

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Congress to launch campaign to expose BJP's attempt to mislead women: Pilot

RAIPUR, MAY 1: Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Friday said his party will launch a door-to-door campaign and organise a protest in Chhattisgarh to expose the BJP's "attempt to mislead" women on the reservation issue.

Speaking to reporters at the state Congress office here after chairing meetings with party MLAs and newly appointed district and block unit presidents, Pilot, AICC in-charge for Chhattisgarh, alleged that Thursday's special session of the state assembly was aimed at "giving effect to hypocrisy and falsehood."

"I have been saying this and even Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi had said in the House (Lok Sabha) that the women's reservation bill was passed three years ago. The BJP unnecessarily held back its implementation...under the pretext of reservation, they wanted to push delimitation before the census, which the entire opposition opposed," he said.



The Congress remains committed to women's reservation and would fully support its implementation on the basis of the current strength of the Lok Sabha, Pilot added.

Accusing the BJP of pursuing "vested interests," he said the ruling party tried to link delimitation with reservation for political gains, but its intentions were exposed. "No matter how much publicity they do, the truth is that the BJP delayed reservation for three years and is now using it as a cover for delimitation," he alleged.

Congress workers will go "door to door" across the

state to highlight the BJP's failures and to counter its "attempts to mislead women", Pilot said.

The Chhattisgarh assembly on Thursday passed a resolution seeking immediate implementation of a one-third reservation for women in Parliament and state legislative assemblies after the completion of delimitation.

The Congress boycotted the proceedings just before it was passed. Referring to rising petroleum prices, Pilot said Rahul Gandhi had warned that the government would wait until assembly elections before increasing prices. "It appears the gov-

ernment delayed the hike to avoid electoral loss. Now there has been a steep increase, which will burden the common man and disrupt household budgets," he said.

If price adjustment had been made earlier, the increase might have been gradual, but the delay led to a sharper hike which will further fuel inflation, Pilot claimed.

The meeting at the Rajiv Bhawan on Friday was part of organisational strengthening efforts, and discussions were held with MLAs and party leaders on future strategy, the Congress leader said.

He also accused the BJP-led state government of acting arbitrarily in matters such as land acquisition, deforestation and allocation of mining and industrial projects to "select entities".

A mega protest will be held soon in the state against the BJP, particularly on the women's reservation issue, he announced. (Agencies)

WB phase-II polls see 91.28 pc turnout among third gender, Puducherry highest at 91.81 pc: EC

NEW DELHI, MAY 1: West Bengal recorded a strong turnout among third gender electors in the second phase of the assembly polls, with 91.28 per cent of them exercising their franchise, according to the Election Commission.

A total of 1,257 third gender electors turned up in two phases of West Bengal elections — 465 in phase I and 792 in phase II.

The turnout stood at 56.79 per cent in phase I, while it rose sharply to 91.28 per cent in phase II.

Puducherry, however, recorded the highest overall turnout among third gender electors at 91.81 per cent in the recently-concluded assembly polls. The poll body said Puducherry has 139 third gender electors, of whom 91.81 per cent exercised their franchise.

Tamil Nadu has 7,728 third gender electors, out of which 60.49 per cent voted during the April 23 polls.

In other states, Assam has 343 third gender electors,



registering a turnout of 36.84 per cent, while Kerala has 277 third gender electors, recording a turnout of 57.04 per cent.

Polling in Tamil Nadu took place on April 23, while elections in Kerala, Assam and Puducherry were held on April 9. West Bengal went to the polls in two phases on April 23 and April 29.

The counting of votes for all the assembly elections will be taken up on May 4. In the

2024 Lok Sabha elections, more people enrolled themselves in the voters' list in the 'third gender' category, but only 27 per cent of them turned up at the polling stations.

According to the data issued by the poll authority, 48,194 people were eligible to vote as third gender electors in 2024, compared to 39,075 in 2019, an increase of 23.5 per cent over the five years.

But only 13,058 of them actually exercised their franchise, which comes to 27 per cent of the total registered third gender electors.

