

'Height of cowardice, insensitivity': Cong slams detention of Ankita Bhandari's parents

NEW DELHI, OCT 15: The Congress on Thursday lashed out at the Modi government over the detention of the parents of Ankita Bhandari, who was murdered in Uttarakhand in 2022, saying this is the "height of cowardice and insensitivity".

Parents of the 19-year-old Ankita Bhandari were released early Thursday, hours after being detained while protesting near India Gate against Dushyant Kumar Gautam's appointment as Sikkim governor.

While being detained, her father issued a 24-hour ultimatum to the Centre to cancel Gautam's appointment.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge accused the government of carrying out "state-sponsored oppression", saying it is not a sign of its strength, but rather proof of its attempt to evade difficult questions.

"The height of cowardice and insensitivity from the Modi government! Ankita Bhandari's parents, who were seeking justice, have been taken into custody, while a BJP-linked 'VIP' is rewarded with a governorship!" Kharge said in his post in Hindi on X.

"This act of state-sponsored oppression is not a sign of the government's strength, but rather proof of its attempt to evade difficult questions. Treating parents who have lost their daughter in such a manner is utterly



shameful and condemnable," he said.

The Congress party will continue to fight to ensure justice for Ankita, Kharge asserted.

According to sources, her parents were released around 5 am.

Ankita's father threatened to launch a nationwide agitation if the government did not accept their demand. Her family has been alleging that Gautam played a key role in Ankita's death.

"We give a 24-hour ultimatum to the government for the cancellation of Dushyant's appointment. Nationwide protests will be launched if the government does not accept our demand," Ankita's father told PTI Videos.

Apart from the parents,

several Congress leaders, including the party's media and publicity department head Pawan Khara, party MP Imran Pratapgarhi, social media department head Supriya Shrinat and Indian Youth Congress chief Uday Bhanu Chib, were also detained and later released.

The parents have been demanding that Gautam's appointment as Sikkim governor be put on hold until the ongoing CBI investigation into the case is complete.

Ankita, who worked as a receptionist at the Vanantra Resort in Rishikesh, was killed on September 18, 2022.

Her body was recovered from the Chilla canal four days later. Resort owner Pulkit Arya, son of former BJP leader Vinod Arya, and

two accomplices have been convicted in the case and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The case hogged the political spotlight over allegations that an unidentified VIP was linked to the crime. Ankita's family and activists have demanded an investigation into the alleged VIP angle, with Gautam's name being raised in connection with the allegations. Follow Politics

Gautam has denied the accusations and initiated defamation proceedings against them.

The Congress has claimed that the appointment was aimed at shielding Gautam, arguing that a governor cannot be subjected to criminal proceedings while holding office. (PTI)

Ex-Venezuelan president Maduro returning to federal court to face torture allegations

NEW YORK, OCT 15: Former Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife return Thursday to a New York courtroom to face a rewritten indictment accusing them of leading a state-sponsored campaign of repression that tortured scores of victims, including three Americans.

Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were expected to plead not guilty in Manhattan federal court to charges added to a drug trafficking indictment brought months earlier against the two. They were seized from their Caracas home by the US military in a nighttime raid in January.

Attorney Barry Pollack said when the charges were announced last week that Maduro, 63, denies them and



"looks forward to his day in court".

According to the rewritten indictment, Maduro oversaw a violent torture system that beat, asphyxiated, and delivered electric shocks to its victims. He is accused of personally recommending torture methods, receiving updates on specific victims' treatment, and threatening to kill one prisoner's child as a form of psychological torture.

Flores, 69, a former attorney general, helped develop the repressive system and ordered the torture of some specific people, the indictment alleges.

Maduro, who served as Venezuela's president from

2013 until his capture in January, has been under investigation for years by the International Criminal Court over allegations of crimes against humanity, tied to his crackdown on opponents. He has always denied wrongdoing.

Earlier this year, Maduro and his wife pleaded not guilty in the US drug case, which said they conspired to flood the US with cocaine. Their attorneys say the case should be dismissed immunity grounds because they were the leader and first lady of a foreign country.

The revised indictment covers allegations of torture stretching back to Maduro's ascent to power in 2013, when he took over as president from his mentor Hugo Chavez, who died of cancer that year. (AP)

SC Issues Notice To EC On Rahul Gandhi's Plea On SIR 'Irregularities'

NEW DELHI, OCT 15: The Supreme Court on Thursday sought response from the Election Commission and others on a plea filed by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and several other opposition leaders over alleged large-scale voter deletions and SIR irregularities.

The court also issued notice to Gandhi, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and others on a plea against their march to the apex court over alleged SIR irregularities, while observing that nobody can browbeat the judiciary.

Taking up the plea filed by the opposition leaders, a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi issued notice to the poll panel, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek



Joshi.

"We are issuing notice ...Tagging with pending cases. But we would like to ask one of the petitioners about his conduct," the bench said.

