

## India joins global initiative to combat extremism online

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India has joined a major global initiative to combat terrorism and extremism online and secure the internet. The initiative — 'Christchurch call to action' — has been named after the New Zealand city where 51 people were killed in an attack on mosques. It was launched in Paris yesterday by India, France, New Zealand, Canada and several other countries. The declaration on Christchurch call to action said a free, open and secure internet is a powerful tool by which to promote connectivity, enhance social

inclusiveness and foster economic growth. It said the internet is, however, not immune from abuse by terrorist and violent extremist actors, and there is a need for collective efforts globally to secure the internet from terror groups. This was tragically highlighted by the terrorist attacks in Christchurch which were designed to go viral, it said. The declaration said, the dissemination of such content online has adverse impacts on the human rights of the victims, on our collective security and on people all over the world. The declaration said the Christchurch attack highlighted the urgent need

for action and enhanced cooperation among the wide range of actors with influence over this issue, including governments, civil society, and online service providers, such as social media companies, to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online. The event to launch of the initiative was attended by several world leaders and high-ranking officials including from India. The initiative outlines collective, voluntary commitments from governments and online service providers intended to address the issue of terrorist and violent extremist content online and to prevent the abuse of the internet.

## Trinamool edgy as internal analysis indicates Left vote may shift to BJP

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One hundred and ninety-nine years after his birth, Bengal's Renaissance icon Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar has become a poll plank in the eastern state. And the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) has quickly used the vandalism in a Kolkata college named after him to reach out to unusual quarters: the Left's educated, middle-class vote bank. The internal reports and feedback of TMC suggest that the Left's vote — as much as 30% in the 2014 general election — is shifting to some extent to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the latter is recognised as a key challenger to the Trinamool. "Our prospects now hinge on the level of shift of the Left vote. We hope to get more than 30 seats but if the Left loses more than 10% of its share, we may even go down to 25," said a Trinamool leader on condition of anonymity. The party leaders also fear that in at least 15 seats where the minority concentration is low, the BJP has garnered considerable strength to take on the Trinamool. And any addition, particularly from the Left's vote base, will give the BJP further recognition among the Bengali middle class.

improve its tally, is enjoying the political mood swing in Bengal. Recently, in an interview to HT, Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "The right-thinking people [who] belong to CPM, belong to Congress and even belong to TMC... are voting for BJP... In a political sense, you can say that CPM votes are being transferred to the BJP; this is one part of the story. But I believe that CPM, Congress and TMC — the right-thinking people of all these three parties, they are voting for PM Modi this time." The CPI(M), or Communist Party of India (Marxist), leadership is also aware of the ground situation. CPI(M) politburo member Nilotpal Basu said on Wednesday, "Both Trinamool and BJP are publicizing the crack in the Left's vote. But why is Trinamool crying over this theory? Even Mamata said why Left vote is

shifting to the BJP. You should ask Trinamool how both their leaders and voters are also shifting to the BJP." Another CPI(M) leader said "in the highly polarized Bengal election, the binary is Trinamool versus BJP and so we have some disadvantage." The vandalism in Vidyasagar College and the destruction of Vidyasagar's bust have led to a barrage of protests on social media, mostly by educated Bengalis for whom Vidyasagar remains a Bengali icon. His book, 'Barnaparichay', still remains the most popular primer for beginners to learn the Bengali language. The Trinamool held protests both in Kolkata and elsewhere, while the BJP quickly called a press conference to blame Trinamool for the vandalism. And the Left marched on the streets of Kolkata blaming both the Trinamool and the BJP.

## Rahul Gandhi meets Alwar gang-rape survivor, says 'justice will be done'

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Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Thursday met the woman who was gang-raped in Rajasthan's Alwar on April 26. He promised swift action against the culprits and said "justice will be done". "I spoke to Ashok Gehlot Ji after I heard about the incident. This is not a political issue for me. Justice will be done and action will be taken against culprits," said Rahul Gandhi in Alwar. He said a message should be sent that 'this will not be tolerated.' The Congress chief was accompanied by CM Ashok Gehlot, state Congress chief Sachin Pilot, AICC general secretary Avinash Pande and Alwar MP candidate Jitendra Singh. Rahul Gandhi was scheduled to visit the survivor on Wednesday but had to postpone it due to bad weather. On PM Narendra Modi's charges of negligence by state government in the case, Rahul Gandhi said, "I am not here to do politics over the issue. I am here to meet the family and they will get justice".

