
India's Gandhis face money laundering charges, opposition plans protests



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India's opposition Congress party has announced nationwide protests on Wednesday after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) charged senior leaders Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, along with others, in a money laundering case. The charges, presented in a Delhi court on Tuesday, accuse the Gandhis of using a shell company to illegally acquire assets worth over 20 billion rupees (\$233 million; £176 million) from the National Herald newspaper.

Congress spokesperson Jairam Ramesh denounced the charges as “politics of vendetta and intimidation” by the government. The Gandhis, who have denied any wrongdoing, have yet to publicly comment. Other Congress members, including Sam Pitroda, are also named in the investigation.

The ED began its probe in 2021 following a complaint by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) member Subramanian Swamy. Swamy alleges the Gandhis used party funds to take over Associated Journals Limited (AJL), publisher of the National Herald, and illegally acquired valuable properties. AJL ceased operations in 2008 but relaunched as a digital outlet in 2016.

Congress insists the party rescued the publisher due to its historical legacy, lending AJL over 900 million rupees. In 2010, AJL became debt-free after swapping debt for equity and assigning shares to Young Indian, a non-profit company. Sonia and Rahul Gandhi each own 38% of Young Indian.

The ED claims that Young Indian acquired AJL’s properties for only 5 million rupees, significantly undervaluing them. It has also issued notices to seize assets worth 6.6 billion rupees linked to Young Indian. The case is set for a hearing on April 25.

The opposition accuses the government of using the ED as a tool to target political rivals, with similar cases involving opposition figures in recent years.