

'Govt anti-people, only concerned with securing 2/3rd majority': Sibal urges Wangchuk to end fast

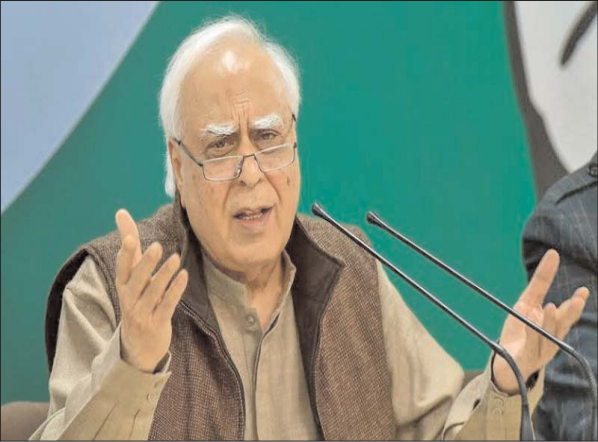
NEW DELHI, JULY 16: Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Thursday appealed to activist Sonam Wangchuk to end his indefinite hunger strike and dubbed the BJP-led Centre as "anti-people", asserting that such a government had no right to stay in power.

He urged Wangchuk to end his fast, saying the Government couldn't care less about him but the youth was with him and there were many more battles to be fought in the future.

"Why does a person go on a hunger strike? Why did Mahatma Gandhi undertake fasts? Whenever it appeared that the government was taking the path of injustice, there was bound to be protest. Protest has many forms and methods, and fasting is one such way. When someone goes on a fast, especially a fast unto death, offering even his life, the government should at least adopt a dialogue-oriented approach," Sibal said at a press conference here.

Recalling Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement, Sibal said the then government had engaged in dialogue whenever Hazare went on a hunger strike over the Jan Lokpal Bill.

"A Government exists for the people and to listen to the people. But when a stage



comes where the government states that it will not listen to anyone, that is the stage Indian politics has reached today," the former Union minister said.

Attacking the Modi Government, Sibal alleged that it is more concerned with splitting parties, increasing its strength in the Lok Sabha, securing a two-thirds majority to change the Constitution and deleting voters through the Election Commission than addressing people's concerns.

He also alleged that repeated paper leaks had failed to elicit any accountability from the Government.

"Why are the youth agitating? So many paper leaks have happened but Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has not resigned. There will be no resignation by Pradhan, because that is

their policy. They have nothing to do with the people. Such a government is anti-people, and it has no right to stay in power," Sibal said.

He claimed that fear of action by agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate, the CBI, the Income Tax Department and state police had discourage people and civil society from speaking out.

Appealing directly to Wangchuk, Sibal said, "The Government will not listen, so why would you give your life? We have to struggle for long and there are several battles ahead, such people are needed, they are loved by the people. Therefore, I urge him to end his fast."

Wangchuk's weight loss crossed nine kilograms on the 19th day of his indefinite hunger strike on Thursday, with doctors warning that he

had entered a critical stage and that the prolonged fast could begin affecting his organs.

In a video message released late Wednesday night, Wangchuk ruled out ending his fast despite appeals from political leaders and supporters, saying doing so without any response from the government would send the wrong message. Instead, he urged people to strengthen the Cockroach Janta Party's (CJP) proposed Parliament march on July 20.

Support for the agitation continued to pour in, with farmer leader Rakesh Tikait announcing that he would visit Wangchuk at Jantar Mantar on Thursday evening. Music composer Vishal Dadlani, actor Sayaji Shinde and author Shobhaa De also appealed to the government to engage in dialogue with the activist and expressed concern over his deteriorating health.

