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Alliance prospects improving day by day, says Mayawati

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Asia Bibi, who was caught in blasphemy row, leaves Pakistan

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Pant and Prithvi help Capitals pip Sunrisers in Eliminator

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NEARBY



Priyanka dares Modi to fight poll on promises

NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday challenged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fight the election on demonetisation, GST, crime against women and 'false promises' made to the nation's youth. She said only the Congress party could bring development to all sections of society.

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BJP govt. will demolish illegal colonies: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said that the Narendra Modi-led government has large-scale plans to demolish unauthorised colonies in Delhi. Addressing a press conference, he said a few Central government officials had told him about the plan.

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'Modi doesn't know how to speak the truth'

GWALIOR

Congress president Rahul Gandhi told a rally at Phoolbagh in Gwalior on Wednesday that while his party has delivered on promises made in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi "does not know how to speak the truth".

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# SC agrees with EC on clean chit to Modi, Shah speeches

Asks Congress MP to file fresh petition against comments 'violating' poll code

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed with the contention of the Election Commission of India (EC) that its clean chit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah for their poll speeches may be right or wrong, but the court certainly cannot examine the merit of its decisions on the basis of a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by Congress MP Sushmita Dev.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, however, gave Ms. Dev the liberty to challenge afresh, if she so desired, the merit of the EC orders clearing Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah of violating the Model Code of Conduct by delivering alleged

The PIL has become infructuous. The complaints have been decided by us, rightly or wrongly. Our orders have been communicated to the Congress party, to Mr. Randeep Surjewala... This petition is only about delay. The petitioner cannot expand the petition and go into the merits of our orders

— SENIOR ADVOCATE RAKESH DWIVEDI, for the Election Commission

Rightly or wrongly, orders have been passed. You (Sushmita Dev) have to challenge them separately, individually... They (EC) have decided and now it is for you to challenge... File independent writ petitions — CJI **RANJAN GOGOI**

hate speeches and misuse of the armed forces for political propaganda.

'Plea deals with delay'

The hearing saw the Bench fundamentally agreeing to the objection raised by the

poll body that Ms. Dev's present plea dealt solely with the issue of delay shown by it in deciding complaints against Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah. The EC said Ms. Dev cannot later improve on her PIL plea through affidavits

challenging the merits of its orders.

"The PIL has become infructuous. The complaints have been decided by us, rightly or wrongly. Our orders have been communicated to the Congress party, to Mr. Randeep Surjewala... This petition is only about delay. The petitioner cannot expand the petition and go into the merits of our orders," senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, for the EC, raised a preliminary objection.

Ms. Dev's latest affidavit, filed on May 7, accuses Mr. Modi of making "obscene" remarks to "malign" the image of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

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## Naidu meets Rahul; to call on Mamata too

Opposition leaders plan conclave on May 21 to discuss post-poll arrangement

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu met Congress president Rahul Gandhi in New Delhi on Wednesday morning before heading out to West Bengal.

Neither the Congress chief nor Mr. Naidu spoke to the media after the meeting.

Mr. Naidu will be meeting West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and attending her party's rallies on Thursday and Friday.



N. Chandrababu Naidu

Opposition leaders are trying to work out a meeting on May 21, two days before the Lok Sabha results,

to discuss the prospects of a post-poll arrangement.

In an interview to *The Hindu* on Wednesday, Mr. Naidu asserted that post-May 23, a new Prime Minister would replace Narendra Modi. The prime ministerial candidate would be amicably selected, he said.

"There are only three possible options. One, where the Congress leads; second, where the Congress supports from outside like in the United Front government, or third, where the

Congress has to join the alliance. There is no fourth option," he said.

Mr. Naidu was in Delhi to attend the Supreme Court hearing on a review petition filed by 21 Opposition parties demanding 50% Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail count. The court dismissed the petition, following which the parties again met the Election Commission to press their demand.

ALTERNATIVE DREAMS  
► EDITORIAL

## Rahul Gandhi tenders an unconditional apology to SC

Says he wrongfully attributed 'chowkidar' remark to court

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday unconditionally apologised to the Supreme Court for wrongfully attributing the phrase 'Chowkidar chor hai' (watchman is a thief) to it.

"The deponent [Gandhi] unconditionally apologises for the wrongful attributions to the Supreme Court. The deponent further states that any such attributions were entirely unintentional, non-wilful and inadvertent," Mr. Gandhi submitted in a three-page additional affidavit.

The case is scheduled for hearing on May 10 along with the Rafale case review petitions before a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi.

On April 10, Mr. Gandhi



Rahul Gandhi

made the remark to media in a reaction to a Supreme Court verdict allowing the maintainability of the Rafale review petitions.

