

## News

## Brief

### Punjab CM blessed with baby girl

Chandigarh, March 28 (IANS) Amid poll heat, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and his wife Gurpreet Kaur were blessed with a baby girl on Thursday.

Bhagwant Mann shared the news on X with a post in Punjabi.

"God has given the gift of a daughter... Both the mother and the child are healthy," he said in the post.

He had married Gurpreet Kaur two years ago after separating from his wife with whom he has two children.

### Former Haryana minister resigns from Congress

Chandigarh, March 28 (IANS) Days after her industrialist son Naveen Jindal joined the BJP, former Haryana minister Savitri Jindal, 84, quit the Congress. Chairperson emeritus of the OP Jindal Group, Savitri Jindal, a billionaire with a net worth of \$29.1 billion is likely to join the Bharatiya Janata Party.

She announced her decision to quit the Congress on a social media post. "I represented the people of Hissar for 10 years as an MLA and have served Haryana state selflessly as a minister. The people of Hissar are my family and on the advice of my family, I am resigning from the primary membership of the Congress today," she wrote in a post in Hindi.

Her son Naveen Jindal, who represented the Kurukshetra constituency in Lok Sabha from 2004-14 as a Congress MP, will contest Lok Sabha elections 2024 from the same seat on the BJP ticket.

### Not going to ED's Delhi office : Mahua Moitra

Kolkata, March 28 (IANS) Trinamool Congress candidate from Krishnanagar Lok Sabha constituency in West Bengal, Mahua Moitra has said that she will not be going to Delhi to appear before the Enforcement Directorate on Thursday in connection with a Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) violation case.

She told mediapersons in Krishnanagar on Thursday that as a part of her campaign schedule she will be going to Kaliganj, one of the seven Assembly constituencies in the Lok Sabha seat. Moitra, who was expelled from Lok Sabha last year in December, was asked to appear at ED's New Delhi office on Thursday.

### TN MP dies at hospital after 4 days

Chennai, March 28 (IANS) MDMK MP from Tamil Nadu's Erode constituency, A. Ganeshamurthi died in a private hospital in Coimbatore early Thursday morning.

Ganeshamurthi (76) was upset over being denied a ticket to contest in the Lok Sabha polls. He reportedly attempted suicide by consuming poison on Sunday. Initially, he was rushed to a local hospital in Erode but as his condition deteriorated, he shifted to a private hospital in Coimbatore. According to his relatives, Ganeshamurthi had consumed insecticide on Sunday, which led to his hospitalisation and subsequent death.

## Lawyers write to CJI over group trying to 'pressurise judiciary'

New Delhi, March 28 (IANS) A group of senior lawyers, including Senior Advocate Harish Salve, Bar Council of India Chairperson, Manan Kumar Mishra, in a letter addressed to the Chief Justice of India (CJI), expressed concerns against mounting political and professional pressure through the actions of an interest group, which they alleged was aimed at undermining the judiciary's integrity.

Without naming anyone in the letter dated March 26 to CJI, DY Chandrachud, the lawyers have accused the group of employing pressure tactics to influence judicial outcomes, particularly in cases involving political figures, which pose a significant threat to the democratic fabric and the trust placed in judicial processes.

"This heated interest group operates in various ways. They create false

narratives of a supposed 'better past' and 'golden period' of the courts, contrasting it with the happenings in the present. These are nothing but intentional statements, made to sway court decisions and to embarrass the courts for certain political gains. It's troubling to see some lawyers defend politicians by the day, and then try to influence judges through the media at night," the letter stated. "They have also concocted an entire theory of 'bench fixing' - which is not just disrespectful and contemptuous - it's an attack on the honour and dignity of our courts. At times, it also leads to slanderous attacks and insinuations on respected judges.

"They have also stooped to the level of comparing our courts to those countries where there is no rule of law and accusing our judicial institutions of unfair practices.

These aren't just criticisms, they are direct attacks meant to damage the public's trust in our judiciary and threaten the fair application of our laws," the letter added.

The lawyers have also accused some vested interests of trying to influence who the judges are in their cases and spread lies on social media to put pressure on the judges to decide in a particular way, threatening the fairness of Indian courts and striking at the heart of legal principles.

The group of lawyers, who are behind the letter titled 'Judiciary Under Threat-Safeguarding Judiciary from Political and Professional Pressure', number around 600 and also include Adish Aggarwala, Chetan Mittal, Pinky Anand, Hitesh Jain, Ujjwala Pawar, Uday Holla and Swarupama Chaturvedi, sources said.

-IANS



BJP Workers display election material ahead of Lok Sabha Elections, in Ranchi, Jharkhand on Thursday.UNI

## India again slams US' remarks on Kejriwal

New Delhi, March 28 (IANS) Calling the US State Department's remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal "unwarranted", India on Thursday said that any such external imputation on the electoral and legal process is completely unacceptable.

