

SC grants bail to TMC leader Kuntal Ghosh in cash-for-jobs recruitment scam case

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday granted bail to TMC leader Kuntal Ghosh, who has been in judicial custody, in connection with the cash-for-jobs recruitment scam case registered by the CBI.

A bench comprising Justice Surya Kant and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan granted the bail considering the unlikelihood of the trial completing soon.

The Court said, "The petitioner is allowed and petitioner is directed to be released on bail, subject to conditions to be imposed by Trial Court." The Court also directed that Ghosh can't hold any public office for now.

Ghosh's counsel said that in July 2024, the investigation was still underway...trial court observed this in July... the investigation is not complete even to the extent that charges can be framed...Custody of over 19 months, 3 co-accused were granted bail.

CBI counsel alleged that Ghosh created a parallel website.

Justice Kant said, "Last time you said you (CBI) propose to examine 183 witnesses. Your investigation is not complete. We



don't want to impede your investigation, but the fact remains that process is taking further time. One can foresee process will take good amount of years... that's a practical approach, he said.

CBI counsel said that Crores of rupees was collected from undeserving candidates for jobs...he is highly influential.

Justice Kant said he has been granted bail in the ED matter.

CBI's allegations against Ghosh are that he is a prominent leader of a political party which is presently

ruling the state. Under a deep-rooted conspiracy, the petitioner is alleged to have created a fake website resembling the original website where false results regarding the recruitment of primary teachers were displayed.

The petitioner is alleged to have collected bribes from undeserving candidates...one of his co-accused alone collected over 4 crore from 141 candidates and diverted to petitioner.

The petitioner was arrested on February 20, 2023, and has been in custody since then. He was ac-

cused in the ED case also. Calcutta High Court has granted bail in the aforesaid ED case, adverting to the subject case registered by CBI.

The Court noted, "It appears that a chargesheet was filed on January 16, 2024. The said chargesheet revealed that no documents were appended.

Consequently, the special judge directed the investigating agency to submit all relied-upon documents, so that the court could consider cognizance.

On July 23, 2024, the court observed investiga-

tion was still underway and it was thus not conceivable for that court to commence trial and charges could not be framed.

The Court noted that the Additional Solicitor General (for CBI) has submitted that owing to the nature of the allegations, CBI is required to examine the plethora of documents and 100s of candidates, who are alleged victims of the alleged scam.

Supplementary charge sheet(s) will be filed, the court noted.

The Court said It is true that owing to the nature of the allegations and the nature of the evidence required to be collected, it is natural that the agency is likely to take some more time to file the final supplementary chargesheet.

It's too early to foresee the conclusion of the trial in the near future...Detention of petitioner in custody for an indefinite period will not be in conformity with well-settled principles of criminal jurisprudence.

The court said that a balance can be struck by restoring conditional liberty to the petitioner, in such a manner that he does not impede investigation.

Eight dead, 30 injured after bus overturns in Maharashtra's Gondia

MUMBAI: At least eight people died after a Maharashtra State Transport bus overturned near Bindravana Tola village on the Gondia-Arjuni road in the Gondia district on Friday afternoon.

The bus was on its way from Nagpur to Gondia.

"A State transport bus met with an accident in Gondia district. The bus was en route from the Bhandara depot to Gondia when the bus driver lost control of the vehicle near Bindravana Tola village on the Gondia-Arjuni road and overturned on the side of the road. Eight people have died and around 30 people are injured," said the police.

The official further said that the injured have been shifted to the Gondia District Hospital, adding that the death toll is expected to increase. Information about the situation was taken from the local administration. Instructions have been issued for immediate and proper treatment of the injured," said the CMO.

Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis offered his condolences to the bereaved family members.

Taking to his official handle on X, Fadnavis posted, "It is very unfortunate that a Shivshahi bus met with an unfortunate



in a horrific accident. Eight bodies have been recovered from the site of the incident, and the death toll is expected to increase. Information about the situation was taken from the local administration. Instructions have been issued for immediate and proper treatment of the injured," said the CMO.

Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis offered his condolences to the bereaved family members.

Taking to his official handle on X, Fadnavis posted, "It is very unfortunate that a Shivshahi bus met with an unfortunate

accident near Sadak Arjun in Gondia district in which some passengers died. I pay my heartfelt respects to the deceased. We share the grief of their families."

"The people who were injured in this incident may immediately receive treatment in a private hospital if necessary. I have also told the Collector of Gondia to make arrangements to shift them to Nagpur if required Senior administration officials have reached the spot and are coordinating relief efforts. I pray to God for the speedy recovery of the injured in this incident," posted Fadnavis on X.

SC to decide whether advocates can work as Journalists, next hearing on Dec 16

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday said that it will decide whether advocates can simultaneously work as journalists while practising law.

A bench of Justice Abhay S Oka and Justice Augustine George Masih was hearing a petition filed by Advocate Mohd. Kamran, who worked as a freelance journalist.

Justice Oka observed, "It was argued before us that it is permissible for a member of the bar to continue as a journalist. So we will decide that issue."

The Court had earlier directed the Bar Council of India (BCI) and the Bar Council of Uttar Pradesh to examine Kamran's dual roles and his compliance with the BCI Rules on Professional Conduct and Etiquette, which prohibit advocates from engaging in other professions or businesses.

During Friday's proceedings, the counsel for the BCI sought two weeks

to file an affidavit addressing the issue. The Court noted that Kamran has since filed an affidavit stating he will work only as an advocate. Taking his affidavit on record, the bench listed the matter for a hearing on December 16, 2024.

The controversy dates back to July 2024, when the Court questioned Kamran's dual roles, citing Chapter II of the BCI Rules, which bars advocates from engaging in business or full-time salaried employment. Kamran, however, defended his position, referring to Section 51 of the same chapter, which allows advocates to engage in journalism, teaching, or lecturing, provided these activities do not involve advertising or full-time employment.

He clarified that he was not salaried or employed by any media organization but merely contributed articles. The case originated from a defamation complaint filed by Kamran

against former BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. Kamran alleged that Singh wrote defamatory letters to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, accusing him of having serious criminal cases while being a state-accredited journalist. The Allahabad High Court had quashed the defamation case, citing the confidential nature of the letters and the absence of public dissemination.

Kamran challenged the High Court's order in the Supreme Court, which, on July 29, 2024, directed the BCI and the Uttar Pradesh Bar Council to investigate his professional conduct. Notices were also issued in Kamran's petition challenging the High Court's dismissal of his defamation complaint.

The upcoming hearing on December 16 will address whether Kamran's dual roles align with the ethical and professional standards set by the BCI Rules.

K'taka cabinet seeks to reopen graft case against BSY

BENGALURU: In a development that could spell fresh trouble for B S Yediyurappa, the state cabinet on Thursday decided to seek the governor's nod for the prosecution of the BJP veteran and former chief minister in an alleged Rs 12 crore bribery case over a Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) housing project in 2020.

"The cabinet concluded that the governor [Thawar Chand Gehlot] did not apply his mind while rejecting the petition seeking prosecution sanction against Yediyurappa. A decision was taken to advise the governor to reconsider his stance and grant sanction to investigate the corruption charges against Yediyurappa," H K Patil, the minister for law and parliamentary affairs, said after the cabinet meeting.

The case revolves around allegations of bribery, cheating, and money laundering over a contract awarded to a construction company for a residential complex in Bidarhalli.

A cabinet note released by Patil says: "It has been alleged that Accused No. 7 demanded a bribe of Rs 12 crore (on behalf of Accused No. 1 -- Sri B S Yediyurappa) from Accused No. 5 (Ramalingam Construction Company)."