Earlier in the day, the Delhi High Court directed authorities to monitor Wangchuk's health on a daily basis and provide medical intervention whenever required, observing that "the life of any citizen is precious". The Centre and the Delhi government told the court they had no objection to regular medical monitoring. (PTI)

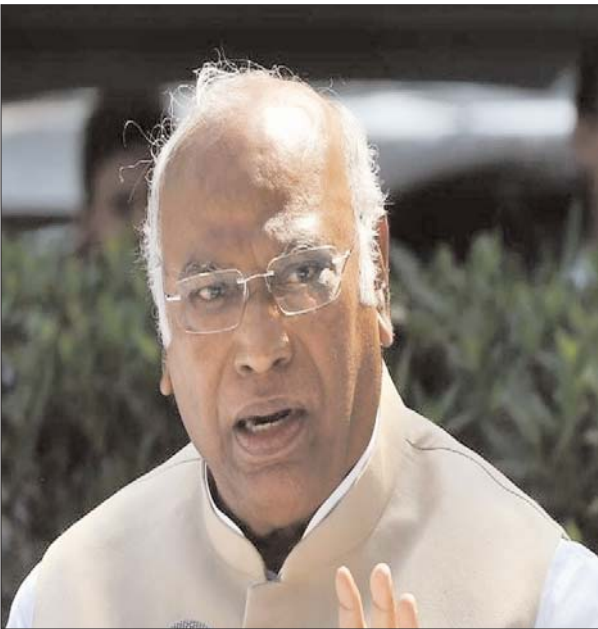
Mallikarjun Kharge urges PM Modi to call all-party meeting to discuss delimitation

NEW DELHI, JUL 16: Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to convene an All-Party Meeting to discuss the government's "revised proposals" on the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026.

The Constitution Amendment Bill, linked to 33 per cent women's reservation in legislatures and delimitation in the Lok Sabha, was defeated in the Lower House on April 17, after it received 298 votes in favour and 230 against, falling significantly short of the constitutionally required two-thirds majority of members present and voting.

Amid speculation around the Centre's bid to bring the Bill back in the Monsoon Session of Parliament, beginning on July 20, Kharge asked for "adequate time" to study the proposed legislation before its introduction in Parliament.

In a letter to PM Modi, the Congress chief wrote, "All of March and April, 2026, I had been writing to Hon'ble Minister of Parliamentary Affairs requesting that the Union Government convene an All



Party Meeting to discuss its proposals regarding Delimitation etc. Unfortunately, these requests had not been accepted. The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, then failed to secure the required 2/3rd majority in Lok Sabha on 17 April, 2026 by a clear margin."

"I have been reading in media reports that the Union Government now proposes to reintroduce a revised (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 during the forthcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament. I would, once again,

request you to convene an All-Party Meeting to discuss the Government's revised proposals on delimitation, etc., and give us adequate time to study them in detail before they are introduced in Parliament," the letter read.

Earlier today, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said the party would strongly oppose the proposed Delimitation Bill if it is reintroduced in the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament.

a press conference after a meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Strategy Group,

Ramesh said the party had held detailed discussions on the Bills that were likely to be introduced during the session.

He added the party was yet to receive the government's official legislative agenda and would get details at the all-party meeting scheduled for July 19.

Reiterating the party's stand, Ramesh said, "Congress Party's stand has always been clear: we will strongly oppose the Delimitation Bill and continue to do so. We will make every effort to maintain unity among all opposition parties."

He acknowledged that the NDA has a bigger strength now with 20 TMC MPs merging with the Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI) and six Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs joining the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

Meanwhile, NCP(SCP) MP Supriya Sule has dismissed media reports suggesting the party will support the Union government's proposed Delimitation Bill, terming the depiction of the party's stand as "inaccurate and speculative."

The Delimitation Bill aimed at increasing the number of seats in the Lok Sabha up to 850. (Agencies)

Delhi HC grants last opportunity to Kejriwal, Sisodia, Durgesh Pathak to file replies in CBI's excise policy case revision; hearing on August 17-18

NEW DELHI, JUL 16: The Delhi High Court on Thursday granted a last and final opportunity to former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and AAP leader Durgesh Pathak to file their replies in the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) revision petition challenging the trial court's order discharging all accused in the Delhi excise policy case.

Justice Manoj Jain noted that no counsel appeared on behalf of any of the respondents, including Kejriwal, Sisodia and Pathak, during the hearing.

