

Myanmar's ex-leader Aung San Suu Kyi moved from prison to house arrest

MYANMAR, APR 17: Myanmar's detained former leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has been moved from prison to house arrest, a spokesperson for the military government told media.

"Since the weather is extremely hot, it is not only for Aung San Suu Kyi... For all those, who need necessary precautions, especially elderly prisoners, we are working to protect them from heatstroke," junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun said in comments reported by four media outlets.

Zaw Min Tun did not respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

Suu Kyi, 78, has been detained by the Myanmar



military since it overthrew her government in a 2021 coup. She faces 27 years in prison for crimes ranging from treason and bribery to violations of the telecommunications law, charges she denies.

In February, her son Kim Aris said she was being held in solitary confinement and that she was in good spirits "even if her health is not as good as it was in the past".

World leaders and pro-

democracy activists have repeatedly called for her release.

A spokesperson for the NUG shadow government called for the unconditional release of Suu Kyi and U Win Myint, Myanmar's ousted president, who has also been moved to house arrest according to the media reports.

"Moving them from prisons to houses is good, as houses are better than prisons.

However, they must be unconditionally freed. They must take full responsibility for the health and security of Aung San Suu Kyi and U Win Myint," spokesperson Kyaw Zaw told Reuters late on Tuesday.

British actor Hugh Grant settles privacy lawsuit against publisher of the Sun: Court documents

LONDON, APR 17: British actor Hugh Grant has settled a lawsuit against the publisher of The Sun tabloid newspaper over claims journalists used private investigators to tap his phone and burgle his house, his lawyer said in court documents on Wednesday.

Grant, alongside King Charles' son Prince Harry, was suing News Group Newspapers (NGN) for alleged widespread unlawful information gathering, including landline tapping, burglary and "blagging" confidential information about him.

His case was one of several lawsuits which were el-



igible to go to trial at London's High Court in January, but the actor has agreed to settle with NGN, his lawyer David Sherborne said.

Grant, famous for films such as "Love Actually" and "Notting Hill", has become

a prominent campaigner on press reform since the phone-hacking scandal emerged more than a decade ago.

He previously brought a lawsuit against NGN in relation to the now-defunct News of the World tabloid

which was settled in 2012, a year after the newspaper was shut down by media magnate Rupert Murdoch following a public backlash.

NGN has always rejected allegations of any wrongdoing by staff at The Sun, having settled more than 1,000 cases without making any admission of liability in relation to the paper.

However, the settlement of Grant's lawsuit, whose case focused exclusively on alleged wrongdoing at the paper, raises questions about the sustainability of that long-held position.

NGN did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

As phase-one poll campaign draws to a close, Rahul Gandhi talks of lesson learnt from grandmother Indira

CALCUTTA, APR 17: Less than 48 hours to go before the first phase of polling in the Lok Sabha polls, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi invoked memories of his grandmother, the late prime minister Indira Gandhi, in Karnataka's Kolar as the country goes into a general election like no other.

"I came here as a child with my grandmother and went to the Kolar gold field. I remember going down into the mine. It was very hot inside and meeting the workers," Rahul said addressing an election rally attended by party president Mallikarjun Khadge, Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah and deputy chief minister D.K. Shivakumar among others, while campaigning came to a close in 102 of the 543 constituencies across the country.

"I learnt a lot about politics from my grandmother and I did not even understand she was teaching me politics," said Rahul, who has projected himself as a challenger to Narendra Modi. "In all her lessons that she taught me there was only one lesson. She would tell me, 'Rahul, a leader has only one job and one technique'. All the leader has to do is search carefully for unfairness and where one spots it, without backing down, without fear must challenge it."

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Indira Gandhi. That also marks the one and only time that a political party—the Congress under rookie politician Rajiv Gandhi — had breached the 400-plus seats mark, a target that Prime Minister Narendra Modi aspires to breach on June 4, when the results for the seven-phase elections are to be announced.

Forty-six years ago, a scenic Karnataka town sur-



rounded by lush coffee plantations had paved the way for Indira Gandhi's political rebirth since the stunning electoral defeat of 1977, when she won the by-election from Chikamagalur, around 315 km from Kolar.

Four decades later, the Congress has been out of power in Delhi for ten years, its leaders across states jumping ship, allies turning their backs in some states, its bank accounts frozen, battling for survival, which Rahul has time and again linked to the survival of India as a democracy.

