

# SC grants Kejriwal interim bail till June 1 for campaigning in LS polls

## STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: In a major relief to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Supreme Court on Friday granted him interim bail till June 1 to campaign in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta said Kejriwal, arrested in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam, will have to surrender and go back to jail on June 2.

The bench refused the request of senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Kejriwal, that the interim bail be granted till June 5.

June 1 is the last day of the seven-phase elections. The votes will be counted on June 4.

The court said reasons for granting Kejriwal interim bail will follow.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, appearing for the Enforcement Directorate, opposed the granting of interim bail to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief



on grounds of poll campaigning saying no such precedents are available.

Observing that granting Kejriwal interim bail for 21 days will not make much of a difference, the bench said the ED's Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) was registered in August 2022 while the chief minister was arrested on March 21 this year.

"He (Kejriwal) was out there for one-and-a-half-years. He could have been arrested earlier or after but nothing such thing happened," the bench told ED.

The law officers urged the court to impose bail conditions, including that

Kejriwal will not say anything regarding the excise policy case.

The bench said the conditions will be similar to those imposed on AAP leader Sanjay Singh, who was given bail last month in connection with the case.

According to lawyer Shadan Farasat, who appeared for Kejriwal, the court pronounced a very short oral order.

"We have not yet seen the written order. So we don't know the exact contents of the written order. The court said they are releasing Kejriwal on an interim release/bail until June 2, and there are no conditions on what he can say

and what he cannot say during the campaigning process and while he is out in these 20-22 days," he said.

"We are hoping that this order is uploaded today, and then we will update appropriate procedure for his release," Farasat added.

The apex court is hearing Kejriwal's plea challenging the Delhi High Court's verdict last month upholding his arrest in the case.

The bench said arguments on Kejriwal's plea against the arrest will continue next week and it will try to pronounce the judgement on the petition before the summer vacations starting May 20.

The matter relates to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now-scraped excise policy for 2021-22.

# SC disposes of former CM Hemant Soren's plea in money laundering case

## STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday disposed of a plea filed by former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren seeking a direction to the high court to deliver its verdict on his petition challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta observed that the petition has become infructuous as the high court has delivered its judgement on May 3 and Soren has already challenged the same in the apex court.

Soren had also sought interim bail for campaigning in the Lok Sabha elections till the high court delivers its verdict on his plea against arrest.

"This has become infructuous," the bench told senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Arunabh Chowdhury, who were appearing for Soren.



Sibal said Soren's special leave petition (SLP) challenging the last week's verdict of the high court is coming up for hearing before the top court on May 13.

He said both the petitions be heard together on May 13.

The bench, however, said Soren's counsel can raise all the contentions in the SLP which will come up for hearing on May 13.

"Forget that he is a former chief minister. I (Soren) have a right as a citizen to be dealt with fairly by the high court," Sibal said.

"You have challenged the

high court order in another petition. You argue there," the bench said, while disposing of his plea.

On April 29, the apex court had said it would be open for the high court to pronounce its verdict on Soren's plea challenging his arrest in the case. The order was reserved by the high court on February 28.

In this case, the Enforcement Directorate is probing the alleged "huge amounts of proceeds of crime generated by manipulation of official records by showing dummy sellers and purchasers in the guise of forged/bogus documents to

acquire huge parcels of land having value in crores".

Soren, in his plea filed through advocate Pragya Baghel, had said there has been a pattern that has emerged and it is reflected in the actions of the ED for prosecuting and targeting individuals, especially political leaders belonging to the opposition, on the basis of "cooked-up allegations".

"Knowing that the elections are around the corner and with a malafide intent of paralysing the leaders of opposition political parties, of which Hemant Soren being the leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) was arrested on January 31, 2024," his plea said.

Soren was arrested on January 31 in the case after he resigned as Jharkhand chief minister, and party loyalist and state transport minister Champai Soren was named as his successor.

# Special court in Pune sentences two to life imprisonment, acquits three in Dabholkar murder case

## STATE TIMES NEWS

PUNE: Nearly 11 years after rationalist Dr Narendra Dabholkar was shot dead in Pune, a special court on Friday convicted his two assailants and sentenced them to life imprisonment for the murder, and acquitted three others, including alleged king conspirator Virendrasinh Tawde, for want of evidence.

