

Anti-Muslim attacks lead to curfew

In Sri Lanka’s Chilaw, war of words on Facebook is followed by violence targeting mosques and shops

REUTERS
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO

Several dozen people threw stones at mosques and stores and a local man was beaten in the town of Chilaw on Sri Lanka’s west coast on Sunday in a dispute that started on Facebook, sources told Reuters.

This comes three weeks after bombers blew themselves up on in four hotels and three churches, killing more than 250 people on Easter Sunday. Since then, Muslim groups say they have received dozens of complaints from across the country about people being harassed.

“A police curfew has been imposed in Chilaw Police area with immediate effect until 6 a.m. tomorrow to control the tense situation,” police spokesman Ruwan Gunasekera told Reuters. The police later said the curfew would be lifted at 4 a.m.

One arrested

Authorities said they arrested the author of a Facebook post, identifying him as Abdul Hameed Mohamed Hasmar, 38. Locals in Chilaw, a



A new chapter: People attending a mass at the St. Theresa's Church in Colombo. •REUTERS

majority Christian town, said a post by him was interpreted as menacing and an angry crowd beat him. “Later they pelted stones at three mosques and some Muslim-owned shops. Now the situation has calmed down, but we are scared of the night,” said one local Muslim man.

One mosque suffered extensive damage, he said. Vi-

deo footage circulating online shows several dozen young men shouting and throwing stones at a clothes store called New Hasmars, which locals said belonged to Hasmar.

Some communities say they are fearful that the government, which failed to act on successive warnings about looming Islamist at-

tacks, has not caught all potential militants. A week ago in Negombo, where more than 100 people were killed during Easter prayers, a violent clash erupted between local Muslims and Christians after a traffic dispute.

Sunday mass resumes

Meanwhile, thousands of Catholics attended mass in

Colombo on Sunday amid tight security. Soldiers armed with automatic assault rifles guarded St. Theresa’s church at Colombo’s Thimbirigasyaya residential quarter, while members of the congregation were searched for explosives.

The sprawling church car park was empty as the authorities did not allow any vehicles into the compound as part of high-level security.

Regular services were cancelled across all churches soon after the deadly suicide attacks, but the Archbishop of Colombo Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith announced on Thursday that mass would be held in his diocese from on Sunday.

The Cardinal conducted private Sunday services in the past two weeks, which were broadcast live on television.

Most churches outside Colombo had resumed regular services from last week, but under tight security provided by the local police.

Catholic private schools, which remained closed after the Easter holidays will now reopen on Tuesday, church officials said.

Rouhani calls for unity amidst ‘unprecedented’ U.S. pressure

‘We can move past these conditions provided we are united’

REUTERS
DUBAI

President Hassan Rouhani called on Saturday for unity among Iran’s political factions to overcome conditions which he said may be harder than those during the 1980s war with Iraq, state media reported, as the country faces tightening U.S. sanctions. U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday urged Iran’s leaders to talk with him about giving up their nuclear programme and said he could not rule out a military confrontation.

“Today, it cannot be said whether conditions are better or worse than the (1980-88) war period, but during the war we did not have a problem with our banks, oil sales or imports and exports, and there were only



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. •REUTERS

sanctions on arms purchases,” Mr. Rouhani said, according to the state news agency IRNA.

“The pressures by enemies is a war unprecedented in the history of our Islamic revolution... but I do not despair and have great hope for the future and believe that we can move past these difficult conditions provided that we are united,” Mr. Rou-

hani told activists from various factions.

Magazine suspended

Separately, a media court on Saturday suspended the weekly *Seda* (Voice), the semi-official news agency ISNA reported, after the reformist magazine published an issue that included articles warning about the possibility of war with the United States.

“At the Crossroads of War and Peace, have moderates lost or will they again save Iran from war?” the main headline on the front page read against a photograph of U.S. Navy warships.

On social media, hardliners attacked the magazine as “Trump’s voice”, suggesting its warning about the danger of war amounted to a call for talks with the United States.

Guaidó seeks Pentagon’s help

REUTERS
CARACAS

Venezuelan Opposition leader Juan Guaidó said on Saturday that he has asked his envoy to the United States to meet with Pentagon officials to “cooperate” on a solution to the South American country’s political crisis.