Former chief election commissioner (CEC) Navin Chawla pushed for allowing third gender persons to register themselves as voters in 'Others' or 'O' category, which is now the norm as EC identifies voters as 'Male', 'Female' and 'Others' or third gender. (Agencies)

High Drama In Punjab Assembly

Congress, Akali Dal Allege CM Mann Was Drunk During House Proceedings

CHANDIGARH, MAY 1: Opposition parties in Punjab, including the Congress, and the Shiromani Akali Dal, on Friday levelled serious allegations against Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, claiming he appeared intoxicated during the Vidhan Sabha proceedings and demanding an alcohol test.

Congress MLAs staged a walkout and urged the Speaker to initiate action, while the party also called for dope testing of all MLAs and an independent medical check by PGIMER.

Congress leader Sukhpal Singh Khaira demanded that an alcohol test be conducted. In a post on X, Khaira wrote, "Cm @BhagwantMann was found drunk in the Vidhan Sabha today! We @INCIndia walked out of the house demanding from the Speaker @SpeakerSandhwan that an alcohol test of Cm @BhagwantMann be conducted and we offered to undertake the test ourselves too." Cm @BhagwantMann was found drunk in the Vidhan Sabha today!

We @INCIndia walked out of the house demanding from the Speaker @SpeakerSandhwan that an alcohol test of Cm @BhagwantMann be conducted and we offered to undertake the test ourselves too.

The conduct of... pic.twitter.com/H4mPdN4Gcd — Sukhpal Singh Khaira (@SukhpalKhaira) May 1, 2026

"The conduct of @AamAdmiParty Cm Bhagwant Mann has lowered the prestige of the august house of Vidhan Sabha. We @INCPunjab Mla's urge @ArvindKejriwal to take action against Cm for impropriety and that too by being drunk in the assembly-Khaira," the post read.



LoP in the assembly Par-tap Singh Bajwa also criticised Mann for allegedly being drunk and called for an immediate dope test.

"What should we even do coming to the Assembly where the Chief Minister is in an inebriated state? What is the purpose of holding a session when the head of the state is completely sozzled? We demand that everyone's test be conducted," he said.

The Shiromani Akali Dal also made similar allegations, calling it a matter of shame and demanding a dope test of the Chief Minister. The Aam Aadmi Party has not yet responded to the charges.

"It is a matter of great shame that @BhagwantMann showed up drunk with alcohol in the hallowed chamber of the Vidhan Sabha on the occasion of 'Labour Day' today. You can see for yourselves how the Chief Minister is behaving in the Vidhan Sabha," the party wrote in a post on X.

— Shiromani Akali Dal (@Akali_Dal) May 1, 2026
"The Shiromani Akali Dal strongly condemns the Chief Minister's conduct, and he should not have come after drinking on this day. The Shiromani Akali Dal demands that the Chief Minister undergo a dope test today in front of the entire Punjab so that Punjabis too can know the truth," the post

read.

Further, Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal accused Mann of repeatedly attending public and official functions under the influence of alcohol and demanded that he undergo an alcohol test.

— Swati Maliwal (@Swati-JaiHind) May 1, 2026

She also called for action if the allegations are proven true.

In a post on X, Maliwal said, "Today, once again, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann has arrived at the temple of democracy, the Punjab Legislative Assembly, completely intoxicated with alcohol. This man goes to the Gurdwara Sahib after drinking, goes to the temple after drinking, used to come to the Lok Sabha after drinking, goes to government meetings after drinking, and drank so much abroad that he was deplanned."

"Before the elections, he had placed his hand on his mother's head and declared that he would never drink alcohol again. The CM of a sensitive border state like Punjab stays intoxicated all the time... signs files while under the influence. What shamelessness. How can a man who is only ever away from alcohol during sleep possibly run Punjab? CM Mann should undergo an alcohol test, and if found guilty, he should be removed from the CM position," she said.

BJP's Sunil Jakhar also joined the chorus of opposition parties calling for a breathalyser test which he said would unmask many.

"The general session of the Assembly is important, but its significance increases even further when it is a special session. If a breathalyser test were conducted to find out the condition in which the leaders reach the Assembly on this day, many faces would be unmasked," Jakhar said.

The Congress Legislative Party (CLP) has formally written to the Speaker, urging immediate alcohol-meter and dope testing of the Chief Minister and all MLAs during the ongoing Assembly session.