In his affidavit, Mr. Gandhi, through advocate Sunil Fernandes, urged that the court may "graciously be pleased to accept the instant affidavit and close the present contempt proceedings."

On April 30, the court was categorical that he had to either offer an apology or face criminal contempt.

Admit mistake: judge

"Any person can make a mistake, but having made it, you should go ahead and admit it," Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul on the Bench had told senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, who represented Mr. Gandhi.

"And what is this 'regret' written inside brackets," Chief Justice Gogoi had asked Mr. Singhvi.

The court had said it could make no sense of what Mr. Gandhi wanted to convey in his earlier 28-page affidavit, which expressed 'regret' without apologising.

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## Iran says it will not honour nuclear curbs

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TEHRAN

Iran said on Wednesday it had stopped respecting limits on its nuclear activities agreed under a 2015 deal with major powers until they find a way to bypass renewed U.S. sanctions.

The announcement came as Washington stepped up its rhetoric against Tehran, accusing it of planning "imminent" attacks and deploying an aircraft carrier strike group with several nuclear-capable B-52 bombers to the

region. Iran said it was responding to the sweeping unilateral sanctions that Washington has reimposed since it quit the agreement one year ago, which have dealt a severe blow to the Iranian economy.

Iran's Supreme National Security Council said that it no longer considered itself bound by the agreed restrictions on stocks of enriched uranium and heavy water.

U.S. THREATENS MORE  
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## Gandhi family used warship as personal taxi: PM

JATIN ANAND  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the Gandhi family of using a naval warship as a "personal taxi" and attacked "fourth generation practitioners of dynastic politics". He also took a dig at the AAP-led Delhi government for what he termed was its 'naakaam (unsuccessful) model of governance' without naming it on Wednesday.

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### Runaway plane



An AN-32 transport aircraft of the IAF overshot the runway on Tuesday night while taking off from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Airport in Mumbai. No injuries were reported but the incident affected flight operations. • VIJAY BATE (REPORT ON PAGE 7)

## Stick to July 31 deadline for final NRC, says SC

Act with wise discretion while dealing with objectors: court

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked Assam National Register of Citizens (NRC) Coordinator Prateek Hajela to act with "wise discretion" while dealing with people who had failed to appear for scheduled hearings on their objections filed against exclusion from the draft NRC.

"Objections' hearings have started. 'Objectors' are not appearing in most cases," Mr. Hajela reported to a Special Bench of Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Rohinton F. Nariman. "If they are not appear-



Anxious moments: People checking their names during a hearing at an NRC Seva Kendra in Guwahati. • PTI

ing, the law will take its own course," the Chief Justice replied.

The Chief Justice told Mr. Hajela to take whatever ac-

tion was necessary in the cases of the absentee 'objectors'.

The decisions taken should be free and fair,

keeping the law in mind.

"But whatever you do, do it by July 31. A day earlier than July 31 but not a day later," he said before listing the case for July 3, after the summer vacation.

In the previous hearing, the court had urged the NRC authorities to make the hearing processes as hassle-free as possible.

Over 35 lakh people excluded from the draft had filed claims for Indian citizenship.

The court asked the NRC authorities to ensure "optimum convenience" for those seeking justice in the proceedings.

## 3 arrested in Alwar gang rape case, SP shunted out

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
JAIPUR

Three of the five accused in the Alwar gang-rape case of April 26, which caused widespread outrage after video footage of the incident was uploaded on social media, have been arrested by the police. The State government also shunted out Superintendent of Police, Alwar, Rajiv Pachar on Tuesday night.

The accused have been identified as Indraraj, Ashok and Mukesh, while two of their accomplices are absconding.

Inspector General of Police, Jaipur Range, S. Sengathir on Wednesday said that Mukesh had recorded the crime and uploaded the video on social media.

Mr. Sengathir said 14 police teams have been formed to arrest the remaining accused. The victim — a Dalit woman — was allegedly raped in front of her husband after the couple was waylaid on Thanagazi-Alwar bypass road and dragged to a deserted area.

The SHO of Thanagazi police station has been suspended and four policemen sent to the police lines.

Protests erupted in Thanagazi on Wednesday as residents blocked the Alwar-Jaipur highway demanding immediate arrest of all the accused.

In Jaipur, BJP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Kirori Lal Meena led a protest march with his supporters to the Chief Minister's residence. The police stopped the march at the Civil Lines railway crossing.

## NC, PDP seek action in 'bribery' case

PEERZADA ASHIQ  
SRINAGAR

The National Conference, the Congress and the Peoples Democratic Party on

Wednesday demanded action on the bribery charges levelled by local journalists of Leh against Bharatiya Janata Party leaders to swing

votes, as an inquiry had found "prima facie merit" in the allegations.

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