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Facile win keeps Kolkata Knight Riders in contention for playoffs spot

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NEARBY



3 militants killed in Shopian encounter

SRINAGAR

Three days to the polls, south Kashmir's Shopian district on Friday witnessed a major encounter that left three militants, including an associate of slain Hizbul Mujahideen 'commander' Burhan Wani, dead and a soldier injured. Around 20 protesters were also injured in the clashes that followed the encounter.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8

Gandhi Nagar AAP legislator joins BJP

NEW DELHI

A day after a war of words over alleged horse trading erupted on social media between AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal and BJP leader Vijay Goel, Gandhi Nagar AAP legislator Anil Kumar Bajpai joined the BJP on Friday.

DELHI METRO ▶ PAGE 1

Woman served 'cyanide-laced juice'; husband held

NEW DELHI

A software engineer and his girlfriend have been arrested for allegedly killing the former's wife by serving her 'cyanide-laced juice' in south-west Delhi's Kishangarh, the police said on Friday.

DELHI METRO ▶ PAGE 1

DELHI METRO ▶ 6 PAGES



Widespread havoc: The cyclone brought down a highway signboard in Puri. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

8 dead as Cyclone Fani hits Puri

Rain, winds leave destruction across coastal Odisha; over one million evacuated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESHWAR/KOLKATA

The extremely severe cyclonic storm Fani barrelled into the Odisha coast on Friday morning, unleashing torrential rain and winds gusting up to 175 kmph, killing at least eight people, bringing rail and air transport to a halt, and swampy towns and villages, officials said.

The cyclonic system made landfall at 8 a.m. near the coastal pilgrim town of Puri and brought heavy winds and rainfall to the State capital Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.

While the system weakened to a 'very severe cy-

clonic storm', it is expected to cause significant damage as it moves north-northeast through coastal Odisha and West Bengal towards Bangladesh.

The system lay centred about 20 km west of Balasore and 200 km west-south west of Kolkata around 8.30 p.m. on Friday, with wind speeds of 110-120 km per hour, gusting at 135 km per hour.

Extensive damage

More than one million people in low-lying areas were evacuated to nearly 4,000 shelters, ahead of the cyclone's landfall.

Odisha authorities said

Fani caused extensive damage to thatched houses as well as several temporary structures. "160 people have been injured and admitted to hospital for treatment.

The Special Circuit House, Puri, the Office and Residence of the SP and the Collector have been badly damaged along with many other buildings," said a note from the State Emergency Operation Centre, Bhubaneswar.

Power disrupted

Electricity was disrupted in several places and many trees were uprooted, leading to damaged roads and communication networks.

The roof of the hostel

building at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhubaneswar, was blown away.

Trains cancelled

With aviation equipment at Bhubaneswar's Biju Patnaik International Airport significantly damaged, flight operations remained suspended on Friday, while Paradip and Gopalpur ports were also closed as a precautionary measure.

Around 220 trains on the Howrah-Chennai route have been cancelled, an East Coast Railway official said.

(With inputs from PTI)

FULL COVERAGE ▶ PAGE 5

CBI searching for evidence on eleven 'murdered' girls

Files 7th status report in Muzaffarpur shelter home case

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is searching for evidence related to the 11 girls believed to have been murdered by kingpin Brajesh Thakur, who is accused of the rape and sexual abuse of children in his shelter home in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar.

The agency got wind of the alleged murders from the rescued children. The names of these girls, who mysteriously disappeared from the *balikagruh* (girls' home), emerged in multiple statements of children, who said the 11 girls were murdered by Thakur and his accomplices.

In its seventh status report to the Supreme Court,

Path to justice

Thrust areas of the CBI probe into Muzaffarpur shelter case:

■ Obtain report from CFSL, New Delhi, on the bones recovered from a burial ground on the basis of a statement given by an accused

■ Probe whether procedure was followed in the appointment of members of the child welfare committee, who have been chargesheeted. Examination of members of the Juvenile Justice Board



■ Probe visits made by certain officers, including judicial officers, to the shelter

■ Fixing accountability on the Social Welfare Department of the Bihar government for continuing to give grants and not taking punitive action against NGO despite adverse reports

the CBI, which is facing allegations that its probe into the grisly case is "hogwash", said a scrutiny of the girls' home register at Muzaffarpur had so far revealed that

a total of 35 girls with identical or similar names had lived there at one point of time or the other.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

SC stays Dileep's trial in actor sexual assault case

Yet to decide on copy of memory card

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the trial of Malayalam film actor Dileep in a case of sexual assault of a woman actor in a car.

A Bench, led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, froze the trial proceedings till the court finally decides his plea for a copy of the memory card believed to be crucial in the case.

The case is now likely to come up in July when the court re-opens after the

summer vacation.

Dileep, through his counsel and senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, said there were several discrepancies in the police claim, and the memory card would prove him right. Unlike what the police claimed, the video seemed to have been shot not in a moving car. The car was stationary.

"Human voices could be heard in the background," he claimed.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Court to hear VVPAT review plea next week

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear next week a petition filed by 21 Opposition parties, led by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and Telugu Desam Party leader N. Chandrababu Naidu, to review its judgment rejecting 50% random physical verification of electronic voting machines using the voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT).

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Only 10 of 100 Ganga sewage projects completed

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The National Democratic Alliance government has only finished 10 of the 100 sewage infrastructure projects commissioned after 2015 under the Namami Gange mission, according to records.

Commissioning of sewage treatment plants (STP) and laying sewer lines are at the heart of the mission to clean the Ganga. Nearly ₹23,000 crore has been sanctioned for sewage management work. River-front development, cleaning ghats and removing trash from the river – the cosmetic side of the mission – make up about for ₹1,200 crore of the mission outlay.

The bulk of the projects completed were those commissioned before the Ganga mission began work in earnest under programmes such as the Ganga Action Plan-1 and Ganga Action Plan-2, which began in 1987 and 1996 respectively.

For instance, as of March 31, 27 of the 37 completed STP and sewer infrastructure were those commissioned before 2015, says a report on the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) website.

U.P.'s performance

Uttar Pradesh, responsible for about three-fourths of the inadequately treated industrial waste and municipal sewage, had 18 pre-2015 STP and sewage infrastructure projects commissioned. Only 12 of these have been completed, and only 1 – of the 33 projects commissioned after 2015 at the cost of ₹8,000 crore – has been wrapped up, records show. Making the Ganga pris-



The commissioning of sewage treatment plants is at the heart of the mission.

tine was one of the claims of the Narendra Modi government and this was followed up by sanctioning ₹20,000 crore for the NMCG.

As of March – the latest figures available – slightly over ₹28,000 crore has been sanctioned for various projects but only about ₹6,700 crore (about 25%) has been spent. Last March, the ratio was about 20%. The incomplete projects are reflected in the river quality.

Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, Director-General, NMCG, said completing pending projects too was a major obligation of the mission. Moreover, it was only after August 2016 that the NMCG got the necessary independence and authority to commission projects quickly, he explained. "Most of the major projects we have sanctioned have been in 2017 and 2018 and several of them will come online (and translate into improved water quality) by 2019 and early 2020. We have also followed a new model of having a single private operator take care of all the infrastructure works of a city (to improve efficiency) and implemented the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) in awarding tenders to STP and infrastructure developers," he told *The Hindu*.

Commercial flights yet to take off at Hindon

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

Two months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a civil terminal at Indian Air Force's Hindon airbase in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad for the government's low-cost flying scheme, flights are yet to take off.

The 'civil enclave' at the airbase was envisaged as an

alternative to the congested Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, which was able to provide very few slots for flights under the regional connectivity scheme, also known as UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik). The building used to facilitate air travellers was inaugurated by the PM on March 8.

Officials of the Airport Authority of India said that

the delay in operations is because they are still in discussions with IAF regarding allocation of slots for RCS flights.

AAI writes to airlines

On Friday, the AAI wrote to airlines to apply once again for slots for flights. An earlier attempt to secure arrival and departure slots didn't yield any result, officials said.

Hindon's civil terminal can't be operational round-the-clock because of IAF's own operations.

The civil terminal was expected to connect Jamnagar, Shimla, Kalaburagi, Kannur, Nasik, Hubli, Faizabad, Pithoragarh with a flight each. These were to be operated by four airlines – Star Air, Heritage Aviation, IndiGo and Turbojet.

DELHI ☀️🌙 Timings

SATURDAY, MAY 04

☀️ RISE 05:39 SET 18:58

🌙 RISE 05:25 SET 18:26

SUNDAY, MAY 05

☀️ RISE 05:38 SET 18:59

🌙 RISE 06:01 SET 19:24

MONDAY, MAY 06

☀️ RISE 05:37 SET 18:59

🌙 RISE 06:40 SET 20:24

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	39	25
Safdarjang	39	25
Palam	40	25

Delhi Palam Today
40°C Morning temperature to drop. Dry, hot weather to prevail with partly cloudy sky. Pollution level to improve marginally.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
40°C A comfortable morning with light dust haze around. Day will turn hot with mainly clear sky. Poor pollution level to continue.

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BJP demands Tripura CEO’s removal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
TRIPURA

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Friday demanded the removal of Tripura Chief Electoral Officer Sriram Taranikanti and accused him of being a “conspirator”, a party official said here.

State BJP spokesman Nabendu Bhattacharjee said that a six-member delegation led by Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met Election Commission officials in Delhi and demanded that Mr. Taranikanti be replaced by another senior officer.

Mr. Bhattacharjee said that the CEO, during the Lok Sabha election to the Tripura West parliamentary seat on April 11, had directed election officials to “escort voters to the polling booths and their safe return at the behest of the CPI(M)”.

SC orders questioning of Bharati Ghosh by CID

‘Move vacation Bench in case of non-cooperation by ex-IPS officer’

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday ordered former IPS officer Bharati Ghosh to appear for questioning before the West Bengal CID on May 14, two days after polling takes place in the Ghatal Lok Sabha seat in Midnapore district from where she is contesting as a Bharatiya Janata Party candidate.

A Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and K.M. Joseph also gave the West Bengal government the liberty to move the vacation Bench in case of any non-cooperation by the former IPS officer of the West Bengal cadre.

Extortion cases
Once considered close to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Ms. Ghosh joined the BJP after falling out with her. The CID is probing an extortion case against her.



Former IPS officer Bharati Ghosh is the BJP candidate for the Ghatal Lok Sabha seat. •SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

The West Bengal government had told the court that there were four categories of cases against the former officer rooted in certain acts of hers in the wake of demonetisation, possession of disproportionate assets and recovery of cash to the tune of ₹2 crore among others.

The Bench on Friday said the State government’s plea seeking vacation of the apex court’s two “ex-parte” or-

ders – restraining it from taking any coercive action against Ms. Ghosh and seeking to bar her from entering the State – would be taken up for hearing in July, when the top court reopens after the summer break.

The West Bengal government had sought to bar the former IPS officer from entering the State contending that she may tamper with evidence.

20 Bangladeshis set to be deported

They had entered the country illegally or overstayed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Twenty Bangladeshi nationals are expected to be sent home on Saturday. Officials said the government has completed the procedure of deporting the 20 people who had entered the country illegally or overstayed. The process was undertaken after Bangladesh authorities confirmed their nationality.

Of the 20, 19 had been lodged in southern Assam’s Silchar Central Jail and one in western Assam’s Kokrajhar Central Jail. These jails also serve as detention

camp for people marked foreigners.

The deportation would be second after 21 Bangladeshi nationals were sent home on January 19. Bangladesh had taken back 52 nationals in June 2018.

Officials in southern Assam said the Border Security Force would be handing over the Bangladeshi nationals to Border Guards Bangladesh at the Karimganj border.

Rohingya girls
The Mizoram police on April 30 detained eight Rohingya girls at Vairengte in

northern Mizoram. The girls, in their late teens, said they were picked up from refugee camps in Bangladesh by agents and had been promised jobs in Malaysia.

“We feel they are victims of human trafficking and were to be smuggled out via Champhai (eastern Mizoram) to Myanmar and beyond,” a police officer in Mizoram said.

That day, the police also detained 23 Nepalese girls from Champhai and arrested one Lal Bahadur. They are being questioned for more information.

Odisha pulls out all stops to restore normalcy after Fani fury

Power supply, roads, telephone lines in disarray

PRESS TURST OF INDIA
BHUBANESHWAR/KOLKATA

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, who reviewed the situation in following the landfall of severe cyclonic storm Fani, said Puri district, particularly the holy town had suffered huge damage. “Energy infrastructure has been completely destroyed. Restoration of electricity is a challenging task,” he said.

Hundreds of engineers and technicians worked on a war-footing to restore power supply. Work is on to restore road communication, thrown into disarray with thousands of uprooted trees blocking the way in innumerable places, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said.

He said since the cyclone was still passing through Odisha, it will take time to make an assessment of the damage.

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) DIG Randeep Rana said not many casualties were reported so far as precautionary measures were in place.

The Chief Minister said nearly 12 lakh people were evacuated and shifted to safer locations within 24 hours ahead of the cyclone from about 10,000 villages and 52 urban agglomerations in probably the largest such exercise at the time of a natural calamity in the country.

The evacuees have been accommodated in over 4,000 shelters, including 880 specially designed cyclone centres where free cooked food is being served to them, he said.

After the landfall, the system is expected to sweep north-northeast through coastal Odisha towns of Khurda, Cuttack, Jajpur, Bhadrak and Balasore before en-



Torn apart: The impact of cyclone Fani's landfall in Puri district. On right, shanties in Puri lying shattered after the landfall. • BISWARANJAN ROUT; PTI



CFTRI to send food to cyclone-hit Odisha

MYSURU
The city-based Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) is set prepare nearly 1 lakh meals for distribution in the cyclone ravaged areas of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. CFTRI sources said the effort is being led by Dr. K.S.M.S. Raghavarao, Director, along with nearly 1,000 students and staff. In the past, CFTRI has sent food and relief material to Kerala during the floods.