In the letter, the CLP raised concerns over an incident highlighted by MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira during the session. The issue reportedly involves allegations to which the Chief Minister responded, prompting serious questions about the conduct of House members. The party stated that such concerns, if not addressed, could undermine public trust in the institution.

Citing the urgency of the matter, the CLP demanded the implementation of a transparent protocol. This includes mandatory alcohol-meter testing of all members present in the House within one hour, starting with the Chief Minister. It also called for comprehensive dope testing of all MLAs from both Treasury and Opposition benches without exception.

The letter further suggested deploying an independent medical team from the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, to ensure fair and impartial testing. (Agencies)

In an open letter, South African Hindu Dharma Sabha (SAHDS) president Ram Maharaj said the history of Indians, despite the community being a minority, must be adequately reflected in curricula.

"As far back as 1981, the SAHDS had adopted a unanimous resolution at its inaugural National Hindu Convention in Durban, calling for substantial inclusion of Indian history in school curricula," he said.

Hate speech: No cognisable offence made out against Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Verma: SC

NEW DELHI, MAY 1: The Supreme Court has said that no cognisable offence was made out against BJP leaders Anurag Thakur and Parvesh Verma for their alleged hate speeches over the anti-CAA protest in Delhi in 2020.

While BJP MP Thakur is a former union minister, Verma is a minister in the Delhi government.

In its April 29 verdict on a batch of pleas concerning hate speeches, a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta also dealt with the petition filed by CPI(M) leaders Brinda Karat and K M Tiwari who had challenged a June 2022 verdict of the Delhi High Court.

The high court had dismissed a petition by Karat and Tiwari challenging the trial court's refusal to direct registration of an FIR against Thakur and Verma for their alleged hate speeches over the anti-CAA protest at Delhi's Shaheen Bagh.

In its judgement, the apex court noted that the high court had, on an independent assessment, held that the speeches do not disclose commission of any cognisable offence, and also observed that the statements were not directed against any specific community nor did they incite violence or public

disorder.

"Upon a careful consideration of the material placed on record, including the alleged speeches, the status report dated February 26, 2020 submitted before the trial court, and the reasons recorded by the courts below, we are in agreement with the conclusion that no cognisable offence is made out," the top court said.

The CPI(M) leaders had claimed that on January 27, 2020, Thakur allegedly made a hate speech at a rally in Rithala. They had further claimed that on January 28, 2020, Verma allegedly made inflammatory hate speeches. A trial court on August 26, 2020, dismissed the petitioners' complaint on the ground that it was not sustainable as the requisite sanction from the competent authority was not obtained.

In its verdict, the apex court observed the high court had declined to direct registration of an FIR on the grounds that prior sanction under Sections 196 and 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) had not been obtained. The bench said the scheme of erstwhile CrPC does not contemplate any embargo on the direction for registration of an FIR or the conduct of investigation at the pre-cognisance stage.

"To hold otherwise would amount to introducing a restriction not envisaged by the legislature," the top court said, adding, "The requirement of sanction is, therefore, a condition precedent only for taking cognisance and not for the registration of an FIR or for the conduct of investigation".

It said any interpretation that makes the registration of an FIR contingent upon prior sanction would invert this statutory scheme and render the provisions relating to investigation unworkable. It noted that relief sought before the trial court in the case was confined to a direction to the police to register an FIR on the basis of the complaint submitted by the appellants.

The bench said the criminal process is designed to protect both the rights of the accused and the interests of society.

"While the requirement of sanction serves as a safeguard against frivolous or vexatious prosecution at the stage of cognisance, it cannot be permitted to operate as a shield to prevent the very initiation of the investigative process where a cognisable offence is disclosed," it said.

The bench said failure on the part of the authorities to perform their statutory du-

ties at the threshold stage not only defeats the legislative intent but also places the ordinary citizen in a position of vulnerability against institutional inaction.

It said the rule of law mandates that the machinery of investigation be set in motion in accordance with law, uninfluenced by extraneous considerations.

"Accordingly, while we disapprove the reasoning adopted by the high court on the issue of prior sanction, we find no ground to interfere with the ultimate conclusion," the bench said.