In March 2023, barely two months before the Karnataka state Assembly polls were held, Rahul was expelled from the Lok Sabha (a Supreme Court intervention reinstated him as an MP).

The expulsion had followed a Gujarat lower court order that found him guilty of defamation for using the surname "Modi" during a campaign meeting for the Lok Sabha polls five years ago.

"In every single lesson she taught me this was the crux. If you challenge unfairness you will get hurt, you will be abused, you will be attacked," Rahul told the crowd. "The more the abuse, the more the attacks, the better you are doing your job and your only duty is never to get scared, never to back down... and if you look at India today the government in Delhi is the

master in spreading unfairness."

What followed next in the speech was Rahul's by now all-too familiar attack on Modi and the Prime Minister's push for select industrialists, attack on the coopting of government institutions and the Congress' own plans for reforms pan-India if, and it is a big if, voted to power.

Ahead of the 2023 Karnataka Assembly polls held in May, Rahul had spent 22 days in Karnataka during his Bharat Jodo Yatra which started in September 2022. Of the 135 seats in the 224-member Assembly that the Congress won, 15 of these were among the 20-odd seats that were along the route of the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Rahul had similarly embarked on a Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Manipur's Thoubal to Mumbai, covering some 6,700 km and passed through 15 states. In between, the party lost some allies in some states like the JDU and the Trinamul Congress in Bihar and Bengal. The party also found bitter foes, the Left and the Aam Aadmi Party, joining forces with it in Bengal, Delhi and Haryana, the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, sealed the deal with factions of the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party led by Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar respectively. "Rahul Gandhi logon ka jagaane ka kaam kar rahe

hain (Rahul Gandhi is trying to awaken the people). In the course of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, he is talking about unemployment, the BJP favouring the rich corporates at the cost of the poor, the minimum support price, caste census, more quota for the backward classes and dalits in government jobs and back-breaking price rise. But the media instead of talking about the people's issues is hyping up the RSS-BJP's narrative, bordering on crass communalism," RJD leader and former Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav said over a month ago. "He is reaching out to the people, sharing their agony and distress. He is doing what a responsible Opposition leader should do. He is on the right track."

In 2018, less than a year before the Lok Sabha polls, the Congress had managed to form the government with the help of the Janta Dal (Secular), which crumbled under "Operation Lotus" when 17 MLAs defected. In the Lok Sabha polls of 2019, the BJP had won 25 of the 28 seats.

For Modi to cross the 400-mark, the BJP would have to do a repeat in Karnataka and those states where it has already reached a peak, while breaching new territories.

Rahul Gandhi made no mention of what the Congress was seeking, rather what he had to offer.

"We are going to do an X-ray of India and place it in front of the people," said Rahul referring to the poll promise of a caste census. "Every time I mention the caste census, Modi goes quiet. Is he for caste census or against it? This is the only way to give the rights to the people of India, the tribals, the backward classes, the dalits, the poor in the general caste."

Pop stars Taylor Swift and Beyoncé avoided a collision on the charts again

LONDON, APR 17: In February, Taylor Swift took the stage at the Grammy Awards to accept the prize for best pop vocal album. After dutifully thanking the Recording Academy and her fans, she got down to business: "My brand-new album comes out April 19," she said, in a surprise announcement revealing "The Tortured Poets Department." It was a heads-up for her loyal followers, as well as anyone else in the business with a spring release on the radar: If you want your new album to debut at No. 1, don't release it on April 19. Or April 26. Or May 3, for that matter.

A week later, following a teaser during a Super Bowl commercial, Beyoncé also dropped news of a new album: "Cowboy Carter" would arrive earlier than "Poets," with breathing room, on March 29. Another pop powerhouse in the Grammy audience made her own announcement in early April: Billie Eilish will unveil her forthcoming third album, "Hit Me Hard and Soft," a month after Swift's release, on May 17.

Beyoncé and Swift, the 21st century's preeminent pop stars, have often been cast as competitors if not rivals, a story line partly rooted in misogyny and amplified by duelling fan armies filled with stans, or superfans.

