

The trigger

May 8, 2018: President Donald Trump unilaterally pulls the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal. Announces sanctions on Iran

On April 8, 2019: Washington declares Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps a "terrorist" group. Its Quds Force, which operates abroad, is also put on the blacklist



Attacks on ships

May 12: Four ships, including three oil tankers, are damaged in mysterious attacks in the Gulf that

June 13: Two tankers, Norwegian and Japanese, come under attack in the Gulf of Oman



June 20: Iran's Revolutionary Guard says it shot down a U.S. drone, which violated Iranian airspace near the Strait of Hormuz

 Trump approves a retaliatory strike, but cancels it at the last

June 24: Trump announces "hard-hitting" financial sanctions on Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and senior Iranian military leaders

July 18: Trump says the U.S. military has taken down an Iranian drone that came dangerously close to one of its naval vessels in the Strait of Hormuz

Saudi oil attack

September 14: Aerial attacks claimed by Yemen's Iranbacked Houthi rebels spark fires at two major Saudi oil

 Tehran is accused by the U.S. and other powers of being responsible but denies involvement

September 20: Trump announces "the highest sanctions ever imposed on a country", hitting Iran's



Killing the commander

The U.S. carries out air strikes against bases of a pro-Iran group in Irag, in retaliation for an attack on U.S.

Dec. 31: Pro-Iran protesters storm the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad expressing fury over the strikes

interests

Jan. 3. 2020: A U.S. strike kills commander **Qasem** Soleimani, the Quds Force chief, in Iraq

Pentagon says Trump ordered the "killing" after the siege of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad

Iran-backed militias **Baghdad** commander of Iran-backed militias in Iraq killed in airstrike at Baghdad's international airport

The U.S. act of terrorism is extremly dangerous. The U.S. bears all consequences of its rogue adventurism



Iran vows revenge after U.S. kills General

Tens of thousands of angry Iranians take to the streets of Tehran, chanting 'Death to America'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

A furious Iran threatened to avenge a U.S. strike that killed a top Iranian commander at Baghdad's international airport on Friday, raising fears of a wider regional conflict between the arch-foes.

The Pentagon said U.S. President Donald Trump had ordered Qasem Soleimani's "killing" after a pro-Iran mob this week laid siege to the U.S. Embassy in the Iraqi capital.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei promised "severe revenge" for Soleimani's death, the biggest escalation yet in a feared proxy war between Iran and the U.S. on Iraqi soil.

Angry Iranians took to the streets of Tehran chanting "Death to America" and holding up posters of Soleimani, who was widely ad-

How was the operation carried out?



 Drones were used in the strike that hit two vehicles on a road leading to the Baghdad international airport

• Soleimani was travelling in one of

operandi of the

Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy

mired in the Islamic

no comment, then followed

up by declaring Soleimani

should have been killed "ma-

U.S. Secretary of State

Mike Pompeo said Soleimani

ny years ago".

Mr. Trump tweeted a pic-

Israeli Army, which carries out targeted assassinations of enemies, rather than the U.S. forces

The method used

chief of the Iraqi

force Hashed

al-Shaabi, was

is more simila

to the modus

also killed

ture of an American flag with

Americans told to leave

had been planning an "imminent" attack "that would have put dozens if not hundreds of American lives at

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad urged all American citizens to leave Iraq "immediately" and U.S. nationals working at southern oil fields were being evacuated, Iraq's Petrol Ministry said.

Early on Friday, a precision drone strike struck two cars belonging to Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi, a paramilitary force with close ties to Iran, as they drove away from Baghdad International Airport.

Soleimani also served as Iran's pointman on Iraq, visiting the country in times of turmoil.

Muhandis was the Hashed's deputy chief, but was widely recognised as the real shot-caller within the group. A replacement for him has not yet been named. Both were under U.S. sanctions.

Ceremonies to mourn them will be held on Saturday, when Iraq's Parliament is also set to hold an emergency meeting.

A leading Hashed member, Hadi al-Ameri, urged lawmakers "to take a bold decision to oust foreign troops from Iraq, because their presence has become a threat for Iraqis".

Additional troops

Some 5,200 U.S. troops are stationed across the country, and a U.S. defence official told AFP that some additional forces had arrived in recent hours to boost security at the American Embassy.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi said the strike was a "flagrant violation" of a security accord with the U.S., warning it would "spark a devastating war in Iraq".

Meanwhile, Mr. Khamenei has named Esmail Qaani, the deputy head of the Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations arm, as the successor to Soleimani.

Who was Qassem Soleimani

He was the main architect of Iran's recent foreign interventions

STANLY JOHNY

Major General Oassem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Ouds Force who was killed in a U.S. air strike in Baghdad on Friday, had an illustrious career as a spymaster and military strategist. Always a defender of the Islamic revolution, Soleimani was so close to Spreme Leader Ali Khamenei that he once called him "the living martyr of revolution". As Khamenei once said about another fallen soldier, in the end, Soleimani "drank the sweet syrup of martyrdom".

