



NEARBY
Voters allege rigging at two more Asaoti booths
ASAOTI
Several Dalit and Muslim residents of Asaoti, a Thakur-dominated village under the Prithla Assembly constituency in Haryana, have alleged rigging by upper caste dabangs (musclemen) at booth nos. 86 and 87 during the recent Lok Sabha poll. Returning Officer Ashok Garg said a complaint has been received about booth no. 87 and the matter was under investigation.

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'JNU selection panel must get AC, EC nod'
NEW DELHI
In a significant ruling on appointment of faculty members at Jawaharlal Nehru University, the Delhi High Court has ordered that members of the selection panel, including names recommended by the Vice-Chancellor, have to get the approval of the Academic Council and the Executive Council.

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ULFA faction member held for grenade attack
GUWAHATI
The police on Thursday said they had arrested the mastermind of Wednesday's grenade attack that injured 12 people, including two SSB personnel. He was identified as Pranamo Rajguru, a member of the pro-talks ULFA faction.

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Congress will not insist on Prime Minister's post: Azad

Sonia said to have reached out to potential allies for meet on govt. formation

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI
The Congress is not averse to offering the post of Prime Minister to the leader of a regional party, amid reports that former Congress president Sonia Gandhi has reached out to potential allies for a meeting on May 23 to discuss government formation in case of a hung verdict.
"My party high command has already made it clear that the Congress is not averse to making a leader from any regional party the Prime Minister," Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad told reporters in Shimla on Thursday. His statement comes barely 24 hours after he had said the Congress

My party high command has made it clear that the Congress is not averse to making a leader from any regional party Prime Minister
We are in the last phase of elections and I can say on the basis of my experience during campaigning across the country that neither BJP nor NDA is going to return to power at the Centre
— GHULAM NABI AZAD, SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER

viewed as a sign of the Congress's flexible approach towards the leadership question, as who will be the Opposition's prime ministerial candidate could be the biggest hurdle to non-NDA regional parties coming together.
Apart from Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati expressing her desire, Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee is a front-runner. She has also been in touch with Telangana Chief Minister and Telangana Rashtra Samithi leader K. Chandrasekhar Rao, who too has projected himself as one of the contenders though the TRS has never been part of any of the Opposition meetings.

"will not make an issue" if the post was not offered to the party. "We are not going to make it an issue that we [the Congress] will not let any other [leader] to become the Prime Minister if it is not offered to us," Mr. Azad said late on Wednesday evening in Patna.
"We are in the last phase

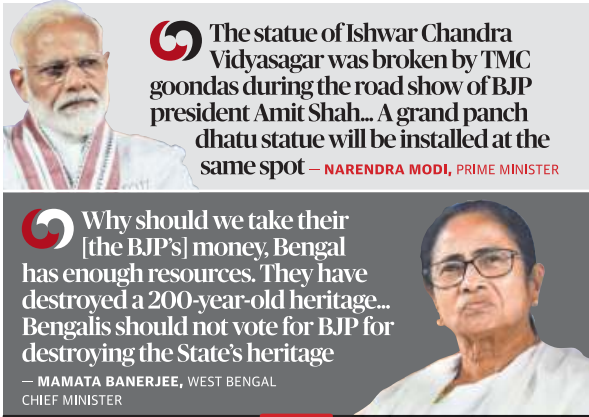
of the election, and I can say on the basis of my experience of campaigning across the country that neither the BJP nor the NDA is going to return to power. Narendra Modi is also not going to become the Prime Minister for the second time," he said.
His comments are being

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Modi, Mamata target each other over damage to statue

PM accuses Trinamool of erasing evidence of attack

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA
On the second day after the bust of the 19th century Bengal reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was vandalised, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued to attack each other over Tuesday's incident.
While Mr. Modi said the Trinamool Congress was trying "to erase evidence of the attack," Ms. Banerjee targeted him for offering to raise a "giant statue" of Vidyasagar in the north Kolkata college where it was vandalised. Mr. Modi accused the Trinamool Congress of breaking the lock of the college where the bust was kept.
"There were CCTV cameras in the college. In the



same way the Trinamool erased evidence in the Saradha and Narada scams, they are trying to erase the evidence in this incident too," Mr. Modi said at a meeting in Mathurapur in South 24 Parganas district.
Trinamool MP Derek

O'Brien tweeted that there are "at least 40 video clips which are irrefutable proof [that the BJP activists broke the bust]."
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WEST BENGAL TANGO
▶ EDITORIAL

5 militants, 2 soldiers killed in Kashmir

Two civilians were also killed

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR
Five militants, two civilians and two soldiers were killed in gunfights in south Kashmir on Thursday.
The police said three JeM militants were killed in Pulwama. Jawan Sandeep and civilian Rayees Dar were also killed. In Shopian, two militants were killed and a civilian was found dead at the site. A jawan died of injuries.

three Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) militants were killed during a cordon and search operation in Pulwama's Dalipora area around 2 a.m.
"As the security forces were evacuating civilians from the neighbourhood of the target house, the hiding militants fired indiscriminately. An Army jawan, Sepoy Sandeep, and civilian Rayees Dar were killed," said the police.

