

Supreme Court seeks Election Commission's reply on plea over voter turnout data

The Supreme Court on Friday sought the response of the Election Commission of India (ECI) on the disclosure of the authentic voting percentage of the first two phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections after a plea filed by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) pointed out that the final voting figures showed an increase of 6% from the tentative voting percentage released soon after the conclusion of polling. A bench headed by chief justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud gave a week's time for the poll panel to file its response and posted the matter for hearing on May 24, the eve of the sixth phase of polling. The plea, argued by advocate Prashant Bhushan, said that soon after voting for the two phases on April 19 and 26 ended, ECI issued a press release giving tentative voter turnout across 21 states and Union territories to be 60% in first phase and 60.96% for second phase as of 7pm. The revised data published on April 30 recorded an increase of nearly 6% with the total voting figures for the two phases being 66.14% and 66.71%. To be sure voting percentages usually rise in the days after provisional turnout is released as it takes time for polling team to return from far-flung polling booths situated in geographically challenging terrains, depending on weather conditions among other things. The delay in updating data can also occur due to re-polling in any constituency. However, the lag this time has been longer, and that was fixed in

the third phase. Being the last working day before the court closes for vacation, the bench took up the matter on an urgent mentioning by advocate Prashant Bhushan appearing for ADR and told EC counsel Amit Sharma to take instructions. Taking up the matter after 4pm, the court asked EC why there was delay in uploading the voting percentage. In the hearing, which resumed at 6pm (after judges returned from a farewell function of retiring judge justice AS Bopanna), the court asked EC, "On what basis do you disclose the tentative voting percentage. Is it based on Form 17C? What is the difficulty of putting this on website?" Bhushan said that every polling officer in the election booth is required to fill up Form 17C and submit to the returning officer. This form contains the actual figures of voting which needs to be uploaded by EC, he added. The EC counsel explained that after polling is completed, the returning officer collects data from the entire constituency, which takes time. While some constituencies are at far flung places, there are other constituencies where repolling is ordered. "This application is filed on May 9 and there is a set pattern. It started with questioning of electoral roll, EVMs and now voting percentage. This issue is only to create doubt in the minds of new voters. Such impression creates an impact on voter turnout," Sharma said. Senior advocate Maninder Singh, who later joined the



hearing on behalf of EC said that the Supreme Court had on April 26 given an authoritative pronouncement on all aspects including EVMs where the issue of Form 17C was also discussed. Bhushan denied this but Singh said that the issue should not detain the court any further noting that the matter was being taken up after hours at the behest of some vested interest. The bench, also comprising justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, objected to this comment. "That is a very wrong charge against the court. If need arises, we will sit through the night," it said. Realising that the issue cannot be decided in a hurry, the bench allowed EC's request to respond to the application. "It is submitted that four phases of elections have been completed and since the application have been filed in a petition filed by ADR (pending since 2019) after four years, we find the request of EC to be fair. We grant EC a week's time to file response and direct that the application be listed before the assigned bench on May 24," the order said. EC told the court that the Form 17C data is shared with every poll

candidate and in case of any objection, the candidate is free to raise it. "There is no ground taken to demonstrate that there is any aggrieved person. The preliminary figures of voting are provided in the app which is not accurate and gets updated later. "The application by ADR took exception to the "unreasonable delay" shown by ECI in disclosing data on votes polled as the data for first phase voting was disclosed 11 days after voting ended on April 19 and 4 days after the second phase voting closed on April 26. Asking EC to put these apprehensions to rest, it added: "In order to uphold the voter's confidence, it is necessary that the ECI be directed to disclose on its website scanned legible copies of Form 17C Part- I (Account of Votes Recorded) of all polling stations which contains the authenticated figures for votes polled, within 48 hours of the close of polling." ADR filed the application in a pending petition filed by it in 2019 raising concern over EVMs. Over the last few weeks, the Trinamool Congress and Communist Party of India (Marxist) have written letters to ECI to publish the total number of electors in each parliamentary constituency, total number of voters noted in the register of voters kept at the polling station, and the number of votes as per EVM across all parliamentary constituencies that voted in the first and second phases. The Congress party, too, wrote to political leaders raising concern over the issue.