For their part, the two artists have regularly dispelled the notion over the years. They were first linked, through no fault of their own, at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards, when Kanye West interrupted a Swift acceptance speech to advocate for her fellow nominee Beyoncé; later that night, Beyoncé brought Swift onstage to finish her remarks. In 2021, Swift shared on Instagram that Beyoncé had sent her congratulatory flowers after



Swift won the album of the year Grammy for "Folklore," calling Beyoncé "the queen of grace & greatness." And last year, following their blockbuster stadium tours, they appeared at each other's concert film premieres, a pointed rebuke to message-board zealots looking to sow discord.

"Clearly, it's very lucrative for the media and stan culture to pit two women against each other, even when the two artists in question refuse to participate in that discussion," Swift told Time magazine. (Representatives for Swift and Beyoncé declined to comment.)

In fact, when it comes to album releases, whether by design or by chance, the two superstars have generally avoided one another altogether. The only other time they've released LPs in the same window was way back in November 2008, when Beyoncé's "I Am... Sasha Fierce" supplanted Swift's "Fearless" at No. 1. Absent Swift's 2006 debut LP, every studio album from Beyoncé and Swift — 21 in all, including Swift's rerecordings of her earlier catalog — has entered the Billboard 200 at No. 1. (Eilish's previous albums both opened big at the top, as well.)

In the streaming era, where songs have superseded albums as music's main currency, and chart

placements are based on an opaque formula that blends streams with sales, a No. 1 album doesn't have quite the same cultural or historical resonance it once did. Still, said Jonathan Daniel of Crush Management, which oversees the careers of Miley Cyrus, Green Day and Lorde, it remains "a great talking point," perhaps most of all for the online superfans who take pride in hoisting their heroes to the top.

"Pop-stan Twitter is fierce," Daniel said. Partisans treat the Spotify and Billboard charts like a zero-sum game. "It's their version of sports."

While top artists and their teams tend to avoid overlapping album releases in order to secure a No. 1 and the bragging rights that go along with it, that wasn't always the case. "In the days when the only way to consume music was to go to your local record store or big-box retailer, labels would sometimes schedule a release so that it would come out on the same day as a similar but bigger release," said Keith Caulfield, Billboard's managing director of charts and data operations.

That way, someone who came to Best Buy to purchase, say, "the 'Bodyguard' soundtrack might also spot the new Anita Baker CD and say, 'I'll get that, too,'" he said. Before social media, where artists can post

album updates to their followers with unrelenting frequency, casual fans might not even have known a new record existed unless they spotted it in the wild.

One of the most high-profile examples of convergent superstar releases came in September 2007, when rappers Kanye West and 50 Cent colluded to issue their new albums on the same date. "We marketed it like a heavyweight boxing match," said Dennis Denenhy, who led publicity for 50 Cent's label, Interscope. "It was Ali vs. Frazier."

West and 50 Cent, both signed to subsidiary labels of Universal Music Group, appeared together on the cover of Rolling Stone to hype the event and draw people to record stores. "It was like a get-out-the-vote campaign," Denenhy said. The reward was increased first-week sales of both titles and a clarion call for hip-hop's commercial clout; the risk, as 50 Cent found out, was finishing a distant second. Kelefa Sanneh, writing for The New York Times, called it "a low point" in 50 Cent's career.

For the likes of Swift and Beyoncé, pinpointing an album release date is both art and science, a calculation based on such disparate factors as proposed tour schedules, the availability of vinyl pressing plants and optimal timing for Grammy consideration. And sometimes, even the best laid plans can go awry.

Daniel recounted that last year, Cyrus' "Endless Summer Vacation" and Lana Del Rey's "Did You Know That There's a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd" were originally slated to be released on the same date, but Del Rey's album ended up pushing back two weeks. "And then Morgan Wallen's 'One Thing at a Time' came out the week before," he said, "and knocked us all out of the water."

