

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

British Indian bookseller to judge inaugural Children's Booker Prize

LONDON, APR 28: The judging panel of the inaugural Children's Booker Prize 2027 was unveiled on Tuesday, which includes a British Indian bookseller behind a popular children's bookshop in north London.

Sanchita Basu De Sarkar, who owns the award-winning Children's Bookshop in Muswell Hill, will join UK Children's Laureate Frank Cottrell-Boyce and actor Lolly Adefope to select the best contemporary fiction for children aged eight to 12 years old.

As with the annual Booker Prize, the winner of the children's version of the literary award will win GBP 50,000 and the shortlisted authors will receive GBP 2,500 each. The first Children's Booker Prize will be awarded on February 2, 2027, to a work written in or translated into English and published in the UK and/or Ireland.

"It brings together everything I love: reading loads of children's books, getting to discuss them with some utterly brilliant people, and sharing the books with children all over the country so we can continue the conversation," said Sanchita Basu De Sarkar, co-founder of the South Asian Illustration and Literature (SAIL) Festival.

The adults on the panel will be joined by child judges, to be selected through a UK-wide competition which also opened this week.

"Judging with the children is going to be a completely unique experience, and one



of the things I'm most excited about for the Children's Booker," said Basu De Sarkar.

"One of my favourite activities in the bookshop is our book club sessions – children make for the most passionate and opinionated readers, and whenever we sit down and discuss books together, I'm always gaining new perspectives. We all come away buzzing with ideas. What a fabulous way to celebrate the National Year of Reading," she said.

The adult panel is charged with selecting a shortlist of eight books to be announced on November 24. Three child judges, aged between eight and 12 years old and living in the UK, will then join them in choosing the winning book as part of a process designed to give children a direct voice in the outcome and ensure the winning book is a recommendation from young readers to their peers.

"I've been asked to find three book-loving kids to join me in judging the first-ever Children's Booker Prize. Whether you've read one

book this year or a hundred; whether you love comic books or big thick chapter books; books with loads of pictures, books with no pictures; it doesn't matter, YOU could be exactly the judge that we're looking for," multi-award-winning children's book author and screenwriter Cottrell-Boyce said in a video encouraging children to apply for the role.

Online entries are invited from parents, carers and educators on behalf of their children, pupils and young people, with the names to be unveiled alongside the shortlist later this year. In the online form, children will be asked to share why they would like to be a Children's Booker Prize judge and answer questions about books and reading.

The successful child entrants will each get: the eight shortlisted books to read and keep; a judges' medal; a trip to London for a "fun day" choosing the winner with the adult judges; a bespoke portrait by 'Beano' illustrator Nigel Parkinson; a 'Beano' comic strip capturing their

judging experience; and another trip to London for the ceremony at the Young V&A in London.

"This new prize is underpinned by a social mission: to create future generations of lifelong readers. We feel confident that we can enthuse children if we are armed with the very best," said Gaby Wood, Chief Executive of the Booker Prize Foundation. "By 'best', we mean books that readers will love, books that can be read over and over again or enjoyed just once. Books that contain great characters, emotion, wit, action, adventure, imagination, and magic. Books that take readers to other places – in the world, in their minds or in their hearts," she said.

The new Children's Booker is open to authors worldwide, both for books written originally in English and for those translated into English, with the prize money to be equally split between author, translator and/or illustrator.

The first three years of the new prize are backed by the AKO Foundation, a grant-giving entity focused on supporting charities that improve the education and well-being of young people. The Booker Prize Foundation said it will be working with publishers and partners to gift and deliver 30,000 copies of the shortlisted and winning books each year to children who need them the most. (PTI)

Akhilesh hits back at PM Modi, says SP stands for unity and inclusive development

LUCKNOW, APR 29: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday hit back after Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the party of being anti-development, saying that the SP believes in unity, inclusiveness and equitable growth.

"Samajwadi Party has always worked to unite people. Our name itself is derived from the Constitution. We believe in removing discrimination and promoting harmony," Yadav said.

He added that the party stands for the "Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb" and "Hindustaniyat", advocating a politics that brings together people across caste and religion.

Referring to the inauguration of the Ganga Expressway, Yadav claimed that it was the SP which had pioneered expressway development in the state. "If anyone has taught how to build expressways, it is the socialists. We showed how greenfield expressways are planned and executed, while the current projects are incomplete," he alleged.

On the economy, Yadav



said that achieving a multi-trillion-dollar economy would require safeguarding the rights of workers. "You cannot discriminate against labourers," he said, raising concerns over wages, saying labourers should at least get pay comparable to neighbouring states like Delhi and Haryana.