During the hearing, some lawyers referred to the Congress leader's march to the apex court over the alleged irregularities in SIR.

"Nobody can browbeat judiciary. We are not sitting in ivory towers," the bench observed.

Referring to the unconditional apology tendered by Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan in a contempt matter, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta submitted that tendering unconditional apology does not mean that actions cannot be defended and said it is a part of procedure.

The bench told Mehta that it is not taking cognisance of media reports that authorities tendered unconditional apologies before the court.

The contempt case pertained to alleged violation of the apex court's direction to ensure no "complete prohibition" on Metro and train services in Delhi in the wake of the October 10 protest called by the Cockroach Janta Party.

The top court also issued notices to the Centre, others on various pleas related to the Election Commission filed by leaders like Asaduddin Owaisi.

The apex court also agreed to examine a plea challenging de-notification of Jantar Mantar as designated protest site. Gandhi and several other opposition leaders had marched to the apex court to file the petition related to SIR on Monday.

The city has witnessed several protests demanding the resignation of the CEC over alleged irregularities in the SIR. (Agencies)

Over 13 Crore Voters Deleted, What Is This If Not A Setting: Dipke

NEW DELHI, OCT 15: Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke on Thursday accused the government of attempting to influence electoral outcomes through alleged voter deletions and asked whether the names of over 13 crore voters being struck off was a "setting".

Addressing a press conference along with All India Students' Association national president Neha Bora, Students' Federation of India leader Aishe Ghosh, All India Students' Federation national president Viraj Devang and actor Prakash Raj among others, Dipke also alleged that extraordinary restrictions have been imposed in the capital to prevent people from joining protests demanding Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar's resignation.

He added that authorities were suppressing dissent over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

Questioning the deletions against the backdrop of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, he said, "The margin of victory in 2024 was just 2 per cent. Over 13 crore voters deleted."

"Where 2 per cent is deciding the election, you are deleting 13 crore votes. What is this if not a setting," he



asked.

The BJP won 240 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats in 2024 with 36.56 per cent of the votes polled, while the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secured 293 seats to form the government.

On the crackdown on protesters, Dipke said, "Former chief ministers, MPs, leaders of opposition, all were detained. For the first time in the history of India, the Railways was shut and metros were shut for Gyanesh," he said, questioning why the government was protecting the chief election commissioner. Describing the slogan of 'One Nation, One Election' as a cover for a different political objective, he said, "One Nation, One Election" was a slogan. The real intention is 'One Nation, One Party, One Leader'." Follow Politics

Dipke also accused the

government of targeting protesters carrying the national flag.

"Those who never embraced the tricolour are attacking it. Our comrades were walking in Connaught Place with the tricolour and have all been detained. When did holding the tiranga become a crime," he asked.

The CJP has announced a "Lehra do Tiranga" march at Central Park in Connaught Place here on Friday.

Dipke urged citizens to join the demonstration, asserting that waving the national flag was a democratic right. He also appealed to political parties to join.

"(Narendra) Modi cannot be bigger than (Mahatma) Gandhi and (Jawaharlal) Nehru," he added.

Bora alleged that the police had targeted journalists covering the protests, detaining them despite their

press credentials and snatching their cameras.

She also referred to an alleged sexual harassment incident involving a journalist, in which an FIR was registered, and accused the police of using force against people raising concerns over electoral rights.

"Police, instead of maintaining law and order, crack down on the public. This is a classic example of what we have seen," she said.

"You send the voice supporting the right to vote to jail. When you drag common people, you are dragging those 13 crore people," she said.

Ghosh urged citizens to unite to defend democracy, saying she placed her faith in the people rather than the ruling BJP.

"Gyanesh has helped them win the whole country," she alleged.

"We don't have hopes with the BJP, we have hopes with our citizens. It is time for all of us to unite. The country for which Bhagat Singh fought and Gandhi sacrificed, we have to save this country," she said.

Ghosh also referred to the treatment of the parents of Ankita Bhandari, a resort receptionist who was murdered in Uttarakhand in 2022, alleging that they had been dragged and treated brutally.

End Of Naxalism Doesn't Erase Five Decades Of Suffering It Caused: Shah

NEW DELHI, OCT 15: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said efforts were being made to improve primary infrastructure and facilities in Chhattisgarh, where the Congress rule had failed to provide even basic amenities for decades.

Outlining the BJP Government's efforts to rebuild Bastar and rehabilitate victims of Left-Wing Extremism, Shah said eliminating Naxalism was not enough; the government must also address the suffering it had caused over five decades, particularly among the region's poor tribal communities.

Addressing virtually a ceremony to provide assistance to Chhattisgarh's Naxal-affected, Shah said a disability assistance programme held in Jagdalpur from October 5-7 had benefitted more than 3,600 people with disabilities, including around

1,570 in Bastar alone.