War hero

Army immediately after the revolution. He was on the frontlines during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. His commanders were so impressed by his bravery during the war that they promoted the young soldier, in his 20s, to head the 41st Tharallah Division of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In 1990, he was named the IRGC commander of Kerman Province. Tehran was aware of its

Soleimani joined the Iranian

limitations as a conventional military power and also about the challenges it faced in a hostile region. To overcome this asymmetry, iran started cultivating deep ties with the Shia population across the region. The main job of the Quds Force, as the foreign operational wing of the IRGC, was to build a network of operatives, organisations, militias and parties under Iran's influence. By the time Soleimani was appointed the head of the Ouds Force in 1998, Iran had already established a network of resistance. His job was to take it to new levels. And he did just that.

Defender of revolution Soleimani was a hardliner of the hardliners. He never hid

cording to the New Yorker where he stood in Iran's complex power dynamics, profile of the General. What in which the hardliners, moderates and reformists compete for influence through elections and other means. In 1999, when students revolted against the regime, Soleimani and other senior military figures wrote a letter to the then reformist President, Mohammad Khatami, demanding action against protesters. "Our patience has run out," they wrote, warning that if the government didn't crush the protests, the military would.

NEWS ANALYSIS

The police finally cracked down on the protesters.

In recent years, when Iran has rapidly expanded its presence in both Iraq and Syria and ties between Tehran and Washington were fast-deteriorating, Soleimani was very much in focus. In 2018, he responded directly to a warning from President Donald Trump against the Iranian President not to threaten the U.S. Soleimani said, "It is beneath the dignity of our President to respond to you. I, as a soldier, respond to you."

Enemy of 18 The main challenges Soleimani faced in the final years of his career and life, besides the threats from the U.S., were the civil war in Syria and the rise of the Islamic State (IS). In 2011-13, the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad kept losing territories to the rebels. Mr. Assad's Syria was the only national ally of Iran in the region and is also a critical link between itself and Hezbollah in Lebanon. If Mr. Assad falls, Tehran would be weakened. Soleimani 's mission was to stop it from happening. "The Syrian Army is useless," he once told an Iraqi politician, ac-

he did was to build and train Shia militias and send them to Syria to fight the rebels along with the regime. He also coordinated with Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, in strategising the war. In 2013, the regime

troops, Shia militias and Hezbollah fighters captured Qusayr, a town on the Syria-Lebanon border, from the rebels, which was one of the early victories of the Assad regime in the civil war. Though the Russian intervention in 2015 actually turned around the conflict, the real ground support for the Assad regime came from the Iranians. And it's Soleimani who oversaw that ground support. Syria was

He applied the same strategy in Iraq in the war against the IS. The Irantrained militias, which was bombed by the U.S. last + month that precipitated the current crisis, were in the forefront of the war against the IS. Soleimani 's men fought in the battlefield along with the Kurdish Peshmerga militia and the Iraqi Army while the U.S. provided air support. This model was tested in Amirii, a predominateiy Shia town in Iraq on the Iranian border, which was captured by the IS. In 2014, the Iraqi Army, backed by Shia militias, broke the siege of Amirli. This model was repeated in Tikrit, Fallujah, Ramadi and finally Mosul, which all were liberated from the IS.

The IS Caliphate is now destroyed. The Syrian regime has survived the civil war. But the man who played a pivotal role in both these feats has been assassinated by the U.S. Iran may not take it lightly. The risks of a major conflict are at an all-time high now.

⁺ India condemns vandalism at Gurdwara Nankana Sahib in Pak.

Miscreants desecrate shrine, throw stones at pilgrims

NEW DELHI

India on Friday strongly condemned acts of vandalism at the Nankana Sahib in Pakistan and urged the neighbouring country to ensure safety of the Sikh community there.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) called upon the Pakistan government to ensure safety of the Sikh community and protection of the holy Gurudwara, which was targeted by a mob on Friday afternoon.

According to media reports, the crowd also threw stones at pilgrims and whipped up communal fren-



India urges Pakistan to ensure safety of minority Sikh community. • ANI

zy in the area.

"We call upon the Government of Pakistan to take immediate steps to ensure the safety, security of the members of the Sikh community. Strong action must be taken against the miscreants who indulged in desecration of the holy Gurudwara and attacked members of the minority Sikh community," the MEA said in a statement.

The agitated mob pelted stones from a nearby area towards the place of worship after a dispute broke out over the alleged forcible abduction and conversion of a Sikh girl, Jagjit Kaur, who was kidnapped from her home in Nankana Sahib in August last year.

The issue also drew attention of the Punjab Chief Minister, Captain Amarinder Singh, who appealed to Prime Minister Imran Khan to ensure the safety of the holy Gurudwara.

