



**Modi pitches himself as the 'only strong leader' in the country**

Page 12



**Pawars facing new challenge in party stronghold of Baramati**

Page 13



**Comedian Zelensky set to be Ukraine President after landslide victory**

Page 14



**Pant, Dhawan power Delhi Capitals to the top of the table**

Page 17

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**FIR filed against Pragy for Babri remark**

**BHOPAL**  
 Acting on the Election Commission's orders, the police on Monday filed an FIR against BJP Lok Sabha candidate from Bhopal, Pragy Singh Thakur, for her remark that she was "proud" of her participation in the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in 1992, an official said.

NATION PAGE 9

DELHI METRO PAGE 4

## Rahul to court: slogan was just poll rhetoric

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
 NEW DELHI

The comment "Chowkidar chor hai" [watchman is a thief] was made with rhetorical flourish in the heat of political campaigning, Congress president Rahul Gandhi explained to the Supreme Court on Monday. It was said in an atmosphere of vindication at the Supreme Court deciding to reopen the Rafale case despite government efforts to shut out new facts and documents published about the purchase of the 36 jets, he said.

Mr. Gandhi was responding to a criminal contempt petition filed by BJP lawmaker Meenakshi Lekhi, who accused him of misrepresenting court proceedings by attributing the comment to the Supreme Court and thus causing prejudice in the minds of the people against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

# Sri Lanka names local Islamist group for Easter Sunday blasts

Sophisticated attacks point to wider international groups, says Minister; 30 held

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
 COLOMBO

Sri Lankan authorities on Monday named a little-known local Islamist radical group, the National Thowheed Jamaath, as responsible for the ghastly Easter Sunday serial blasts that claimed nearly 300 lives and injured over 500 across the island nation.

President Sirisena also decided to enforce Emergency regulations with effect from midnight Monday, official sources said.

The police have arrested nearly 30 suspects in connection with Sunday's coordinated explosions at churches and hotels in and around Colombo and in Batticaloa, in the island's Eastern Province.



**Searing pain:** Lalitha is inconsolable at the funeral of her 11-year-old niece, Sneha Savindi, at Negombo in Sri Lanka on Monday. Sneha died in Sunday's blast at St. Sebastian Church. AP

**87 detonators found**  
 A van parked near one of the attacked churches exploded on Monday, but no casualties or injuries were reported. The police also said they found 87 bomb detonators at a Colombo bus station.

While no domestic or international organisation has so far claimed responsibility for the attacks, Health Minister Rajitha Senarathne said the National Thowheed Jamaath had perpetrated the attack using suicide bombers. "All suicide bombers

are believed to be Sri Lankan nationals," he said. However, Mr. Senarathne said, "We do not believe these attacks were carried out by a group of people who were confined to this country... There must be an international network, without which these attacks could not have succeeded."

The government declared Tuesday as a national day of mourning.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12  
 TOURISTS IN PANIC PAGE 9  
 MORE REPORTS PAGE 14

## 6 JD(S) workers among 8 Indians confirmed dead

STAFF REPORTER  
 BENGALURU

At least eight Indians are among the 31 foreign nationals confirmed to have been killed in the blasts in Sri Lanka, officials said on Monday. The victims include six Janata Dal (S) workers from Karnataka, who were in Colombo on vacation and stay-

ing at the Shangri-La Hotel, and a woman from Kerala, P.S. Raseena, another guest at the same hotel, who was identified by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

A seventh member of the JD(S) team, staying at the same hotel, is missing.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

# U.S. ends waiver for India on Iran oil

Exemptions from sanctions for a 180-day period enabled imports of commodity

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN  
 WASHINGTON

The U.S. will not renew exemptions from its sanctions for importing oil from Iran, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on Monday.

The exemptions were granted last November for a 180-day-period for India and seven other countries, and are due to expire on May 2.

"Today we are announcing the United States will not issue any additional Signifi-



Mike Pompeo

cant Reduction Exceptions [SREs] to existing importers of Iranian oil. The Trump Administration has taken Iran's oil exports to historic

lows, and we are dramatically accelerating our pressure campaign in a calibrated way that meets our national security objectives while maintaining well-supplied global oil markets," Mr. Pompeo said via a statement.

"We will continue to apply maximum pressure on the Iranian regime until its leaders change their destructive behaviour, respect the rights of the Iranian people, and return to the negotiating table."

