

# International

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2019



The Indian 'Miss Marple' snooping on poll candidates

## Deported Honduran migrant gives up on American dream

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MINUWANGODA, Sri Lanka: Heavily-armed Sri Lankan soldiers ride a motorcycle in front of the Juma Mosque after a mob attack yesterday. — AFP

## Lanka anti-Muslim riots claim first life

Mosques, shops, homes vandalized • Curfew slapped for second night • 13 people arrested

**MINUWANGODA, Sri Lanka:** Sri Lanka announced yesterday a curfew for a second straight night after a man was killed by sword-wielding rioters in an escalating anti-Muslim backlash following the Easter terror attacks. Violence broke out late Monday, three weeks after Islamist extremist bombings killed 258 people, with rampaging mobs carrying out arson attacks and 2,000 people vandalizing a mosque, witnesses said.

Police announced another nationwide curfew for a second night to try and stop the violence, beginning at 9:00 pm (15:30 GMT). The curfew had been in place all day in North-Western Province (NWP), where police said a 45-year-old Muslim man was slaughtered in his carpentry shop late Monday by a crowd carrying swords. Fauzul Ameen was buried yesterday at a Muslim cemetery in Nattandiya under tight security. Heavily armed troops and police backed by armored personnel carriers guarded a service attended by around 100 people.

Police said yesterday that 13 people had been arrested including Amith Weerasinghe, a man from Sri Lanka's majority Buddhist Sinhalese community on bail for his role in similar riots in March last year. Elsewhere in NWP, north of Colombo, attackers outnumbering police and security forces set fire to Muslim-owned shops, vandalized homes and smashed windows, furniture and fittings inside several mosques.

In the adjoining Gampaha district, men on motorbikes led arson attacks in the town of Minuwangoda, 45 km north of Colombo, local residents told AFP. "They were from out of town," an owner of an electronic goods store told AFP by telephone. "After they started smashing Muslim shops and throwing petrol bombs, the locals joined in."

### 'Police did nothing'

He said police and security forces appeared to be overwhelmed and that by

the time troops fired in the air to disperse the mobs it was too late. A pasta factory owned by a Muslim businessman burned to the ground after unidentified attackers threw burning tyres inside. "Police and security forces also did not do anything to put out the fire," the owner of Diamond Pasta, Ashraf Jithy, told AFP by telephone. "Three of my Muslim workers were injured while trying to escape from the burning factory."

In the NWP, attackers have systematically targeted mosques for two days, local clerics told AFP. In the town of Kinyama, two mosques were smashed as outnumbered armed police and troops stood by. "About 2,000 people surrounded our mosque and smashed everything inside, even the bathroom fittings," cleric M.I.M. Siddeeqe told AFP by telephone from the curfew-bound town of Bingiriya. Video footage of the unrest showed burning shops as mobs armed with sticks and stones roamed the streets attacking

Muslim-owned shops. "Security forces are assisting police who have been ordered to use maximum force to contain the violence," police spokesman Ruwan Gunasekera said.

### Politically orchestrated?

Political commentator Victor Ivan suggested that the violence was politically orchestrated. "The opposition feels that they can gain when there is instability and the government appears to be weak," Ivan told AFP. "There is evidence of junior level opposition figures instigating communal violence." He said the political establishment, including the opposition, had failed to provide leadership and restore confidence after the April 21 attacks claimed by the Islamic State group.

In an address to the nation on Monday night, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said the unrest would hinder investigations into the attacks that targeted three churches and three luxury

hotels. In a separate TV address, police chief Chandana Wickramaratne warned of stern action against rioters, and said that constables have been issued orders to use maximum force. The attacks came during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan. Muslims make up around 10 percent of Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka's population, and Christians about 7.6 percent. A state of emergency has been in place since the bombings and security forces have been given sweeping powers to detain suspects.

Internet service providers said the telecoms regulator yesterday extended a social media ban to Twitter. Earlier, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram had been blocked to prevent the spread of messages inciting violence. Sri Lankan cricket legend Kumar Sangakkara was among those to call for calm, earlier tweeting: "STOP. BREATHE. THINK. OPEN YOUR EYES. If we lose ourselves in violence, racism, thuggery and hatred we lose our country." — AFP

## Russia, US ready for better relations

**SOCHI, Russia:** Moscow and Washington's top diplomats said yesterday they were ready to improve ties, ahead of the countries' highest-level talks in nearly a year as President Vladimir Putin hosts Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Pompeo arrived in the sunny Black Sea resort of Sochi yesterday amid a raft of disagreements, from arms control to the raging Venezuela and Iran crises. At the start of talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and before a planned evening meeting with Putin, Pompeo expressed hope the two rivals could "stabilize the relationship."