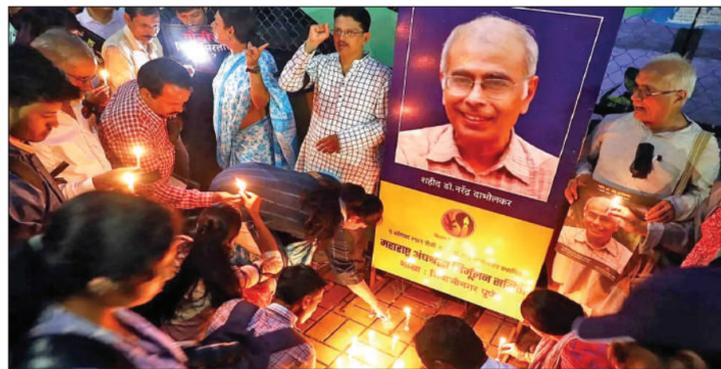
Reading out the order in a packed courtroom, Additional Sessions Judge (Special Court) P P Jadhav, presiding over UAPA cases, said the prosecution had proved the charges of murder and conspiracy against shooters Sachin Andure and Sharad Kalaskar.

The court sentenced them to life imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 5 lakh each.

The court acquitted three accused, ENT surgeon Tawde, Sanjeev Punalekar and Vikram Bhawe, for want of evidence.

Dabholkar (67), an anti-superstition crusader, was shot dead by two motorcycle-borne men while he was on a morning walk on Omkareshwar Bridge in Pune city on August 20, 2013.

The court observed that some sections of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), an anti-terror law, were



invoked in the case, but due to the competent officer's negligence, these charges were not proved.

The judge said though Tawde was charged as the conspirator in the case and there was ample scope for doubt against him, the prosecution had failed to convert the suspicion into evidence, which is why he was acquitted of all charges.

"In the case of Bhawe and Punalekar, even if there is scope for suspicion, there is no evidence, and therefore, both have been acquitted of all charges for want of evidence," the judge said.

Andure and Kalaskar were charged with shooting Dabholkar dead, and charges under sections 302 (murder) and 34 (common intention) were proved beyond doubt, he said.

The judge further said there is a provision for capital punishment and life imprisonment for these sections and asked the defence and prosecution to put forth their arguments.

Appearing for the accused, advocate Virendra Ichalkaranjkar said the case did not fall under the rarest of the rare category, to which public prosecutor Prakash Suryawanshi said the prosecution did not seek capital punishment.

After hearing the brief arguments, the judge sentenced Andure and Kalaskar to life imprisonment and fined them Rs 5 lakh each.

The judge also observed that some statements were made during the trial justifying Dabholkar's killing and said it was regrettable.

"It is pertinent to point out that any person's murder is an unfortunate thing. However, some statements came from the defence counsel during the trial justifying the act, which was regrettable, and the advocates of the accused should think about this," he said.

Reacting to the judgement, Dabholkar's daughter Mukta said the masterminds of the murder were

still at large, and they would appeal against the order in the high court.

His son Hamid Dabholkar said if the masterminds of the killing were not brought to justice, such incidents would be repeated.

It is evident from the chargesheet that Dabholkar was murdered for ideological reasons, he said.

The prosecution examined 20 witnesses, while the defence examined two witnesses during the trial.

The Pune police initially investigated the case. The CBI took over the probe in 2014 following a Bombay High Court order and arrested Tawde linked to the Hindu right-wing organisation Sanatan Sanstha, in June 2016.

According to the prosecution, Tawde was one of the masterminds of the murder. Sanatan Sanstha, to which Tawde and some of the other accused were linked, was opposed to the work carried out by Dabholkar's organisation,

the Maharashtra Andhashradha Nirmoolan Samiti (committee for eradication of superstition, Maharashtra), it claimed.

The CBI first named fugitives Sarang Akolkar and Vinay Pawar as the shooters in its chargesheet. But later it arrested Sachin Andure and Sharad Kalaskar and claimed in a supplementary chargesheet that they had shot Dabholkar.