The Court was informed that only these three respondents have not yet filed their replies, despite earlier opportunities. Taking note of the delay, the Bench granted them one last and final opportunity to place their replies on record, making it clear that no further delay in the proceedings would be accepted.

The matter has now been fixed for August 17 and August 18 for hearing.

Appearing for the CBI, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, along with Addi-



tional Solicitor General DP Singh, requested the Court to advance the hearing and list the matter in the last week of July, submitting that the case required expeditious consideration.

The Bench responded that it would examine whether the dates could be preponed but observed that doing so "appears a little difficult." The Court added that it would reassess the possibility if its board permitted.

The High Court also directed that the interim order

operating in the matter shall continue until the next date of hearing.

The CBI has challenged the February 27 trial court judgment discharging all accused, including Kejriwal, Sisodia and Durgesh Pathak, in the Delhi excise policy case.

Earlier, after the matter was transferred from Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma to Justice Manoj Jain, the High Court directed the CBI to formally inform Kejriwal, Sisodia and Pathak about the

transfer of the case.

The Court had observed that while the transfer had been widely reported in the media, formal intimation should nevertheless be given so that all parties could appear before the present Bench.

The CBI has contended that the discharge order is legally unsustainable and has sought its reversal, arguing that the case involves serious allegations and that sufficient material exists to proceed against the accused.

PURI, JULY 16: Braving relentless rainfall, lakhs of devotees on Thursday witnessed the 'Pahandi' ritual, in which idols of Lord Jagannath and his two siblings are taken to chariots from the 12th-century Puri temple, marking the beginning of the nine-day annual Rath Yatra in Odisha.

Amid the beating of gongs and the blowing of conches and cymbals, Chakraraj Sudarshan was first taken out from the main temple and seated at the 'Darpadalan' chariot of Devi Subhadra.

Shree Sudarshan is the wheel weapon of Lord Vishnu, who is worshipped in the form of Lord Jagannath in Puri, said Pandit Suryanaray Rathsharma.

The idol of Lord Balabhadra, the elder brother of Lord Jagannath, was also in the ceremonial procession to his "Talapadma" chariot.

In a special procession called 'Sunya Pahandi' (the Goddess looking at the sky while being carried to the chariot) by servitors, the idol of Goddess Subhadra, the sister of Lord Jagannath and Lord Balabhadra, was brought to her chariot.

When finally the idol of Lord Jagannath was taken out of the temple, emotions spilt over the Grand Road as devotees raised their hands and started chanting the 'Jai Jagannath' slogan.

dancers, folk artistes and cultural troupes performed before the 'Kalia Thakura'.

In the 'Pahandi' ritual, the idols of the sibling deities are brought in ceremonial processions to their respective chariots, parked in front of the Lion's Gate of the temple, for a journey to Shree Gundicha Temple, consid-



ered the birthplace of the deities, about 2.6 kilometres from the 12th-century shrine here.

According to the temple administration, the processions of the deities started at 9 am.

Special arrangements have been made to drain out rainwater from the Grand Road and facilitate a smooth procession, as devotees will pull the chariots of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra along the thoroughfare from the shrine to the Shree Gundicha Temple.

Devotees will begin pulling the chariots at 4 pm after the traditional chariot sweeping by Puri's titular king Gajapati Maharaja Dibyasingha Deb and Puri Shankaracharya Swami Nischalananda Saraswati's visit, a temple official said.

Rath Yatra, held on the second day of the Odia month of 'Ashadha Shukla Tithi' (bright fortnight) every year, is the only occasion

when the sibling deities are taken out from the 'Ratna Sinhasana', the bejewelled throne, of the temple.

Heavy rain failed to dampen the spirits of devotees, who were seen dancing on the Grand Road and celebrating the chariot festival.

According to an India Meteorological Department official, Puri received 233 mm rainfall in the past 48 hours, and the seaside pilgrim town is likely to receive light to moderate rainfall during the day.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Mahi reviewed preparedness and emphasised the safety and convenience of devotees.