AAP built on lies, why was Kejriwal silent in Lucknow?



New Delhi: In the first response after being accused by Aam Aadmi Party of using Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal to frame Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the BJP said the AAP was a party built on lies and could stoop to any level and asked if this was the case, why didn't Kejriwal himself say anything in Lucknow two days ago? Speaking to ANI, BJP chief JP Nadda said: "The Aam Aadmi Party is a party built on the foundation of lies and its credibility is not zero, it is in minus. Today Arvind Kejriwal has been exposed in front of the people of the country and the people of Delhi. He has been exposed in every way... If this thing has been hatched by the BJP, then why were you moving the microphone away in Lucknow?" Nadda asked. He asked why Kejriwal was silent that day. "What is stopping you? The culture of the AAP shows that they call people to their homes and beat them up. We never spoke to her (Swati Maliwal), nor did anyone from our party speak to her. This is not how we function. We are very straightforward. Now, their theft has been caught... He has no credibility, his party also has no credibility. They can stoop to any level, any allegation," Nadda said. Maliwal has accused Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar of assault and outraging her modesty.

Bihar Man, Minor Wife Die In Custody, Angry Mob Sets Police Station On Fire

Angry villagers vandalised a police station and set it on fire in Tarabari village of Bihar's Araria district after a man and his minor 'wife' allegedly died by suicide in the police custody. The man had lost his wife over a year back. He married his late wife's 14-year-old sister two days ago, but they were detained by the police on Thursday afternoon. The legal age for women to get married in India is 18. The locals said the man and his wife were detained by the police soon after their marriage, alleging that they died in custody after being beaten up by cops. A CCTV video, apparently of the police lockup, shows a

man climbing onto the lockup door, hanging himself with a cloth. As the news about duo's death spread in the area, angry villagers surrounded the Tarabari police station and threw stones at the police personnel. The angry villagers went on a rampage and vandalised the police station, later set it on fire. At least five police personnel were injured in the incident. Officials said as soon as information about the incident was received, police personnel from several police stations including Sadar SDPO Rampukar Singh reached the spot. The angry villagers, however, continued the protest and raised slogans



against the police. Locals alleged that couple died in custody due to negligence of the police after being beaten up. Police have so far refused to comment on the matter.

We are not aware": MEA on Indian students facing 'deportation' in Canada

New Delhi [India]: Amid the recent reports of Indian students in Canada protesting against the Justin Trudeau government for "changing the immigration policy overnight and denying them work permits", the Ministry of External Affairs stated on Friday that they don't have any update on deportation issues being faced by these students. Addressing the weekly media briefing, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "You know we have a large number of students who have gone to Canada to study. The figure is pretty significant. But what you are mentioning is that several students are facing problems that we haven't come across as of now. Sorry, deportation. I don't have an update on that. We are not aware of," he added. MEA further pointed out that there may be some rare cases but there is no major problem concerning students in Canada. "There may be one case here or one case there, that's about it. But we don't see any major



problem as far as students in Canada, as they're concerned," said MEA. Meanwhile, Jaiswal also emphasised the importance of BRICS, highlighting the expansive program planned by the Russian presidency with over 250 meetings. "BRICS is an important platform. I understand the Russian presidency is preparing a very expansive, ambitious program. There are

over 250 meetings that are planned. We look forward to participating in the BRICS meetings and strengthening the BRICS agenda," Randhir Jaiswal said. "And we also hope that the expanded BRICS becomes an important platform to give voice to the issue of multipolarity..." he added. On January 1, 2024, Russia took over the chairmanship of BRICS, an intergovernmental organization that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, plus four new members: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates joined BRICS as new full members, which is a strong indication of the growing authority of the association and its role in international affairs. During the BRICS Chairmanship, the Russian side will continue its work in all three key areas, including, politics and security, economy and finance, and humanitarian cooperation.

