■NYT

the police officials at the scene that the inquiry would be handled in the shadow of an investigation from a different time: the Central Park Five case, also known as the Central Park jogger case,

from April 1989. Both concerned a young white woman attacked in a park and younger teenage suspects who are black and Latino.

In the Central Park case, five teenagers were wrongly

convicted of rape and attempted murder while the real attacker rampaged for months.

On the night of the killing, police officials took the unusual step of calling in prosecutors almost immediately to minimise any chance that investigators would repeat missteps made in the Central Park case, officials said.

In addition, all the questioning of a 13-year-old suspect was recorded on video, police said.

It was later proved that one man, Matias Reyes, had raped the Central Park victim – the second woman he had beaten and raped in the park that week. The wrongly convicted teenagers served

seven to 14 years in prison before the truth emerged.

The killing of Majors has shocked the neighbourhood and the Columbia University community.

The delicate case is also the first big test for the new Police Commissioner Dermot F. Shea as his department faces intense pressure to bring the killers of Majors to justice without arresting the wrong people.

Asked about the influence of the Central Park Five on practices that investigators are using in the Majors case, Mr. Shea declined to directly respond. But he did say it was unusual to have a suspect so young accused of such a grave crime. NY TIMES

Malicious campaign against me, says Pak. CJ

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s outgoing Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa on Friday said he was retiring with a crystal clear conscience, but noted that a “malicious campaign” had been launched against him and the judiciary following the death sentence handed out to Pervez Musharraf in the high treason case against the ex-military ruler.

Justice Khosa, 64, who retires at midnight on Friday, said the judiciary and he were being singled out for criticism.

Gen. Musharraf was given death sentence for abrogating the Constitution in 2007.

Law Minister Farogh Naseem said on Thursday that



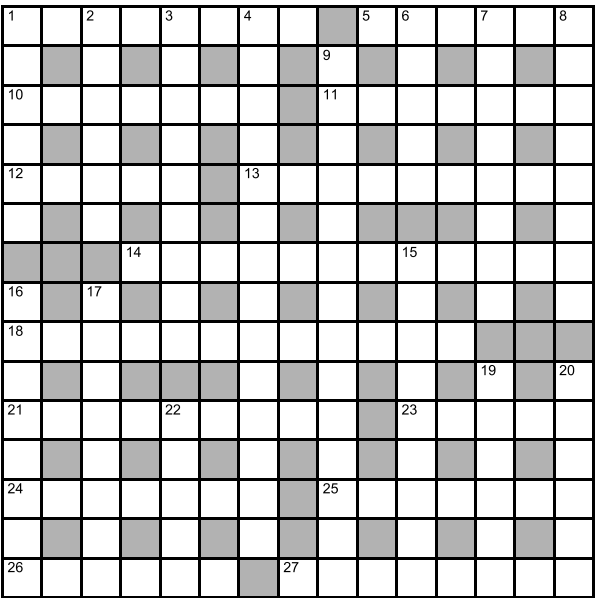
Asif Saeed Khosa

the judge who wrote the judgment was mentally unfit and should be stopped from performing his duties.

“A malicious campaign has been started against the judiciary and myself. The allegations are baseless and incorrect. We know the limits of our powers and we know that the truth shall always prevail,” he said.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12812

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



■ ACROSS

- 1 One understanding about modern art very quickly (2,1,5)
- 5 Low-budget inferior film beginning to bore one in travel (1,5)
- 10 Gaining power, allocate new file (7)
- 11 Italian film director collapsed on island (7)

■ DOWN

- 1 Abandoning female, fiend is breaking heart (6)
- 2 Strong aggressive woman in a menagerie abruptly cuts staff (6)

(set by Dr. X)

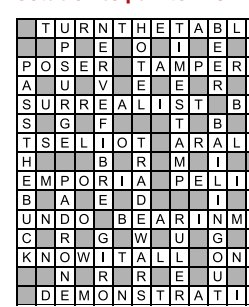
- 12 Comical figure embracing queen (5)
- 13 Right information in notes about units of ionising radiation (9)
- 14 Woman desiring hot love affair wants a man – it’s midnight (8,4)
- 18 Hippies beginning to face menace quietly elope abroad (6,6)
- 21 Forgive and forget or start to eventually cheat around in anger (9)
- 23 Which orb holds the blood of the Gods? (5)
- 24 Kind to shelter one pagan (7)
- 25 Slips away when date’s about to consume drinks (7)
- 26 Watch determined person giving up cigarettes at last (6)
- 27 Ditch partner after starting to brawl in a vicious manner (8)

- 3 Pure evil spreading around society is sickening (9)
- 4 They are meant to forestall issues? (14)
- 6 Pull up agent clumsily collecting fine (5)
- 7 One making speech is evil, suppressing primarily obnoxious case (5,3)
- 8 Disregarding wife, sap embraces damsel in liaison (8)
- 9 A stinging rebuff is a reason to meet ENT specialist? (1,4,2,4,3)
- 15 Ex-convict going round drunk steals vehicle to gad about (9)
- 16 Couple of females in a real panic (8)
- 17 Very old container in spot, most likely to explode violently (8)
- 19 Carpenter’s tool in workbench is elegant (6)
- 20 Dicey to go after fellow in high spirits (6)
- 22 Talk with snitch to trap leader of insurgents (5)

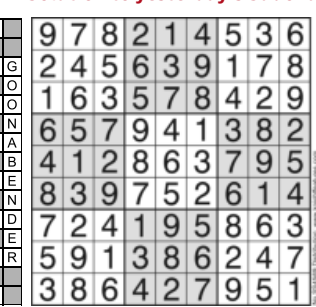
SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12811



Solution to yesterday’s Sudoku



FAITH

Embodiment of Jnana

When a cow sees or hears its calf, it ejects milk from its udder. In the same manner, God’s mercy flows towards his devotees, said R. Narayanan in a discourse. But instead of seeking the feet of the Lord, we run after riches that are like bubbles of water. Wealth is like lightning, and can be easily lost. Soorapadman wielded great power and had many boons, none of which helped him when Lord Shanmukha attacked him. Wealth or power will not save us when Yama knocks on the door. They will not rid us of the fear of death. But if we reform and turn towards God, then we will attain liberation.

Saint Arunagirinatha, in his Kandar Alankaram, addresses Muruga as the nephew of the Lord who crushed the ego of Kaliya, the snake, who lived in the Yamuna, and struck terror in the hearts of those who lived in Vrindavan. There are many leelas of Krishna, but Arunagirinatha refers specifically to this leela. The reason, perhaps, was that Lord Krishna spared the life of the snake. It is to show that Muruga is just as merciful as Krishna, if one gives up one’s ego and pride. Once one has placed one’s trust in Muruga, one need not fear anything. If one reads Arunagirinatha’s Tiruppugazh, one need not fear Yama.

When a divine fruit was promised to the one who first went round the world, Vinayaka went round His parents – Siva and Parvati. But Muruga went round the world. Vinayaka got the fruit because circumambulating the Divine Couple was equal to going round the world. But Muruga’s act was also significant, for it showed us that the Divine Couple are all pervasive. An angry Muruga was pacified by Siva, who said to Him, “Pazham nee – you are a divine fruit” – meaning Muruga was Himself the embodiment of jnana.