In its 125-page verdict on the batch of pleas, the bench said hate speech was "fundamentally antithetical" to the constitutional value of fraternity and strikes at the moral fabric of our republic, but no "legislative vacuum" exists warranting intervention as the existing framework adequately addresses the issue.

Termining as "misconceived" the contention that the field of hate speech remains legislatively unoccupied, the top court said the constitutional scheme, founded upon the doctrine of separation of powers, does not permit the judiciary to create new offences or expand the contours of criminal liability through judicial directions. (PTI)

Hindu body urges inclusion of Indian history in South African textbooks

JOHANNESBURG, May 1: A leading Hindu organisation in South Africa has urged authorities not to "airbrush" the history of Indians in the country, calling for greater representation of the community's contributions in school textbooks currently under revision.

In an open letter, South African Hindu Dharma Sabha (SAHDS) president Ram Maharaj said the history of Indians, despite the community being a minority, must be adequately reflected in curricula.

"The history of Indians in South Africa cannot and must not be airbrushed away in history books. We demand

that the current content on the history of Indians be at least doubled across all grades, because minorities matter," Maharaj said.

The current level of representation, he alleged, is "an affront" and a "blatant erasure" of the monumental contributions Indians have made to the building of South Africa.

He recalled that Indians, since arriving as indentured labourers in 1860, had contributed across economic, cultural, political and social spheres in South Africa.

"To diminish this legacy in our textbooks is to diminish the truth itself," Maharaj said, adding that enhanced representation would promote interracial understanding, social cohesion and nation building.

Africa has historically enjoyed privilege.

"It must be recorded that our great indentured ancestors toiled tirelessly, and lived in slave-like conditions, incessantly suffering from torture and trauma, deprivation and discrimination.

"However, down through the generations, Indians survived and thrived by prioritising educational advancement with a sense of vision and mission, turning adversity into advantage, and doing more with less," the Hindu leader said.

The SAHDS has recommended that textbooks highlight the suffering and sacrifices of indentured Indians, as well as their role in the anti-apartheid struggle that led to the election of Nelson Mandela as the country's first democratically-elected president.

Maharaj noted that the struggle was initiated by the

Natal Indian Congress, founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1894, nearly two decades before the African National Congress was established.

He also called for recognition of Indian figures such as the Padavatan brothers and Valliamma, as well as philanthropists, including VN Naik, ML Sultan, Narend Pattundeen, AM Moola, RK Khan, and HE Joosab, who helped establish schools and hospitals for the community.

The SAHDS further sought attention to historical discrimination against Hindus during the colonial era, including the demolition of temples and forced resettlement.

Maharaj said the organisation believes that a fair and accurate portrayal of Indian history would strengthen unity in diversity and foster greater harmony in South Africa. (PTI)

SC grants anticipatory bail to Cong leader Pawan Khera

NEW DELHI, MAY 01: The Supreme Court has granted anticipatory bail to Congress leader Pawan Khera in a case registered against him for making allegations that Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife possessed multiple passports and undisclosed properties abroad.

A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and AS Chandkar granted the pre-arrest bail to Khera subject to certain conditions, an order uploaded on Friday said.

The court had earlier on Thursday reserved its order on the matter.

"The appellant (Pawan Khera) is directed to be released on anticipatory bail in the event of his arrest in the Crime Branch P.S. Case No. 04/2026 and on such reasonable terms and conditions which may be put by the Investigating Officer as deemed fit," it said.

The bench directed Khera to cooperate in the investigation and to appear before the police station as and when

required and intimated and he shall not influence or tamper with any of the evidence during pendency of the investigation or trial in the case.

It directed Khera to not leave India without prior leave of the competent court and said if the trial court deems it fit to impose some other conditions, it has the discretion to do the needful and put those conditions during trial.

While allowing the appeal of Khera against April 24 or-

der of the Gauhati High Court, the bench said, "In our view, the observations as made by the high court in the order impugned is not based on correct appreciation of all the material which has been placed on record and appears to be erroneous, in particular shifting the burden on the accused."

The top court said without alleging any offence under Section 339 of BNS and merely on the basis of a statement made by the advocate general.