Extensive damage to Bhubaneswar airport

NEW DELHI
Bhubaneswar airport suffered "extensive" damage on Thursday due to cyclonic storm Fani, including damage to navigational aids, passenger terminal building and Air Traffic Control (ATC) tower, according to Airports Authority of India (AAI) Chairman Guruprasad Mohapatra. "A large part of the perimeter wall has caved-in, glass roofing panel of our terminal building and ATC tower has been damaged and there are debris on the runway as well....," Mr. Mohapatra said.

EC says it's taking steps to protect EVMs, VVPATs

KOLKATA
With cyclone Fani barreling its way to West Bengal from Odisha, the Election Commission has taken all measures to protect strongrooms where EVMs and VVPATs have been stored, a senior EC official said Friday. "We have spoken to the district magistrate of the seven Lok Sabha constituencies and also had a detailed discussion with other officials of the EC regarding measures to protect the strongrooms in view of the cyclone," the EC official told reporters. PTI

Navy, Coast Guard pitch in with men and material

INS Ranvijay sails to Odisha, Dornier aircraft kept ready

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and the Navy have deployed men, material and assets as part of preparatory efforts for the extremely severe cyclonic storm 'Fani'. They have launched Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations as soon as it crossed the coast, south of Puri in Odisha, on Friday morning. The Eastern Naval Command intensified rescue operations in Chilika and Puri. Additional relief material and medical teams were sent to Odisha from Visakhapatnam, the Navy said.

INS Ranvijay and Airavat with helicopters sailed to Odisha from Visakhapatnam with relief material and medical teams, joining the rescue operations with INS Sahyadri, Ranvir and Kadmatt.

In addition a Dornier maritime reconnaissance aircraft was deployed in the



Maximum impact: Electric poles grounded in Puri in Odisha on Friday. • REUTERS

afternoon for aerial survey to assess the impact of the cyclone.

The ICG had launched preparatory efforts from April 23 with the first sign of low pressure in South East Bay of Bengal. As part of this, 34 disaster response teams were kept on standby at various places and two ships, ICGS Sagar and Shaurya, sailed from Chennai with one helicopter on-board for aerial surveillance and assistance.

"Two ships, ICGS Samudra Paheredar and Shaunak sailed from Visakhapatnam with potable water, lifesaving equipment and Gemini craft," the ICG said in a statement. ICGS Shaunak has a helicopter on board.

Response teams were dispatched in fishing hamlets and port areas of Gopalpur as soon as Fani crossed the coast. Medical teams have been augmented at Paradip, Haldia and Gopalpur too, the ICG said.

Retired judge to probe civil judge exam

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court appointed its former judge, Justice A.K. Sikri, on Friday to examine the evaluation process of the main exam for the post of Civil Judge (Junior Division) in Haryana, in which only nine people were shortlisted out of more than 1,100 candidates.

A Bench led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi highlighted how the exam was meant to fill up 107 vacancies.

The Bench said Justice (Retd.) Sikri would look into whether the evaluation process was acceptable.

The Bench, also comprising Justice Deepak Gupta, directed the Punjab and Haryana High Court to submit answer sheets to Justice Sikri.

The top court's order came on a plea filed by 92 aspirants to the post of Civil Judge (Junior Division) in Haryana, seeking the quashing of the result of its Main (Written) Examination, which was declared on April 11.

The apex court had on April 29 directed the Punjab and Haryana High Court Registry not to appoint any civil judge in Haryana without its nod.

The petition challenged the selection and evaluation method on grounds of being "unreasonable, arbitrary, and mala fide".

Health Ministry core team on alert

Focus on preventing diseases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Close to hundred public health personnel, doctors, staff nurses and auxiliary medical staff have been kept on high alert for deployment at areas hit by cyclone Fani by the Union Health Ministry.

The team's primary aim is to alert the Centre and State government to prevent any major disease outbreak. They personnel will also assist in providing health care services to the cyclone victims.

Speaking to *The Hindu* on Friday, Health Secretary Preeti Sudan explained that besides the group of medical staff, the Ministry is also in constant touch with the State health departments and is co-coordinating with Central government's team that is keeping a close watch on how the situation is developing.

"The advantage of having information of where the cyclone will hit has to be followed up with work to mini-

mise the risk of waterborne diseases and vector transmitted diseases which is extremely high after cyclone," she said.

WHO warning

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has already warned about this, noted Ms. Sudan, adding that the Ministry has procured the list of essential medicines prescribed by the WHO.

Giving details of the measures taken by the Ministry, Joint Secretary, Health Ministry, Lav Agarwal said, "We have two teams – one of public health experts and the other which is a quick response team."

"Their mandate is to immediately alert and prevent any outbreak which follows a natural disaster."

AIIMS exam

AIIMS Delhi has cancelled its PG exam, scheduled for May 5, at the exam centre in Bhubaneswar. Another exam will be conducted for students of this centre.

Not keeping record of pre-natal tests is criminal: SC

Court dismisses plea by doctors affected by law

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

In a significant judgment, the Supreme Court on Friday upheld provisions in the anti-pre-natal sex determination law which 'criminalises' non-maintenance of medical records by obstetricians and gynaecologists and suspend their medical licence indefinitely.

A Bench of Justices Arun Mishra and Vineet Saran held that the particular provisions in the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act of 1994 were necessary to prevent

female foeticide in the country.

Social legislation

There are only 586 convictions out of 4202 cases registered even after 24 years of existence. It reflects the challenges being faced in implementing this social legislation, the court observed. The main purpose of the Act is to ban the use of sex selection and misuse of pre-natal diagnostic technique for sex selective abortions and to regulate such techniques.

The court dismissed averments made by doctors that the provisions in the law cri-

minalise even the smallest anomaly in paperwork which is in fact an inadvertent and unintentional error. The sections have made obstetricians and gynaecologists vulnerable to prosecution all over the country.

"It is a responsible job of the person who is undertaking such a test i.e., the gynaecologist/medical geneticist/radiologist/paediatrician/director of the clinic/centre/laboratory to fill the requisite information. In case he keeps it vague, he knows fully well that he is violating the provisions of the Act," the court observed.

AgustaWestland: court pulls up ED over chargesheet leak to media

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Friday pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for alleged leak of a supplementary chargesheet in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper case to the media, saying the denial given by the agency did not inspire any confidence and was not worthy of reliance.

Special Judge Arvind Kumar further directed ED's Director to ensure that "no such incident like the leak of

the documents is repeated in future in any matter".

The court was hearing a plea by Christian Michel, alleged middleman arrested in the case, seeking an enquiry into the leak in the money laundering case.

Mr. Michel had accused the ED of politicising the case by passing the documents to the media.

ED's rebuttal

The ED had refuted the allegations of handing over the documents to journalists

and had filed a status report claiming there was no leakage of the chargesheet on its part and "most likely" the leak to the media was caused from an extra copy that was left with the court staff.

The court staff had denied receiving any extra copy from the ED.

"The allegations made by the ED, on face of it, appears incorrect. The version of the ED is not inspiring any confidence and is not worthy of reliance," the court said.

IN BRIEF



SGNP bids adieu to last white tiger Bajirao

MUMBAI
The Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) lost its last surviving white tiger on Friday morning when Bajirao, the 18-year-old male tiger, died at 5.30 a.m. The big cat was suffering from senile arthritis for the past four years and had been unable to walk for the past ten days. It was cremated after a post mortem.

Top Maoist leader named in Gadchiroli attack FIR

MUMBAI
The Gadchiroli police have named a top leader in the Communist Party of India (Maoist) as an accused in connection with the attack that claimed 16 lives on Wednesday. Police sources on Friday said that Bhaskar, who is the 'North Commander' of the CPI (Maoist), has been named in the FIR, along with 40 others.

Hot days till Monday in 13 T.N. districts

CHENNAI
The met department has forecast that heatwave conditions will prevail in 13 districts of Tamil Nadu till Monday. Vellore and Tiruttani recorded the highest day temperature on Friday, with the mercury level touching 44.1 degrees Celsius. Though the peak summer season is still a day away, Chennai is already in the tight grip of a heatwave-like condition.

R.K. Studios sold to Godrej Properties

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

RK Studios at Chembur in Mumbai, an iconic location which used to be the film studio of late actor and film-maker Raj Kapoor, will undergo real estate development. It was set up by the legendary actor more than

70 years ago in 1948.

Godrej Properties, the real estate development company of the Godrej Group, has acquired the 2.2 acre land for an unspecified amount to develop a mixed-use project.

This project will offer approximately 33,000

square metres (approximately 0.35 million square feet) of saleable area comprising modern residential apartments of various configurations as well as a luxury retail experience, Godrej Properties said in a regulatory filing with stock exchanges.

"We are happy to add this iconic site in Chembur to our development portfolio," said Pirojsha Godrej, executive chairman, Godrej Properties.

For the past several years, the premises was being rented out for shooting films and TV serials.



GST buoyancy

With collections hitting a record high, the next step should be to simplify the tax regime

The final month of financial year 2018-19 has given the government some reason for cheer. Targets for indirect tax collections may have been missed for the last year, but collections from the Goods and Services Tax in April for economic activity in March scaled a new high. The GST inflows of ₹1,13,865 crore in April are the highest recorded since the tax regime was introduced in July 2017. They represent an increase of over 10% compared to the same month a year ago, and over 15% buoyancy over the average monthly GST collections in 2018-19 of ₹98,114 crore. To be clear, GST revenues have crossed the ₹1 lakh crore mark in March, January and October as well. The government has acknowledged that economic growth did slow down in 2018-19, owing to declining private consumption growth, a tepid increase in fixed investments and muted exports. The hope would be that the latest GST numbers are a harbinger of better growth momentum for 2019-20. The growth rate of the economy fell from 8.2% in the first quarter to 7.1% in the second and 6.6% in the third, so any improvement in the final quarter numbers due at the end of May should provide some succour. Healthier GST collections, if sustained, will also mean less pressure on the Centre to cover its fiscal deficit.

The April GST numbers have come as a surprise to many experts, given the lacklustre economic activity witnessed across many sectors in recent months, which should normally have impacted tax collections adversely. This perplexing trend may be attributed to increasing compliance among businesses amidst the aggressive push by the tax authorities to widen the tax base. GST filings, for instance, were the highest in March this year. However, the April surge has occurred despite a decrease in the total number of GSTR-3B returns filed by businesses, from 75.95 lakh in March to 72.13 lakh in April. In the absence of more disaggregated data, it could be argued that tax rate cuts by the GST Council in December too may have spurred higher volumes for some goods and services. The rush to pay tax arrears at the end of the financial year may have been another seasonal factor contributing to better tax collection during the last month. Enforcement action by the taxman to collect more revenue from registered taxpayers who have not been filing returns could be yet another factor. It is still too early to assume that this is the beginning of a secular trend. One must not lose sight of the need for further simplification of the GST regime once the election season is over. A significant number of businesses have already been brought into the tax net since the advent of the GST. In order to encourage greater compliance, there must be efforts to make it easier for small firms to remain in the tax net by cutting down the time and energy required to fill myriad tax returns. A nudge would be preferable to the stick.

Spanish steps

Election results give Pedro Sanchez an opportunity to deepen centre-left politics

A convincing victory for the Socialist party (PSOE) in Spain's general election on Sunday has dealt a blow to the prospect of a rightwing coalition with the far-right Vox. The verdict is a personal triumph for Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who failed to save his minority government in February despite having regained the party leadership. The PSOE is short of the 176 required for a governing majority. Yet, it is in some ways spoilt for choice: it can either enter into a formal alliance or rule on its own. Mr. Sánchez can count on issue-based support. Encouragingly, the anti-capitalist Podemos has indicated a readiness to work in a PSOE-led coalition. It had nurtured ambitions of overtaking the PSOE as the principal force on the political left after the 2015 elections, but now its current stance stems from what it sees as a larger role to isolate the conservatives and the far-right. The chances of the liberal Ciudadanos supporting the PSOE are remote, as the former seems set on replacing the conservative Popular Party as Spain's main centre-right alternative. In any case, Ciudadanos's more recent proclivity to cohabit in a coalition with the Vox may not go down well with the PSOE rank and file. Collaboration with the Catalan secessionists would be equally hard. They had in February joined the Opposition to vote out Mr. Sánchez's government, which insisted on negotiating a settlement within the framework of the Constitution. One of the parties has demanded a second Catalan referendum and the withdrawal of the sedition trial against separatist leaders as a condition for supporting Mr. Sánchez again.

The victory in Spain is the latest in a string of successes for social democrats in the European Union, since the xenophobic backlash in many countries after Germany welcomed about a million Syrian refugees in 2015. Yet, the unfolding political fragmentation and the erosion of two-party dominance across Europe also means these gains cannot be exaggerated. As voters in the 28-nation bloc brace themselves to elect a parliament this month, this new reality could become more manifest. Halting the populist surge – as exemplified in Britain's vote to leave the EU – opposed to freedom of movement and closer European integration is their biggest challenge. Centrist forces have responded to the extremist threat by leaning either too much to the left or to the right, hollowing out the middle ground. Such pandering to populists has cost them dearly. It is time moderate parties abandoned this perilous course. The near-unambiguity of Mr. Sánchez's latest mandate is the envy of most governments around Europe. Having been handed one, he must ensure a full term in office, something that has eluded Spain for some years.

The essence of democracy

What the candidature of Pragya Singh Thakur reveals about the BJP's election campaign



GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI

What does Sir William Garrow (1760-1840) have to do with the elections now under way in India? The well-known and much-invoked phrase “innocent until proven guilty” was coined by that British barrister in the course of a 1791 trial at the Old Bailey. He turned the tables on legal practice at that trial by saying that the accusers, not those accused, must be tested, made to establish and prove their accusation in court. The English Court of Appeal in 1935 described Sir William's concept as the “golden thread” connecting the burden of proof and the presumption of innocence “within the web of English criminal law”.