Subsequently, the central agency arrested advocate Sanjeev Punalekar and Vikram Bhawe as alleged co-conspirators.

During the trial, advocate Virendra Ichalkaranjkar had questioned the CBI's flip-flop over the shooters' identity.

The accused were booked under Indian Penal Code sections 120 B (conspiracy), 302 (murder), relevant sections of the Arms Act, and section 16 (punishment for terrorist act) of the UAPA.

While Tawde, Andure and Kalaskar are in jail, Punalekar and Bhawe are on bail.

Dabholkar's murder was followed by the murders of three other rationalists/activists in the next four years: communist leader Govind Pansare (Kolhapur, February 2015), Kannada scholar and writer M M Kalburgi (Dharwad, August 2015) and journalist Gauri Lankesh (Bengaluru, September 2017).

It was suspected that the culprits in these four cases were linked.

# Sonalika drives into FY25 with staggering 11,656 overall tractor sales and gains market share in April'24



## STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI (INDIA): After an unprecedented success in FY24 with the highest ever annual overall market share, India's No. 1 tractor export brand Sonalika Tractors is excited to have commenced its FY25 journey with a robust new platform. The company has clocked a record 11,656 overall tractor sales and has continued to gain market share on a y-o-y basis in April'24 with its diligent efforts and perseverance.

Every innovative tractor which is rolled out from Sonalika's World's No. 1 tractor plant in Hoshiarpur exhibits excellence in terms of delivering productivity and profitability for farmers. Sonalika's thrust on creating a perfect blend of quality and performance in its heavy tractor range has enabled the company to firmly secure the 3rd largest tractor brand position in India - the world's biggest tractor market. The company has already launched a 5-year warranty and showcasing tractor prices on its website, which keeps them perpetually excited about having

Sonalika as a reliable partner in their farming journey.

Sharing his thoughts on the new benchmark performance, Mr Raman Mittal, Joint Managing Director, International Tractors Limited, said, "We are elated to have begun our FY25 voyage with an exciting performance of 11,656 overall tractor sales in April'24 with a market share gain. Our advanced heavy-duty tractor series have consistently led farmers towards a world full of new opportunities and which is why we are today proudly 15+ lakh farmer family.

Moreover, the El Nino effect continues to weaken and with above normal monsoon predictions in the year ahead, the reservoirs are expected to rebound faster to normal levels which should subsequently make for a healthy demand during the year. With a year full of boundless opportunities ahead, we are now more confident to launch new products in FY25 for increasing farmer productivity as we believe there remains no limit for us to what can be achieved."

# Freedom of speech does not mean freedom to support separatism: EAM Jaishankar on Canada

## STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: By allowing political space to Khalistani separatist elements, the Canadian government is sending a message that its vote bank is "more powerful" than its rule of law, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said.

In an exclusive interview to PTI late Thursday, Jaishankar said India respects and practices freedom of speech, but that does not equate with freedom to threaten foreign diplomats, extend support to separatism or allow political space to elements advocating violence.

The external affairs minister also wondered how people with dubious backgrounds are being allowed to enter and live in Canada, referring to Khalistani supporters among the Sikh migrants from Punjab.

"In any rules-based society, you would imagine that you would check people's background, how they came, what passport they carried etc.," he said.

"If you have people whose presence there is itself on very dubious documents, what does it say about you? It actually says that your vote bank is more powerful than your rule of law," the minister said.

The Indian diaspora in Canada is about 1.8 million strong and there are another one million Non Resident Indians residing in the country. The Indian diaspora, mostly of Sikh ethnicity, is considered an influential bloc in Canada's politics.

Ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September last year of the "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Nijjar. New Delhi rejected Trudeau's charges as "absurd". India has been maintaining that the main issue has been that of Canada giving space to pro-Khalistani elements operating from Canadian soil with impunity. "It is not so



much a question of running out of options. What we have seen to our regret has been the direction of Canadian politics where separatists and extremist forces, many of whom openly advocate violence, have been given political space in that country," Jaishankar said.

"And there are people in positions of prominence today in Canadian politics who actually espouse that kind of separatism and extremism," he said.