The cabinet note further details: "The money was collected by accused

No. 7, G C Prakash, from accused No. 8, K Ravi, for it to be delivered to accused No. 2, B Y Vijayendra [Yediyurappa's son]."

The Rs 12 crore bribe charge was reportedly corroborated by an audio clip of an alleged conversation between Vijayendra and a private Kannada news channel.

"Prakash, the then BDA commissioner, demanded a Rs 12 crore bribe on behalf of Yediyurappa from Ramalingam company," Patil added.

Following the revelations, T J Abraham, the president of Karnataka Anti-Graft and Environmental Forum, approached Governor Gehlot on Nov 11, 2020, seeking his sanction for Yediyurappa's prosecution.

However, the governor did not act on the petition for several months, leading Abraham to take the matter to the city civil and sessions court. In June 2021, the court dismissed it on grounds of insufficient sanction, after the governor junked the petition.

Interestingly, Abraham had earlier succeeded in obtaining prosecution sanction against chief minister Siddaramaiah in the Muda land allotment case -- a decision later upheld by Karnataka high court.

Eknath Shinde heads to native village after arriving from Delhi

NEW DELHI: Eknath Shinde, who returned to Mumbai from New Delhi on Friday morning is traveling to his native village in Satara district amid ongoing suspense over his successor, a week after the Maharashtra assembly poll results.

Shinde had told reporters in New Delhi late Thursday night that the next meeting of the Mahayuti alliance on government formation would be held in Mumbai on Friday.

However, the caretaker CM is now traveling to his native village Dare in Satara district in western Maharashtra, with the meeting now expected to take place on Sunday, according to sources.

The Shiv Sena leader has repeatedly stated that he would not be an obstacle in government formation and would abide by the decisions taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah regarding the next



chief minister. Different viewpoints are emerging within the Shiv Sena regarding Shinde's role in the next government, which will be headed by the BJP, the largest constituent in the Mahayuti alliance that achieved a resounding victory in the recently concluded assembly elections.

Many leaders in the Shiv Sena are urging Shinde to accept the deputy chief minister's post if offered by the BJP. However, another faction believes it would not be appropriate for him to accept the No. 2 position

after serving as the chief minister for more than two-and-a-half years, sources said.

"The government formation process will start after the BJP announces its legislature party leader," they said. During his Delhi trip, Shinde had met Shah and discussed formation of the next government in the state. His deputies in the outgoing state cabinet Devendra Fadnavis (BJP) and Ajit Pawar (NCP) had also met the senior BJP leader.

Air India pilot suicide: Mumbai Police probe Aditya Pandit's deleted WhatsApp chats and video calls

MUMBAI: The Andheri Court on Friday extended the police custody of Delhi resident Aditya Pandit (27) until Monday.

Pandit was arrested by the Powai police in connection with the abetment of suicide case of Air India pilot Srishri Tuli (25), who was found dead at her rented house near Marol Police Quarters in Mumbai on November 25.

The police sought an extension of Pandit's custody to gather more evidence and retrieve deleted WhatsApp chats between him and Srishri from his mobile phone. Investigators believe the chats may provide crucial insights into the events leading to her death.

According to the Powai police, Tuli had made a video call to Pandit shortly before taking her own life.

Authorities said she died following an argument with Pandit.

His police custody, which began four days ago, was extended based on his alleged failure to report Tuli's threats and his decision to enter her locked house without involving law enforcement.

"Pandit's arrest stems from his failure to alert the

police about Tuli's threats and his decision to access her locked residence without police involvement.

His position as the last person in contact with the deceased has raised suspicion about his potential involvement," the police stated.

Before Pandit left for Delhi, Tuli had reportedly threatened self-harm. When he ignored her warnings, she allegedly made her intentions clear during a video call.

"Pandit was arrested after learning that he has concealed information by deleting communications with Tuli. When questioned about the deleted messages, he stated he had threatened self-harm if she died. Police are sceptical of his explanation and are working with forensic experts to recover the deleted content," a police officer said.