The report card

And that connects Sir William with the Indian polls directly. The National Election Watch is a grouping of NGOs and others working for transparency and accountability in elections. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) is a non-partisan NGO working for electoral and political reforms. They have given us telling statistics for four out of the seven phases of elections that have taken place so far. In the first phase of the elections, 17% of the candidates had criminal cases pending against them. In the second phase, the figure went down marginally to 16%. In the third phase, with the largest number of seats in any phase, the percentage of candidates figuring in criminal cases

climbed to 21%. In two-thirds of these, the accused have been charged for serious offences like rape, attempt to murder, and murder. In the fourth phase, the last one held so far, according to ADR, a total of 210 candidates faced criminal charges, with 158 being “serious”. Five candidates had declared cases related to murder, 24 related to attempt to murder, 4 to kidnapping, 21 to crimes against women, and 16 candidates to hate speech. The phenomenon is not peculiar to any one party. The BJP, Congress, BSP, and the Shiv Sena have fielded criminally charged candidates, the BJP being on top of the scale numerically. Even some independent candidates are criminally charged.

The numbers in the three phases remaining are not likely to be very different. Around 20% of all the candidates in the seven phases, it may be, will be candidates with one criminal charge or another pending against them.

Sir William would have exclaimed, “That does not matter; they may all be found to be innocent!” They well may. Also, they may be the ones who get defeated. On the other hand, studies have shown that those with criminal records (muscle power) plus a seemingly unlimited power of spending (money power) have a distinctly higher chance of succeeding over those with just one of those ‘powers’ and over those who have neither. So, some of these this time round may well get elected, their dates in court rubbing shoulders with their dates in and with Parliament. And business will be as usual for them, with Garrowian logic and ethics and the notion that many, if not most, of these cases are ‘politically foisted’ winning the day. The Election Commission has asked for an amend-



A.M.FAROUKI

ment to the Representation of the People Act to bar, with some caveats, those charged with criminal offences from contesting. But after hearing the matter, the Supreme Court declined, in 2018, to enter this area, ‘leaving the decision on criminal netas on Parliament’.

Illiberal intent

It is precisely this ‘liberal’ arrangement that the most illiberal take advantage of. It is exactly this democratic legerdemain that the most undemocratic occupy. It is this very legal latitude that the most law-disdaining use, abuse.

Mitesh Patel is perfectly entitled under the law to contest from the Anand seat in Gujarat. And we should grant him the presumption of innocence. Whatever else he may be accused of, he cannot be accused of hiding anything. He has declared in his poll affidavit that he was an accused in the 2002 post-Godhra riots, that an FIR was registered against him in Anand district in 2002 for engaging in arson, rioting, stone-pelting and theft, among other charges. And, he has declared, he was booked under Indian Penal Code Sections 147 (rioting) 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapon), 436 (arson), 332 (causing hurt to deter public servant), 143 (unlawful assembly) and 380 (theft). He may well be found to be innocent of all these crimes.

The point, however, is not that.

The point is that the Anand Sessions Court acquitted him in 2010. Sir William, there you go! But the matter does not end there. The Government of Gujarat, yes, the BJP Government of Gujarat, acting with amazing rectitude and objectivity, filed an appeal in 2011 against his acquittal. (We shall not go into how it could not have but done so.) So, the charge has not gone away. On the one hand, the BJP government appeals against his acquittal, on the other the BJP gives him a ticket to contest from Anand. Perfectly legal, of course. Consistent with liberal, democratic nostrums. But what about the ethics of it? Eth... what? What in ‘Elections 2019’ is that?

The case of Pragya Thakur

As I am sure with millions of others, when I heard of Pragya Singh Thakur's candidature from Bhopal, I had but one thought: Malegaon, 2008. We know she is an accused in the 2008 Malegaon bombings, was granted bail following the dropping of charges by the National Investigation Agency and is currently under trial for multiple charges in terms of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Technically, she can contest. Technically, she is as yet ‘innocent’. Technically, no one can fault her or the BJP for making her its chosen candidate from Bhopal.

But what does her candidature, of Mitesh Patel, and of others, say of the party that has selected them? Why, from so many hopeful applicants for tickets, have they been favoured? Because they can deliver a very particular electoral product. They can deliver polarised victories. Pragya Singh Thakur's comments on Hemant Karkare, the valiant police officer who was martyred in the Mumbai terrorist attack known as ‘26/11’, do not

bear repetition. They belong to the world of curses, hoodoo, jinxes, ‘the evil eye’, not to the world of rational humanity. And though the BJP ‘has distanced’ itself from those comments, it has remained as near as near can be to her candidacy.

Narendra Modi is a candidate from the temple-town of Varanasi, Amit Shah from the heart-core of the Gujarat riots, Ahmedabad. One is the BJP's leader, the other its president. Yet, it is not these two leaders but the two candidates “presumed innocent till proven guilty” who represent the face, mind and heart of the party that seeks India's mandate to govern its one billion people. Face, mind and heart are incomplete without a soul.

Where is that to come from? From our deepest feelings as a people. We are not at war. But 20 years ago, in 1999, we were: the Kargil War. Our soldiers became the soul of the country. In any war, they become that. It so happened, by the inexorable calendar of parliamentary democracies, that elections had to be, and were, announced, right in the middle of that war. Then-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee kept the war and his election campaign distinct. BJP registers will show anyone interested in history that at a political meeting in Haryana when he noticed photographs of our defence chiefs displayed in the backdrop, he said, ‘No, this is not proper.’ And the arrangement was rectified.

Not proper, not done. That is what ethics are about. Not presumptions of innocence till proven guilty, but presumptions of intention that need no proving.

Gopal Krishna Gandhi is a former administrator, diplomat and governor

An image makeover of the Belt and Road Initiative

India's attitude has to be set in the larger picture of the relationship with China



P.S. RAGHAVAN

As the Second Belt and Road Forum (BRF), reviewing progress of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), concluded in Beijing on April 27, China had reason to be satisfied. The summit segment was attended by 37 heads of state or government. The list included strategic partner Russia and almost all from Central and Southeast Asia, two important areas of BRI operation.

If the attendance from South Asia was somewhat disappointing (only Pakistan and Nepal at the leaders' level), South Asian countries, except India and Bhutan, joined various initiatives launched at the forum. The east coast of Africa, which is on the Maritime Silk Road, sent five leaders. Particularly in the context of recent U.S. tirades against the “predatory economics” of the BRI, it was significant that nine European leaders attended, including seven from the European Union. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sent a special envoy, conveying that the BRI “is a grand vision with great potential”. The UN Secretary General and IMF Managing Director were in attendance, the latter extolling the BRI's achievements, “from stimulating infrastructure investment to developing new global supply chains”. China claimed

participation from 150 countries at the forum, which included a CEO conference, where agreements worth \$64 billion were signed.

Litany of complaints

The Chinese leadership claimed the attendance rebutted allegations that BRI is a geopolitical tool and exploitative “debt trap” driving countries into dependence on China. It would be more realistic to see it as indicating China's economic clout and the desire of most countries to hedge their bets in the current turbulence in great power relations. Concerns about the viability of BRI projects have not dissolved; it is just that immediate benefits sometimes obscure the direness of future consequences.

Over the years, the structure and implementation of the BRI have attracted negative comment, including from some of the countries represented at the forum. There is a litany of complaints: that projects are selected as per Chinese priorities, with inadequate consultation with recipients; terms are agreed bilaterally and non-transparently with the leadership, and benefits do not trickle down to the population; contracts go to Chinese companies, are implemented by Chinese labour, with raw materials and products from China; most projects are over-valued and economically unviable; most financing is by Chinese loans on unrealistic terms, leading eventually to “debt traps”; foreign companies and private investment are spurned; corruption flourishes in the absence of transparency, labour laws are flouted and environ-



mental compliance is lax. Above all, the BRI exhibits China's geostrategic ambition for economic dominance and political hegemony.

China promises a makeover

President Xi Jinping's speeches and the final forum communique silenced this criticism by promising a total makeover of the BRI. They declared that it will be guided by extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. Cooperation should be transparent, people-centric, green and clean, with zero tolerance for corruption. Project evaluation, tendering, bidding and implementation would meet international standards. The right of participating countries to define their developmental priorities would be respected, as also their laws, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Foreign investment would be welcomed. Economic, social, fiscal and environmental sustainability of projects should be ensured, with emphasis on debt sustainability. In short, it was a promise to transform the BRI, in one fell swoop, from all that it was into all that it should have been. The question is how this rhetoric will translate into action.

The other remarkable feature was the launch of the “Belt and Road” as an overarching framework for bilateral and plurilateral cooperation. China announced a clutch of “Belt and Road” scholarships, training courses and exchange programmes. Groups of countries launched cooperation mechanisms for ports administration, accounting standards, tax administration, banking, intellectual property, sustainable cities, energy and dispute settlement, among many others. Some of these mechanisms were facilitated by UN agencies. China listed 283 “deliverables” from the forum, comprising Chinese initiatives, bilateral and multilateral agreements, investment projects and financing arrangements. The message was the BRI is now more than a bunch of Chinese infrastructure projects; it is truly a “community of common destiny” (as Mr. Xi termed it in 2017) to reshape global governance – a sort of G-150, promoting multilateralism, globalisation, development and human rights, whose members could forge plurilateral cooperation under its umbrella.

All in all, it was a show of China's self-confidence about its place in the world at a time of churn in global politics. The U.S. absence was barely mentioned, nor did the shadow of the increasingly strident U.S. campaign against China's “militarism”, “predatory economics” and “technology theft” intrude into the bonhomie of forum proceedings. India's absence was gracefully handled, with the Chinese Foreign Minister confirm-

ing that it would not affect the ongoing high-level India-China dialogue.

An important – potentially the most impactful – initiative of the BRI has gone relatively unnoticed. Mr. Xi announced in 2017 that it would enhance digital connectivity and integration of big data to build the “digital silk road of the 21st century”. Digital connectivity infrastructure is to be built in tandem with physical connectivity. This arouses U.S. (and wider) concerns that with its lead in 5G network technology and deep pockets, China will establish dominance of its 5G standards and equipment in Eurasia and beyond. The sudden image makeover of the BRI may well be intended to open up a more accommodating attitude to this technology insertion.

India and the BRI

The debate in India about whether or not we should join the BRI will probably be reignited in the wake of its new avatar. The opposition to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor determined absence at the forum. There is no specific opportunity for India in any other element of the BRI. India's attitude to it has to be set in the larger picture of the relationship with China, which combines a strong economic partnership with major strategic challenges, further complicated by the global geopolitical flux.

P.S. Raghavan, a former diplomat, is Chairman of the National Security Advisory Board. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

A rap on the knuckles

It is a shame that the Supreme Court has to direct the Election Commission to do its job (“Decide on Modi, Amit Shah ‘hate speeches’ by May 6, SC tells EC,” May 3). This clearly shows that the EC has failed to combat hate speeches by leaders, for reasons unknown to us. The country needs a dynamic and unbiased Election Commission. As Chief Election Commissioner, T.N. Seshan did a stellar job of reforming the election process in India.

KSHIRASAGARA BALAJI RAO,
Hyderabad

Who knew that the political discourse would come to such a low that politicians would use martyrs to gain political mileage in the name of nationalism? Vote-hungry politicians will never be able to feel the agony that families of martyrs suffer. Unfortunately, the Chief Election Commissioner seems to be a mute spectator to this shoddy electioneering. I hope voters understand that hate is being whipped up by these politicians. The failure of the EC to stem this rot is very sad.

BRIJ B. GOYAL,
Ludhiana

The EC was once a tall entity. If it had demonstrated its credibility in attending to violations of the Model Code of Conduct by parties and candidates with visible fairness and promptness, people would not view EVMs with such suspicion.

R. NARAYANAN,
Navi Mumbai

Double standards

The fear of defeat is what prompted the Congress to keep Priyanka Gandhi Vadra out of the Varanasi contest (“Priyanka's U-turn in U.P.,” May 3). The writer has said that the party's moves will help consolidate

the Muslim votes in favour of the gathbandhan. When the Muslim votes consolidate in favour of the gathbandhan alliance, it is seen as a consolidation of secular forces. However, if the majority community's votes are in favour of the BJP, it is often termed as consolidation of communal forces. Why such double standards?

C.G. KURIAKOSE,
Kothamangalam

What is climate change?

The need to resolve the day-to-day issues faced by the common man has pushed to the background the urgent need of tackling

climate change (“Is India doing enough to combat climate change?” May 3). The problem in India is that the dangers of climate change are not yet known to the common people. Efforts need to be made to educate the common man

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>An Election-2019 page story titled “Bairahich reveals communal and political faultlines of U.P.” (May 3, 2019) erroneously said the OBCs and *non-Jatav* OBCs were largely behind Mr. Modi across the constituency. It should have been the OBCs and *non-Jatav* Dalits.

>>A Business page story titled “An app to manage diabetes” (May 3, 2019) had a misspelling. The name of the app should be *mySugr* - not *mySuger*.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail:readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturji Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

about its dangers, and about how climate change is linked to everyday issues, rather than discuss it only at an academic level.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

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A new fault line in post-war Sri Lanka

After 10 years of a fragile peace, the deadly bombings on April 21 have blighted the eastern lagoon landscape of the island nation, pitting religious communities against one another. **Meera Srinivasan** reports on the simmering tensions in the aftermath of the attacks

Every few metres in Batticaloa a white poster with the words ‘Kan-neer Anjali’ (tribute with tears) appears, tied to trunks of trees, walls of churches, or gates of mosques. Right below the bold letters is an image of a pair of eyes, weeping.

Near town, the narrow lane leading to the evangelical Zion Church, where one of the bombers blew himself up, just as his fellow jihadists did at two Catholic churches in Colombo and Negombo, is cordoned off. A huge banner with mugshots and names of the victims hangs at the entrance. Many of them are studio pictures of well-dressed children smiling at the camera.