His remarks came in response to a question on how India plans to deal with challenges emanating from Canada and whether the options for New Delhi are running out.

"We cannot for the good relations overlook that," he said during the freewheeling interview at PTI's headquarters.

Jaishankar said Canada's response to India's concerns has been that it has freedom of speech.

"Whenever we have taken this up with the Canadians...it is not a new issue... It has been going on almost for 10 years and they keep saying, oh 'we have freedom of

speech."

"We also have freedom of speech in our country. But freedom of speech does not mean freedom to threaten foreign diplomats, freedom of speech does not mean the kind of positions and the kind of activities which people in Canada are doing which does harm to our country because of its support for separatism," Jaishankar said.

"And freedom of speech does not mean this kind of space which is also given to people of various dubious backgrounds -- people associated with organised crime and so on," the external affairs minister added.

In the last few months, India has been expressing concerns over the security of its diplomats in Canada and calling on Ottawa to ensure that they are able to carry out their responsibilities without fear.

There have been instances of pro-Khalistani elements threatening to harm Indian diplomats.

Days after Trudeau's allegations in September last, India asked Ottawa to downsize its diplomatic presence in the country to ensure parity. Canada subsequently withdrew 41 diplomats and their family members from India.

India has been asserting that its "core issue" with Canada remains that of the space given to separatists, terrorists and anti-India elements in that country.

Last week, Canadian authorities charged three Indian nationals with the murder of Nijjar. It is reported that they entered Canada on student visas.

On Thursday, India said Canada has not provided any "specific" evidence or information in the case yet.

# Woman employee of Raj Bhavan to write to President Murmu to seek justice on molestation issue

## STATE TIMES NEWS

KOLKATA: A day after West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose screened multiple CCTV footage from Raj Bhavan, in a bid to clear the air over allegations of molestation brought against him by a contractual woman employee of the governor's house, the victim on Friday said she will seek President Droupadi Murmu's intervention into the matter.

The employee raised her objections to the public screening of unedited footage where her identity was allegedly disclosed since her face wasn't blurred.

Stating that she could not repose much hope on the Kolkata Police whose hands are tied on account of the constitutional immunity the Governor Bose enjoys, the victim said she was going through severe depression and felt that writing to the President was the only recourse to justice.

"I know that because of Constitutional immunity nothing will happen to a sitting Governor. But what about the offence he committed? I have decided to



write to the President seeking her intervention in the matter. I am writing to her to get justice and nothing else," the alleged victim told PTI.

Expressing her outrage over the screening of the footage without protecting her identity, the victim said she would also approach the police for redress.

She deemed that the act of screening of the May 2 CCTV footage was an "insult" and accused the governor of further violating her privacy and confidentiality while lamenting the "lack of cooperation from the governor" throughout the investigation process.

"How did the governor screen my footage without my permission? He committed a new crime today," she said.

Kolkata Police had earlier confirmed that it would conduct an 'enquiry' instead of a full-fledged investigation which requires the filing of an FIR since the governor is protected under Clause 2 of Article 361 of the Constitution which grants him total immunity from criminal proceedings of any kind.

The contractual woman employee of Raj Bhavan had on Friday lodged a complaint with Kolkata Police alleging that she was molested by Bose in the governor's house on April 24 and May 2.

She criticised Bose for orchestrating a "ridiculous drama" to deflect from his actions, emphasising that he should have provided the footage to police at the outset of the investigation.

"He (the Governor) com-

mitted an ugly act. Then he staged a ridiculous drama to cover his fault. He never took my permission before releasing the footage. This is in violation of our laws since my identity should have been kept confidential," she said.

Footage from two CCTV cameras positioned at the main (north) gate, spanning from 5.32 pm to 6.41 pm on May 2, was shown to a select group of people and journalists at the Central Marble Hall on the ground floor of Raj Bhavan.

In the first footage, the employee, dressed in jeans and a top, was seen hurrying to the police outpost housed within the governor house amidst a significant number of police personnel who were deployed in the premises for the scheduled visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on that day.

The second footage, which lasted for around 10 minutes, showed various vehicles including fire tenders arriving at the north gate of Raj Bhavan and policemen lining up for their regular duties. The victim, however, could not be spotted.