

Lanka freezes accounts
of 41 terror suspects

THE HINDU ONLINE

Bank accounts of 41 terror suspects in Sri Lanka having links with the outlawed Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jammath (NTJ) that was behind the Easter Sunday bombings in the country have been frozen, according to a media report. Nine suicide bombers, including a woman, carried out a series of devastating blasts that tore through three churches and three luxury hotels, killing 258 people and injuring over 500 others.

The ISIS terror group claimed the attacks, but the government blamed the local NTJ for the bombings.

PM Modi to meet
mother today

NDTV ONLINE

With the national election over and the BJP making a big bang comeback, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted he will fly to his home state Gujarat today to meet his mother Heeraben and finally to Varanasi, from where he won by nearly 4.8 lakh votes, to thank the "people of this great land".

Modi meets his mother regularly before important occasions such as elections, apart from routine visits despite his packed day plans.

Cow vigilantes beat
up three in MP

NDTV ONLINE

Suspected cow vigilantes allegedly thrashed two persons in Madhya Pradesh's Seoni with sticks, accusing them of carrying beef, following which five accused have been arrested, police said yesterday. The group of five suspected attackers also allegedly forced one of the victims to beat up a woman accompanying them with chappals, a police officer said. Police said that the three persons who were beaten up have also been arrested as possession and sale of beef is illegal in Madhya Pradesh.

'I don't want to remain as CM'

Mamata tells party after BJP surge in West Bengal; post-polls violence kills 1

AGENCIES

Mamata Banerjee, addressing her first press conference after her party's national election setback in Bengal, said she did not want to continue as chief minister and had told her Trinamool Congress that.

"I have told my party, for six months I have been unable to work. I was a powerless Chief Minister. I cannot accept that. I don't want to continue as Chief Minister. The chair is nothing for me. Party symbol is most important for me," Mamata Banerjee told reporters.

The BJP scored a remarkable tally in West Bengal, a long-term left stronghold turned Trinamool territory. It won 18 of the state's 42 Lok Sabha seats, in a massive improvement over its 2014 tally of two seats. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool won only a few more, 22.

At yesterday's meeting, the Trinamool Congress began a review of its dismal performance and the challenge ahead for the assembly



Congress president Rahul Gandhi gestures while talking to his mother and Congress party senior leader Sonia Gandhi during a Congress Working Committee meeting in New Delhi, yesterday. Story on back page. PHOTO: AFP

elections 2021. A few leaders who have spoken on the results have said this was a temporary setback and people will be back with the Trinamool Congress by the time assembly elections come around.

Mamata Banerjee questioned the fairness of the election.

"I can only continue if people are willing to take a bold step. We need to increase our vote share. BJP's vote has come from the Left. This is mathematics," said the Chief Minister.

"I can't accept this. How can BJP win so many seats in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana? People are scared to speak but I am not."

Meanwhile, clashes between supporters of BJP and TMC has left one dead, officials said.

Paramilitary forces boosted security yesterday because of the violence.

The BJP said a 23-year-old party worker was shot dead by Trinamool activists late Friday at Chakda, north of the regional capital Kolkata. The rival party denied any involvement.

The man's family said he was shot in a field near his home.

Clashes between BJP and Trinamool activists were also reported in three other districts.

19TH LOK SABHA

More than 40pc MPs
face criminal charges

AFP, New Delhi

More than 40 percent of lawmakers in India's new parliament face criminal charges -- some as serious as murder and rape -- and the list is growing, an electoral reform group said yesterday.

One member of parliament for the opposition Congress party is battling 204 cases including manslaughter and robbery, the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) said.

At least 233 of the 543 members named as winning seats on Thursday face criminal proceedings, according to the ADR, whose election chief Anil Verma said there is a "disturbing trend" in parliament that "is bad for the democracy".

The ADR said it studied the records of 539 of the winners and found that the number facing criminal cases was the highest since it started studies in 2004.

The report said 116 of the 303 lawmakers from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) landslide win face charges, including one for terrorism.

Twenty-nine of the 52 Congress MPs face cases, Dean Kuriakose from Idukki, in Kerala state, faces 204 criminal cases.

The ADR said the number of lawmakers facing grave criminal cases had more than doubled in a decade -- including 11 murder cases, 30 manslaughter charges and three accused of rape.

Indian laws bar people from contesting an election if they have been convicted while in office for crimes that carry jail terms of two or more years, with some exceptions depending on the crime.

Candidates standing for office for the first time are allowed to have a conviction.



'North Korean
missile test
violated UN
resolution'

REUTERS, Tokyo

US National Security Adviser John Bolton yesterday said North Korea's recent missile launches violated a UN Security Council resolution and urged leader Kim Jong Un to return to denuclearisation talks.