On April 26, five men had raped a married Dalit woman in front of her husband, and later circulated the video on social media. All the accused have been arrested. The Congress government in Rajasthan has faced criticism over lack of prompt action in the case. The Rajasthan police allegedly delayed the filing of a First Information Report (FIR). An FIR was filed only after a purported video of the sexual assault began circulating on social media. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had referred to the gang-rape incident at a poll rally and accused the Congress. He has also asked Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati she had not withdrawn support from the Congress government in Rajasthan. Mayawati had hit back at PM Modi accusing him of indulging in "dirty politics". Ashok Gehlot on Thursday accused PM Modi of doing politics over the issue said an FIR was lodged on May 2. "He (Modi) speaks lies, which is unfortunate. The entire BJP is protesting, shows who is doing politics," Gehlot said.



## Assam govt orders inquiry into Guwahati grenade attack



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Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal has ordered the Director General of Police to conduct an inquiry into the Guwahati blast. Condemning the blast, the Chief Minister said that culprits must be arrested soon. 12 persons were injured in the grenade blast in Guwahati last night. Most of the injured persons are stable now. Senior police officials said that motor cycle-borne miscreants hurled grenade at Zoo Road area. Among injured, 2 are SSB personnel, deployed near a security picket. Several ministers, DGP and Guwahati

Police Commissioner visited the blast spot and hospitals where injured people are being treated. DGP Kuladhar Saikia said that police investigation is on. Guwahati city is on following the blast. Banned outfit ULFA (Independence) claimed the responsibility of the blast. 12 person were injured in the explosion outside a mall on Zoo Road in Guwahati on Wednesday. Police report said that two unknown bike-borne lobbed a grenade on state police troops and fled the spot. Police had been conducting search operation since the blast took place. All the injured were taken to Guwahati Medical College Hospital and are undergoing treatment.

## Home Minister speaks to Assam CM over grenade blast

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Home Minister Rajnath Singh has spoken to Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal regarding the grenade blast in Guwahati that injured 12 people last night. Mr Sonowal apprised the Home Minister about the current situation. Mr Singh wished the speedy recovery of the injured. Police and other agencies are investigating the incident. The Assam Chief Minister has ordered the State DGP to conduct an inquiry into the blast. The Chief Minister will hold a high-level security meeting in Guwahati this evening. Several senior police and Home department officials will attend the meeting. Security has been beefed up in the city after the incident.

## Three terrorists killed, army jawan martyred in Pulwama encounter

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In Jammu & Kashmir, three terrorists were killed and an army jawan martyred in an encounter in Dalipora village of Pulwama district. Two security personnel and a civilian were also injured in the operation launched

during pre dawn hours. Security sources said that arms and ammunition was also recovered from the encounter site. The authorities imposed curfew in Pulwama town. Internet services in Pulwama and adjoining areas have been snapped as a precautionary measure.

## TN Islamic group linked to Lanka Easter blasts decries 'terrorist' tag

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The deadly Easter terror attack in Sri Lanka that claimed 253 lives has put Tamil-speaking Islamist groups on either side of the Palk Strait under the scanner. The National Thowheed Jama'ath (NTJ) is one of the prime suspects that the Sri Lankan government banned in the immediate aftermath of the eight serial blasts, for which the Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility. President Maithripala Sirisena used his emergency powers to ban the NTJ and another group known as the Jama'ath Millathu Ibraheem (JMI). Security and counter terrorism experts in Sri Lanka believe the hitherto little-known NTJ to be an organisation that split from the Sri Lanka Thowheed Jama'ath (SLTJ) in 2014. SLTJ, a prominent Muslim outfit that seeks to spread a fundamentalist, Wahhabi version of Islam has a track record of inciting racial hatred, vandalising Buddhist places of worship, and openly endorsing the IS brand of violent jihad. In 2016, SLTJ's general secretary Abdul Razik was arrested for hate speech. The Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jama'ath (TNTJ), which in the aftermath of the bombings, found itself in the eye of the storm — initial reports by media houses laid the blame of the terror attack on them — is a bonafide affiliate of SLTJ. Both organisations actively collaborate towards translating and distributing versions of the Quran, spreading the message of what they claim is true Islam; the SLTJ has also hosted TNTJ leaders in Sri Lanka. Beyond religious ideology, the two organisations are conjoined by the bonds of Tamil linguistic identity. Muslims comprise nearly 10% of Sri Lanka's population. Concentrated in the north and east of the country, a majority