US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller reiterated on Wednesday its call for "fair, transparent, timely legal processes" as India summoned an American diplomat and lodged a strong protest over the remarks.

Addressing a weekly media briefing, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, said that "yesterday, India had lodged its strong objection and protest with a senior official from the US embassy with regard to the comments made by

the State Department".

"The recent remarks by the State Department are unwarranted. Any such external imputation on the electoral and legal process is completely unacceptable," Jaiswal said in response to a question. Asserting that in India, legal processes are driven only by the rule of law, Jaiswal said that anyone who has a similar ethos, especially fellow democracies, should have no difficulty in appreciating this fact.

He further said that India is proud of its independent and robust democratic institutions and is committed to protecting them from any form of "undue external influences".

"Mutual respect and understanding form the foundation of international relations and states are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty and in-

ternal affairs of others," Jaiswal said.

The meeting at the foreign ministry's South Block office with Gloria Berben, the US Acting Deputy Chief of Mission in Delhi, lasted 45 minutes with India objecting strongly to the US stance on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convenor.

After Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh, Kejriwal was the third AAP leader who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with the alleged liquor policy scam.

Earlier, India summoned a senior diplomat from the German Embassy and lodged a strong protest over comments on Kejriwal, saying that the Chief Minister is entitled to a fair and impartial trial.

India called it a "blatant interference" in the country's internal matters.

-IANS

### Man stabbed to death during fight over drinking water in K'taka

Bengaluru, March 28 (IANS) A youth was stabbed to death during a brawl over drinking water in Karnataka's Yadgir district, said officials on Thursday.

The deceased was identified as 21-year-old Nandakumara Katimani. The accused, Hanumantha and Hanumavva, have been arrested. According to police, the incident was reported in Hunsagi town of the district on Wednesday night. The accused had quarrelled with the grandmother of the deceased over drinking water. Victim Nandakumara had intervened and objected to the accused's behaviour.

## CM not above law, says ED as Kejriwal questions rationale behind his arrest

New Delhi, March 28 (IANS) The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday said a chief minister was not above law even as Arvind Kejriwal questioned the rationale behind his arrest in the liquor policy case.

Delhi CM, on being allowed to put forth his assertions in the Rouse Avenue court, questioned the ED's action and also the reason behind his arrest.

Kejriwal said that the CBI filed 31,000 pages while ED filed 25,000 pages in the case but no court has proved him guilty.

"The case has been going on for two years. The case was filed on August 17. No court has found me guilty. There are no charges against me nor has any case been filed against me. But I have been arrested," he said.

The investigative agency, on the other



hand, sought seven more days of his custody while claiming that the AAP convenor was being evasive and not co-operating in the investigations.

Kejriwal also said that he was not opposed to ED's custody and said that they can keep him in custody as long as they want.

"My name was taken by four witnesses, people come and talk at my residence, is that enough to arrest a sitting CM," he asked the court.

Calling his arrest a political conspiracy, Kejriwal alleged that people are

"being turned approver" in the case and they are being "forced" to change their statements.

He also raised the issue of electoral bonds and claimed that BJP was "getting money", a charge the ED strongly opposed.

The Additional Solicitor General, replying to Kejriwal's charge of Sarath Reddy donating Rs 55 crore to the BJP, said it has nothing to do with the liquor scam.

"We are not concerned with anyone paying any money to any person. That has nothing to do with the liquor scam," he said.

The ASG submitted that the ED has evidence to show that Delhi CM demanded Rs 100 crore in kickbacks. "We have not arrested him because he is the Chief Minister, we have arrested him on the basis of material in our possession," the ED told the court.

## Congress veteran Pratap Bhanu Sharma will take on BJP stalwart Shivraj Singh Chouhan from Vidisha

Bhopal, March 28 (IANS) With the Congress on Wednesday fielding veteran Pratap Bhanu Sharma against BJP stalwart and former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the electoral contest in the high-profile Vidisha Lok Sabha constituency will be watched closely.

Pratap Bhanu Sharma (77), an old-time mechanical engineer and a seasoned Congress politician, has won two Lok Sabha elections from his home district Vidisha, in 1980 and 1984.

Political pundits claimed Pratap Bhanu Sharma was close to former Prime Minister, late Rajiv Gandhi.

Pratap Bhanu Sharma has not contested any election for the last few years, however, he has been discharging duties for the party in various roles, including as in-charge of Rewa District during the last Assembly election held in November last year.

Interestingly, Pratap Bhanu Sharma, who is contesting Lok Sabha elections after a gap of almost 40 years, will take on the BJP's most popular leader Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who is also fighting the general elections after a gap of nearly two decades.

Before becoming the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh in 2005, Shivraj Singh Chouhan had won

the Vidisha constituency five times in a row from 1991 till 2004.

More importantly, the BJP has retained the Vidisha Lok Sabha seat since 1989.