It was the first time a senior US official has described the tests as a violation of UN resolutions aimed at halting North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes and came ahead of a four-day visit to Japan by US President Donald Trump who arrives later in the day.

"The UN resolution prohibits the launch of any ballistic missiles," Bolton said at a press roundtable.

North Korea's test firings included short range ballistic missiles and so there was "no doubt" it was a violation, he added.

Earlier this month, Kim Jong Un oversaw the first flight of a previously untested weapon - a relatively small, fast missile experts believe will be easier to hide, launch and manoeuvre in flight.

Bolton said that the United States was still open to talks with Kim's regime but that it had not changed its position from the one outlined at the last summit between the United States and North Korea in Hanoi.

"Trump has held the door open for Kim, the next step is for Kim to walk through it," he said.

Bolton also urged Kim to agree to a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which he said could help restart dialogue on North Korea's weapons programmes.

An Abe Kim summit "could be substantive assistance to that", he said.



EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT POLLS

A woman casts her ballot at a polling station in Bratislava, Slovakia during the European Elections, yesterday. Polls were open in Malta, Slovakia and Latvia, with most of the bloc's 28 member states -- including big players Germany, France and Italy -- to vote today. More than 400 million people are eligible to elect 751 members of the European Parliament, with the first official results will be announced once voting in all EU countries is over today. Polling has shown for months that eurosceptics and the anti-immigration far right could make big gains in the vote, which will also help determine who replaces Jean-Claude Juncker as head of the European Commission as well as other top jobs.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump to expose
'attempted coup'

President's row with Democrats takes harsh turn

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump doubled down Friday on his claim of an "attempted coup" against him as his battle with Democratic foes entered a vicious new phase of personal insults and strong-arm tactics.

Hovering over it all: the looming question of whether or not the Republican leader will be impeached -- "the big I-word," as Trump put it recently.

The president said he has given his attorney general wide latitude to declassify intelligence information as he probes the origins of the government's investigation into Trump's 2016 campaign ties to Russia.

"They will be able to see ... how the hoax or witch hunt started and why it started," he told reporters as he departed on a trip to Japan. "It was an attempted coup or an attempted takedown of the president of the United States."

"There's word and rumor that the FBI and others were involved, CIA were involved with the UK, having to do with the Russian hoax," he said, adding that he might talk to the outgoing British Prime Minister Theresa May about it.

"We're exposing everything," he added.

House Democratic leaders have launched numerous probes aimed at getting evidence gathered during Special Counsel Robert Mueller's 22-month probe into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential campaign -- only to be stonewalled by the White House.

That has raised calls by Democrats to initiate impeachment proceedings against Trump.

US sends 1500 troops to ME

AFP, Washington

The United States said it was deploying 1,500 additional troops to the Middle East to counter "credible threats" from Iran in a move denounced by Tehran on Saturday as "a threat to international peace".

"Increased US presence in our region is very dangerous and a threat to international peace and security and must be confronted," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told the official IRNA news agency.

The escalation of the US military presence follows a decision in early May to send an aircraft carrier strike force and B-52 bombers in a show of force against what Washington's leaders believed was an imminent Iranian plan to attack US assets.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump, declaring a national emergency because of tensions with Iran, swept aside objections from Congress on Friday to complete the sale of over \$8 billion worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan.

The Trump administration informed congressional committees that it will go ahead with 22 military sales to the Saudis, United Arab Emirates and Jordan, infuriating lawmakers by circumventing a long-standing precedent for congressional review of major weapons sales.

Members of Congress had been blocking sales of offensive military equipment to Saudi Arabia and the

reconnaissance aircraft, fighter jets and engineers. Six hundred of the personnel belong to a Patriot missile defense battalion that had its deployment in the region extended.

Pentagon officials said the move was necessary after multiple threatening actions and several small-scale attacks in May by Iranian forces, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, and "proxy" forces.

Those include a rocket launched into the Green Zone in Baghdad, explosive devices that damaged four tankers in Fujairah near the entrance to the Gulf, and a Houthi drone attack against a Saudi oil installation.

Iran has denied involvement in any of the attacks.

US officials said the aim of the deployment was both to extend greater protection to the 70,000 US forces in the Middle East and Afghanistan, and to deliver a message to Iran to refrain from attacks.

"We think that through a combination of a very measured deployment of assets as well as public messaging, we are again trying to underscore that we are not seeking hostilities with Iran," he said.

COUNTERING IRAN 'THREAT'

Defying Congress, Trump sets \$8 billion-plus in weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE

Tehran says US troop boost 'threat to international peace'

Everest traffic jam turns deadly

Deaths of British, Irish climbers push toll to 10 in a week

AGENCIES

Two more mountaineers have died on Mount Everest after crowds of people became stuck in a queue leading to the summit of the world's highest mountain.