As water-logging emerged as a major challenge, he directed the Puri district administration, the municipal authorities, and relevant departments to remain on high alert and ensure swift action to remove water.

Odisha DGP Y B Khurania said that a multi-layer security arrangement was made

in Puri, with 19 IPS officers and nearly 13,000 police personnel deployed for the festival.

Additionally, 15 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces - including the CRPF, BSF, RAF, and National Security Force - have been stationed at strategic points to fortify security.

A total of 473 AI-powered CCTV cameras, integrated with drone-jamming systems, are monitoring the Grand Road and adjoining areas through two command-and-control centres, officials said.

A joint patrolling system involving the Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard and Odisha Police Maritime Station has also been set up, and quick response teams are deployed.

Over 500 lifeguards and fire service personnel have been stationed along the beachfront to ensure visitor safety and prevent any possible incidents of drowning, the officials added. (PTI)

Drone-Based Transport Of TB Samples Can Sharply Reduce Diagnosis Time, Patients' Expenses: ICMR Study

New Delhi, Jul 16: The use of drones to transport sputum samples from remote health centres to diagnostic laboratories can reduce tuberculosis diagnosis time from 15 days to just five, while significantly lowering patients' expenses, according to a recent study conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The programme-based study under the ICMR's flagship i-DRONE initiative, conducted in Telangana's Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri district, enrolled 840 participants to evaluate a drone-enabled system for transporting sputum sam-

ples from primary health centres (PHCs) and sub-centres to designated tuberculosis (TB) diagnostic laboratories. Researchers found that the median turnaround time for TB diagnosis dropped from 15 days under the conventional system to just five days after the introduction of drone-assisted transport, enabling earlier diagnosis of the disease and quicker clinical response, the Union health ministry said in a statement.

The study also reported a sharp decline in the financial burden on patients. The mean out-of-pocket expenditure for obtaining a TB diagnosis fell from about Rs

9,451 under the conventional system, to around Rs 91 during the drone-enabled phase.

The reduction was mainly due to lower travel costs, reduced wage loss and access to sputum collection closer to patients' homes.

The median out-of-pocket expenditure during the drone phase was zero, indicating that many participants incurred no travel-related expenses for diagnosis.

The intervention operated through a hub-and-spoke network linking 11 PHCs, 60 sub-centres and four TB units, allowing patients to submit sputum samples at nearby health facilities in-

stead of travelling long distances to diagnostic centres.

ICMR Director General and Secretary, Department of Health Research Dr Rajiv Bahl said affordable and timely diagnosis remains central to India's TB elimination efforts and the findings show how technology can help overcome geographical barriers while reducing the burden on patients in remote areas. Healthcare workers involved in the study reported that drone-enabled transport reduced delays, improved operational efficiency and gained community acceptance after initial familiarisation.

Gang supplying mule accounts busted in Delhi; bank employee among 3 held

NEW DELHI, July 16: A bank officer and two more persons were arrested for allegedly running a mule account racket to route money siphoned off in cyber frauds, police said on Thursday.

The gang allegedly opened around 22 bank accounts in the names of fake firms and individuals and sold them to cyber fraudsters, they said.

The racket was unravelled when a PhD scholar from Delhi University reported to the police that he was allegedly cheated of Rs 1.66 lakh after a promise of

high returns through stock market trading. "The complainant had joined a social media group that shared stock market tips and was lured with the promise of earning Rs 20,000 on an investment of Rs 5,000. After clicking a link shared in the group, he was redirected and was persuaded to transfer money in multiple transactions on the pretext of profit-sharing, verification and processing charges," Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Raja Banthia in a statement said.

During their probe, teams tracked a portion of the cheated money to a bank account opened in the name of a garment trading firm. Analysis of around 100 mobile numbers, IMEIs and the money trail across multiple bank accounts eventually led police to three premises in Budh Vihar and Rohini.

On June 2, police arrested Chirag and Amar Yadav, aged 22 and 48, while the alleged kingpin, 28-year-old Nitesh Kumar, was arrested from Moti Nagar on July 8, the officer said.