Mr. Guaidó added that he had received word from China that the country would join a diplomatic effort between European and Latin American countries, known as the International Contact Group on Venezuela, to negotiate an end to the crisis.

“We have instructed our Ambassador Carlos Vecchio to meet immediately... with the Southern Command and its admiral to establish a direct relationship,” Mr. Guaidó said at a rally in Caracas



Opposition meet: Supporters of the Venezuelan Opposition at a rally by Juan Guaidó in Caracas on Saturday. •AP

on Saturday. “We have said from the beginning that we will use all the resources at our disposal to build pressure.”

The Southern Command had said in a tweet on Thursday that it was prepared to discuss “how we can support the future role” of Venezuelan armed forces leaders who “restore

constitutional order,” when invited by Mr. Guaidó.

Mr. Guaidó was speaking at a rally in support of Opposition lawmakers who have been arrested, taken refuge at foreign Embassies in Caracas, and been threatened in recent days amid a broad crackdown by Nicolás Maduro against Congress after the April 30 uprising.

Trump could meet Xi on sidelines of G20 meet in June

There is still time to negotiate, says aide after U.S. President orders new tariffs on Chinese imports

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump and China’s Xi Jinping could meet next month on the sidelines of the G20 summit to hash out their differences on trade, but no new talks are scheduled, White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow said on Sunday.

The world’s top two economies ended two days of negotiations in Washington

on Friday with no deal. While making it clear that the U.S. was unwilling to settle, Mr. Kudlow sought to tamp down concerns, insisting that the process was ongoing. “We need to see something much clearer and until we do, we have to keep our tariffs on,” he said in an interview on ‘Fox News Sunday’, adding: “We can’t accept any backtracking.”

As for future negotiations,

while there are “no concrete, definite plans yet”, Mr. Kudlow said China had invited Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer to Beijing – and higher-level discussions could be on the cards. The chances of Mr. Trump and Mr. Xi meeting during the Group of 20 summit in Japan in late June “are probably pretty good,” the top White House aide said.

The G20 summit is scheduled to take place in Osaka on June 28-29.

Mr. Trump ordered new punitive duties, which took effect on Friday, on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports, raising them to 25% from 10%. He then ordered a tariff hike on almost all remaining imports – \$300 billion worth, according to Mr. Lighthizer – from China.

But Mr. Kudlow insisted it

would be months before such punitive measures take effect, and that there was still time to negotiate.

In his own comments on Saturday, Mr. Trump struck a more belligerent tone, urging China that it would be “wise for them to act now”. “They know I am going to win... and the deal will become far worse for them if it has to be negotiated in my second term,” he tweeted.

ELSEWHERE



Netanyahu to seek more time to form government

JERUSALEM
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that he would ask President Reuven Rivlin for more time to form a new coalition government, citing recent holidays and the Gaza flare-up. “Such an extension is not only acceptable but also required due to scheduling problems,” he said. AFP

23 Rohingya girls rescued from traffickers

DHAKA
Twenty-three teenage Rohingya girls were rescued after being brought from refugee camps to the capital Dhaka to be sent to Malaysia by air, Bangladesh police said Sunday. Dhaka police also arrested four human traffickers, including a Rohingya couple, and recovered over 50 Bangladeshi passports from them on Saturday. AFP

Bangladesh charges 8 over killing of activists

DHAKA
Eight Islamist extremists from a banned group were charged by Bangladesh police on Sunday for the 2016 murders of two prominent gay rights activists. Dhaka police’s counterterrorism unit filed the chargesheet against the eight men, saying they were members of Ansar al-Islam, said deputy commissioner of police Mohibul Islam Khan. AFP

Hodeidah pullout going on as planned, says UN

HODEIDAH
The UN said on Sunday that a Yemeni rebel withdrawal from key Red Sea ports was proceeding as planned, after the government accused insurgents of faking the pullout. It said the coastguard had taken over responsibility for security at the three sites after a Houthi rebel withdrawal that had begun on Saturday. AFP

U.K. man gets life for killing Indian-origin wife

Angela was stabbed to death in 2018

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

A man in the U.K. has been sentenced to life imprisonment for stabbing to death his Indian-origin wife following a row on the Christmas day last year.