Sri Lankans are yet to fully comprehend the dreadful Easter blasts that shook the country less than a fortnight ago, killing over 250 people across churches and hotels in and around the capital Colombo, and in this eastern city some 300 km away. They are grappling with possible reasons and necessary responses with urgency, evident in the many statements and solidarity messages emerging from different religious and civil society groups.

But the people of Batticaloa have an additional burden.

Batticaloa’s burden

While Sri Lanka’s Muslims, who make up nearly 10% of the population, are scattered across the island, their highest concentration is in the Eastern Province, comprising Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara districts.

Apart from losing 28 of its residents, including 14 children who were at Sunday school on April 21, Batticaloa is also where Zahran Hashim, the alleged mastermind of the Easter attacks, hailed from. Perhaps for that reason, the district has remained in the spotlight, more often figuring in tales about a radical Islamist-turned-suicide bomber and much less in those about victims of his ghastly act.

Stories of pastor Kumaran who lost his 11-year-old son, the parents of young siblings Sharon and Sarah, and the family of Ramesh Raju, who tried intercepting the suicide bomber and died, faded within days.

Even as different narratives of the distressing episode compete for credibility, Muslims and Christians suddenly find themselves cast on either side of the atrocity as “perpetrators” and “victims”, despite many knowing that those who perished were not all Christians and despite much of the Muslim community vehemently condemning the attacks carried out by a small radical group as “barbaric”. More perplexing is the nature of the attack itself – of Muslims targeting Christians, fellow minorities, with whom they have no known animosity. In fact, in Sri Lanka’s post-war years, Muslims and, in fewer instances, Christians have faced violent attacks from hard-line Sinhala-Buddhist forces.

While scores of affected families struggle to cope with the shock and those stubborn Easter morning memories that won’t leave, the people of Batticaloa appear to be bracing for other likely repercussions, not fully known, but potentially dangerous. Their scenic coastal town with lush paddy lands around, and a calming lagoon running through, unexpectedly turned into a site of horror on Easter day.

“The Christians are shattered,” says Fr. Rajan Rohan, attached to the St. John’s church in Batticaloa, which is run by the American Ceylon Mission. Hailing from the nearby Valaichchenai town, he returned to Batticaloa last September, after completing assignments in the northern Jaffna city during the final years of the war, and later in Nuwara Eliya, in the Central Province. “When I came back here, I was shocked to see how much this place had changed.”

As a child, Fr. Rohan recalls being thrilled around Ramzan. “We loved that *kanji* (porridge) our neighbours made with beef stock. It was a delicacy that we eagerly awaited every year,” he says. Muslim families sharing treats with children in the neighbourhood was not uncommon, and words like “co-existence” had no use in an effortlessly multireligious society.

But in 2018, things were different in Fr. Rohan’s home town. “There was a lot of Islamophobia among our Tamil people. In a country that has paid a heavy price because of Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism, it was startling to see Tamils so preoccupied with Muslims,” he recalls. “They would say things like ‘we can never trust Muslims’ easily in conversation.”

Sri Lanka’s Muslims are mostly Tamil-speaking, but identify as a separate ethnic group, distinct from Tamils, most of whom are Hindus and the rest Christians. The three-decade-long civil war not only saw raging hostility between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils, who bore the brunt of the carnage, but also witnessed Tamil-Muslim relations sour.

Despite being bound by language, they grew apart, with the Tamil mili-



A policeman frisks a devotee as he arrives at a mosque to attend prayer in Colombo after the bomb blasts on April 21. (Below) Kattankudy, which is among the most densely populated areas in the island. ■AFP



There was a lot of Islamophobia among our Tamil people. In a country that has paid a heavy price because of Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism, it was startling to see Tamils so preoccupied with Muslims.

FR. RAJAN ROHAN
St. John’s church, Batticaloa

tants seeing the Muslims as aligned to and aiding the state security forces that they were fighting. The 1990 mosque massacres in Kattankudy and nearby Eravur, in which the LTTE mowed down nearly 150 Muslims at prayer, and the LTTE’s mass expulsion of Muslims from the north later that year, have left a long shadow of bitterness and resentment.

On his return, Fr. Rohan, who leads an interfaith initiative, found it hard to bring Tamils and Muslims together. “But we were trying. And just when we had begun working on those lines, this [bombings] has happened,” he says, pointing to the “daunting” task ahead.

Strained ties

It is not just Tamil-Muslim ties that witnessed a change in the past decades. The Muslim community has seen substantial changes within, according to A.L.M. Sabeel, a member of the local Urban Council and a former secretary of the Kattankudy Mosques Federation.

Starkly different from the rest of Batticaloa, Kattankudy town stands out. Short date palm trees line the median cutting through this town for some 50 metres, with shops on either side selling garments, gadgets and other essentials. Several mosques and cultural centres can be seen along the main road, while thousands of families live in crammed houses along the streets off the main road. The township is among the most densely populated areas in the island.

“Women of my mother’s generation used to wear a saree, wrapping their heads with the pallu. But in the last 15-20 years, we see more women switching to the abaya [full gown]. The face veil is an even more recent thing,” notes Sabeel, 45, who was raised here. Among men, the full-length white robes and long beards are recent imports. “My

father was clean-shaven. But many men of my generation, including myself, sport a beard,” he says, attributing the relatively newer trends to more labour migration to West Asian countries, Arab funding for local institutions and consequent interactions, and social media exposure. “I don’t think some of these ideas suit us, especially these clothes in such hot weather.”

However, changes in attire, he points out, coincided with “a more significant shift”. “We are a minority in this country and have historically embraced a Sri Lankan identity. But in recent times, many Muslims appear keen on asserting their religious identity, often in the name of culture.” The community, in his view, also turned more insular during this time.

Meanwhile, some within the community question this new, relatively more rigid idea of “Islamic culture”. Culture is about convenience, argues a 40-year-old mother of three. “I wear the abaya when I go out somewhere but prefer a salwar kameez with a headscarf when I visit my doctor. Culture is what you want to make of it. Some people might criticise you over your choices but isn’t that the case in every community?”

Accommodating different shades of opinion on the practice of Islam, Islamic culture and assertion, Sri Lankan Muslims have largely remained together as a community, with trade being a key binding factor. Although Muslims of the east were engaged in agriculture, fisheries and livelihoods such as weaving in the past, they became a predominantly trading community over the years.

“It is true that Muslims mobilise well and maintain good networks within the community. And that irritates many Tamils,” Sabeel notes.

A troubled youth

Thangavel Roshan, 28, took the Easter weekend off and travelled from Colombo, where he works at a construction site. “We usually work all seven days to accumulate our days off to travel home,” he says, seated outside his home in Navatkudah in Batticaloa. A few metres into this locality, concrete roads give way to rickety mud roads.

His right leg is bandaged and kept raised on a plastic stool. Roshan, along with his family, was at Zion Church on

Easter Sunday when he saw the bomb explode right in front of his eyes. “I was lucky, I escaped with this injury,” he says. His parents and siblings too did, as they were further away. Doctors have advised Roshan three months’ rest before he can get back to work. “If there were enough jobs here, I wouldn’t be working so far away. A big chunk of my salary goes for the commute [Colombo is an eight-hour bus ride away]. I haven’t saved a rupee so far,” he says.

His older brother Thangavel Nelson works at a highway project in Kurunegala in the North Western Province. “They say post-war development and all that; I think that happened only in the north. The east hasn’t got anything... no factories, no development, no jobs. We have to struggle outside for such little money,” he sulks, blaming Tamil politicians “who don’t care.”

“But look at Muslims,” he says, voicing what appears to be a popular grievance among many Tamils. “They get government jobs, they prosper in business. Unlike us, they are very secure.”

Much of the antagonism is also linked to the ongoing struggles around resources in the district, according to Siralega Maunaguru, retired professor at the Eastern University in Batticaloa.

“There are a lot of simmering tensions between the communities over allocation of land in many areas, and in sharing water. People of different communities accuse each other’s local politicians of manipulating and favouring their people,” she says, adding that conversations on these subjects often quickly escalate to anti-Muslim speech. “The recent bombings are bound to fan those tensions.”

Muslim politicians and their patronage networks are common talking points among Tamils. As partners in Sri Lanka’s ruling coalition, Muslim leaders hold key ministerial portfolios, while the main Tamil party is in opposition. Tamil leaders, in turn, are seen as lacking political power or the will to make a difference.

With clashing interests of the political class and the leaders’ vote bank manoeuvres shaping their realities, people, especially the youth, appear to be entangled in a web of insecurities – political, economic and social.

“Their politicians take good care of them. Muslim people can get away with

anything,” says Nelson matter-of-factly.

Old prejudice, new fear

This view, which is shared by many others, is precisely what makes Fr. Rohan rather nervous. Inter-community relations, which are also ethnic relations in this context, are fragile and need to be handled with great care, he observes. “We have to sensitise our [Tamil] community, including children. Even in jest, a Tamil child should not tell a Muslim friend anything like, ‘we can’t trust you guys, you’ll drop a bomb’.”

Clearly, Fr. Rohan’s immediate concern was about preventing any backlash against the Muslims. “While we comfort the affected families, it is important to try and prevent adverse reactions. We don’t want others to use our name and attack the Muslims for what a small, isolated group did. That will lead to more hate and clashes in our society.”

His apprehension is rooted in two main reasons. One, the delicate social relations that prevail in the multi-ethnic districts of the Eastern Province, where Muslims are the single largest group, constituting 38% of the population. The province is also home to some 6 lakh Tamils (Hindus and Christians), and 3.5 lakh Sinhalese (Buddhists and Christians), making it one of Sri Lanka’s most diverse regions. Two, the spate of anti-Muslim violence in varying intensities, and led by hard-line Sinhala-Buddhist groups in the last seven years, has made Muslims more vulnerable.

Further, he emphasises that Tamil society cannot afford another cycle of violence and distress. “If our youth resort to militancy again, some of us will turn targets very soon. We saw that happen with the LTTE, where the organisation we nurtured turned against us when we voiced disagreement or dissent.”

The government too has a role in preventing any retaliation, he notes. “They were quick to ban the radical Islamist organisations behind the attacks as ‘terrorist’ outfits. They ought to show the same promptness when it comes to radical Sinhala-Buddhist organisations notorious for inciting violence.”

In the current Sri Lankan context, his fears of a backlash are well-founded – where post-war reconciliation has dragged, a political solution to the Tamil question remains out of sight, and youth across ethnicities are disgruntled amid growing joblessness. Especially so in the wake of Sri Lankan authorities naming the little-known local radical Islamist group, the National Thowheed Jamaath (NTJ), and its allies as perpetrators of the Easter attacks, which the Islamic State has also claimed.

Whether it is the NTJ’s links abroad, or the rationale for their targets (churches and hotels) or the extent of radicalisation within the Muslim community, questions outnumber answers at this point. But those feeling uneasy about the likely impact of the attacks say there is no time to waste.

The peril of radicalisation

With the government claiming that Hashim was among the nine suicide bombers who carried out the coordinated bombings, some may believe the problem is over, but it is hardly so, according to M.B.M. Firthous, a Kattankudy-based preacher, who also heads a lo-

A few youth were perhaps ideologically drawn to a more rigid practice of Islam. Others, who were deeply affected by the anti-Muslim attacks, found the radical path speaking to their outrage. But they were very, very few and didn’t have the community’s support.

A.L.M. SABEEL
Former secretary of the Kattankudy Mosques Federation

cal school. “The conciliatory statements that different religious leaders made after the attacks talk about peace and co-existence, but those are things that have to be said. The problem, unfortunately, runs deeper,” he says. The sooner it is acknowledged, the greater the chances of addressing it, he notes.

After every incident of an anti-Muslim attack in recent years, “some forces” within the Muslim community tried to radicalise youth through classes and videos, urging them to retaliate. But the community had no appetite for it and rejected it outright, according to different mosque leaders in the province.

“A few youth were perhaps ideologically drawn to a more rigid interpretation and practice of Islam, at times due to social media influences. Others, who were deeply affected by the anti-Muslim attacks, found the radical path speaking to their outrage. But they were very, very few and didn’t have any support from the community,” says Sabeel.

But radicalisation is not about numbers, Firthous cautions. “If the idea has been sown in even one person’s mind, we have to be very worried,” he says, pointing to an “urgent need” for introspection within the Muslim community. “We cannot afford to isolate ourselves. There is a lot to be done by all communities.” He also blames the many peace-building efforts that followed the civil war: “They were run by NGOs and well-funded by donors, but they merely scratched the surface without any meaningful effort or reflection on the part of communities.”

And today, the outrage over the disparities and injustices accumulated over years of war and peace is manifesting in new, grievous ways. About a week after the victims of the blast were laid to rest in Batticaloa, and amid several interfaith meetings and messages of assurance, a group of young men went around parts of Batticaloa on motorbikes, distributing flyers asking Tamils to boycott Muslim-owned shops and to quit working there. “We, the youth, must be aware and prevent terrorists who, in the garb of traders, enter our towns,” says the provocative leaflet attributed to ‘Tamil youth, Eastern Province’.

According to a resident who received it on Wednesday night, a trishaw (three-wheeler) followed the motorbikes, with someone inside speaking through a loudspeaker. They were “clearly stoking hatred”, says the resident, who asked not to be named. “We don’t know who got the youth to distribute the flyers. It could be anyone seeking political mileage from this tragic moment. But sadly, they might get it. Even at the cost of more violence and bloodshed, perhaps.”



FROM PAGE ONE

CBI looking for evidence on 11 ‘murdered’ girls

A “field-level verification” of the existence of these girls is also under way. The CBI assured the court of an update in its next status report.

The agency has also revealed how one of the accused, Guddu Patel, led them to a “particular spot in a burial ground.” “A bundle of bones was recovered when the area was excavated,” the CBI told a Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, on Friday.

