

On reaching court, CM Kejriwal says excise policy case a 'political conspiracy'

NEW DELHI, MAR 28: This is a "political conspiracy", Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said as he arrived at the Rouse Avenue Court here for a hearing in the excise policy-linked money laundering case.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the case on March 21 and subsequently he was sent to remand till March 28 by the court.

"This is a political conspiracy. The people will give an answer," Kejriwal told reporters as he entered the courtroom.

He is being produced before Special



Judge Kaveri Baweja.

AAP ministers Atishi, Gopal Rai and Saurabh Bharadwaj along with the chief minister's wife Sunita Kejriwal were inside the court.

Court sources said the ED is likely to seek an extension of the chief minister's custodial remand.

Delhi HC dismisses PIL to remove Arvind Kejriwal from CM post after arrest

NEW DELHI, MAR 28: In a big relief for AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal, the Delhi High Court on Thursday dismissed a PIL seeking his removal from the post of Chief Minister following his arrest in a money laundering case related to Delhi excise policy scam.

"This Court is of the view that there is no scope for judicial interference vis-à-vis the relief sought for in the PIL. The PIL is dismissed. We have not commented on the merits," a Division Bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora said, dismissing the PIL filed by one Surjit Singh Yadav.

"You (Yadav) will have to show us some bar or prohibition that prohibits him from being a CM. If there is any constitutional failure the President or Governor will act on it.

Dera karseva chief of Uttarakhand's Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara shot dead

DEHRADUN/RUDRAPUR, MAR 28: The dera karseva chief of the Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara in Uttarakhand was shot dead within the premises of the shrine by two motorcycle-borne assailants early Thursday, police said.

Baba Tarsem Singh was rushed to a hospital in Khattima where he died during treatment, Udham Singh Nagar Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Manju Nath told reporters.

"We have clear (CCTV camera) videos of the assailants. They are both Sikhs," he said and added that they fled after the incident.

The Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara is a revered Sikh



shrine located on the Rudrapur-Tanakpur route in Udham Singh Nagar district of the state.

In CCTV camera footage, the assailants were seen entering the gurdwara on a mo-

torcycle around 6:15 am and shooting at Singh with a rifle, Nath said and added that the shooter was riding pillion.

"Two rounds were fired at Singh who was sitting on a chair. The first shot was fired

from the front and the other from the back. Singh immediately fell on the ground," the SSP said.

Eight police teams have been mobilised to apprehend the dera karseva chief's attackers, he said.

Terming the incident "serious", Uttarakhand Director General of Police (DGP) Abhinav Kumar said a special investigation team (SIT) comprising personnel of the Special Task Force and local police has been constituted to look into the incident.

"If there is a conspiracy behind the incident, it will be unravelled. The help of central agencies will also be taken for this," he said and added that "we will nab the assailants soon".

Erode MP, who attempted suicide, dies



ERODE (TAMIL NADU), MAR 28: Erode MP A Ganeshamurthi, who allegedly attempted suicide recently, died at a Coimbatore hospital on Thursday morning, sources from his party MDMK and police said.

Expressing shock and grief over his demise, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin said Ganeshamurthi started his political journey in the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and effectively discharged his responsibilities in various capacities including the post of district secretary. Later, he traversed the political path along with Vaiko (MDMK chief).

"His loss has given an inexpressible grief. He was an energetic diplomat. I offer my deepest condolences and sympathies to the members of the DMK, MDMK, his family and friends," Stalin said in a statement.

Vaiko expressed shock over the sudden demise and said he called on Ganeshamurthi's son Kapilan and daughter Tamilpiriya and conveyed his condolences. According to police, the 77-year-old Ganeshamurthi had allegedly tried to kill himself after consuming some poisonous tablets on March 24 at his home here. He was rushed to a hospital here and later referred to another private institute in Coimbatore. The Erode Town police has already registered an attempt to suicide case. This will now be altered to a death by suicide case, police said. Hospital authorities handed the body to the police who took it to the Institute of

Road Transport (IRT) Medical College Hospital for autopsy. After the post-mortem, the body will be taken to Kumaravalsu village, 15 km from here, where it will be buried, party sources said. Ganeshamurthi was elected as an MP on the DMK's rising sun symbol in 2019. He had previously won the Lok Sabha polls from Palani in 1998 and Erode in 2009. A widower, Ganesamurthi is survived by a son and a daughter.

"He was a brave and determined leader. There's no iota of truth that Ganeshamurthi made a suicide attempt over not getting a seat to contest Lok Sabha election again," Vaiko said while speaking to reporters in Coimbatore. Recalling his association with the departed leader since his college days in Chennai, Vaiko said both worked hard to develop the party (then DMK).

"The struggles during the

student union days are still vivid in my mind. ... He was in charge of Erode district of DMK and later joined hands with me to launch the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam," the MDMK chief said.