According to the police,

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U.S. President announces new points-based green card system

Education, language skills to be rewarded in new proposal

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON
U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday announced a proposal that will include significant changes to the way green cards are allocated, by dramatically reducing the number of family-based green cards and moving towards a points-based ("merit-based") system that will reward, among other factors, education, skills and English language

proficiency. The plan, which the President outlined at a Rose Garden gathering, with senior administration officials and influential Hill Republicans in attendance, sought to boost border security and tighten asylum procedures.
Mr. Trump's new plan, details of which had already been reported widely in the U.S. media before the announcement, will dramatically increase the number of

green cards that are given through the skills route versus the family-based route. However, the overall number of green cards, just over 1.1 million in 2017, will remain the same.
Currently about 12% of those receiving green cards entered the U.S. based on skill-based visas (such as the H1B), while some 66% are family-based green cards.

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Pragya calls Godse 'patriot', whips up storm

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
Terror accused and BJP candidate from Bhopal Pragya Singh Thakur kicked off a political storm on Thursday, calling Mahatma Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse a "patriot."
The Opposition parties lambasted her, while the BJP was quick to distance itself from her remarks and asked her to is-

sue a public apology. Complying with the directive, she later apologised and withdrew her comments.
"Nathuram Godse was a patriot and will remain so. People calling him a terrorist should introspect. They will be given a befitting reply in these elections," Ms. Thakur had said.



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Keeping the flock together



Shepherds take their sheep for grazing on a hot afternoon in Palwal on Thursday. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Rahul assures Alwar gang-rape victim of swift justice

'Want to send across a message that such behaviour will not be tolerated'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR
Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Thursday vowed to ensure that culprits in the alleged gang rape of a Dalit woman at Thanagazi in Rajasthan's Alwar district were swiftly brought to justice. He gave this assurance to the victim and her family when he met them, after having flown in directly from New Delhi by helicopter.
"As soon as I heard about the incident, I called [Rajasthan Chief Minister] Ashok Gehlotji," Mr. Gandhi told reporters after meeting the fa-



Rahul Gandhi with Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot (right) and party MP Sushmita Dev at Alwar in Rajasthan on Thursday. • PTI

mily, asserting that he had not come to indulge in politics and that this was "[more

of] an emotional issue" for him. "This is not a political issue for me... I have met the victim's family and they have sought justice. It will be done," he said.
"Jo bhi zimmedar hain unke khilaf zabardast karyawahi hogi (Stringent action will be taken against those responsible)," Mr. Gandhi said. "I want to send across a message, not just in Alwar or in Rajasthan, but in the entire country that such behaviour against our sisters and mothers will not be tolerated," he added.
Mr. Gandhi was accompa-

nied by Mr. Gehlot, Deputy CM Sachin Pilot, AICC State in-charge Avinash Pande and Alwar candidate Jitendra Singh.
Judicial custody
The special court for SC/ST cases in Alwar on Thursday sent all the six accused in the case to judicial custody till May 30, after they were produced in court following expiry of their police remand.
Mr. Gehlot told reporters that the chargesheet would be filed in court within seven days and the victim given a government job.

No job without local language skills: Assam literary body

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI
An influential, century-old literary organisation in Assam has issued a diktat saying people who do not know Assamese or any other indigenous language would not be allowed to work in the State.
The Assam Sahitya Sabha, established in 1917, has also set the BJP-led government a month's deadline to make Kendriya Vidyalayas and schools affiliated to the CBSE to introduce any recognised indigenous tongue as the third language up to Class 12.
Private universities such as Don Bosco University that have allegedly resisted using a local language as a medium of instruction have also been asked to fall in line or face punitive action.
"We have served notice according to the provisions of the Assam Accord (of 1985 that ended a six-year agitation for ejecting illegal migrants). The Centre should have made an effort to protect the cultural and linguistic identity of the indigenous peoples. We have to protect our identity," Paramananda Rajbongshi, president of the Sabha said in a statement on Thursday.
The Sabha has been at the forefront of a movement for resisting the threat to Assamese and other local tongues from mainstream languages.

'Use of military in political arguments worrisome'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH
Lt. Gen. (retd) D.S. Hooda, the main architect of the 2016 surgical strikes on terror launch pads in Pakistan-

occupied Kashmir, said on Thursday it is "worrisome" that the military is increasingly being drawn into the political discourse and used to win political arguments.

The Indian Army's former Northern Command chief also said the talk around politicisation of the military "is sort of exaggerated".
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