The agency is fighting rising criticism over the delay in slapping murder charges on the accused. “Further investigation is going on. Therefore, to contend that the allegations of murder have not been looked into, or that graver provisions of the law have not been invoked, is misconceived and premature,” the CBI submitted.

The apex court decided to hear the case in detail on May 6.

SC to hear review plea on VVPATs next week

The review petition was filed three weeks ago after the Supreme Court, on April 8, directed the Election Commission to increase physical counting of VVPAT slips to five random electronic voting machines (EVMs) in each Assembly segment/constituency.

Earlier, under the EC guideline 16.6, only the VVPAT slips from one EVM in every Assembly segment/constituency was subjected to physical verification. Scrutiny of votes polled through five EVMs was quite enough to ensure that an election was “foolproof”, the court had said in its April verdict.

The Supreme Court’s decision was however a far shot from what the Opposition had wanted: VVPAT verification in 50% or 125 polling booths in each constituency. The physical scrutiny of slips in five EVMs has increased the VVPAT verification percentage from 0.44% to less than two percent.

The review plea contended that the Indian democracy could not be left to the mercy of EVM program-

mers. It pointed to large-scale tampering and selective malfunctioning of EVMs in the Lok Sabha polls of 2019. The earlier judgment had refused to delve into the issue of integrity of the EVMs.

Instead, the court was more keen on the logistics of physical verification in its April 8 judgment. It had said the VVPAT verification of five EVMs, rather than in 125 polling booths, was far more “viable at this point of time” in the Lok Sabha poll season. It had added that verification of five EVMs would not be a drain on the ECI’s infrastructural resources and manpower as the Opposition’s idea would have been. The ECI has said that a 50% random physical verification of VVPATs would delay Lok Sabha poll results of 2019 by six whole days.

The ECI had quoted from a March 22 report of the Indian Statistical Institute, which had said that a sample verification of 479 EVMs and VVPATs out of a total 10.35 lakh machine would lift public confidence to 99.99%.

SC stays Dileep’s trial in sexual assault case

The visuals of the alleged incident in the memory card, Mr. Rohatgi had submitted, would help to prove that it was not a “forced situation”.

He had argued that the clip was a “compendium of five or six distinct pieces” and Dileep had “no connection” with the alleged incident that happened in February last year.

Mr. Rohatgi had argued that the original mobile phone or memory card was untraceable and a copy of the visual came out when an accused shared it with his lawyer, who turned it over to the Magistrate.

The Kerala government had countered that the memory card was not a document under Section 207 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, but only a “material object.”

The State has contended

that the case was registered based on the victim’s statement. She had already identified the visuals and her attackers. Her statement and other collected evidence made out a clear case. The State said the memory card, which was recovered only three days after the alleged sexual assault, corroborated the statement of the victim.

“The supply of a copy of the memory card to the petitioner/accused is strongly objected to on the main ground that there is no guarantee that the contents thereof will not be leaked out, thereby causing extreme damage to the pride, dignity, privacy and peaceful life of the victim. Thus, the accused will achieve the very purpose for which this crime was committed,” the government had argued to counter Dileep’s plea.

A smart and shining address in Varanasi for the PM’s people

Core team ensures constituency’s grievances are addressed

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Manduadih railway station in Varanasi is hardly a place where the young and the restless of the city are likely to hang out, but the place is nowadays teeming with selfie seekers and locals who are there as tourists – not to catch a train but to look at their station.

Featuring coloured lights, granite platforms, and a model of an old steam engine in the portico, the place is now an unlikely tourist spot. And for the local populace, it encapsulates just what it means to be residents of Prime Minister Modi’s Lok Sabha constituency.

For the last five years, Varanasi has received much from the fact that it elected the Prime Minister of India.

A 4.4 km flyover connecting the city to Babatpur airport, better roads, a world class cancer hospital, improved electricity supply, a determined effort to set electrical cables underground and cleaner ghats around the Ganga, the lifeblood of this area.

‘PMO secretariat’

All the activities are run from a three-room office a short distance away from Manikarnika Ghat, named the “PMO secretariat” where locals send in requests and grievances to get fast tracked to their MP.

According to sources at the office, Union ministers also drop in and look in on requests from the area for swift redressal, with Union Railway Minister Piyush

Azhar listing a crucial political decision: France

All states bound to freeze his assets and block access to financial system, says envoy Alexandre Ziegler

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

France on Friday termed the listing of Masood Azhar as a global terrorist a very important “political decision” as for the first time the world has reached a decision on the issue.

Separately, diplomatic sources said the link to Pulwama is that the process started after the terror attack and United Nations Security Council had mentioned the incident.



Alexandre Ziegler. •PTI

‘Long process’

“It is very good news for the world community and obviously for India as well. It’s been a long process. A pro-

cess in which we had played a significant role together with other partners. We are an unconditional partner of India to extend this unconditional support,” French envoy in India Alexandre Ziegler said talking to the media. Mr Ziegler said the designation was important because it directly hinders the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief’s activities. “All states are bound to freeze his assets

and block his access to the financial system, ban him from entering or transiting through their territory; not provide him any arms or military assistance whatsoever, whether directly or indirectly,” he stated.

Stating that the fight against terrorism is one of the pillars of India-France strategic partnership, Mr. Ziegler added that fighting terrorism in cyberspace will be one of the priorities of their G7 presidency.

On this note, he stated, “Today, I would like to confirm that India is officially invited to the August summit in France and for the preparatory meetings.” Stating that

the listing was probably “too long story” as it started 18 years back in 2001, Mr. Ziegler added that “for all of us it seemed very unfair” that a terrorist group was sanctioned but its leader was not.

No Pulwama mention

On May 1, the sanctions committee of the UNCS listed Azhar as a global terrorist but did not refer to the Pulwama terror attack which was mentioned in the initial listing.

China has said it agreed to the listing only because the U.S., U.K., and France agreed to revise the listing which didn’t mention Pulwama.

Responding to this, diplomatic sources said the link to

Pulwama was that the process started after the February 14 terror attack.

‘More evidence’

“Significance of listing is not the technical details but the result. The result is Masood Azhar is sanctioned,” a diplomatic source stated.

Talking of how the listing got through this time, sources said it was a factual process and there was not enough evidence earlier.

Asked to comment on Pakistan’s response to the listing, the sources said they were “glad that Pakistan is satisfied with it” as the global community had been pushing Pakistan to act against it.



Tense times: Kashmiri villagers looking inside a damaged house after a gun battle between militants and security forces in Shopian district of Jammu and Kashmir on Friday. • NISSAR AHMAD

3 militants killed in Shopian encounter, 1 soldier injured

The district is set for Lok Sabha polls on Monday

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Three days to the polls, south Kashmir’s Shopian district on Friday witnessed a major encounter that left three militants, including an associate of slain Hizbul Mujahideen ‘commander’ Burhan Wani, dead and a soldier injured. Around 20 protesters were also injured in the clashes that followed the encounter.

According to the police, the militants were encircled in a follow-up to “a credible tip-off” about their presence in Shopian’s Adkhara area early in the morning.

“During searches, the hiding militants fired upon the security forces, leading to an encounter. Initially, with the efforts of the police and the security forces, the civilians trapped around the encounter site were evacuated to safety. All the three trapped militants were killed later,” said the police.

One Army jawan, Yugenar Kumar, also sustained gunshot injuries. He was evacuated to a hospital and is undergoing treatment, the police said.

The three slain militants were identified by the police as Lateef Ahmad Dar alias Tiger of Dogripora Pulwama, Tariq Ahmad Sheikh alias Mufti Waqas of Moolu Chitragam of Shopian and Shariq Ahmad Nengroo of Chotigam Shopian.

Photo had gone viral

Lateef is believed to be the last associate of slain ‘commander’ Wani, who was killed in 2016 in an encounter. He was also seen in the viral online picture of 11 armed militants surrounding Wani. All the 11 militants in the photograph are dead now, said a police officer.

“Dar, since 2014, was involved in planning and executing several attacks in the area. Sheikh was also part of groups involved in planning and executing attacks on the security establishments and was instrumental in luring youth to join militant organisations and snatching weapons of security forces,” the police said.

The house where the militants were hiding was blasted in the joint operation of the Army, the police and the

CRPF. Two other houses were also partially damaged in the operation.

At least 20 protesters were injured in clashes, as dozens of youth rushed to the encounter site to help the local militants to escape from the spot. According to the locals, three protesters were hit by pellets fired from shotguns and were shifted to Srinagar for treatment.

Shopian and Pulwama, where these militants hail from, are going to the polls on May 6. The police on Friday said they had arrested a youth, Shafat Yousuf Malik, in north Kashmir’s Handwara when he was on his way to join militants.

Reported missing from Kangan area of Ganderbal district recently, he “was prevented from joining a militant outfit”, said the police.

“Malik was provided with arms and ammunition by a militant group and was on his way to join the proscribed Hizb-ul-Mujahideen outfit. With his arrest, Malik was restrained from joining the militant outfit,” said the police.

Biopic on Modi to be out on May 24

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

The makers of the biopic on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with Vivek Oberoi in the lead role, on Friday announced that the film will be released countrywide on May 24, a day after the results of the Lok Sabha elections are declared.

The film, titled *PM Narendra Modi*, was earlier set to release on April 11 but was banned by the Election Commission.

In its order last month, the EC had banned the screening of film during the poll period, saying any such film that subverses the purpose of any political entity or individual should not be displayed in the electronic media.

The EC order had come a day before the movie was to be released.

Producer Sandip Ssingh said he hoped the film will have a smooth run in the theatres.

Producer’s statement

“As a responsible citizen we respect the law of the country. After a lot of discussions and keeping the curiosity and excitement about the film in mind we have decided to release the film immediately after the Lok Sabha election results,” Mr. Ssingh said in a statement.

“We are now releasing our film on May 24. This is the first time a film will be promoted for only four days. I hope now nobody has any problem with the film and we are hoping for the smooth release this time,” he added.

Directed by Omung Kumar, the film also features Boman Irani, Manoj Joshi, Prashant Narayanan, Zariina Wahab, Barkha Sengupta and Darshan Kumar, among others.

Suresh Oberoi and Anand Pandit are co-producers of the film.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing a recent rally at Muzaffarpur in Bihar. •RANJEET KUMAR

EC clears two more Modi speeches

Cong. had alleged violation of MCC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission ruled on Friday that there was no violation of its advisories or the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in two more speeches of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and two of BJP president Amit Shah.

Five speeches of the Prime Minister have so far got the poll panel’s clearance.

In at least two cases, one Election Commissioner gave a dissenting opinion.

The latest complaint was lodged by Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala, who alleged violations of the Commission’s advisories and the MCC in Mr. Modi’s speech at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh on April 25. He had also complained about an interview the Prime Minister gave to *Aaj Tak* news channel on April 26.

According to the EC, the issue was examined in detail in accordance with the extant advisories and MCC provisions.

The complete transcript of the speech was scrutinised, following which the Commission concluded that no violation was made out. Mr. Modi had raised the issue of Pulwama terror attack and the subsequent

killing of 42 terrorists in his speeches.

Another of the Prime Minister’s speech at Maharashtra’s Nanded on April 6, criticising Congress president Rahul Gandhi’s decision to also contest from Wayanad in Kerala, was reported to the EC.

A detailed report of the Chief Electoral Officer, Maharashtra, was sought. The Commission said after the examination of the complete transcript and the ground report that it was of the view that no violation had been committed.

Shah’s remarks

Mr. Surjewala had also complained against Mr. Shah’s speeches at Nagpur on April 9 and at Krishnanagar in West Bengal on April 22. In both cases, after going through the reports and the transcripts, the Commission ruled that there was no violation. In Krishnanagar, Mr. Shah had allegedly made the “Modi’s Vayu Sena” remark while referring to the air strike in Pakistan’s Balakot. The Commission had earlier cautioned Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi for their “Modi Ji Ki Sena” comment.

Rahul writes open letter to residents of Amethi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress president Rahul Gandhi, in an open letter to the voters of his Lok Sabha constituency Amethi, promised to give momentum to the development works allegedly “blocked” by the BJP government.

“It is my promise to the people of Amethi that as soon as the Congress forms its government at the Centre, the schemes blocked by the BJP will be started. On May 6, vote in large numbers to bring back this member of the family,” the three-time MP from the seat said in the letter.

A delegation of his party also approached the Election Commission of India, demanding more resources for stringent monitoring, special observers, and increased security in Amethi to ensure free and fair polls.

“We have hostile govern-

EC grants more time

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Friday allowed Rahul Gandhi to give his response to its show cause notice on his speech in Madhya Pradesh’s Shahdol by May 7. The EC had issued the notice on Wednesday, asking him to reply within 48 hours but he had requested an extension.

ments in the State and Union governments, who have been stalling all the development works proposed by the Congress president Rahul Gandhi in the constituency,” Congress spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Abhishek Manu Singhvi said after the delegation’s meeting in Amethi.

‘Modi is insulting Army by questioning UPA era strikes’

Congress reacts to PM’s ‘video games’ comment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of insulting the Indian Army by questioning the UPA era cross border strikes. The party was reacting to Mr. Modi’s comments dismissing the list of six surgical strikes released by the opposition party on Thursday as “kagazi strikes” or merely on paper.

“Modiji’s shameless utterances today in an election rally in Sikar, Rajasthan comparing the surgical strikes conducted by the armed forces as “paper” and “video games” is nothing but a direct abuse of the indomitable courage and bravery of our brave jawans,” Congress communications-in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala



Randeep Singh Surjewala

said in a statement here. He added that the Prime Minister’s statements reveal his desperation and nervousness.

He said the Prime Minister was also questioning previous Army chiefs, including Gen. Bikram Singh who served during the UPA years.

The Congress had released a list of six cross border strikes under the UPA regime, which triggered a war

of words between the two parties. At an election rally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi challenged the Congress’ claim and accused the party of telling lies.

“*Pehle upeksha, fir virodh, ab metool, metool!* (They initially rejected it, then opposed and now saying ‘me too’),” Mr. Modi said adding that all the UPA’s surgical strikes were merely on paper.