"I am here today because President (Donald) Trump is committed to improving this relationship," he said. "We have differences - each country will protect its own interests and look after its own people - but it's not that we have to be adversaries on every issue." Lavrov said Russia was ready to open a new page in ties. "I believe it's time to start building a new, more responsible and constructive model of mutual perception of each other," he said. "We understand that a lot of suspicions and biases have accumulated on both sides. We win nothing from this."

Pompeo's visit to Russia - his first as Secretary of State - came as tensions mounted dangerously in the Gulf, with Iran and the United States engaged in a new war of words over Tehran's nuclear deal. Pompeo is the highest-ranking US official to see Putin since last July, when Trump met him in Helsinki. Then, Trump stunned the US political establishment by appearing to accept the Russian leader's statement at face value that he did not meddle in the US election, contrary to US intelligence evaluations. Pompeo was greeted on arrival by local officials including the may-

or of Sochi, with whom he exchanged pleasantries on the tarmac.

### Sabre-rattling

Ahead of the negotiations Putin toured a top military flight test center in southern Russia and inspected a new nuclear-capable hypersonic missile dubbed Kinzhal (Dagger). His spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied that the display of military muscle was designed to send a message to the Americans. At a meeting Monday, Putin also tasked his top brass with developing defenses against hypersonic weapons. Peskov slammed what he called Washington's "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran, saying it would only drive Tehran into a corner.

Pompeo cancelled a stop in Moscow on Monday to instead have an unscheduled meeting in Brussels with European foreign ministers, who have been uncomfortable with the hawkish direction of the United States on Iran. The United States has pulled out of the nuclear deal which was backed by the Europeans, Russia and China and slapped sweeping sanctions on Tehran in an all-out effort to curb its regional clout.

The United States has recently ramped up the pressure by saying the deployment to the region of an aircraft carrier strike group and nuclear-capable bombers was to counter vaguely described threats from Iran. The renewed diplomacy between Moscow and Washington follows a long-awaited report by investigator Robert Mueller. He found that Russia interfered in the 2016 election but that there was insufficient evidence to conclude that the Trump campaign colluded with Moscow.

Besides Iran, Washington and Moscow are at loggerheads on an array of urgent strategic questions, including Venezuela, the Syrian civil war and the conflict in Ukraine. The United States has been trying for more than three months to topple Venezuelan President



SOCHI, Russia: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (right) shakes hands with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during a meeting yesterday. — AFP

Nicolas Maduro. Pompeo has repeatedly blamed Russia for giving him a lifeline. Both the United States and Russia hope to make some progress on arms control. Moscow is seeking a five-year extension of the New START treaty, which caps the number of nuclear warheads well below Cold War limits and is set to expire in 2021.

The Trump administration this year pulled out of another key arms control agreement, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty, with NATO allies saying a Russian missile system was in violation. Moscow has denied the claims. Last year Putin revealed a new generation of "invincible" nuclear weapons and warned of a new arms race if America pulled out of weapons treaties.

Trump on Monday announced that he expected a "very fruitful meeting" with Putin at the G20 summit in Japan next month, only for Peskov to deny Washington had requested such a meeting. The US president's enthusiasm for courting Putin has little support in Washington, even within his own administration. — AFP

## UN chief meets NZ mosque victims, decries online hate

**CHRISTCHURCH:** UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned hate speech was spreading online "like wildfire" at a meeting with victims of the Christchurch mosque shootings yesterday, vowing the world body will lead efforts to extinguish the problem. Guterres visited the Al Noor mosque, one of two Muslim centers in the New Zealand city where a self-described white supremacist killed 51 people in a March 15 shooting that the attacker live-streamed on Facebook.

The UN chief is travelling the South Pacific to highlight the impact of climate change but said he also wanted to show his support for Christchurch's Muslim community during Ramadan. "I know there are no words to relieve the hurt and sorrow and pain, but I wanted to come here personally to transmit love, support and total and complete admiration," he said. He told victims of the worst mass shooting in modern New Zealand history that there had been "a dangerous upsurge in hatred" as social media was exploited to promote bigotry.

"Hate speech is spreading like wildfire in social media. We must extinguish it," the Portuguese diplomat said. "There is no room for hate speech - online or offline." He highlighted a previously announced plan for his special adviser on genocide prevention Adama Dieng to combat online extremism. He said Dieng's mission was to "bring together a United Nations team to scale up our



CHRISTCHURCH: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres lays a floral tribute to the victims to the twin mosque attacks at the Linwood Islamic Centre yesterday. — AFP

response to hate speech and present a global plan of action".

His remarks come as New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who hosted Guterres when he arrived in Auckland on Sunday, embarks on her own quest to tame social media in Paris this week. Ardern will co-host a meeting of world leaders and tech firms to promote a "Christchurch call" aimed at curbing online extremism. She has been highly critical of social media giants in the wake of the Christchurch killings, saying they should be "taking ownership and responsibility over their platforms". — AFP