"With rising inflation, how will workers manage rent, food, healthcare and support

their families?" he asked. Alleging exploitation of labourers in collusion with industrialists, Yadav said that farmers, workers, women and youth are now aware of these issues.

Earlier, addressing a gathering after the inauguration of the Ganga Expressway, Prime Minister Modi launched a sharp attack on the Samajwadi Party, accusing it of having an "anti-

women" mindset and aligning with parties like the DMK that "abuse" the people of Uttar Pradesh.

PM Modi said that the SP does not like the progress of Uttar Pradesh and wants to "push the state back into its old era". "The Samajwadi Party is not only anti-development but also anti-women. Recent events have exposed their mindset," he said. (Agencies)

HC Issues Fresh Notice To Kejriwal On ED Plea Against Acquittal In Summons Cases

NEW DELHI, APR 29: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday issued a fresh notice to AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on pleas by the ED challenging his acquittal in two separate cases lodged against him for not appearing before the agency despite summonses issued in the excise policy case.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma noted that according to the registry, the earlier notice issued to the former chief minister had not been served.

The investigating agency's counsel said notice was issued to Kejriwal on April 1 but no one has entered an appearance on his behalf.

"Registry reports that (he is) not served. I will issue fresh notice. Respondent has not been served," the judge said, and listed the matter for hearing on July 22.

The cases stem from the ED's complaint to the trial court that the then chief minister intentionally disobeyed



the summonses issued to him by not joining the probe.

It also alleged that Kejriwal raised frivolous objections and deliberately created grounds for not attending the probe.

In the high court, the ED's counsel earlier submitted that the trial court "committed a grave error" as it acquitted Kejriwal despite no dispute that summonses were duly issued and received but he did not appear before the

agency.

In its orders passed on January 22, the trial court ruled the ED failed to prove that Kejriwal intentionally disobeyed the summonses issued to him.

The trial court held that "Neither the service of summonses through emails has been proved by the ED nor the process of issuing summonses to any person under Section 50(2) of the Prevention of Money Laundering

Act (PMLA) via email has been proved to be in accordance with the law." The ED has alleged that the other accused in the case were in touch with Kejriwal for formulating the now-scrapped excise policy that resulted in undue benefits to them and kickbacks to the Aam Aadmi Party.

Kejriwal is presently on interim bail in the money laundering case, with the Supreme Court referring questions on the aspect of the "need and necessity of arrest" under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to a larger bench for an in-depth consideration.

On February 27, the trial court discharged Kejriwal, Sisodia and 21 others in the liquor policy case, saying the CBI case was wholly unable to survive judicial scrutiny and stood discredited in its entirety.

The CBI's plea against the discharge is pending in the high court. (Agencies)

SRI VIJAYA PURAM, APR 29: Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said the Great Nicobar project at Campbell Bay in Andaman and Nicobar Islands was "one of the biggest scams and gravest crimes against the natural and tribal heritage of the country".

He said the project would entail the axing of millions of trees on 160 sq km of rainforest, and called it "destruction dressed in development's language".

In a social media post, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha said, "I travelled throughout Great Nicobar today. These are the most extraordinary forests I have ever seen in my life. Trees older than memory. Forests that took generations to grow. The people on this island are equally beautiful — both the Adivasi communities and the settlers — but they are being robbed of what is rightfully theirs."

"The Government calls



what it is doing here a 'project'. What I have seen is not a project. It is millions of trees marked for the axe. It is 160 sq km of rainforest condemned to die. It is communities that have been ignored while their homes have been snatched away. This is not development. This is destruction dressed in development's language," he said.

"So, I will say it plainly, and I will keep saying it: what is being done in Great Nicobar is one of the biggest scams and gravest crimes against this country's natural and

tribal heritage in our lifetime. It must be stopped. And it can be stopped — if Indians choose to see what I have seen," Gandhi added.

The Centre says the Rs 81,000 crore project, which includes a transhipment terminal, a power plant and a township, will boost maritime trade, connectivity and security, which will prove to be a force multiplier in promoting the geo-strategic and economic interests of the nation.

On Tuesday, Gandhi went to Campbell Bay in Nicobar

district to meet the tribal leaders against the project. A section of tribal communities is alleging a lack of transparency, environmental risks, and continued neglect of tribal rights by the central government.

Gandhi, who arrived in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on April 26, also criticised corporate influence in the Union territory and stressed that development should prioritise local needs rather than corporate interests.

During his visit, he interacted with the members of Nicobarese tribal community and also met the members of the settler community. He also visited Indira Point and paid tributes to former prime minister, the late Indira Gandhi.