The deaths of an Irish and a British climber on Mount Everest took the toll from a deadly week on the world's highest peak to 10, expedition organisers said yesterday.

British climber Robin Fisher, 44, reached the summit yesterday morning but collapsed when he had got just 150 metres back down the slope.

"Our guides tried to help but he died soon after," Murari Sharma of Everest Parivar Expedition told AFP.

On the northern Tibet side of the mountain, a 56-year-old Irish man died Friday morning, his expedition organisers confirmed in a statement on their Facebook page.

The man decided to return without reaching the summit but died in his tent at the North Col pass at 7,000 metres (22,965 feet).

Four climbers from India and one each from the United States, Austria and Nepal have already died on Everest in the past week. Another Irish mountaineer is missing presumed dead after he slipped and fell close to the summit.

A traffic jam of climbers in the Everest "death zone" has been blamed for at least four of the deaths, heightening concerns that the drive for profits is trumping safety.

Nepal issued a record 381 permits for mainly foreign climbers, costing \$11,000 each, for the spring climbing season. Each climber with a permit is assisted by at least one sherpa, adding to the summit logjam.

With the short window of suitable weather due to close soon, bottlenecks of scores of climbers wanting to achieve the ultimate mountaineering accolade have built up each day.

An estimated 600 people had reached the summit via the Nepal side by Friday, a government official said, based on information from expedition organisers.



LYON BOMB 'ATTACK'

Cops hunt for suspect

AFP, Lyon

French police were yesterday pulling out all the stops to locate a suspect following a blast in the heart of Lyon that wounded 13 people.

"All means have been activated to identify and detain the person who committed this act," Paris prosecutor Remy Heitz told media in Lyon, the third-biggest French city.

The blast occurred just two days ahead of hotly contested European Parliament elections and with France on watch for any repeat of recent deadly terrorist attacks which have rocked the country.

Heitz has taken charge of the investigation into "attempted murder in relation with a terrorist enterprise and association with terrorist criminals."

French Justice Minister Nicole Belloubet said late Friday however that it was too soon to say whether the blast could be termed a "terrorist act".

President Emmanuel Macron initially called the Friday evening explosion an "attack" but later took a more cautious tone with a tweet that condemned "the violence that has struck" the city's residents.

Police issued an appeal for witnesses on Twitter as they sought a man -- described as "dangerous" -- who was believed to be in his early 30s and who was picked up by security cameras riding an all-terrain bicycle immediately before the explosion.

An image of the suspect, wearing light-coloured shorts and a long-sleeved dark top, was posted. His face was partially covered by a khaki cap and sunglasses.

The number of wounded stood at 13 -- eight women, a 10-year-old girl and four men -- of which 11 needed hospital treatment. None of their injuries were life-threatening. No one has claimed the attack, Heitz noted.



US judge blocks Mississippi
'heartbeat' abortion ban

A US federal judge Friday blocked Mississippi's strict abortion law which would have banned the procedure after six weeks of pregnancy. The bill banning abortion where a heartbeat is detectable -- from six weeks -- was passed in March and was due to go into effect on July 1. The new "Heartbeat Bill" which was signed into law by state Governor Phil Bryant makes exceptions for medical complications, but not for cases of incest or rape. More than a dozen states have adopted laws banning or drastically curtailing access to abortion which was legalized in the landmark 1973 US Supreme Court ruling Roe v Wade.

Ramaphosa sworn in as
president of South Africa

Trade unionist-turned-businessman Cyril Ramaphosa was sworn in as South Africa's president yesterday, vowing to create jobs and tackle deep-rooted corruption that has strangled economic growth. Ramaphosa, who becomes the country's fourth democratically elected president since the end of apartheid, took the presidential oath before a crowd of about 32,000 people in a rugby stadium in the capital, Pretoria. Ramaphosa's African National Congress (ANC) clinched a 57.5% majority in a general election earlier in May, down from 62% in 2014 as voters turned against the ruling party due to revelations about government corruption and record unemployment.



Clashes at Venezuela
jail kill 29 inmates

At least 29 prisoners were killed and 19 police wounded in clashes at a jail in western Venezuela Friday, authorities said. The incident at the police station jail in the town of Acarigua, in Portuguesa state, occurred when police special forces (FAES) tried to stop a "massive prison break" which resulted in the deaths of 29 inmates, according to Portuguesa public security secretary Oscar Valero. The prisoners received the officers with "a hail of gunfire" while detonating three grenades, which injured 19 police, Valero told reporters. Violence is a problem in such detention facilities, where inmates are supposed to be held for a maximum of 48 hours, Una Ventana a la Libertad said. The Acarigua jail has capacity for 60 inmates but was holding 500, according to the police report. SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS