

# Money laundering case: ED summons J'khand minister Alamgir Alam for questioning after massive cash seizure

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

RANCHI: The

Enforcement Directorate has summoned Jharkhand Rural Development Minister and Congress leader Alamgir Alam for questioning in a money laundering case on May 14, official sources said Sunday.

The federal agency had last week arrested Alam's personal secretary and state administrative service officer Sanjeev Kumar Lal (52) and the latter's domestic help Jahangir Alam (42) following the seizure of more than Rs 32 crore cash from a flat linked to them.

Alam, 70, has been asked to depose at the zonal office of the ED in Ranchi on Tuesday for recording his statement under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the sources said.

The money laundering investigation pertains to alleged irregularities and payment of "bribes" in the state rural development department.

The agency had informed a special PMLA court here, while seeking the remand of the two arrested persons, that Lal collected "commission" on behalf of some influential people and government officials from "top



to bottom" in the rural department are involved in the alleged illegal cash payments nexus.

The total seizure of cash by the ED in this case has been recorded at around Rs 36.75 crore as the agency seized about Rs 3 crore from other locations including Rs 10.05 lakh from Lal's place apart from Rs 1.5 crore cash from a contractor's place last Tuesday.

Alamgir Alam had distanced himself from the activities of Lal while speaking to reporters after the ED raids, pointing out that he had earlier served with other ministers of the state government too.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his election campaign speeches in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh last week, had mentioned

the seizure of "mounds of cash". The opposition parties had claimed the ED action was part of the campaign by the Centre to target their leaders.

The ED said that the names of "senior bureaucrats and politicians" have emerged in the case and this was being investigated.

It had conducted searches at the rural development ministry in Ranchi too with Lal accompanying ED officials.

The money laundering case of September 2020 is based on an anti-corruption branch (Jamshedpur) case of Jharkhand Police and a March 2023 FIR filed by the economic offences wing of the Delhi Police against former chief engineer of the state rural works department Veerendra Kumar

Ram and some others.

Ram was arrested by the ED last year.

Ram, the ED claimed, used to "collect commissions" in terms of allocation of tender and execution of work and this commission of 1.5 per cent was "distributed" among his seniors and politicians.

It was alleged by the ED before the court that one such commission was handed over by Ram to Lal in September 2022.

The agency has arrested former chief minister and JMM leader Hemant Soren, IAS officers Chhavi Ranjan and Pooja Singhal apart from other politically linked persons over the last 2-3 years as part of various money laundering investigations being conducted by it in the state.

# NOTA could be effective only if more than 50 pc voters opt for it: Ex-CEC Rawat

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

INDORE: Former Chief Election Commissioner OP Rawat on Sunday described 'NOTA' as having a "symbolic" impact and said if it gets more than 50 per cent votes in a seat, only then a thought could be given to make it legally effective on poll results.

Rawat, a former IAS officer of the Madhya Pradesh cadre, also told PTI that if one out of 99 out of 100 votes go in favour of None of the Above (NOTA) option and a candidate gets one vote, even then he/she will emerge victorious.

The Congress received a jolt in Madhya Pradesh's Indore Lok Sabha seat after its candidate Akshay Kanti Bam withdrew his nomination on April 29, the last date for the withdrawal of nominations.

Bam later joined the BJP, prompting the Congress to appeal to the people to press the NOTA option on EVMs during polling in Indore on May 13 to teach the "safron party a lesson".

The Congress is out of the electoral race for the first time in the 72-year history of the Indore Lok Sabha seat.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Indore recorded 69 per cent turnout with 5,045 voters opting for NOTA.

Rawat said, "In the present situation, NOTA has



only symbolic significance and it cannot have an impact on the election result of any seat."

"In an election, if 99 votes out of 100 go to NOTA and a candidate gets only one vote, still the candidate, and not NOTA, will be declared the winner," he said.

The former CEC said if more than 50 per cent of the voters in a seat favour NOTA, only then there is a point in thinking of making this voting option legally effective on the election results.

"More than 50 per cent electors will have to once opt for NOTA in a seat to show the political community that they do not consider candidates with criminal back-

ground or other undeserving ones worthy of their votes. Only after this, pressure on Parliament and the Election Commission will increase and they will have to think about changing laws to make NOTA effective on the election results," he said.

The 'NOTA' button was introduced on the electronic voting machines in September 2013 following the Supreme Court's decision.

It was added to the voting options to discourage parties from fielding tainted candidates.

Anil Verma, head of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), an electoral reform advocacy

group, said that in the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections, NOTA got an average of less than two per cent votes.

"To take the NOTA option to the next level, it should be made legally powerful. We believe that if NOTA gets more votes than polled by the candidates in any seat, then the election should be cancelled and a fresh poll should be conducted with new candidates," he said.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, 'NOTA' got the maximum votes in Gopalganj seat of Bihar where 51,660 electors favoured this option and it received around five per cent of the total votes.

# Defamation case: SC to hear Delhi CM Kejriwal's plea against summons on Monday

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The

Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging a Delhi High Court order upholding the summons issued to him in a criminal defamation case for retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Dhruv Rathee in May 2018.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta is likely to hear the matter in which Kejriwal has admitted that he "committed a mistake" by retweeting the alleged defamatory video.

On March 11, the top court asked Kejriwal whether he wanted to give an apology to the complainant in the matter.

Kejriwal on February 26 told the apex court that



he made a mistake by retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Rathee related to the BJP IT Cell.

The counsel appearing for complainant Vikas Sankrityayan has told the top court that Kejriwal may issue an apology on social media platforms like microblogging plat-

form 'X' or Instagram.

On February 26, the apex court, without issuing notice on Kejriwal's plea challenging the high court order, had asked the complainant whether he wanted to close the matter in view of the petitioner accepting it was a mistake.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi,

appearing for Kejriwal, had said, "I can say this much that I made a mistake by retweeting."

The top court had asked the trial court not to take up the defamation case involving Kejriwal till further orders.

In its February 5 verdict, the high court said that reposting alleged libellous content would attract the defamation law.

It said a sense of responsibility has to be attached while retweeting content about which one does not have knowledge and added that retweeting defamatory content must invite penal, civil as well as tort action if the person retweeting it does not attach a disclaimer.

The high court, while refusing to quash the trial court's 2019 order summoning Kejriwal, had said

when a public figure tweets a defamatory post, the ramifications extend far beyond a mere whisper in someone's ears.

It had said if the act of retweeting or reposting is allowed to be misused as it is still considered to be a vacant grey area of law, it will encourage people with ill intentions to misuse it and conveniently take a plea that they had merely retweeted a content.

The chief minister had said in the high court that the trial court failed to appreciate that his tweet was not intended or likely to harm the complainant.

Sankrityayan claimed the YouTube video titled 'BJP IT Cell Part II' was circulated by Rathee, who lives in Germany, "where in a number of false and defamatory allegations were made".

# BJP flags off bike rally in Delhi, Sikh youths join in PM Modi's support

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: BJP on

Sunday flagged off a bike rally where several youth from Sikh community participated in support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an official statement said.

The rally, with slogan #SikhWithModi, was started from the state BJP office and reached the national headquarters via Connaught Place.

Addressing the rally, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said the Prime Minister values every section of society, but the way the Kartarpur Corridor was opened for the Sikh community, Bal Divas was announced on the name of Veer Shabbajade on December 26, taxes were removed from langar, and the 350th birth anniversary celebration of Guru Govind Singh was organised, all these historic works were done by the Modi government. Not only this, but PM Modi also "wiped the tears" of the victims of Sikh riots, he said, adding that if any government has empowered Sikh youth with opportunities, "it is only the Modi government".

BJP leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa said, "With the hashtag #SikhWithModi, today, the Sikh community is moving forward on the streets with the message that we all stand with Modi. Our dream of a developed India will be fulfilled under the leadership of Modi." BJP MP General VK Singh said that PM Modi has always been inclined towards the Sikh community.

# Drugs worth Rs 84 lakh seized in Guwahati, 4 arrested

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

GUWAHATI: Drugs worth

Rs 84 lakh were seized and four persons were arrested in Guwahati on Sunday, police said.

Acting on a tip-off regarding transportation of drugs at Khanapara, a Special Task Force (STF) carried out the operation, they said. Movement of the four "habitual drugs peddlers cum thieves" were noticed in the area and accordingly, they were arrested, police said in a statement.

From them, 77 vials containing 105 gram of heroin were seized. Besides, two mobile phones and Rs 7,220 in cash were also seized. The total value of the seized drugs is around Rs 84 lakh as per Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) standards, an official said.

# India concerned over delay in implementation of pathbreaking IMEC project

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The delay in

implementation of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) in view of the current situation in West Asia is a matter of "concern" and the expectation generated following the firming up of the initiative in September last has to be "adjusted" a bit now, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said.

In an exclusive interview to PTI, Jaishankar said all the stakeholders of the IMEC – a ship-to-rail transit network – are committed to it as they feel it is a "great" initiative.

"It has definitely been a source of concern for us and the kind of expectation we had when the agreement was signed in September, we have had to adjust it a bit," he said when asked whether the ongoing crisis in West Asia would delay the project by at least a few years.

"On the other hand, all the parties to the agreement have reconfirmed that 'we think it is a great idea' and all are committed to it," he said.

Billed as a pathbreaking initiative, the IMEC envisages a vast road, railroad and shipping network among Saudi Arabia, India, the United States and Europe with an aim to ensure integration among Asia, the

Middle East and the West.

"So we will have to wait for things to stabilise a bit. I think it is a matter of great concern and it is also a very complex issue. Because it is not a single issue on which you have a black and white judgement," Jaishankar said.

"I think you have a range of concerns out there, from terrorism to hostages to humanitarian corridor to a two-state solution," he said in the interview late Thursday.

"So how do you get the balance right and more importantly, how do you make it actually work on the ground," he added.

The IMEC also envisages the inclusion of an electricity cable network, a hydrogen pipeline, high-speed data cable network to facilitate overall economic growth in the partner countries. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor is also seen as an initiative by like-minded nations to gain strategic influence in the face of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has faced increasing criticism over a lack of transparency and disregard for the sovereignty of the nations.

The BRI is a mega connectivity project that connects China with Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Russia and Europe.

The IMEC initiative was firmed up on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Delhi. An agreement was signed by India, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the US and some other G20 partners for the corridor.

There has been a delay in rolling out the initiative on the ground in view of the precarious security situation in West Asia.

West Asia has been witnessing escalating tensions following attacks on Israel by Hamas on October 7 that killed 1,200 people. Hamas kidnapped more than 220 others, some of whom were released during a brief ceasefire.

The tensions escalated further in view of fresh hostilities between Iran and Israel.

Last month, Iran launched its first direct attack on Israel by firing hundreds of drones and missiles in response to a suspected Israeli strike on its consulate in Damascus on April 1.

India has been calling for de-escalation of the situation and creating conditions for an early resumption of direct peace negotiations towards a two-state solution to the Palestine issue.

# 2,480 illegal immigrants detected in Manipur in 2023 before outbreak of violence: CM

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

IMPHAL: Manipur Chief

Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday said that a state Cabinet sub-committee had detected 2,480 illegal immigrants in 2023 but the campaign was cut short after violence broke out on May 3 last year.

Addressing a press conference Singh said concerned with increasing deforestation and setting up of new villages by illegal immigrants, a Cabinet sub-committee was formed in February 2023 after a cabinet meeting attended by two Kuki ministers Letpao Haokip and Nencha Kipgen.

Haokip was made the head of the sub-committee to identify illegal immigrants.

"We are not biased against anybody but against the illegal immigrants. It was a decision taken by the state cabinet," Singh said.

"Biometrics were taken in ten villages of Chandel during which 1,165 illegal immigrants were found, 1,147 illegal immigrants were found in 13 villages of Tengnoupal district, 154 illegal immigrants in Churachandpur and rest were found in Kamjong district,"



Singh said.

These figures are not inclusive of the additional 5,457 illegal immigrants who entered Kamjong district, Singh said, adding biometrics of 5,173 people have been taken while 329 have returned back voluntarily after situation improved in the neighbouring country.

"The detection of illegal immigrants was not limited to one community but was to cover the entire state of Manipur. They were found after visiting villages," Singh said.

"The campaign for identifying illegal immigrants was, however, cut short just after a

month it started and had to be stopped after violence broke out on May 3," Singh said.

More than 219 people were killed and thousands displaced from homes after ethnic clashes broke out on May 3 last year, when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Tribals - Nagas and Kukis - constitute little over 40 per cent and reside in the hill districts.