Leaked report on corruption allegation against President Muizzu stirs controversy in Maldives, Oppn demands probe

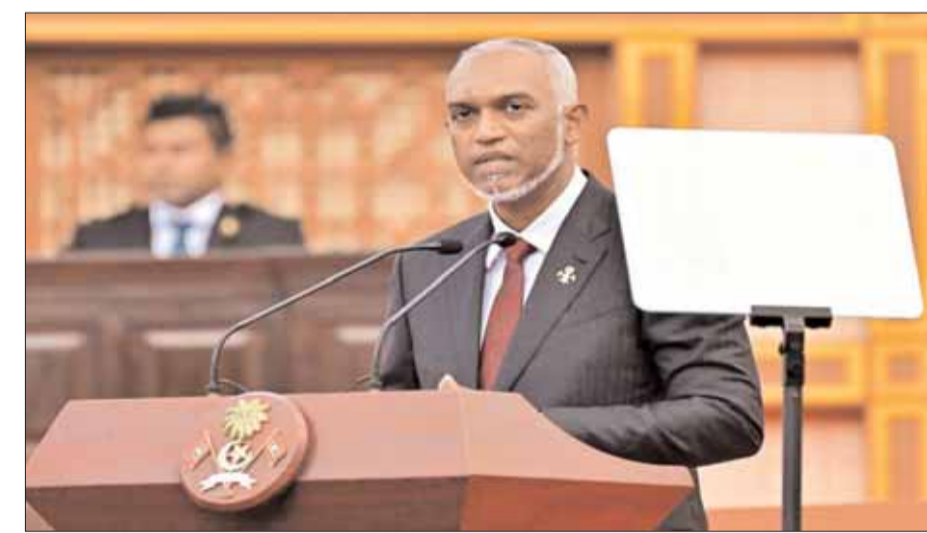
MALE, APR 17: Ahead of the parliamentary polls in the Maldives, the opposition parties have demanded a probe and impeachment of President Mohamed Muizzu following the leaked report of his alleged corruption from 2018, a charge dismissed by him.

Elections to the Majlis are to be held on Sunday and the atmosphere has been vitiated by the trading of charges between the main opposition the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and the Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC).

Local media reports have highlighted that the political storm started on Monday with an anonymous handle 'Hassan Kurusee' posting on social media X leaked intelligence reports, including documents prepared by the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of the Maldives Monetary Authority and the Maldives Police Service that allegedly linked President Muizzu to corruption.

"These reports, dated circa 2018, claim irregularities in money transfers to President Muizzu's personal bank account, highlighting 10 critical red flag indicators of financial misconduct. These indicators suggest involvement with politically exposed persons, embezzlement, structured transactions, and the use of corporate entities to hide fund origins," news portal Maldives Republic (mvrepublic.com) reported.

The allegations soon created a political storm with several reactions pouring in on various social media



channels. News portals and newspapers, however, tread with caution. The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and People's National Front (PNF) demanded an investigation into the matter.

Former Vice President Dr Mohamed Jameel Ahmed urged Muizzu's impeachment following the leaked intelligence reports. Taking to his social media handle X, Jameel reposted these documents, emphasising the need for accountability at all levels of governance. Apart from demanding Muizzu's impeachment, Jameel, a senior member of the Progressive Party of Maldives, "also accused President Muizzu of extensive corruption in his flagship Ras Male' development project and alleged excessive spending on public relations. Jameel has called on President Muizzu to cooperate with independent investigations into these allegations," mvrepublic.com said. The news portal also claimed that this was the first time an FIU report was

leaked and said, there has been no official confirmation or response from government bodies regarding the legitimacy of the reports or the allegations.

Adhadhu.com reported that President Muizzu responded late on Tuesday night to corruption allegations declaring that the opposition "cannot show any wrongdoing on his part regardless of how far attempts to implicate him are taken" and also accused the opposition of leaking the reports out of desperation. "The same allegations had been made during his campaigns for mayor and President," he said adding, the response would also be the same as before.

"While you attempt to pin something on me like this, you couldn't do it before and you can't do it now. There's nothing you can show against me no matter how far you take this," Adhadhu.com said, quoting the President.

Atoll Times gave a detailed account of what President Muizzu said in his defence, including how he

would "never compromise the rights of the people and that no matter how many such allegations are made, nobody will be able to show anything done in such a manner." The last five years opposition was in government, if there was anything done wrong, it would have come to light," Muizzu said.

"The President's remarks came after the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and People's National Front (PNF) called on the relevant authorities to investigate the serious allegations against the President. But no government investigative agency has yet to comment on the issue," Adhadhu.com reported.

A total of 368 candidates are contesting for 93 seats in this year's parliamentary elections on April 21, according to media reports. The outcome of the elections will determine whether the opposition parties can act against President Muizzu, who assumed charge in November last year.