

# [***New Delhi's top elected official arrested in liquor bribery case***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BM2-TR51-DYMD-64VP-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

NEW DELHI — Anti-corruption crusader [*Arvind Kejriwal*](https://apnews.com/hub/arvind-kejriwal) was arrested Thursday by the federal investigative agency for suspected financial crimes, which accused his party and ministers of accepting 1 billion rupees in bribes from liquor contractors nearly two years ago, his party said, adding a fresh challenge for India's opposition ahead of general elections.

Atishi Singh, a leader of Kejriwal’s Aam Aadmi Party, or Common People’s Party, denied the accusations. She charged they were fabricated by the federal Enforcement Directorate, which is controlled by [*Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government*](https://apnews.com/hub/narendra-modi).

Opposition figures and critics slammed the move as undemocratic, and accused Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party of misusing the agency to weaken the opposition just weeks before voting begins April 19.

“This is no longer a fight between the BJP and the AAP. This is a fight between the country’s people and the BJP. This is no longer a fight of the AAP, but a fight of all those who want clean ***politics*** in the country,” Sandeep Pathak, an Aam Aadmi Party lawmaker, said at a news conference held at midnight.

Kejriwal’s party called for a nationwide protest Friday against the arrest, and said it would ask India's Supreme Court to quash the arrest since the investigation is still in progress. Kejriwal will continue to be Delhi's chief minister while the party fights the accusations, Singh said.

Footage from local TV showed police whisking away Kejriwal's supporters in buses as federal agents arrested him after questioning him for hours at his residence in New Delhi.

One of the charges under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act is that 14 wholesale liquor distributors earned an “excess profit” of 3.38 billion rupees ($41 million) when the now-scrapped liquor policy was in operation two years ago. Government attorney S.V. Raju alleged the liquor distributors in turn paid 1 billion rupees ($12.1 million) in bribes to Kejriwal’s party and other ministers.

The arrest came hours after Delhi's High Court refused to grant any protection to Kejriwal, 55, over the summons issued to him by the Enforcement Directorate, which is the main federal agency for investigating economic offenses.

The agency had called Kejriwal for questioning nine times in recent months, but he skipped the summons each time, saying he was busy with his political work, a government lawyer said.

AAP is part of a broad alliance of opposition parties called INDIA, the main challenger to Modi's BJP in the [*national elections to be held in April-June*](https://apnews.com/article/india-general-elections-2024-52fe2ee3260624c1658bacdbb1bd15a5). Led by the Indian National Congress party that once dominated the country’s ***politics***, the unity front includes over two dozen powerful regional parties.

“A scared dictator wants to create a dead democracy,” Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said about the arrest in a post on X, adding that “the arrest of elected chief ministers has become a common thing."

Kejriwal’s arrest is [*another setback for the bloc*](https://apnews.com/article/india-modi-opposition-elections-alliance-cracking-ce93caddc7eb0ea4880b1bd77069efc2), and came after the Congress party accused the government earlier Thursday of crippling the party by [*feeezing its bank accounts*](https://apnews.com/article/india-election-opposition-congress-tax-accounts-cf0d39fa9cae7839f8139ed1a881a4b3) in a tax dispute ahead of the national elections.

The opposition has long claimed it has been unfairly targeted and in a manner that undermines India’s democratic principles.

The Enforcement Directorate has launched probes of many key opposition leaders, all of whom are political opponents of the BJP. Modi’s party denies using law enforcement agencies to target the opposition and says the agencies act independently.

Modi’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has been [*defeated in Delhi state elections by Kejriwal’s party*](https://apnews.com/article/religion-elections-new-delhi-2d906d1d2694372a9e2643efd6b6f659) and also was defeated in northern Punjab state in 2022.

Kejriwal launched the Aam Aadmi Party in 2012, and it won the Delhi state legislature election a year later, when he became the chief minister. Kejriwal, a former civil servant, campaigned on a promise to rid the Indian political system and governance of corruption and inefficiency.

The party’s symbol — a broom — and its promise to sweep the administration of graft struck a chord with Delhi residents, fed up with runaway inflation and slow economic growth. But he resigned as the chief minister 49 days later because his minority government couldn’t enact an anti-corruption law due to a lack of support from other political parties.

He took over as chief minister for a second five-year term in 2015 after his party’s stunning victory in the state elections when it grabbed 67 of 70 seats.

In the 2020 elections, Kejriwal's party re-emerged victorious and retained power in Delhi. Kejriwal was sworn in as chief minister of Delhi for the third time in a row. Outside Delhi, his party registered another major victory in the 2022 Punjab state elections.

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