

DEFAMATION CASE Court to hear Rahul Gandhi's plea on May 2

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
New Delhi

The Gujarat High Court yesterday said it would again hear on May 2 Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's plea challenging a Surat court order declining a stay on his conviction in a four-year-old criminal defamation case.

As the high court began hearing Rahul's petition challenging the Surat sessions court order, his lawyer Abhishek Manu Singhvi told the single judge bench of Justice Hemant Prachchak that if his client's petition is not allowed, the conviction will have irreversible consequences for Rahul Gandhi who would stand disqualified for a period of eight years.

The alleged offence for which Rahul Gandhi has been convicted and sentenced to two years in jail is neither serious nor does it involve moral turpitude, Singhvi argued while seeking a stay on the former's conviction in the 2019 defamation case.

A maximum punishment of two years in a bailable, non-cognizable offence that means he could lose his Lok Sabha seat "permanently and irreversibly", which is a "very serious additional irreversible consequence to the person and the constituency he represents," Singhvi contended.

Senior lawyer Nirupam Nanavati representing Purnesh Modi told the high court that Rahul's criminal revision petition is not maintainable and he should clarify under what legal provision he has moved the high court.



A woman lights a candle as she pays tribute to civilian people killed on Friday by a Russian missile strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, at a strike site in the town of Uman, Cherkasy region, Ukraine yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

SUDAN CRISIS ENTERS THIRD WEEK

'Country is falling apart'

Says Guterres; UN envoy says combatants more open to talks

AGENCIES

Warplanes on bombing raids drew heavy anti-aircraft fire over Khartoum yesterday as fierce fighting between Sudan's army and paramilitaries entered a third week, violating a renewed truce.

Army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his number two Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have agreed to multiple truces but none has effectively taken hold as the number of dead civilians continues to rise and chaos and lawlessness grip Khartoum, a city of five million people where many have been cloistered in their homes lacking food, water, and electricity.

"There is no right to go on fighting for power when the country is falling apart," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told Al



Arabiya television, reports AFP.

Guterres threw his support behind African-led mediation efforts.

"My appeal is for everything to be done to support an African-led initiative for peace in Sudan," he told Saudi-owned Al Arabiya.

Meanwhile, Volker Perthes, UN special representative in Sudan told Reuters yesterday that warring sides in Sudan are more open to negotiations and have accepted the conflict

that cannot continue.

He said the sides had nominated representatives for talks which had been suggested for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, or Juba in South Sudan, though he said there was a practical question over whether they could get there to "actually sit together".

He said no timeline had been set for talks.

Volker Perthes, who gave a possible flicker of hope even as fighting continued, noted that he had told the Security Council both sides thought they could win the conflict, most recently in a briefing a couple of days ago, but he also said attitudes were changing.

"They both think they will win, but they are both sort of more open to negotiations, the word 'negotiations' or 'talks' was not there in their discourse in the first week or so," he said.

"They have both accepted that this war cannot continue," he added.

Clouds carry bacteria across distances

Says study

AFP, Montreal

In a recent study by a team of Canadian and French researchers, clouds were found to carry drug-resistant bacteria over long distances.

"These bacteria usually live on the surface of vegetation like leaves, or in soil," lead author Florent Rossi said in a telephone interview Friday.

"We found that they are carried by the wind into the atmosphere and can travel long distances -- around the world -- at high altitudes in clouds," he told AFP.

The discovery was published in last month's edition of the journal *Science of The Total Environment*.

The researchers from Laval University in Quebec City and Clermont Auvergne University in central France searched for antibiotic-resistant genes from bacteria found in cloud samples.

An analysis of the retrieved mist revealed that they contained between 330 to more than 30,000 bacteria per millilitre of cloud water, for an average of around 8,000 bacteria per millilitre.

KSA, Iran to reopen embassies 'within days'

REUTERS, Beirut

Saudi Arabia and Iran will reopen embassies in each other's capitals "within days," Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said on Friday in a sign of warming relations after the two countries closed their missions seven years ago.

Speaking at a news conference in the Lebanese capital Beirut, Amirabdollahian did not give specific dates for the reopening of the embassies, which closed in 2016.

"During the last phone call between the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia on Eid al-Fitr, we agreed to work in the next coming days on the reopening of the Iranian and Saudi embassies in Tehran and Riyadh," Amirabdollahian said, according to an official Arabic translation.

The regional rivals agreed last month to restore diplomatic relations.

The Iranian FM also confirmed President Ebrahim Raisi would visit Syria in "the near future."

SUPPLEMENT

Climate resilience through local empowerment

Insights from the Local Government Initiative on Climate Change (LoGIC) Project

SARAH BINTAY SHAKHAWAT

Rikta Roy knows firsthand the devastating effects of climate change on coastal communities. Living in Dacope, one of the worst climate-affected areas in Bangladesh, she has experienced increased storms, cyclones, and salinity levels that have disrupted her livelihood over the years. Despite starting a small poultry farm with hopes of generating income, Rikta's dreams were shattered by Cyclone Amphan in May 2020, which swept away the farm.