Arrested BJP Leader's Big 100 Cr Bribe Charge Against DK Shivakumar in Sex Tapes Case



In a twist to the Prajwal Revanna sex scandal case, arrested BJP leader G Devaraje Gowda on Friday alleged that Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar offered him Rs 100 crore to implicate former Chief Minister and JD-S state President HD Kumaraswamy for circulating the explicit videos. He said that it was Shivakumar who planned the entire scheme and obtained a pen drive, carrying explicit videos involving Revanna from his driver, in an alleged attempt to implicate Kumaraswamy and PM Modi falsely. "I was told to make a statement that it was Kumaraswamy who circulated the pen drives containing sex videos. But it was Shivakumar who obtained the pen drive from Karthik Gowda, who worked as a driver for Prajwal Revanna, and planned the entire episode," Gowda said. The arrested leader further alleged that the Congress leaders also planned to malign the image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi by linking him to the infamous sex scandal case. "They had planned in a big way to bring disrepute to Prime Minister Modi, Kumaraswamy, and the BJP. They offered me Rs 100 crore and sent Rs 5 crore as advance to Room No. 110 at Bowring Club. A local leader from Channarayapatna, Gopalaswamy, was sent to negotiate the deal," Devaraje Gowda claimed. Gowda further claimed that the Deputy CM even sent him Rs 5 crore in advance to make such statements and it was his refusal to do so that landed him in jail in a false case adding that he would expose Shivakumar as soon as he is out of the prison. "I have the audio recordings of Shivakumar's conversations. I will release them as soon as I am released," he said. The leader said a team of four Congress ministers, including Cheluvarayawamy, Krishna Byre Gowda, and Priyank Kharge, was formed to handle the developments relating to the sex video scandal. "After I refused the offer, police cases were lodged against me and I was arrested. I am ready to expose him (Shivakumar) once I am released. The Congress government will collapse in Karnataka," he said while speaking to the media from the police vehicle. On Friday, Gowda, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and Advocate G Devaraje Gowda, who was arrested in another sexual harassment case, was sent to judicial custody. The controversy revolves around the pen drives containing explicit videos involving JD(S) MLA Prajwal Revanna, which surfaced just days before the second phase of polling on April 26.

'Not surprised at what Arvind Kejriwal said'



Speculation about a BJP lobby "conspiring" to oust Yogi Adityanath as chief minister had been swirling in and around the Gorakhnath temple for months if not years, long before Arvind Kejriwal expressed the suspicion in public. Conversations with several temple employees, local BJP politicians and ordinary devotees in Gorakhpur suggested they were staunchly behind their "Maharajji" and former MP, and expected him to outwit his enemies. Kejriwal had last week claimed that if Narendra Modi was re-elected, Adityanath would be sacked as chief minister, apparently to pave the way for Amit Shah to succeed Modi as Prime Minister. The Aam Aadmi Party chief this week underscored that none from the BJP had contested his claim. At the Gorakhnath temple, where Adityanath is the Mahant, all this is old hat. "We are not surprised at what the AAP chief said. We believe that even Maharajji suspects it," a temple employee said, asking not to be identified. "There was a time in 2019 when we came to know about a plan to send him back (from Lucknow) to his mutt in Gorakhpur. But he's a fighter and wouldn't give up easily even if Modi insists." He added: "It was Shah who decided to make him Uttar Pradesh chief minister after the BJP won the 2017 Assembly elections." The temple employee said: "But he (Shah) soon realised that Maharajji had silently taken his place in the party hierarchy. Since then, he has been trying to harm Maharajji." Asked about Kejriwal's comments by the media in Gorakhpur early this week, Adityanath had walked away, saying: "They (those making the claim) should think about their own