Former Prime Minister, late Atal Bihari Vajpayee represented Vidisha Lok Sabha constituency in 1991, while another prominent leader of the BJP, Sushma Swaraj won two elections - in 2009 and 2014. The Vidisha seat comprises eight Assembly segments including Bhojpur, Sanchi, Silwani, Vidisha, Basoda, Budhni, Ichhawar and Khategaon.

Ramakant Bhargava is the current MP of Vidisha.

## AAP Delhi office took care of expenditure during Goa election 2022, says ED plea seeking further custody of Kejriwal

New Delhi, March 28 (IANS) The Enforcement Directorate (ED), in its application for further custody of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy case, said that a statement from an AAP candidate in the 2022 Goa Assembly elections was obtained, revealing that his election expenditure was taken care of by the AAP office in Delhi. "He (the candidate) has revealed that he was not having any money and his election expenditure (all expenses for rallies/events/public hoardings) was taken care of by the AAP Office Delhi only, through their associates," read the remand application submitted in the Rouse Avenue Court. The ED said that during the CM's custody, summons was also issued to senior Excise Department officials in Punjab

who were allegedly "involved in arm-twisting of certain wholesalers of Delhi when they refused to pay the demanded bribes in Delhi". "The factories of these wholesalers were either shut down or (they) not allowed to dispatch their goods in Punjab by these Punjab Excise Officials when the demands of bribes were not fulfilled in Delhi. However, they could not appear on these summons due to the Hooch tragedy in Sangrur, Punjab and sought some time," it said.

The ED argued that Kejriwal needs to be interrogated further in the wake of several findings. The remand application submitted by the ED stated that during his custodial interrogation, his statements were recorded on five consecutive days - March 23, 24, 25,

26, and 27 - and that his responses were "evasive". The ED said that in addition, statements of three other persons were also recorded during this period. "During the ED custody period, C. Arvind, PS to then DyCM Manish Sisodia who was handed over the draft GoM report 2021-22 at the residence of Arvind Kejriwal and in his presence, was confronted with him," the remand application read. "Further, during the ED custody, data in one mobile phone (belonging to the arrestee's wife) has been extracted and is being analysed. However, data from the other 4 digital devices seized during the search at Arvind Kejriwal's premises on March 21, 2024 (belonging to the arrestee himself) are yet to be extracted as the arrestee has sought time in providing password/

login credentials after consulting with his lawyers," it said. The ED also said that some of the documents/details such as movable/immovable property details, ITR, other financial details etc. were sought and Kejriwal said that he would tell his counsel/family members and the information would be shared by them. "However, no details were furnished by him and his counsel/family members," it said. It said that during the custody period, the ED has called for the visitor register from the CM's office/camp office. However, it is informed that there no registers are maintained there and the appointments with the CM are made on the online system/portal in the CM's office. The information has been sought again from the CM's office and its delivery is awaited.

## Actor Mukesh, BJP candidate Ashwini file nominations in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram, March 28 (IANS) With the filing of nominations beginning on Thursday for seats going to Lok Sabha polls in Kerala, actor-turned-politician, Mukesh of the CPI(M) and ML Ashwini of the BJP filed their papers at their respective constituencies.

Kerala goes to the polls on April 26 to elect all its 20 Lok Sabha members.

Actor Mukesh a sitting legislator from Kollam Assembly constituency has been fielded on the Kollam Lok Sabha seat and he is pitted against four-time sit-

ting MP, NK Premachandran of the RSP and TV actor Krishnakumar of the BJP. Premachandran won the 2019 polls trouncing the present state Finance Minister, KN Balagopal by a margin of over 1.48 lakh votes. Mukesh on Thursday morning, accompanied by the top brass of the CPI(M) and other Left leaders arrived before the district Returning Officer and filed his nomination.

At Kasargod, the BJP's representative at the Manjeshwar block panchayat, Ashwini, who is a popular woman leader, filed her nomination.

## A year after Yadvendra Yadav leaves BJP blaming Scindia, Congress fields him from Guna

Bhopal, March 28 (IANS) One year after Yadvendra Singh Yadav left the BJP, accusing Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia of discriminating against the old party workers in Gwalior-Chambal region, the Congress has made him a candidate against the latter from Guna Lok Sabha constituency.

Yadvendra Yadav had joined the Congress in March last year, ahead of the November Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh.

At that time, his show of power via a convoy of more than 500 vehicles and 5,000 local supporters from Ashok Nagar to Bhopal was discussed more than his move to Congress.

Yadvendra Yadav, an Ashok Nagar panchayat member of the Congress, is the son of late Jan Sangh leader and three-time former BJP MLA, Deshraj Singh Yadav. Notably, Scindia, who had contested the last Lok Sabha election on a Congress symbol in 2019, had lost to the BJP's KP Yadav.

Political observers believe that over three lakh voters of the Yadav community in Guna constituency could be the major factor behind the Congress picking him to take on Scindia.



President Droupadi Murmu at the Assistant Executive Engineers of CPWD (2022 and 2023 batches), at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Thursday. UNI

  
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