The tribal communities alleged that they are facing considerable hardship due to the proposed project and demanded that the central government take their concerns into account. (PTI)

Mamata Visits Polling Booths In Bhabanipur, Alleges Central Forces Acting At BJP's Behest

KOLKATA, APR 29: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday visited several polling booths in her Bhabanipur assembly constituency where voting is underway and alleged that central forces and election observers were acting at the behest of the BJP.

The Bhabanipur assembly segment is Banerjee's political bastion, where she is locked in a prestige battle against Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari in what is being seen as a symbolic rematch of Nandigram, where he had defeated her in the 2021 assembly polls.

The TMC supremo, who usually steps out of her Kalighat residence in the afternoon on polling day to cast her vote at Mitra Institution School, went out before 8 am and visited several polling stations in the constituency, including those in the Chetla area of south Kolkata.

She later sat outside a polling station at Chakraborty in Bhabanipur and spoke to reporters, alleging irregularities and accusing the BJP of trying to influence the polling process through central forces and observers.

"Several observers have come from outside and are acting as per the BJP's directions. People are supposed to cast their votes — can voting take place like this?" Banerjee said.

She also alleged that all TMC party flags had been removed beforehand and



claimed that outsiders were interfering with the polling process.

"They are not allowing the councillor of ward number 70 to step out. They are picking up all our boys. Abhishek and I stayed awake the entire night," she said. Banerjee further claimed that some people from outside the state were trying to create disturbances in the constituency and sought immediate intervention from the Election Commission.

The BJP, however, dismissed her allegations, claiming that the ruling party was trying to create confusion after sensing public anger against it.

The party's de facto second-in-command Abhishek Banerjee asserted that the TMC will win with a higher number of seats than in 2021.

His Diamond Harbour MP, after casting his vote at Mitra Institution, accused the poll observers of highhandedness in different places.

"But these things will not matter, we will win by a higher number of seats this

election," he told reporters.

Adhikari, on the other hand, said the CM will lose the election. The LoP offered prayers at two temples in the constituency's Khidirpur area.

Adhikari said people are coming out in large numbers to vote, with the Election Commission making proper arrangements for ensuring free and fair election. "Does not matter, she will lose," Adhikari told reporters about the TMC chief venturing out on polling day early in the morning in a departure from her practice of going out only in the afternoon to cast her vote. Voting is underway in 142 constituencies in the second and final phase of the West Bengal assembly elections amid unprecedented security arrangements.

Polling began at 7 am with voters lining up outside booths across Kolkata, Howrah, North and South 24 Parganas, Nadia, Hooghly and Purba Bardhaman — districts that together form the political and electoral core of the state.

The outcome of this phase is expected to be crucial as it covers south Bengal, considered the TMC's traditional stronghold, where the BJP is seeking major inroads. Polling will continue till 6 pm.

The first phase of the assembly elections on April 23 had recorded a turnout of 93.19 per cent — the highest ever in the state. Counting of votes will take place on May 4. (Agencies)

Cong accuses Rajnath of giving 'clean chit to Pak', dubs his remarks at SCO 'anti-national'

NEW DELHI, APR 29: The Congress on Wednesday alleged that Defence Minister Rajnath Singh gave a "shameful clean chit" to Pakistan while speaking at an SCO meeting in Bishkek, and claimed that his shocking statements were "anti-national".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh also alleged that this "new stance" in relation to Pakistan is all part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policy of "appeasement" of the US and "calibrated capitulation" to China.

Ramesh shared a video clip of Singh speaking in Bishkek in which he said, "We must not forget that terrorism has no nationality and no theology. No grievance, real or supposed, can



become an excuse for terrorism and humanitarian loss."

In his post on X attacking Singh, Ramesh said, "Yesterday, the Defence Minister, obviously with the approval of and at the instance of the Prime Minister, gave a shameful clean chit to Pakistan while speaking in Bishkek."

Is Pakistan not the epicentre of terrorism, Ramesh

asked. "Are there no terrorist camps in Pakistan with India as their target? Is there no ideological anti-India indoctrination in Pakistan? Were not the Mumbai and Pahalgalam terror attacks masterminded and executed by terrorists from Pakistan?" the Congress leader said.

"Clearly this new stance in relation to Pakistan is all

part of the PM's policy of appeasement of the US and calibrated capitulation to China," Ramesh said.

"The Defence Minister's shocking statements are as anti-national as the PM's bizarre clean chit to China on June 19, 2020," he alleged.

Singh, in an address at a conclave of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Bishkek, had also said Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's firm resolve that "terror epicentres" are no longer immune to "justifiable punishment".

Singh had also called on the influential grouping to not lose sight of "state-sponsored" cross-border terrorism and that there should not be any place for any "double standards" in combating the menace. (PTI)