

Modi critic joins India's election campaign on bail

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal joined India's ongoing general election — boosting the opposition alliance on Saturday — a day after the Supreme Court ordered his temporary release on bail in a controversial graft case.

A fierce critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leader of the Aam Aadmi Party, Kejriwal was arrested in late March, in connection with corruption allegations related to the excise policy of the Delhi government led by him. He denies the accusations.

On Friday, the top court granted Kejriwal 21-day interim bail to campaign in the seven-phase general vote, which started on April 19. He has to surrender after the last day of voting on June 1.

"I will go around the country in the next 21 days to stop this dictatorship of Modi," Kejriwal said at a conference in Delhi.

"After June 4, there will be no Modi government. In all states, their seats are going down and

they will not get more than 220 to 230 seats."

The results of the world's largest election are set to be announced on June 4. The party or coalition that wins at least 272 of the 543 contested seats in the lower house of parliament will form the government.

Seeking a third straight term in office, Modi has been targeting 400 seats for the National Democratic Alliance led by his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which has been in power since 2014.

He is challenged by an alliance of two dozen opposition parties, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, or INDIA, of which Kejriwal's AAP is a part. Kejriwal has accused Modi and his BJP of damaging democracy, and abusing power and the constitution.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal

FASTFACTS

- Top court allows Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to leave custody until June 1.
- His release is expected to give a boost to India's opposition alliance in ongoing polls.

"The opposition's morale will get a further boost," said Satish Kumar Singh, a political analyst in Delhi.

"The release of Kejriwal further reinforces the opposition campaign on the need to save democracy and maintain fairness in the electoral process."

Kejriwal's AAP is a challenger to the BJP in Delhi and Punjab, where voting will take place on May 25 and June 1 respectively.

"Kejriwal's release is a boost to the cadres of the AAP and the opposition alliance at this crucial time when the opposition alliance is challenging the dominance of the BJP in the capital city," Andalib Akhtar, a New Delhi-based commentator and editor of *The Indian Awaz*, told Arab News.

"It's good that the court has taken a decision in favor of democracy and is giving the opposition leader — who was arrested just on the eve of the general elections — an opportunity to be on an equal footing democratically."