He had served as party treasurer, and was a MLA and MP too, Vaiko said and added that both of them were incarcerated when they were detained under the POTA Act. In a statement here, Vaiko said that from his inquiries with the doctors who were treating Ganeshamurthi, he had hoped that the MP would survive. But fate willed otherwise, he said, expressing his deepest condolences and sympathies to his family and friends. AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami said he was saddened to hear the news of the death of the Erode MP. BJP state chief K Annamalai too condoled the death.

'Operation Lotus' underway in Punjab: Bharadwaj

NEW DELHI, MAR 28: 'Operation Lotus' has started in Punjab, senior AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj alleged on Thursday, a day after the party's lone Lok Sabha MP Sushil Kumar Rinku joined the BJP.

'Operation Lotus' is the term used by opposition parties to describe what they call "poaching" of MLAs by the BJP to topple governments.

Addressing a press conference here, Bharadwaj said AAP MLAs in Punjab had said on Wednesday that the majority of them were getting calls and being offered money, Y category security and tickets for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls to join the BJP.

"The BJP is conducting 'Operation Lotus'," he said.

Bharadwaj also questioned Rinku's decision to join the BJP.

"The BJP stood fourth in (the 2022) Punjab (assembly elections) after AAP, Shiromani Akali Dal and Congress.

The question is why did Rinku join the BJP. His tenure as Lok Sabha MP has also ended. The BJP will also come fourth in the Jalandhar Lok Sabha polls," he said.

Rinku, who had been named as the AAP's candidate from Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat, joined the BJP on Wednesday along with the party's Jalandhar West MLA Sheetal Angural.

Rinku quit the Congress to join the AAP last year to contest the bypoll to the Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat. He was a

vocal critic of the BJP in the Lok Sabha and was even suspended from the House for his unruly protests.

The BJP is likely to field him in the Lok Sabha polls as it inducts a number of influential leaders from different political parties in Punjab to emerge as a strong force in the state that has 13 parliamentary constituencies.

On banned outfit Sikhs For Justice's chief Gurpatwant Singh Pannun purported claims that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal met the group's representatives in New York in 2014, Bharadwaj said it's shameful that the BJP and its trolls are taking a terrorist's allegations as "gospel truth".

"This shows the BJP is anti-national," the AAP

leader said.

He also said the Centre is rattled by the governments of the US and Germany expressing concern over democracy in India and calling for a fair trial for Kejriwal.

The Centre recently summoned US and German diplomats following their government's remarks on Kejriwal's arrest.

According to reports, a US State Department official had said that Washington "encouraged a fair, transparent and timely legal process for Chief Minister Kejriwal".

Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate last week in connection with the money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. He is in ED custody till March 28.

Varun Gandhi pens note for people of Pilibhit after BJP denies him LS poll ticket

LUCKNOW, MAR 28: Denied a ticket from Pilibhit Lok Sabha seat, BJP MP Varun Gandhi on Thursday wrote an emotional letter to the people of his constituency in which he asserted that his relationship with them will remain intact till his last breath.

Sharing the letter on X, he said, his relationship with Pilibhit is one of love and trust which is far above any political calculations.

The BJP has fielded Uttar Pradesh Public Works Minister Jitin Prasada from Pilibhit replacing Gandhi, who has been vocal against his own government several times on the issue of inflation and unemployment.

Prasada had filed his nominations on this seat on Wednesday.

Recounting his association with the constituency, he said "Today, when I am writing this letter, countless memories have made me emotional. I remember that little three-year-old child who came to Pilibhit for the first time in 1983 holding the fingers of his mother. Little did he know that one day this land would become his work place and the people here



would become his family".

"The ideals given by Pilibhit were instrumental in my upbringing and development not only as an MP but also as a person. Being your representative has been the greatest honour of my life and I have always raised my voice for your interests to the best of my ability," he said.

Varun Gandhi said his tenure as an MP may be coming to an end, but his relationship with Pilibhit can't end till his last breath.

"If not as an MP, then at

least as a son, I am committed to serve you throughout my life and my doors will always remain open for you as before.

I came into politics to raise the voice of the common man and today I seek your blessings to continue doing this work always. Even if I have to pay any cost for this," he added.

This is for the first time in over three decades that the mother-son duo of Maneka and Varun Gandhi will not be in the fray from the Pilibhit

constituency which is located in the Terai belt bordering Nepal.

The denial of ticket to Varun Gandhi this time did not come as a surprise as he has been criticising the BJP on the issues of farmers, health and jobs.

After he was replaced by Prasada, reports did the rounds that Varun Gandhi might contest from the seat as an independent candidate. The suspense ended on Wednesday when he did not turn up before the nominations ended.