Coastal women like Rikta are particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, often falling into a vicious cycle of poverty and vulnerability. The Local Government Initiative on Climate Change (LoGIC) project stepped in to break this cycle. Through the project, most climate-vulnerable women in Dacope Upazila, including Rikta, were given direct financial support to undertake climate adaptive livelihoods. With this fund, Rikta and her fellow climate-vulnerable women have been able to invest in watermelon cultivation, which now not only generates income but also serves as a beacon of hope for their future.



Community women are collecting safe drinking water thanks to rainwater harvesting water treatment plant under PBCRG Scheme

PHOTO CREDIT: LOGIC ARCHIVE

Throughout the process, the LoGIC project provided comprehensive support to these women, covering everything from planning and financing to developing climate-adaptive business models, leasing land, providing training on watermelon cultivation, creating access to financial institutions, and ultimately establishing market linkages to ensure that they receive fair value for their produce.

The LoGIC is a multi-donor collaborative initiative of Bangladesh Government, UNDP, UNCDF, EU and Sweden. Its primary aim is to empower and equip vulnerable communities, civil society organisations (CSOs), and Local Government Institutions (LGIs) to plan and finance sustainable climate change adaptation solutions in areas most affected by climate change. The Local Government Division (LGD) is the leading implementing partner for the project, working closely with UNDP and UNCDF.

"Besides the primary goal to reduce climate change impacts, the LoGIC project aims to eradicate the adaptation gap. Most of the efforts taken so far to address the impacts of climate change have been coping mechanisms, but adaptation strives for long-term resilience building through various actions," says A K M Azad Rahman, Project Coordinator, LoGIC project, UNDP.

Since July 2017, this project has been implemented in seven severely climate-vulnerable districts in Bangladesh: Khulna, Sunamganj, Kurigram, Bagerhat, Barguna, Patuakhali and Bhola. The 6-year-long LoGIC project is designed to support the most climate-vulnerable people through two financing schemes -- Community Resilience Fund (CRF) and Performance Based Climate Resilience Grants (PBCRG).

"While CRF is dedicated to support women for building climate adaptive livelihoods, PBCRG is used by the Union

Parishads for building climate adaptive infrastructure," shares Jesmul Hasan, Country Focal, UNCDF Bangladesh.

The watermelon cultivation initiative received funding under the Community Resilience Fund (CRF) scheme of the LoGIC project. Other 23 types of successful climate adaptive livelihood options (CALOs) covered under the scheme include vermicomposting, integrated farming, duck rearing, fish polyculture and climate-resilient sheep rearing. To date, the LoGIC project has supported 35,000 climate-vulnerable women, and the number of beneficiaries is expected to increase in the future.

The initiatives funded under the Performance Based Climate Resilience Grants (PBCRG) scheme of LoGIC have also brought about many life-changing stories.

In the coastal Bagerhat District's Morelganj Upazila, for example, the residents of Nishanbari Union were

grappling with increased salinity intrusion in the area, leading to a shortage of drinking water. Recognising the severity of the crisis, the Union Parishad, with support from the LoGIC project, established an integrated water management plant to ensure safe drinking water for the saline-stricken community.

"This is the only water treatment plant in the community that provides pure drinking water to the 500 families who have been suffering for the last two decades. We were closely involved in this initiative and provided voluntary support during its implementation," says Fozila Begam, a resident of Nishanbari Union.

LoGIC supported 72 Union Parishads with PBCRG to implement 639 climate-resilient community level schemes which benefited 898,449 people. The PBCRG schemes include climate resilient water and sanitation facility, solar-powered irrigation system, providing safety equipment to sea-going fishing boats, lightning/flood shelter, improved accessibility to cyclone shelters, vetiver & mangrove plantation and establishing community clinics and market sheds.

What sets the LoGIC project apart from other climate responses in Bangladesh is its Locally-led Adaptations (LLA) approach. Globally recognised as the most effective adaptation approach, LLA leverages local knowledge, ensures community participation, and empowers them to take ownership of the development initiative.

Investing in locally-led climate change adaptation projects can make a significant difference in vulnerable countries like Bangladesh, as demonstrated by the promising results of the LoGIC project. It has provided safety measures, strengthened climate adaptive infrastructure, and created livelihood opportunities. The real challenge now is to scale up the project.

According to A K M Azad Rahman, the project coordinator for LoGIC, the project will be tested in the Chittagong Hill Tracts for the next two years with the aim of expanding it to the national level.

Sarah Bintay Shakhawat is a journalist at *The Daily Star*.



The satisfied smile of a CRF beneficiary reflects the successful outcome of her diligent efforts.