are Tamil speakers. By all measures, the TNTJ is a hardliner religious organisation, but it insists that it had nothing to do with the serial blasts on April 21, Easter Sunday, that occurred in St Sebastian's church in Negombo, among other churches, and in many luxury hotels in Colombo. **Ties of tongue** In the aftermath of the bombings, multiple media reports linked the Chennai-headquartered TNTJ to the attacks, forcing its leaders to address a press conference to deny the allegations, as well as condemn terror attacks as anti-Islamic. "Connecting NTJ with TNTJ is like saying All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) are sister groups because DMK is common to both their names. Thowheed is an Arabic word that means oneness of God, and several organisations use it. No government has linked us with NTJ; it's only the handiwork of some media houses that seek to spread mischief and defame real Islam. We work closely with SLTJ, a peaceful organisation that functions within the laws of Sri Lanka. Whoever has carried out the attacks cannot be a real Muslim," says B Abdul Rehman, a tall, slender man in his mid-thirties who is the vice president of TNTJ. When HT visited them earlier this month, the cramped three-storey headquarters, surrounded by power tools and textile sellers in the wholesale trade hub of the old British settlement of George Town, Chennai, was abuzz with activity. Hundreds of bundles of TNTJ's mouthpiece, a 16-page Tamil weekly tabloid called Unarvu [which loosely translates to 'consciousness'], are piled up ready for dispatch. Every inch of the tabloid dated May 3-9, 2019, is devoted to the Sri Lanka terror attacks. In

Unarvu's crosshairs is a Times of India report that alleged TNTJ's links to the prime suspect NTJ; one article praises BBC's "even-handed coverage" de-linking them from the banned Sri Lankan group; several articles denounce IS as a Jewish-American enterprise. The receptionist's phone hasn't stopped buzzing. The attendant, a bearded man in his twenties, patiently directs all media queries to TNTJ's leadership. Though Hindi is not the lingua franca here, he addresses everyone with the north Indian suffix "ji". TNTJ runs 600 mosques in all districts of the state, conducts summer camps for children, and also provides ambulance services, medical and educational help to the poor within the community, and organises blood donation camps. It runs old age homes, homes for children without families and Islamic schools. It claims to have a membership of nearly one million. **A hardliner view** TNTJ claims to be the largest Muslim group in Tamil Nadu with membership exceeding a million. It was established in 2004 by P Jainulabdeen (popularly known as 'PJ') as a non-political organisation to spread a hardcore Saudi-Wahhabi inspired version of Islam. The TNTJ's precursor, the quasi-political Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK), also led by PJ, was a somewhat bigger tent that attempted to electorally rally the state's 6-7% Muslim population. In the 2011 assembly polls, its political wing, Manidhaneya Makkal Katchi won two seats, as an ally of the AIADMK. In the following elections, it tied up with the DMK, and contested on four seats. It won none. The TMMK, eventually, morphed into a hardliner, proselytising organisation called TNTJ that sought to replace other branches of Islam including Sufism and Shiaism

with its Saudi-inspired version. It began to publish a monthly religious magazine, Ekathuvam (which translates to 'oneness'), and booklets titled Kolgai Vilakkam ('ideological explanation'), and Manithanuketta Margam ('the best path for man'). The TMMK and its later avatar TNTJ, has often been critical of the DMK and Tamil nationalist groups for their support of the militant Sri Lankan separatist movement led by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The predominantly Hindu and Catholic LTTE's expulsion of Tamil-speaking Muslims from the territories under its control in the 1980s sowed the seeds of distrust. Up until 2018, PJ, 66, was the face of TNTJ. Last year, however, he was expelled when multiple audio recordings (purportedly in his voice) of explicit sexual conversations with women, began to circulate. Born in Thondi, a small seaside town in the Muslim-dominated region of Ramanathapuram on the south-eastern coast of Tamil Nadu, just across a stretch of sea from Sri Lanka, he built TNTJ bayan by bayan — the Arabic term used by TNTJ followers for speeches based on the teachings of Quran and Hadith. A small, dark-skinned man, with a closely trimmed beard, PJ's speeches are available on YouTube. Almost always attired in a full-sleeved shirt, a white lungi, a prayer cap and brown tinted Ray-Ban aviator glasses, he speaks Tamil with a thick Madurai accent. The only foreign words used in PJ's bayans are direct, extempore quotations from the Quran in Arabic. TNTJ's version of Islam does not even attempt any indigenisation. There is no mention of Deoband, the pre-eminent seminary of sub-continental Islam in its literature. An overwhelming majority of the young people who now form TNTJ's leadership at the state and district levels were inspired by PJ.