Gotabaya seeks electoral, constitutional reforms

MEERA SRINIVASAN

In his first address to Parliament since becoming President, Gotabaya Kajapaksa on Friday sought constitutional and electoral reform, for "a strong executive and legislature" and sovereignty of the people.

While preserving the "positive characteristics" of the proportional representation system, electoral reforms were needed to ensure the "stability of the Parliament and to ensure the direct representation of the people", he said.

The proportional representation electoral system, currently followed in Sri Lanka, allows smaller parties to be represented in the legislature with a minimum

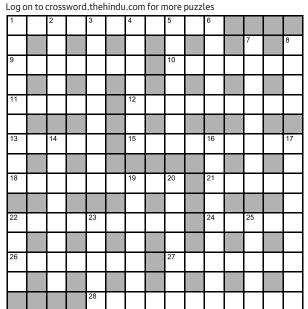
that is numerically skewed towards the majority Sinhala-Buddhist community, politicians representing minorities have had reasonable say because of the PR-system.

vote percentage. In a House

However, Mr. Rajapaksa appeared to favour a shift. "Even though elections can be won through numbers, an unstable Parliament that cannot take clear decisions and remains constantly under the influence of extremism is not one that suits the country," he said.

Further, he underscored enhanced national security and a neutral foreign policy as priorities for his government in his address that was silent on political demands of the Tamils.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12824



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

ACROSS 1 Rapidly airlift a PAC turn-out (2,1,4,4)

- 9 Sailor at square to drink dresses cheaply (5,2)
- 10 Sisterly kind doesn't complete
- exam (7) 11 Discharge His Excellency in peculiar situation (5)
- 12 Poor versifier sees American author with sample (9)

- 13 Even both ways (5) 15 Awfully ignorant about
- institution head limiting supplies (9) 18 Philosophy of life a frog in the
- well cannot have (5,4) 21 Graduates beginning to transform primarily industrial
- district (5) 22 A small attempt to describe whirling moon in space
- 24 Ancient Greek region backing top class repeatedly (5)
- 26 Picks extraordinary place
- 27 Old vessel brought back by master awaiting confirmation

outside limits of Tiruvallur (7)

28 Groom roped in mate to hold the advantage (11)

DOWN

1 Behind the queen, girl's depressed in fading light (9)

- 2 Accord to a good bloodline, essentially (5)
- 3 Ma blessed runaway characters brought together (9)

(set by Gridman)

- 4 Cover the walls again from top to bottom or the other way around (7)
- 5 That woman, consumed by a deadly sin, is most green (7)
- 6 Temporarily place a winter garment (5) 7 Easy answers to clues from
- election losers (5-3) 8 Insult Sri Lanka's tourer
- 14 Tire out in struggles to establish basic truths (8)

regularly (4)

- 16 Old boys and Gail are moved to take it up from essential
- 17 Could be too genial but act independently (2,2,5)
- 19 Single out one very behind (7) 20 Encouraging words to proceed in the same direction (3,2,2)

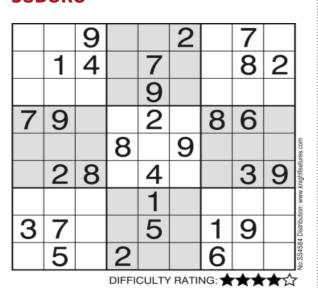
22 Gets no-great snakes (4)

23 Availability status of draft

beer in bar (2,3)

25 Starts noticing absolutely patent, pliable, attractive leather (5)

SUDOKU



Solution to puzzle 12823 Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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FAITH

Pitfalls in life

There was a poor man, who ardently craved wealth. He did severe penance, and when God appeared before him he said he wanted a lot of wealth. God gave him a stick and said, "Every time you strike this stick on the ground, you will get one thousand gold coins. But the moment you lose your temper, the stick will disappear and so will all your wealth." The poor man took the stick and went away happily. On the way, a sanyasi asked him why he carried a stick with him. The poor man tapped the stick on the ground, and as God had promised, a thousand gold coins showed up. The sanyasi then asked the poor man many questions, which the latter answered patiently at first. But with more and more questions being asked the poor man lost his patience and spoke angrily to the sanyasi. Immediately, the stick as well as the coins disappeared, as God had warned.

The story shows the impermanence of wealth and how we can lose everything we possess in a matter of minutes, said M.A. Manickavelu in a discourse. If we run after wealth and other material possession, there will be darkness and worry in our lives. But when we seek God, we get jnana. Thiruvalluvar says that in order to get rid of desires, we must seek the One who has no desires. Vallalar says that we spend our lives in the pursuit of various things. This ruins our health and finally our lives end. Joy is like a mirage. Be like a mother to me, prays Vallalar to Muruga. Saint Appar saw Lord Siva as every one of his relatives. Manickavachagar saw Lord Siva as his parents. Vallalar in his Tiruarupta says to Lord Siva: "When a father punishes a child, the mother comes to its support. If a mother is harsh with the child, then the father comes to its support. But, if you turn against me, to whom will I turn for comfort?"