The current initiative provides assistive devices, including artificial limbs, wheelchairs, tricycles, hearing aids and walking sticks, to people affected by Naxalism.

"The end of Naxalism does not mean that we can erase the suffering of these five decades," Shah said, adding that the government must help victims rebuild their lives and dignity.

He assured the State Government of Central support in such efforts.

Citing the measures taken to rehabilitate former extremists and to extend basic services in affected areas, the Home Minister said approximately 8,526 Naxalites had surrendered. Around 7,500 people without bank accounts were provided with them, and 1,625 people received reward money.

Incentive payments were provided to 7,882 people;

455 received jobs, and 129 were allotted land, he said.

He said security camps will be converted into service centres and community facilities, allowing government officials to focus on health, education, employment and other development needs.

"The very places where our security personnel once sat to protect you will now become the places where officials from the Government of India and the Chhattisgarh government will lay the foundation for a developed Bastar," The Union minister said.

The centres would help address children's health and education needs, employment concerns among young people and the economic needs of tribal communities, he said.

Shah also highlighted the State Government's initiatives such as the Bastar Olympics, Bastar Pandum

and the Niyad Nellanar scheme, saying they were intended to revive tribal culture, improve infrastructure and restore normal life in areas affected by violence.

He said the Bastar Olympics has brought people together for sports in places where gunfire and bomb blasts once created an atmosphere of fear.

Through Bastar Pandum, the Government seeks to revive tribal art and culture, while the Niyad Nellanar scheme will improve basic facilities in remote areas, he said.

Shah said the Government was determined to eliminate the remaining traces of Naxalism and restore Bastar as a peaceful and prosperous region.

"Simply eliminating Naxalism will not be enough. We must eliminate every trace of it and rebuild Bastar as a happy and vibrant place," he said. (PTI)

Not Taking Cognisance Of Media Reports On Apologies In Contempt Case, SC To Centre

NEW DELHI, OCT 15: The Supreme Court on Thursday told the Centre that it was not taking cognisance of media reports suggesting that government authorities tendered unconditional apologies in contempt proceedings over alleged violations of its directions concerning Metro and train services in Delhi during a protest against SIR on October 10.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi made the observation after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta sought to clarify that the Centre and its instrumentalities like Delhi Police and DMRC defended its actions in affidavits filed in response to the contempt notices.

According to drafting norms, the af-

fidavits filed by the Union home secretary, DMRC and Delhi Police start with the averments that unconditional apologies are tendered, the top law officer said.

Mehta told the bench that media headlines and social media posts were portraying the affidavits as admissions of wrongdoing, without taking into account the explanations and justifications provided by the authorities.

"I am not on the merits of the matter. I want to say something other than that, if the other side permits. The court has issued notice in contempt. We have filed responses in the contempt matters. The law is well settled that whenever we file a response to a contempt notice, the first sentence we write is that we hereby ten-

der an unconditional apology, and thereafter we explain how contempt has not been committed," the solicitor general said at the outset.

"It is in compliance with that law that this is the first paragraph in every affidavit. But now, in the media and on social media, it is being said that the government has apologised, that they have nothing to say. I want to clarify that the government has defended its actions, and the first paragraph is in compliance with the law laid down by this court," the law officer said.

The CJI responded that media coverage was not relevant to the court's proceedings.

"What the media does is not relevant. We are not holding proceedings for the

media," the CJI said.

Justice Bagchi then said the court was not taking cognisance of the unqualified apology referred to by the solicitor general, adding that, in view of Mehta's submissions, the apology appeared to be qualified.

Mehta, however, said that the apology was unconditional and that the affidavits subsequently set out the relevant facts and reasons for the authorities' actions.

"It is an unconditional apology. Thereafter, I have given the reasons. Thereafter, I have given the facts. That's all," he said.

The contempt proceedings relate to allegations that authorities violated the Supreme Court's October 9 directions

to ensure there was no "complete prohibition" on Metro and train services in Delhi in view of the October 10 protest called by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP).

Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan and Delhi Police Commissioner Anurag Kumar have filed affidavits tendering unconditional and unqualified apologies while also explaining and defending the measures taken by the administration.

In his affidavit, Mohan said a request was received from Delhi Police to suspend cellular internet services for a day, until 10 pm on October 10.

The request was processed and considered in accordance with law and found to be proportionate, given the

prevailing circumstances and the need to maintain public order, he said.

According to the home secretary, cellular internet services were suspended from 10 pm on October 9 until 10 pm on October 10 within a four-km radius of Raisina Hill.

He clarified that the suspension was limited to cellular internet and did not extend to Wi-Fi, broadband or other non-cellular internet services.

Kumar, in his affidavit, said preventive measures taken on October 10 were based on intelligence inputs and assessments of the evolving ground situation.

He said the measures, including regulation of Metro services, were aimed at maintaining peace and preventing a disturbance of public order.