His mother Maneka Gandhi, the sitting MP from Sultanpur, was, however, given another chance from the same seat by the BJP.

The Pilibhit seat has remained with Maneka Gandhi or her son Varun Gandhi since 1996.

Maneka Gandhi won the seat on a Janata Dal ticket in 1989, lost in 1991 and won again in 1996. She won from the constituency in 1998 and 1999 as an Independent candidate. She won the seat in 2004 and 2014 as a BJP candidate.

Varun Gandhi won the seat in 2009 and 2019 as a BJP candidate.

TMC's Mahua Moitra to campaign in Bengal's Krishnanagar on Thursday, skip ED summons

KOLKATA, MAR 28: MC leader Mahua Moitra has said she will campaign in her Krishnanagar constituency on Thursday, giving a miss to the Enforcement Directorate summons that asked her to appear for questioning at the ED office in New Delhi.

"I will be out for campaigning in the Krishnanagar constituency in the afternoon," she told reporters.

The Enforcement Directorate had issued fresh summons to Moitra and Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani for questioning in a Foreign Exchange Management Act



(FEMA) contravention case. The 49-year-old Trinamool Congress leader was

called for questioning twice earlier by the central agency, but she did not depose citing

official work and sought deferment of the notice.

Moitra, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha in December for "unethical conduct", has been renominated by her party from West Bengal's Krishnanagar seat in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had raided her premises in connection with the cash-for-query case on Saturday, days after anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal directed the federal agency to investigate the allegations levelled against her by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey.

Encourage fair, transparent legal proceedings: US on Kejriwal's arrest

NEW YORK, MAR 28: After India summoned a senior US diplomat to lodge a protest over remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Washington on Wednesday stressed that it encourages fair, transparent, timely legal processes and "we don't think anyone should object to that".

"We continue to follow these actions closely, including the arrest of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal," US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

Miller was responding to a question during the State Department briefing over India summoning Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gloria Berbena in New Delhi earlier in the day as well as on freezing of Congress party's bank accounts.

"We are also aware of the Congress party's allegations that tax authorities have frozen some of their bank accounts in a manner that will make it challenging to effectively campaign in the upcoming elections. And we encourage fair, transparent and timely legal processes for each of these issues.

"With respect to your first question, I'm not going to talk about any private diplomatic conversations, but of course, what we have said publicly is what I just said from here, that we encourage fair, transparent, timely legal processes. We don't think anyone should object to that. We'll make the same thing clear privately," Miller said. Ministry of External Affairs officials summoned

the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gloria Berbena at its office in South Block in Delhi and lodged a strong protest against a US State Department official's remarks on Kejriwal's arrest.

The meeting lasted for more than 30 minutes.

Reports suggested that a US State Department official had said that Washington "encouraged a fair, transparent and timely legal process for chief minister Kejriwal".

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested Kejriwal in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam'.

The case pertains to alleged corruption and money laundering in formulating and executing the Delhi government's excise policy for

2021-22 which was later scrapped.

Earlier, the Ministry of External Affairs said Delhi takes strong objection to the remarks of the spokesperson of the US State Department about certain legal proceedings in India.

"In diplomacy, states are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty and internal affairs of others. This responsibility is even more so in the case of fellow democracies. It could otherwise end up setting unhealthy precedents," the ministry said.

"India's legal processes are based on an independent judiciary which is committed to objective and timely outcomes. Casting aspersions on that is unwarranted," the MEA said.

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ED seeks 7-day further custody of Kejriwal; he tells court ready to face probe

NEW DELHI, MAR 29: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday himself made submissions in a court here during the hearing in the excise policy case and said a smoke-screen of the AAP being corrupt has been created before the nation.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener made the submissions in Hindi after taking permission from the court despite his lawyers being present.

He made the submissions as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) produced him in the court of Special Judge Kaveri Baweja and sought seven-day further

custody, arguing he needs to be confronted with some people linked with the case. The ED said Kejriwal was giving evasive replies and not disclosing passwords of his digital devices.

In his submissions, Kejriwal said, "I am named by four witnesses in the excise policy case. Are four statements enough to arrest a sitting CM?"

He alleged that Sarath Chandra Reddy donated Rs 55 crore to the BJP. "I have evidence of this. Money trail is established as he donated the funds after being arrested," the chief minister said.

Reddy is the director of Aurobindo Pharma Limited and one of the co-ac-

cused-turned-approvers in the case. A smoke-screen of the AAP being corrupt has been created in front of the nation, Kejriwal said and added that he is ready to face ED probe.

The AAP national convener was arrested by the agency in the case on March 21, and subsequently, he was sent to remand till March 28 by the court.

Kejriwal's advocate Ramesh Gupta said the chief minister wants to cooperate in the investigation but not on the ED's grounds for which the agency is seeking extension of his custodial remand.