

In Rajasthan Drama, Case Against Union Minister, Rebel MLA; 1 Arrest

By Our Correspondent

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Jaipur: Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat was accused along with rebel Congress MLA Bhanwar Lal Sharma of sedition and conspiracy in police cases today linked to Congress allegations of a plan to pull down its government in Rajasthan. The Congress alleged that investigations have revealed rebel MLAs were plotting with the BJP against the Ashok Gehlot government. A man named Sanjay Jain, also charged in the FIR, has been arrested. The BJP has denied any links to him, as claimed by the Congress.

The Congress has also suspended Bhanwar Lal Sharma and another rebel MLA, Vishvendra Singh, claiming audio proof that they were involved in deal-making to dislodge the party's government in cahoots with the BJP.

Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said two audio recordings have surfaced in which Bhanwar Lal Sharma was heard in discussions with BJP leaders. The party claims one of the voices belongs to Mr Shekhawat, a senior BJP leader from Rajasthan and Union Minister for "Jal Shakti". "I am ready to face any investigation. The audio doesn't have my voice. If I am called for questioning I will definitely go," Mr Shekhawat said.

The audio tapes have been circulating



Sachin Pilot, Deputy CM, Ashok Gehlot, CM, Rajasthan

online but the Congress did not play them at its media briefing; Mr Surjewala read out what he called were transcripts of the conversations. "Yesterday, shocking tapes were aired by the media in which Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, BJP leader Sanjay Jain and Congress MLA Bhanwar Lal Sharma spoke about bribing MLAs and bringing down the Rajasthan government. Congress has suspended Bhanwar Lal Sharma and Vishvendra Singh from the primary membership of the party. The party has also issued show-cause notices to them," Mr Surjewala said. Mr Sharma has denied the allegations. When the audio tapes surfaced on Thursday, he called them fake and asserted it was not his voice. The Congress has demanded that the allegations be investigated by the Rajasthan Police Special Operation Group (SOG), which reports to Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. The SOG filed two FIRs shortly after Mr Surjewala's press conference, one for sedition.

Mr Gehlot ordered an investigation during the Rajya Sabha election

for three seats last month, when he accused the BJP of plotting with Congress rebels to destabilize his government. Then Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot had rubbished talk of any such plan, saying Congress would not have won two of the three seats if that were true.

The simmering feud between the Chief Minister and his deputy exploded when Sachin Pilot received summons to answer questions on the alleged conspiracy. Mr Gehlot tried to sugar-coat the blow by claiming he had been summoned too, but Mr Pilot pointed out that as Chief Minister, he had sent himself one only as a fig leaf.

Wednesday, Mr Gehlot doubled down on the allegations against Mr Pilot, whom he has sacked as his deputy. "We have proof that horse-trading was being committed. Rs 20 crore was offered... Our deputy chief minister himself was doing the deal and was giving statements that no horse-trading was taking place. What clarifications are you giving when you yourself were involved in it," Mr Gehlot alleged. ■