“It’s a matter of fact there were surgical strikes under our tenure, former Army chiefs have confirmed it. PM in his desperation should not get carried away by his own propaganda, should not make irresponsible comments questioning the credibility of former Chiefs,” Congress MP Anand Sharma told reporters.

A small town shaken by threat of terror

In Sainthamaruthu, where suicide bombers triggered an explosion, locals are living in perpetual fear

MEERA SRINIVASAN
SAINTHAMARUTHU

“Is the font okay?” a young man at the computer asked M.I. Abdul Majeed, showing him a printout that read, ‘for security reasons, visitors are requested to park their vehicles outside the mosque’.

“That’s perfect. Let’s put up this message on all three gates,” said Mr. Majeed, secretary of the Jumma mosque in Sainthamaruthu, located in the southeastern Ampara district.

On Wednesday, more than a week after Sri Lanka’s Easter attacks, administrators at this mosque were on high alert. One of the serial explosions had occurred in neighbouring Batticaloa district, some 45 km north. Within days, locals realised that the threat was even closer. It was in their midst, as was evident when security forces rounded up a house in this town in the early hours of April 27.

Following an overnight gun battle with suspects, in which three alleged jihadists were killed, troops found 15 bodies inside a house where, officials said, at least three suicide bombers triggered explosions. Six children and three women were among the dead, while authorities later identified three men as the father and two brothers of Zahran Hashim, who is believed to have led the serial bombings on April 21.

Tip-off to police
“They were people from Kat-tankudy living here as tenants. We didn’t have the slightest idea that they were terrorists. The moment some people in the locality



The house in Sainthamaruthu, Sri Lanka, where at least 15 people were killed during a raid last week. • GETTY IMAGES

sensed something suspicious,” they alerted the police,” said Abdul Rafeek, a member of the municipal council in nearby Kalmunai town. His point on locals tipping off the police would be repeatedly made by many here, in different ways.

Until the Easter blasts, the following gunfire and bloody explosions that jolted Sainthamaruthu, the small town was focussed on its own problems, especially its 30-year-long-demand for a separate urban council.

The 100%-Muslim town, which is home to some 25,000 people, has been demanding that it be given a separate local body to develop infrastructure and local governance.

“All Muslim parties promised us that they would get us an urban council, but none actually did,” said Y.M. Hanifa, president of the mosque. Losing faith in their political leadership, members of

the mosque backed nine independent candidates in the last local authority elections. “All of them won,” Mr. Hanifa said, with evident pride.

The members were elected to the nearby Kalmunai Municipal Council, the next best to having their local body.

Tsunami colony
“We moved here, into this tsunami settlement built by the government in 2008. Our own homes, boats everything was gone,” said Aboobakkar Aisha, 58, recalling how “even the war or the tsunami” didn’t affect the community as much as the recent incidents did.

It was on the lane parallel to hers that the suspects had taken a home on rent. “We had no idea that people in our midst had such motives. If our people had not alerted the police, all of us would have become suspects in the eyes of the military. That

would have made our lives miserable,” she said.

The attacks and the subsequent responses of the government have already brought other consequences to the community, particularly women.

In addition to heavy policing and perpetual fear, locals feel trapped in the settlement that is made up of rows of tightly packed homes along hard, concrete roads.

“After the government banned face veils, my daughter can’t go out. She can’t even go to the madrasa without wearing it,” said S.M. Fazmia, 30, pointing to how the controversial *niqab* ban – which other Muslim women have challenged on grounds of civil liberties and lack of consultation – had, in this case, restricted women’s mobility.

Those attached to the mosque also flag new, urgent concerns, like keeping radicalisation at bay.

“We know radicalisation had no place in our multi-ethnic context. Let alone its ideological appeal, it is practically very hard to follow that doctrine and coexist with others here. The community is clear on that,” said Mohammed Ismail Mohammed Sadaath, a former lecturer of political science.

Different religious and ethnic groups have coexisted in the past.

Muslims’ links, especially with Tamils, was mostly through education and trade, according to Mr. Hanifa, 83. “My teacher was a Tamil, most of my students were Tamil,” the retired school principal said.

Pak. uses terror as a tool against India: ex-CIA official

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

Pakistan, obsessed with India as a perceived existential threat, has “created terrorist groups to be a tool” in its struggle against its neighbour, a former top American spymaster has said.

Former CIA acting Director Michael Morell, in a podcast discussion with former Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and former U.S. Ambassador to India Ri-

chard Verma on Thursday, alleged that Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world. “What they don’t realise is that it’s impossible to keep those terrorist groups under control. And that eventually comes back to bite you... I believe that Pakistan... maybe the most dangerous country in the world,” said Mr. Morell, who played a key role in the raid that killed Osama bin Laden.

Jail sentence given to Assange disproportionate, says UN group

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

The 50-week jail sentence given to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for breaching a British court’s bail conditions seven years ago is “disproportionate,” the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention said on Friday.

Mr. Assange will serve the nearly one-year jail sentence while fighting a separate attempt to extradite him to the United States.

The UN working group noted that the Swedish allegations – the initial offence that triggered his British arrest – had been withdrawn and that the original bail terms should therefore have been nullified.

It noted too that he had been given near the maximum 12-month sentence available in the U.K. for breaching bail conditions.

The group is “deeply concerned about... the dispro-

More attacks feared, say Sri Lanka officials

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka bolstered security on Friday with fears of attacks against bridges in the capital as the Prime Minister vowed to hunt down any remaining Islamic State (IS) extremists behind the deadly Easter bombings.

Sri Lanka’s minority Muslims, meanwhile, held Friday prayers under tight security, condemning the jihadist attacks.

Islamist extremists were believed to be planning further attacks, authorities said, this time against several bridges and flyovers in the city as well as police stations.

The warnings came as Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said some of the conspirators in the April 21 bombings of three hotels and three luxury hotels may still be at large.

Police confirmed they had instructed stations around Colombo to deploy additional officers and asked the Navy to deploy more vessels on rivers following the leak of police intelligence warning bridges were at risk of attack.

Authorities had information about a small group of radicals who may be trying to stage more strikes, said Health Minister and government spokesman Rajitha Senaratne.

Labour, Tories suffer losses

Liberal Democrats, Green Party make gains in local elections

VIDYA RAM
LONDON

Britain’s two major political parties suffered heavy losses in local elections that took place across England and Northern Ireland this week, in a development that some attributed to their stance on Brexit, while others saw it as a continuation of the fragmentation of politics that had been under way before the Brexit referendum, but saw a temporary halt after it.

The heaviest losses were suffered by the Conservatives, who had lost over 510 Councillors in seats up and down the country by early afternoon, while Labour had lost over 70. Substantial gains were made by both the Liberal Democrat and Green parties, which have gained over 300 and 60, respectively, by early afternoon.

Significantly, among the biggest gains made by the Liberal Democrats was in the city of Chelmsford, which voted to leave in the 2016 referendum. The Liberal Democrats are the largest political party in favour of a new public vote on Brexit, and the party has inevitably seen the results as an endor-



Liberal Democrat leader Vince Cable. • GETTY IMAGES

sement of that strategy. “Three-party politics is back,” declared the party’s leader Vincent Cable. “In big cities and rural England – in both Leave and Remain areas – we have shown ourselves the strongest campaigning force and the big winners of the night.”

UKIP’s losses
Also notably, the UKIP, the heavily pro-Brexit party, also suffered net losses across the country, though made some gains such as in the heavily ‘Leave’ voting northern town of Sunderland. The Green Party, which is also campaigning for a second referendum, saw its gains as partly reflective of the growing concerns about climate change, manifested through school strikes, the rise of the

protest movement ‘Extinction Rebellion’ and the declaration of a climate change emergency by Parliament.

While Labour acknowledged that the results fell short of expectations, its shadow Chancellor John McDonnell suggested that the message being sent was “Brexit-sort it”. “Message received,” he tweeted. Jeremy Corbyn also insisted that the swing towards Labour “in many parts of the country” showed they could win seats in a general election whenever that takes place. Labour has long been pushing for a general election as the right route out of the Brexit impasse.

The results will intensify pressure on both Prime Minister Theresa May and Mr. Corbyn, with both parties facing criticism for the decision to take part in talks to attempt to find a route forward on Brexit. While some Conservatives fear that the talks will force Ms. May to bow to Labour demands on customs union membership, many Labour supporters believe that Labour could end up endorsing the Conservatives’ vision of Brexit.

Pak. SC turns down Sharif’s plea for ‘permanent bail’

His interim bail gets over on May 7

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a petition of ex-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for permanent bail on medical grounds, saying there was no immediate threat to his life.

Mr. Sharif, 69, was granted a six-week interim bail by the top court on March 26 to undergo medical treatment and he filed the petition on April 27 for permanent bail as he was suffering from acute anxiety and depression that may lead to “sudden death”. A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, which heard Mr. Sharif’s petition, also rejected his plea seeking permission for treatment in the U.K.

After hearing the arguments and seeing the medical report, the bench turned



Nawaz Sharif. • AP

down the petition by observing that there was nothing new in the medical reports that suggested immediate threat to his life.

After the rejection of petition, Mr. Sharif would have to go back to jail on May 7 when the six-week bail term gets over.

Mr. Sharif has been serving a seven-year prison term at Lahore Kot Lakhpat Jail since December 24, 2018.

Kim murder: Vietnamese suspect freed

REUTERS
KUALA LUMPUR

A Vietnamese woman who spent more than two years in a Malaysian prison on suspicion of killing the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was freed on Friday, her lawyer said. Doan Thi Huong, 30, was charged along with an Indonesian woman with poisoning Kim Jong-nam by smearing his face with liquid VX, a banned chemical weapon, at Kuala Lumpur airport in 2017.

Malaysian prosecutors dropped a murder charge against Ms. Huong last month after she pleaded guilty to an alternate charge of causing harm.

In a letter, she thanked the governments of Malaysia and Vietnam, as well as those involved in her trial and imprisonment, for “all the support”.

ELSEWHERE



Barr asked to submit full Mueller report by Monday

WASHINGTON

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, in picture, on Friday offered Attorney-General William Barr a last chance to hand over the full version of Robert Mueller’s report, before moving to hold Mr. Barr in contempt of Congress. Mr. Nadler set a 9 a.m. Monday deadline. **REUTERS**

Trump, Putin discuss possible new n-accord

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke for more than an hour on Friday, discussing the possibility of a new nuclear accord, North Korean denuclearisation, Ukraine and the political situation in Venezuela, the White House said. **REUTERS**

Don’t ask us to put down arms, Taliban tells U.S.

Group responds to Khalilzad’s tweet

REUTERS
KABUL

The U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan should stop calling on Taliban militants to lay down their arms and tell the U.S. to end the use of force instead, the Taliban said on Friday.

Zalmay Khalilzad entered a sixth round of talks with the group in Qatar this week. “In our opening session, I underscored to the Talibs that the Afghan people... want this war to end,” he tweeted. “It is time to put down arms, stop the violence, & embrace peace.”

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid issued a series of sharp tweets in response. Mr. Khalilzad “should forget about the idea of us putting down our arms”, he said. “Instead of

such fantasies, he should drive the idea home (to the U.S.) about ending the use of force and incurring further human and financial losses for the decaying Kabul administration.” He said the U.S. must stop repeating failed strategies. “It would be better if [Khalilzad] musters the courage to call a spade a spade, not a gardening tool & accept the current realities.”

In Kabul, President Ashraf Ghani renewed his appeal to hold direct talks with the Taliban and called for an agreement on a ceasefire.

“The Afghan government is ready to announce a ceasefire if the Taliban show readiness in this regard,” he said at the closing ceremony of a ‘loya jirga’ (grand assembly).

Guaidó calls for protests at military bases

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CARACAS

Venezuelan Opposition leader Juan Guaidó on Thursday called for peaceful demonstrations at Army bases, days after a military uprising in support of his bid to oust President Nicolás Maduro fizzled out.

The latest appeal came after Mr. Maduro called on the armed forces of the crisis-racked nation to oppose “any coup plotter”.

In a tweet, Mr. Guaidó asked supporters to gather for peaceful demonstrations



Opposition leader Juan Guaidó. • AP

on Saturday at military bases in a bid to get soldiers to “support the Constitution”.

Meanwhile, Venezuela’s Supreme Court ordered the re-arrest of influential Oppo-

sition figure Leopoldo López – who made a dramatic appearance alongside Mr. Guaidó on Tuesday after he was freed from house arrest.

Mr. López has since taken refuge at the Spanish Embassy. Madrid has said it would not hand Mr. López over to Venezuelan authorities.

U.S. President Donald Trump warned in an interview that Washington has “lots of options”. “There’s always a tipping point” for military intervention, he said, while adding: “I’d rather not do that.”

