



Bailed Modi rival calls for India to resist ‘dictatorship’



Arvind Kejriwal during a press conference at the party HQ in New Delhi, a day after his release (Photos by Getty)

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Hours after India’s apex court granted bail to Delhi’s chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday, the opposition leader launched an attack against the ruling Modi government, urging voters in the ongoing general election to bring an end to “dictatorship”.

“I have come to beg 1.4 billion people to save my country. Save my country from this dictatorship,” Mr Kejriwal said at a press conference held a day after his release from jail. Mr Kejriwal, a key figure in the Indian opposition, and a vocal critic of prime minister Narendra Modi, became India’s first sitting chief minister to be arrested, a month before the country’s general elections started.

The Delhi leader was arrested by India’s Enforcement Directorate (ED) – the country’s main agency for fighting financial crimes – over accusations that his party and state ministers accepted 1bn Indian rupees (£9.5m) in bribes from liquor contractors some two years ago.

His arrest, along with three other top leaders of his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), was widely seen as politically motivated, with the US state department and Germany calling on India to follow due process. “This was an attempt by them to crush us. PM Modi wants to crush AAP because he knows that we can bring about a bright future for the country,” Mr Kejriwal said.

However, the Modi-led government has denied using agencies under its control to harass political opponents. The ED opposed granting Mr Kejriwal bail, saying “any special concession” to him will “amount to anathema to the rule of law and equality”. But the country’s supreme court granted Mr Kejriwal temporary bail to campaign in the ongoing election, with the results set to be announced on 4 June.

However, the apex court ruled that he could not take part in official duties during these 22 days. Meanwhile, Mr Modi, who has been in power for a decade, is seeking a third straight term and faces a weakened coalition, including the main opposition Congress party and its regional allies.

Yesterday, the Delhi leader accused Mr Modi of crushing the opposition and bringing about dictatorship in the country. “Modi ji has a very dangerous mission – ‘One Nation One Leader’. They will send all the opposition leaders to jail and manage all other BJP leaders and undercut them,” Mr Kejriwal said. (The BJP is Mr Modi’s party).



The opposition leader addresses his supporters and party members upon his release from prison (AFP/Getty)

“If they win the elections, they will change the UP [Uttar Pradesh] chief minister Yogi Adityanath in two months. They have tried to end all the popular leaders in their party,” he said. He reiterated his party’s campaign promise that if INDIA (the coalition of which AAP is part) won, then Delhi would get “full statehood”.

The INDIA alliance was formed last year by 26 Indian opposition parties, which joined forces to take on Mr Modi in the 2024 elections. “It is my assessment that BJP is not forming the government on 4 June. My assessment says BJP is getting 220-230 seats. The INDIA bloc will form the government, and AAP will be part of that government,” the Delhi leader said. “We will give full statehood to Delhi. Delhi will have a people’s governor, not a man from Gujarat,” he added.

Mr Kejriwal also asked whether the BJP would live up to its internal rule of retirement at 75, enacted by Mr Modi. “I ask BJP, who is going to be your PM? He is turning 75 next September. He is the one who made the rule that those who turn 75 had to retire. He has to retire next year. I ask BJP, who is your PM pick?” the AAP leader asked. “Who will fulfil Modi’s guarantee? Will Amit Shah do it? When you go out to vote, remember, you are not voting for Amit Shah, not for Modi,” he said.