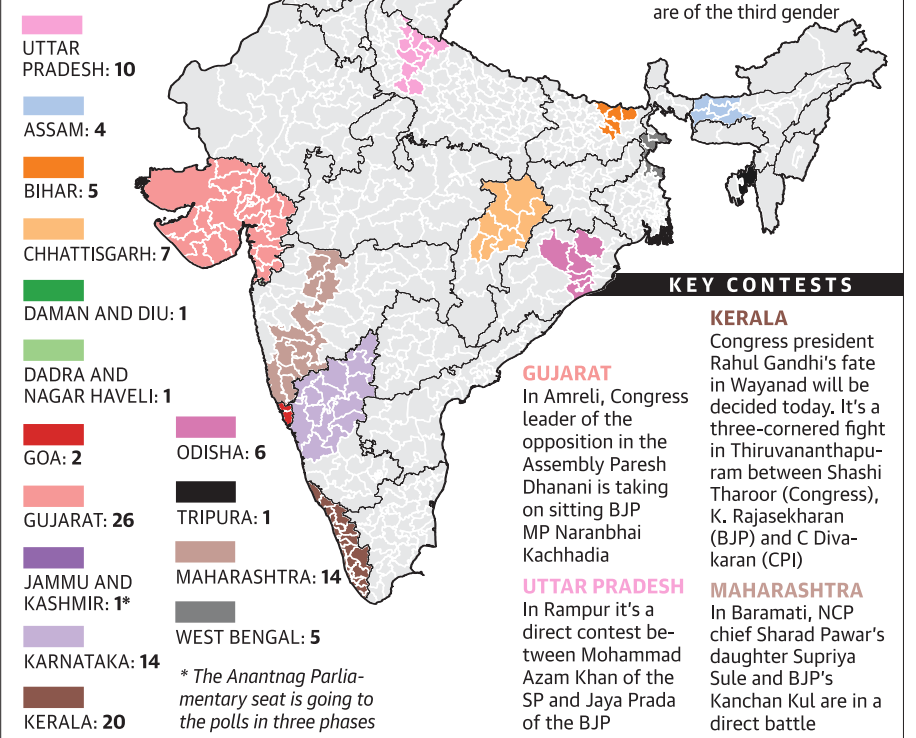
India, China and U.S. allies Japan, South Korea and Turkey will be the most impacted by the non-renewal of waivers.

The other three currently exempted countries – Italy, Greece and Taiwan – have already reduced their imports to zero. "We're going to zero. We are going to zero across the board," Mr. Pompeo told the press.

U.S. WARNS NATIONS AGAINST TRADE WITH IRAN PAGE 12

## The race heats up

Over 18 crore voters will decide the fate of 1,640 candidates in the third phase across 13 States and two Union Territories today



# CJI violated procedure by hearing own case: SC lawyers

'Woman levelling charges should have been given a hearing'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
 NEW DELHI

A storm of public opinion is gathering against the manner in which a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi convened on April 20 and *suo motu* heard a case involving sexual harassment allegations levelled against him by a former Supreme Court employee.

The Bench was convened at short notice after online news portals published allegations levelled by a woman against the CJI. The hearing sparked a public debate on whether the CJI was sitting



CJI Ranjan Gogoi

as a "judge in his own cause" and whether the Bench should have followed the principles of natural justice by giving the complainant a fair chance to be heard in the first place before passing remarks about her.

On Monday, the first working day after a tumultuous weekend, the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), a body of over 6,000 lawyers practising in the Supreme Court, said Saturday's hearing was "in violation of the procedure established by as well as the principles of natural justice." In an urgent meeting, the executive committee of the SCBA said a Full Court should take "all the necessary steps" under the law in this issue.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

# Congress releases all seven names for Delhi

BJP fields Gambhir, Lekhi

STAFF REPORTER  
 NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday released the names of all seven candidates for the Lok Sabha polls in Delhi, while the BJP, which had renominated four sitting MPs on Sunday, announced the names of former India cricketer Gautam Gambhir and incumbent MP Meenakshi Lekhi from East Delhi and New Delhi seats respectively.

Former three-term Chief Minister and Delhi Congress chief Sheila Dikshit is the party's candidate from North East Delhi against Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari.

Former Union Minister Ajay Maken will fight from the prestigious New Delhi seat and former MPs J.P. Agarwal and Mahabal Mishra have been named from Chandni Chowk and West Delhi constituencies respectively.

Delhi Congress working president Rajesh Lilothia is the party's candidate from the reserved seat of North West Delhi and former Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely from East Delhi. Professional boxer Vijender Singh has been declared



Sheila Dikshit

the Congress candidate from South Delhi.

The Congress declared the names a day before the last date of nominations as negotiations for an alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party were on till Sunday evening. Though both parties were keen on an alliance in Delhi to defeat the BJP, the talks fell through as AAP was demanding an alliance on 18 seats, including Delhi, Haryana and Chandigarh.

The BJP, meanwhile, went into a huddle on Monday night to decide the name of its candidate from North West Delhi seat. Sources said the party had almost decided to field Punjabi singer Hans Raj Hans but incumbent MP Udit Raj publicly staked claim to the seat, stopping shy of openly rebelling against the party.