problems. "Defence minister Rajnath Singh made a tepid attempt to deflect the controversy at a public meeting in Lucknow, saying: "Yogi Adityanath has been one of the best chief ministers of UP." A local BJP leader in Gorakhpur, who sought anonymity, endorsed Kejriwal's claim. "Why was Yogi's image absent from the banners and hoardings of Modi in Uttar Pradesh during the first three phases of polling? They released a few banners of Modi and Yogi during the fourth phase after Samajwadi chief Akhilesh Yadav began ridiculing us," he said. Akhilesh had underlined that "one engine was missing from the government of double engine". A "double-engine government" is a Modi coinage about the same party being in power in a state and at the Centre. Kejriwal's claim has seemingly been bolstered by Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, the controversial MP of Kaiserganj and former head of the Wrestling Federation of India, whom some top wrestlers have accused of sexual harassment. Last week, asked who his leader was, Brij Bhushan told the media it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Asked specifically about Adityanath, he remained silent. Pressed, he eventually said: "The PM is our leader and Yogiji is the CM of UP." Many here believe that Adityanath wanted the BJP to distance itself from Brij Bhushan following the harassment allegations but Modi and Shah stuck by him. The party has fielded his son Karan Bhushan Singh from Kaiserganj this time. "We don't know what will happen but the chief minister spends more time in the mutt than at the chief minister's office or residence," Satya Prakash, a regular visitor to the temple, said. He aired the commonly held suspicion here that one way for the party brass to get rid of Adityanath would be to ask him to choose between the mutt and the chief minister's chair. "He holds a Janata Darbar every fortnight at the temple and personally ensures that the complainants are satisfied with his response. He used to hold such darbars (as MP) even

before 2017 at the mutt," Prakash said. "We have the impression that if asked to give up one post, he will resign as chief minister. Being the mahant of the Gorakhnath temple is more respectable than being chief minister." Brajesh Kumar, a Gorakhpur resident, described local perceptions about how Adityanath had outmanoeuvred even the top party leadership. "In 2021, Modi had sent Arvind Kumar Sharma - a former bureaucrat who had served him in Gujarat and Delhi before joining the BJP - to Lucknow to keep an eye on Yogiji. Adityanath was asked to appoint Sharma as deputy chief minister but he stonewalled the idea," Kumar said. "Later that year, when Baby Rani Maurya resigned as Uttarakhand governor and returned to the Uttar Pradesh BJP, we were again apprehensive that she would replace Yogiji. But he again survived. "Sharma was later appointed urban development minister of Uttar Pradesh. Maurya is the state's women and child development minister. Adityanath has in the past acknowledged Shah's role in his elevation as chief minister. He has described how Shah, then BJP president, had called him after the 2017 election results and told him "a helicopter has reached Gorakhpur, come to Delhi immediately". However, Adityanath's supporters say, several state BJP leaders had earlier tried to queer his pitch during the Assembly elections by trying to project him as anti-party. Sunil Singh, a former president of the Hindu Yuva Vahini - a militia founded by Adityanath in the 1990s - fielded many of his colleagues from several Assembly seats in the Gorakhpur division against the official party nominees, claiming he had Adityanath's blessings. It was later clarified that Singh and those he had fielded had all left the Vahini and had no links with Adityanath. After becoming chief minister, Adityanath dissolved the Vahini. Singh later joined the Samajwadi Party and declared the BJP would soon humiliate some of its leaders, including Adityanath.

New CCTV Footage Shows Swati Maliwal Walking Out Of Arvind Kejriwal's Home



A new video has emerged from Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence which shows Swati Maliwal being escorted out by the police and security guards. The incident occurred on Monday, the same day that the AAP MP alleged being assaulted by the Chief Minister's aide Bibhav Kumar. In her FIR, Ms Maliwal alleged that she was brutally assaulted by Bibhav Kumar when she went to the Chief Minister's residence. She alleged that she was kicked, punched and abused by Mr Kumar, who is the personal secretary to Mr Kejriwal. The 39-year-old also said that her clothes were torn, and she received severe injuries on her head and her leg during the assault. But in the new CCTV footage, Swati Maliwal does not appear to have any injuries and is even seen trying to free herself from the policewoman's grip. The Aam Aadmi Party and Swati Maliwal have been trading bitter barbs as each pushed back against the other over the latter's claims. AAP leader Atishi accused Ms Maliwal of colluding with the Bharatiya

Janata Party to discredit the party during the general election. The incident has triggered a political storm. The BJP has heavily criticised Mr Kejriwal for his silence, with its spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia even going as far as labelling Mr Kejriwal the "main criminal" due to his apparent inaction during the assault. Mr Kejriwal deflected questions regarding the incident during a press conference in Lucknow yesterday, where he appeared alongside Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav and AAP MP Sanjay Singh. Mr Singh, addressing the press, acknowledged Mr Kumar's misconduct and deflected criticism towards the BJP, demanding accountability for various women's issues under their governance.