Investigators also found 10-11 phone conversations and numerous missed calls from Tuli on Pandit's phone during the time he claimed to be returning to stop her actions.

"Pandit's mobile has been seized and sent to FSL to recover the deleted data," officials confirmed.

Telangana worker arrested in Sharjah for unpaid mobile bills

HYDERABAD: The family of an Indian worker from Telangana has urged the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to provide assistance to him to return to the country as he was detained by the airport authorities in Sharjah for allegedly having un-cleared mobile bill dues.

Sunkari Prameela, the mother of Sunkari Sridhar, approached the Pravasi Prajvani (Gulf NRI Grievance) in Hyderabad on Friday to take up the issue with the authorities and help her son return home. She claimed that unknown fraudsters misused his SIM to make international calls.

Sridhar of Jagtial district completed his employment contract in the UAE and was returning to Hyderabad, waiting for his final exit from Sharjah on November 17. However, the Airport Immigration Police arrested him on the case that he owed AED 12,850 (Rs 3 lakh) in mobile bills. "He is innocent and was not aware of the misuse of the SIM card.

Kindly provide legal aid to him, get him released from jail, and facilitate his repatriation to India," Prameela said in a representation to Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Friday.

India calls upon Bangladesh Interim Govt to live up to responsibility of protecting minorities

NEW DELHI: India on Friday called upon the Bangladesh Interim Government to live up to its responsibility of protecting Hindus and other minorities, and said the surge in extremist rhetoric, and increasing incidents of violence against them cannot be dismissed as media exaggeration.

Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, answering questions on the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Das in Bangladesh for alleged sedition, said:

"India has consistently and strongly raised with the Bangladesh government the threats and targeted attacks on Hindus and other minorities. Our position on the matter is clear - the interim government must live up to its re-

sponsibility of protecting all minorities.

"We are concerned at the surge of extremist rhetoric, increasing incidents of violence and provocation. These developments cannot be dismissed only as media exaggeration."

On the rising demand from several quarters in Bangladesh, especially the Islamist Jamaat, for banning ISKCON, the spokesperson said that The International Society for Krishna Consciousness or "ISKCON is a globally well-regarded organization with a strong record of social service. We once again call upon Bangladesh to take all steps for the protection of minorities."

On the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna

Das, he said:

"As far as cases against individuals are concerned, we have noted that legal processes are underway. We expect that these processes will deal with the case in a just, fair and transparent manner, ensuring full respect for the legal rights of all concerned."

The remarks come even as the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) has ordered the freezing of bank accounts belonging to 17 individuals associated with the ISKCON Bangladesh, including its former leader Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari, for 30 days.

The directive, issued on Thursday, was sent to various banks and financial institutions in the country. It suspends all trans-

actions from the accounts for one month.

This action follows the arrest of Chinmoy, spokesperson for the Sanatan Jagaran Jote.

On October 25, following a rally at Lalbagh ground in Chittagong, he and 19 others were accused of sedition for allegedly disrespecting Bangladesh's national flag by hoisting a saffron flag above it, leading to a case filed at Kotwali police station on October 30.

The case was filed by local BNP leader Firoz Khan, who was later expelled from the party over the matter.

Chinmoy was arrested at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on Monday.

The following day, he was presented before a

Chittagong court, where his bail plea was rejected, and he was sent to jail.

Supporters of Chinmoy protested his arrest, blocking the prison van for about two and a half hours.

Police eventually dispersed the crowd using sound grenades and escorted Chinmoy to jail.

During the chaos, lawyer Saiful Islam Alif was severely injured near the Rangam Convention Hall.

He was taken to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

These developments have triggered calls to ban ISKCON in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, ISKCON Bangladesh on Thursday distanced itself from Chinmoy and the protests and violence in Chattogram calling for his release.