Laurens Brand, 47, who was charged with murder, used two kitchen knives to repeatedly stab wife Angela Mittal, 41, in 2018.

He was sentenced to life with a minimum term of 16 years and eight months’ imprisonment at a sentencing hearing at Reading Crown Court on Friday. Angela had suffered 59 stab wounds to her neck and chest and died at the scene at their home in Shinfield, Berkshire.

Sentencing Brand, Judge Heather Norton said: “You stabbed your wife in the bedroom of the family home. Your attack on her was ferocious. You stabbed your wife no fewer than 59 times.

“At some point in the

course of that attack, one knife broke. You left the room, you went to the kitchen, you fetched another knife and then returned”.

Forensic evidence

The court heard that the forensic evidence suggests that the victim was alive and struggling to defend herself through much of that attack.

The court heard how Brand had physically and emotionally abused his “formerly bubbly and outgoing wife”.

The police expressed their sympathy with the victim’s family during an “extremely difficult” time.

Angela’s family, including father Bharat and mother Kamla Mittal, paid tribute to her, describing her as a popular young lady known for her “sweet and enduring wit”. They said in a statement: “Her life was tragically cut short due to a senseless crime.

Gwadar hotel attack toll rises to 5

Imran calls it an attempt to ‘sabotage economic projects’

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISLAMABAD

Five people, including a soldier, were killed after gunmen stormed a luxury hotel in the southwestern Pakistani city of Gwadar, the centerpiece of a multi-billion dollar Chinese infrastructure project, the military said on Sunday. The soldier was among security forces who rushed to the five-star Pearl Continental Hotel after the attack on Saturday.

During the attack, “5 individuals got Shaheed (martyred) including 4 hotel employees and a Pakistan Navy soldier,” the military said in a statement. One of the hotel staff killed was a security guard shot at the entrance.

Six others were injured, including four security service officers and two hotel staff members. The military said all three terrorists had been killed. Local police had earlier claimed there had been four attackers.

A Baloch separatist group, the Balochistan Liberation



Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan. •REUTERS

Army (BLA), claimed responsibility for the attack via Twitter.

Prime minister Imran Khan said the attack was a bid to “sabotage prosperity”. “Such attempts especially in Balochistan are an effort to sabotage our economic projects and prosperity. We shall not allow these agendas to succeed,” Mr. Khan said in a statement issued by his office.

The Chinese Embassy in Islamabad also strongly condemned the incident.

The Pearl Continental, part of Pakistan’s largest

five-star hotel chain, is the only luxury hotel in Gwadar, frequented by foreign and Pakistani business delegations as well as diplomats.

‘The next Dubai’

The hotel sits isolated on a ridge overlooking the Arabian Sea port city that was formerly a small fishing village, but now touted by officials as “the next Dubai” thanks to the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

A part of China’s Belt and Road initiative, CPEC seeks to connect the western Chinese province of Xinjiang with Gwadar, with the development of the port being the plan’s flagship project.

The BLA has targeted Chinese workers in Pakistan multiple times, including during a brazen daylight attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi which killed four people in November last year. At the time, the BLA branded Beijing “an oppressor”.

IMF to loan Pak. \$6 billion over 3 years

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan will get \$6 billion from the IMF over the next three years to meet its foreign debt obligations, the country’s adviser on finance said on state television, after signing the agreement.

The deal comes after months of negotiations over what will be Pakistan’s 22nd bailout aimed at staving off a potential balance-of-payments crisis.

“Pakistan will get \$6 billion from the IMF, and in addition we will get \$2 to \$3 billion from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank in the next three years,” said Abdul Hafeez Shaikh.



Narrow escape: The Myanmar Airlines plane which landed at the Mandalay International Airport on Sunday. •AP

ing a graceful landing before the nose of the jet tipped over and ground to a halt.

Technical fault

Ye Htut Aung, Deputy Director General of Myanmar’s Civil Aviation Department, said that the pilot tried repeatedly to drop the landing gear at the front of the plane – first

through its computer system, then manually. “They tried hard twice by flying around twice and asked to check whether the nose wheel dropped or not,” Ye Htut Aung said, calling it a “technical fault”. “So they had to land with the back wheels... The pilot could land it skillfully,” he said.