MARKET WATCH

	03-05-2019	% CHANGE
Sensex	38,963	-0.05
US Dollar	69.22	0.21
Gold	32,470	-0.45
Brent oil	71.27	2.00

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	387.25	-8.05
Asian Paints	1438.55	1.95
Axis Bank	757.30	4.95
Bajaj Auto	3059.75	29.20
Bajaj Finserv	7624.20	45.35
Bajaj Finance	3111.85	-19.90
Bharti Airtel	331.45	7.25
BPCL	380.75	2.30
Britannia Ind	2696.15	-86.90
Cipla	564.50	-1.10
Coal India	252.10	-0.25
Dr Reddys Lab	2907.45	-12.45
Eicher Motors	20352.35	-212.75
GAIL (India)	345.45	-2.10
Grasim Ind	898.65	-0.65
HCL Tech	1143.05	-17.00
HDFC	2006.40	-11.00
HDFC Bank	2367.95	12.15
Hero MotoCorp	2565.40	13.70
Hindalco	205.10	0.40
Hindustan Unilever	1693.55	-30.00
Indiabulls HFL	705.70	26.05
ICICI Bank	401.80	6.25
IndusInd Bank	1556.60	-4.70
Bharti Infratel	274.00	3.15
Infosys	723.60	-7.20
Indian OilCorp	156.15	-1.95
ITC	304.25	-0.75
JSW Steel	308.85	2.20
Kotak Bank	1417.80	11.45
L&T	1363.60	4.85
M&M	645.80	-0.10
Maruti Suzuki	6710.00	26.75
NTPC	135.45	2.35
ONGC	170.25	1.35
PowerGrid Corp	190.85	0.65
Reliance Ind	1408.85	3.80
State Bank	310.00	1.85
Sun Pharma	453.25	1.05
Tata Motors	209.45	2.15
Tata Steel	547.80	-7.15
TCS	2132.00	-83.40
Tech Mahindra	817.40	-19.60
Titan	1145.05	6.90
UltraTech Cement	4566.00	-50.30
UPL	970.35	6.45
Vedanta	167.70	-0.60
Wipro	290.90	-2.75
YES Bank	175.90	2.15
Zee Entertainment	411.40	-7.05

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on May 03

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	69.02	69.34
Euro	76.94	77.30
British Pound	89.73	90.15
Japanese Yen (100)	61.88	62.17
Chinese Yuan	10.25	10.30
Swiss Franc	67.61	67.93
Singapore Dollar	50.58	50.83
Canadian Dollar	51.23	51.47
Malaysian Ringgit	16.66	16.76

Source:Indian Bank

BULLION RATES CHENNAI

May 03 rates in rupees with previous rates in parentheses

Retail Silver (1g)	39.5	(39.7)
22 ct gold (1 g)	2992	(3002)

‘Don’t terminate GSP benefits to India’

25 U.S. lawmakers warn Trump administration that firms seeking to widen exports to India may be hit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

The U.S. should not terminate the GSP programme with India after the expiry of the 60-day notice period on Friday, a group of 25 influential American lawmakers urged the U.S. Trade Representative, warning that companies seeking to expand their exports to India could be hit.

The Generalized System of Preference (GSP) is the largest and oldest U.S. trade preference programme designed to promote economic development by allowing duty-free entry for thousands of products from designated beneficiary countries.

On March 4, President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. intended to terminate India’s designations as a



Last-minute effort: The 60-day notice period for ending GSP benefits to India came to a close on May 3. ■AP

beneficiary developing country under the GSP programme. The 60-day notice period ended on May 3.

On the eve of the end of the notice period, the 25 U.S. lawmakers made a last-ditch effort to convince the Trump administration from going ahead with its decision.

The 25 members of the

U.S. House of Representatives, in a passionate letter, urged U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer to continue negotiating a deal that protects and promotes jobs that rely on trade – both imports and exports – with India.

They argued that terminating GSP for India would

hurt American companies seeking to expand their exports to India.

“India’s termination from GSP follows its failure to provide the United States with assurances that it will provide equitable and reasonable access to its markets in numerous sectors,” Mr. Trump had said in a letter to Congress, providing a notice of his intent to terminate the designation of India as a beneficiary developing country under GSP programme.

In his letter, Mr. Trump said that he was determined that New Delhi had “not assured” the U.S. that it would “provide equitable and reasonable access” to the markets of India.

“I will continue to assess whether the Government of India is providing equitable

and reasonable access to its markets, in accordance with the GSP eligibility criteria,” he wrote.

‘None will benefit’

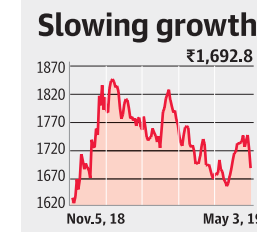
Expressing concern over such a move, the lawmakers said that no party – in the United States or India – would benefit from terminating GSP benefits.

“American companies that rely on duty-free treatment for India under the GSP will pay hundreds of millions of dollars annually in new taxes. In the past, even temporary lapses in such benefits have caused companies to lay off workers, cut salaries and benefits, and delay or cancel job-creating investments in the United States,” the lawmakers said.

India extends retaliatory tariff deadline on U.S. items

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The government has again extended its deadline to impose retaliatory import duties on 29 U.S. products, including on almonds, walnuts and pulses, till May 16. A Finance Ministry notification said that implementation of increased customs duty on specified imports from the U.S. has been postponed from May 2 to May 16 this year. These deadlines have been extended several times since June 2018, when India decided to impose duties in retaliation to a U.S. move to impose high customs duties on certain steel and aluminium products.



Moderation is happening primarily in general trade and wholesale channels and from the lens of geography, it is more pronounced in rural markets

SANJIV MEHTA, CMD, Hindustan Unilever

Metrics	Q4 FY19	Q4 FY18	Growth (%)
Total income (₹ cr.)	10,063	9,197	9.41
Net profit (₹ cr.)	1,538	1,351	13.84
EPS (₹)	7.11	6.24	
Dividend (₹)	13	12	

Subdued rural market impacts HUL growth

Volume growth lowest since Sept. 2017

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Hindustan Unilever Ltd. reported an about 14% rise in net profit for the fourth quarter of 2018-19, even as volume grew at a subdued 7%, due to a slowdown in rural demand. This is the lowest growth since the quarter ended September 30, 2017 when volume rose 4%.

The company registered a profit of ₹1,538 crore in the three-month period ended March 31, 2019, higher than ₹1,351 crore registered in the corresponding quarter of the previous fiscal.

Total sales in the quarter stood at ₹9,809 crore, nearly 9% higher than the corresponding quarter’s sales of ₹9,003 crore. “The moderation is happening primarily in the general trade and wholesale channel and from the lens of geography, it was more pronounced in rural markets,” said chairman and managing director Sanjiv Mehta, while addressing the media.

“This is not a panic situation. This is not an economy going into a tailspin and consumption [vanishing]. This is about relative growth rate,” he added.

Going ahead, the company said it believed that ma-

croeconomic indicators were hinting at a moderate near-term market growth, even as currency and commodities continue to be volatile.

“Low wage rates and food prices mean less money in the hands of rural people that is getting reflected in the consumption pattern or growth slowing down. Wholesalers, who work with larger inventory, would have been impacted with tightening liquidity,” he said.

In terms of segment revenue, while the home care segment clocked double digit growth at 13%, the foods & refreshment segment grew at 9% and beauty & personal care segment saw a growth of 7%.

“In the backdrop of slowing demand, HUL has posted decent operating performance... The weakening rural demand will have impact on the performance in the near term,” said Kaushtubh Pawaskar, Research Analyst, Sharekhan.

For the fiscal 2018-19, the firm saw total sales of ₹37,660 crore, up 8.8% from the previous fiscal’s ₹34,619 crore. Net profit rose 15.4% to ₹6,036 crore in FY19 from ₹5,237 crore in FY18.

Tata Chem Q4 net slips 62.8% to ₹450.1 crore

U.K. operations face obstacles: CEO

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Tata Chemicals’ consolidated net profit for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2019 fell by 62.8% to ₹450.10 as the profit for the same period last year was boosted by pre-tax gain of ₹1,279.39 crore due to sale of its urea and customised fertilizers business to Yera Fertilizers India Private Limited.

On a like-to-like basis, the company’s profit from continuing operations went up by 26.4%.

The profits were reported on an 8% growth in revenue to ₹2,759.39 crore.

Commenting on the results, R. Mukundan, MD and CEO, Tata Chemicals Ltd., said: “We are pleased to share a positive overall performance despite some challenges on the energy cost and overall plant’s fixed cost. The overall operational efficiency continues to grow and the performance



R. Mukundan

was on expected lines across all geographies, except a few obstacles in the U.K. operations. The Indian chemicals business registered a robust performance. U.S. has delivered better results than the same period last year and Kenya exhibited a positive momentum.”

For FY18-19, the company’s consolidated net profit came down by 11% to ₹1,395 crore on 9% growth in its income from operations on consolidated basis to ₹11,296 crore.

RBI imposes fines on PPIs for violating norms

‘They had flouted regulatory rules’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India has slapped monetary penalty on five pre-paid payment instrument issuers including Vodafone m-pesa and Phonepe, for violating regulatory guidelines.

A penalty of ₹3.05 crore has been imposed on Vodafone m-pesa and ₹1 crore each on Mobile Payments, PhonePe and G.I. Technology Private Ltd.

Also, a penalty of ₹5 lakh has been imposed on Y-Cash Software Solutions.

In a separate statement, the central bank said it had imposed a penalty of ₹29.67 lakh on Western Union Financial Services Inc., USA., and ₹10.12 lakh on MoneyGram Payment Systems Inc, USA, for non-compliance of regulatory guidelines.

The penalties on Western Union and MoneyGram had been imposed by the central bank under the provisions

of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for compounding of the contravention.

Yes Bank penalised

RBI also imposed a penalty of ₹11.25 lakh on private sector lender Yes Bank for violation of norms pertaining to issuance and operations of PPIs.

In a statement to the exchanges, the private sector lender said: “RBI has identified certain violations of RBI circular ... on Issuance and Operation of Prepaid Payment Instruments (PPIs) in connection with certain product features of an open loop prepaid card (co-branded) previously issued by the bank.”

“The bank had launched this product as a pilot program from September 13, 2017, and had later discontinued this product with effect from March 14, 2018,” it added.

Asia-Pacific to grow 5.7% this year: ADB

Consumer, investor behaviour may be undermined by trade tensions, says Nakao

RAGHUVIR SRINIVASAN
NADI, FIJI

The Asia-Pacific region is expected to power ahead growing at 5.7% this year but escalating trade tensions are a source of worry, according to Takehiko Nakao, President and Chairperson, Asian Development Bank.

Addressing the opening session of the Board of Governors at ADB’s 52nd Annual Meeting here, Mr. Nakao said that consumer and investor behaviour could be undermined by trade tensions between countries.

Reform, re-orient

“There has been much debate about it but I’m a firm believer in the multilateral system,” he said, adding, “but we have to reform and



Dousing fires: ADB’s Takehiko Nakao says he is a firm believer in the multilateral system. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

reorient ourselves to earn the support of members and their taxpayers.”

The bank’s lending grew to a record \$21.6 billion in 2018, 10% higher compared to 2017. Mr. Nakao elaborat-

ed on the Strategy 2030 plan of ADB which will focus on six key areas – operational and action plans for the private sector, addressing remaining poverty and inequality, accelerating

progress in gender equality, continuing to foster regional cooperation and integration, expanding private sector operations and using concessional resources effectively.

‘World comes to Fiji’

Addressing the session, Fiji’s Prime Minister Josaia Voreque Bainimarama said: “The world has come to us. This conference marks the end of an era of missed opportunities for the Pacific region.”

This is the single largest gathering in Fiji with over 2,000 delegates and was the first time that the ADB held its annual meeting in the Pacific region, he pointed out.

(The correspondent is in Fiji at the invitation of ADB)

IN BRIEF



‘No gold shifted out of India in 2014 or later’

MUMBAI
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday clarified that no gold was shifted by the central bank to other countries in 2014 or thereafter. The clarification comes after some reports suggested that RBI shifted abroad a part of its gold holding in 2014. While RBI said it was a normal practice for central banks world over to keep their gold reserves overseas with Central Banks of other countries like Bank of England for safe custody, it denied any such move in 2014 or later.

Chola Financial Q4 net profit rises 1.96%

CHENNAI
Cholamandalam Financial Holdings Ltd., formerly known as TI Financial Holdings Ltd., has reported a an almost flat growth in standalone net profit for the quarter ended March 2019 to ₹34.26 crore from ₹33.60 crore in the corresponding quarter last year. Total income rose 2.41% to ₹36.47 crore from ₹35.61 crore. The board has recommended a final dividend of 65 paise for fiscal year 2018-19.

Independent director in Reliance Home Fin quits

NEW DELHI
Reliance Home Finance on Friday said one of its Independent Directors Padmanabh Vora has resigned from the board citing default in payment of dues and rating downgrade as reasons. In a separate BSE filing, the company said Rashna Hoshang Khan has been appointed as an Independent Director on the board of the company for five years with effect from May 2, 2019. PTI

Used car industry eyes 7.2 mn units

Crosses 4 mn-mark in FY19, valuation to touch ₹50,000 crore by FY22: IBB report

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

The Indian pre-owned car segment, larger in size than the new car market in terms of volume, is expected to reach between 6.7 million and 7.2 million units a year by FY22, according to IndianBlueBook (IBB), the industry’s pricing and analytics handbook brought out by Mahindra First Choice Wheels.

The pre-owned and associated industry will be valued at ₹50,000 crore by then, it said.

In its third edition of the ‘India Pre-owned Car Market Report’, IBB said despite its large size, the overall pre-owned cars market will remain fragmented, with only 30% of the market will be catered to by organised players



Launch pad: Over 85% pre-owned car buyers choose the vehicle en route to buying a new car, says IBB. •P.V.SIVAKUMAR

who have developed a transparent business model to discover the right price.

“Indian pre-owned vehicle market is at an interesting stage of evolution. Everything around us is changing.

An interesting shift, is the impact of technology in users’ decision-making process, with price transparency and ease of discovery creating new ‘trusted’ channels in the pre-owned car ecosystem,”

Share of small tea growers in harvest rises

Output in north India increases 2.5%

INDRANI DUTTA
KOLKATA

The Indian tea industry harvested its highest tea crop of 1,350 million kg for fiscal 2019 and 1,338.6 million kgs for the calendar year according to official statistics.

The figures show that the small tea growers now have a 48% share in the country’s tea output with West Bengal’s Terai region small growers having the highest share of 73.6% and Tamil Nadu having a 61.2% share.

In 2017 the STG share was around 46.4%, it was learnt.

An analysis of the figures shows that production in north India rose between June and September, but declined in December and January.

Production in south India declined in major months except October and December when significant increase was seen.

“Tea Board is now doing a baseline survey to gauge estate-wise production, equipment use and also the actual acreage under tea,” Deputy Chairman, Tea Board, Arun Kumar Ray told *The Hindu*.

Output in north India rose 2.5%, with Assam – accounting for half of India’s tea crop – showing a 2.5% rise. Darjeeling crop stood at 7.7 million kg in 2018. Tamil Nadu saw a 4.8% drop, trending a similar crop shortfall in the two other tea growing States of the south, Karnataka and Kerala.

GMR arm’s resolution plan gets nod

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

A resolution plan between the gas-based power producer GMR Rajahmundry Energy Ltd (GREL) and its lenders has been executed, GMR Infrastructure Ltd said on Friday.

The existing ₹2,353 crore debt has been lowered to ₹1,412 crore. The GMR Group has infused ₹395 crore towards meeting 20% of principal towards repayment of debt and the interest servicing obligations of GREL for the first year. The balance ₹1,130 crore would be repayable over 20 years. The debt of ₹941 crore has been converted into redeemable preference shares repayable from the 17th to the 20th year.

Home project launches in 9 cities slump 32%

‘GST transition rule changes attributed to fall; trend may change post polls’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

A PropTiger.com study on India’s nine key property markets in the January to March quarter (Q4) has reported a 5% year-on-year decline in home sales and a 32% fall in new project launches. However, as per the report, unsold housing stock declined by about 10% in the same period, providing a breather to developers.

“While there might not be any significant improvement in new launches and home sales in the first quarter of FY20, things may start to change after the results of the Lok Sabha elections are announced,” said Mani Rangarajan, group chief operating officer, Elara Technologies, which owns PropTiger.com. “In fact, as



Safe bet: A cautious approach in new launches has resulted in a fall of 10% in unsold housing stock. •PAUL NORONHA

more clarity emerges on issues pertaining to GST, these numbers might see improvement in the quarters that follow. Property rates would also see an upward movement in time to come,” he said. As per the report, developers sold 75,706 units in Q4 as against 79,601 units in the Q4

FY18. The decline was on account of changes in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) transition rules, the report said.

Despite an overall decline in numbers, home sales in some cities including Hyderabad, Gurugram, Pune and Mumbai increased in Q4.

‘Big 4 audit firms to desist from practising law’

Interim order by Bar Council of Delhi

IANS
NEW DELHI

The Bar Council of Delhi, in an interim order on Friday, directed four big accounting firms, E&Y, Deloitte India, Price Water House Cooper’s and KPMG, to refrain from practising law until further orders from the lawyers’ body.

The Bar Council has also asked these firms for a list of all advocates enrolled across all their offices, in any capacity. The Bar Council will hear the matter next on July 12.

The Bar Council action came on a complaint by senior advocate Lalit Bhasin alleging that though all these firms were accounting firms originally, they were engaged in law practice,

which was not legally permissible. Mr. Bhasin, who is also the president of the Society of India Law Firms, said accounting firms have been encroaching into legal practice and their practice of hiring law graduates to provide non-litigation legal solutions was in contrast with the Advocates Act.

“The Council is of the view that in the meantime, all the firms... refrain themselves from indulging in any such practice until further orders,” said a statement from the Delhi Bar Council.

In November 2018, an expert panel reportedly constituted by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs suggested amendment to the Advocates Act to allow audit firms to offer legal services.

Sagar Cements acquires Jajpur Cements

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Sagar Cements on Friday said it had completed the acquisition of 100% stake in Jajpur Cements Private Ltd (JCPL) and will set in motion the process of establishing a 1.5 million tonne greenfield cement grinding unit in Jajpur, Odisha.

The board of Sagar Cements, had in December, approved the investment of ₹108 crore in JCPL in a phased manner to acquire 100% shareholding and to set up through it a 1.5 million tonne greenfield cement grinding unit in Jajpur, Odisha at a total cost of ₹308.10 crore.

The new unit is likely to be completed by March 2021.



Facebook is considering its own cryptocurrency
SAN FRANCISCO
The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Facebook plans a cryptocurrency-based payment system that it could launch for billions of users worldwide. The system would use a digital coin similar to bitcoin, but different in that Facebook would aim to keep the coin's value stable. PTI



Star Wars actor who played Chewbacca dies
LOS ANGELES
Peter Mayhew, the towering actor who donned a huge, furry costume to give life to the rugged-and-beloved character of Chewbacca in the original *Star Wars* trilogy and two other films, has died. Mr. Mayhew died at his home in north Texas on Tuesday. He was 74. AP



'Woody Allen finding it hard to sell his memoir'
NEW YORK
Oscar-winning U.S. director Woody Allen — who has faced widespread industry scorn over lingering accusations that he molested his adopted daughter — is having trouble finding a book deal for his memoir, *The New York Times* reported. Mr. Allen allegedly abused Dylan Farrow when she was seven years old. AFP

Facebook bans conspiracy theorists

Infowars founder Alex Jones and black activist Louis Farrakhan face crack down

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SAN FRANCISCO
Facebook on Thursday banned prominent conspiracy theorists, including Infowars founder Alex Jones and the controversial black activist Louis Farrakhan, in its latest push to crack down on hate content at the leading social network.

“We’ve always banned individuals or organisations that promote or engage in violence and hate, regardless of ideology,” Facebook, which has been under intensifying pressure to curtail extremist content, said in a

‘Indian adults unaware they are ailing from hypertension’

First large-scale study finds only 45% diagnosed, 8% had BP under control

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

Despite having a heavy burden of a hypertensive population, the proportion of adults with high blood pressure who are aware of their diagnosis, are treated and achieve control, is dismally low, noted the first large-scale, population-based study of hypertension care in the country.

The study, which has been published in *PLOS Medicine*, was carried out by researchers at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the Heidelberg Institute of Global Health, the University of Birmingham and the University of Göttingen.

According to the study, only 3 out of 4 individuals



Hypertension is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, which is a leading cause of death in India. •ISTOCK/GLOBALSTOCK

with hypertension have ever had their blood pressure measured, only 45% had been diagnosed, and only 8% of those surveyed had their blood pressure under control.

More than half the number of Indians aged 15-49 years with hypertension were not aware of their hypertension status. Aware-

ness level was lowest in Chhattisgarh (22.1%) and highest in Puducherry (80.5%).

Hypertension is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, which is a leading cause of death in India. For the study, researchers used the National Health and Family Survey (NFHS-4, 2015-16) data of 731,864 indi-

AIDS drugs prevent sexual transmission of HIV in gay men

‘The risk of transmission with suppressive ART is zero for them’

REUTERS
LONDON

A European study of nearly 1,000 gay male couples — who had sex without condoms where one partner had HIV and was taking antiretroviral drugs to suppress it — has found the treatment can prevent sexual transmission of the virus.

After eight years of follow-up of the so-called serodifferent couples, the study found no cases at all of HIV transmission within couples.

The study proves, the researchers said, that using antiretroviral therapy to suppress the AIDS virus to undetectable levels also means it cannot be passed on via sex, the researchers said.

“Our findings provide conclusive evidence for gay men that the risk of HIV transmission with suppressive ART is zero,” said Alison Rodger, a professor at University College London, who co-led the research.

She said this “powerful

message” could help end the HIV pandemic by preventing the virus’ transmission. In this study alone, the researchers estimate that the treatment prevented around 472 HIV transmissions during the eight years.

The study, published in the *Lancet* medical journal on Thursday, assessed the risk of HIV transmission between serodifferent gay male couples — where one partner is HIV-positive and one is HIV-negative — who do not use condoms.

Superheroes are too fat, too thin to be healthy: study

Male characters are obese, while the females are underweight

REUTERS
NEW YORK

Superheroes like the *Avengers’* Thor and Black Widow may look strong and fit for fighting evil, but they are either too fat or too skinny to be healthy, according to a research.

Male superheroes on average are obese, while the females on average border on being underweight, according to a study of the body mass index (BMI) of their comic book depictions by scientists at Binghamton University and State University of New York Oswego.

The research scrutinised depictions of more than 3,700 Marvel Comics characters such as Thor and Black Widow, currently the stars of the hit movie *Avengers: Endgame*. What stood



Thor, left, and Black Widow from the Marvel universe.

out was hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine features such as their shoulder-to-waist ratio, jaw lines, upper body muscles, waist-to-hip ratio and breast formation, it found. The exaggerated features signal youth, health and fertility and reflect why the characters are appealing, it added.

The male characters tend to have wide shoulders and a narrow waist, and the fe-

male characters have a small waist-to-hip ratio and large busts, the research found.

“These are traits that humans tend to find attractive, but for comic book characters, artists take those traits and make them super-exaggerated,” said researcher Laura Johnsen of Binghamton University.

The findings were published in the journal *Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences*.

Modest fashion



New aesthetic: Models walking down the aisle of a train during a fashion show in Jakarta, Indonesia. Cultural and religious reasons may have birthed modest fashion for Muslims, but today the industry makes for big business. •AP

Twilight rises again, this time as a concert

REUTERS
LOS ANGELES

Twilight is coming back from the dead with a live concert that will tour the world.

Movie studio Lionsgate on Thursday announced that the vampire book and movie romance that had millions of hearts swooning is being adapted for an international live to film event.

The “Twilight in Concert” tour will feature a full orchestra performing the original movie score timed to a screening of the first of the five *Twilight* films.

The movie franchise, based on the novels by Stephenie Meyer, tells the story of teenager Bella Swan who falls in love with mysterious Edward Cullen, a vampire.



A scene from the *Twilight* franchise. •AP

Distracted by tech while driving? The answer may be more tech

While cellphone use is a commonly cited cause of distraction, enjoying scenery or daydreaming can also lead to accidents

PAUL STENQUIST

Driving while distracted is nothing new, but new distractions for drivers pop up all the time. While carmakers and tech companies have worked to keep drivers from checking their phones, the most effective safety features may be the technology that is laying the foundation for autonomous cars.

This advanced driver-assistance technology can automatically bring a vehicle to a stop when a collision is imminent, and lane-departure systems that keep the vehicle between the lines are immune to distraction.

“These systems don’t care if you’re looking at the radio or engaged in conversation,” said Ian Reagan, senior research scientist at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Three years ago, four teenagers were driving home from spring break in Texas when their Hyundai Elantra suddenly veered into the lane of oncoming traffic, where an 18-wheeler slammed into it, killing three of them.

What happened in the seconds preceding the crash?



Eyes on the road: Voice activation lets a driver watch the road instead of dealing with buttons or touch-screen icons, thereby preventing distractions. •NYP

The driver glanced at a navigation app on her cellphone. After that accident, the Texas Department of Public Safety said distracted driving was the No. 1 killer of American teenagers. Overall, driver inattention caused 3,166 deaths in 2017, according to a report from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Cellphone use is the most commonly cited cause of driver distraction, but that covers a wide range of activities. It seems obvious that

texting or programming a navigation app is highly distracting, but is a phone conversation problematic if it takes place with hands on the wheel and eyes on the road?

“Cognitive distraction researchers have focussed on cellphone conversations to see if there’s a crash risk when just talking,” Mr. Reagan said. “Results are mixed. Only a handful of studies show increased risk.

“Controlled studies on simulators and roadways

have shown that when people are engaged in conversation, they scan the road differently, not looking to the sides or in the mirrors as much as when they’re fully focussed,” he continued. “Some people who want to keep cellphones out of the car cite those statistics, but the most serious threats are straight ahead.”

Bryan Reimer, a research scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said, “Talking on the phone while driving is probably a

bad idea under most circumstances, but on a long boring highway drive it might be the best thing to keep yourself engaged. You don’t fall asleep while talking.”

Eating and drinking

While one can hope that drivers remain focused, little can be done to make it so. Other distractions include eating and drinking, conversing with passengers, looking at scenery or daydreaming.

Last I checked, daydreaming was still legal in all 50 states, and all those other actions are, too. Using a cellphone while behind the wheel, on the other hand, is illegal in many areas.

But even where cellphone use is banned, other technology can occupy drivers. For example, our cars’ so-called infotainment systems do much of what a cellphone does, including distract the driver.

Carmakers design such systems with this in mind, however, aiming to minimise the fiddling necessary to operate them. Voice activation, for instance, lets a driver watch the road instead of

dealing with buttons or touch-screen icons. But these voice systems still demand the driver’s attention, and not all systems are created equal.

While autonomous technology has made driving safer and less taxing, it still requires an attentive driver. But Mr. Reimer at MIT has warned that it can open the door to greater distractions.

“In pursuit of automation, we’ve pretty much been letting the technology lead the way,” he said. “Forgetting about, to some degree, the behavior of the driver behind the wheel.” NY TIMES

YouTube to make 9 programmes free to all

Includes hit shows such as *Cobra Kai*

REUTERS
NEW YORK/SAN FRANCISCO

Alphabet Inc’s YouTube unveiled on Thursday nine new original programmes that will be available for free this year as the streaming service shrinks an effort to attract subscribers with content exclusively behind a paywall.

The unveiling at a YouTube event for advertisers and media in New York offered the first glimpse at how the shift announced in November away from subscriber-only content will play out across the world.

Programming has turned out to be less of a draw for YouTube Premium subscribers than ad-free viewing and other perks, while YouTube has faced pressure from advertisers to increase its supply of television-like content that is suitable for sponsorship.

New programmes include a documentary about Dude Perfect, a group that performs sports tricks on YouTube, and an interactive series featuring YouTube star Mark Fischbach that lets viewers control the story-



Programming has been less of a draw for YouTube Premium subscribers.

ryline. YouTube said it is still testing content-related benefits for subscribers. For instance, all episodes from the next season of its popular show *Cobra Kai*, which is based on the *Karate Kid* movie franchise, will be available to subscribers when it launches.

Non-subscribers will gain access to one new episode per week, similar to the rollout of shows on traditional television.

New episodes of a handful of existing programs are likely to remain subscriber-only because of prior commitments, YouTube said.

Overall, YouTube has debuted about 75 shows and 28 films under its previous strategy launched in 2016.