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# After HC order, Gehlot stages dharna for Assembly session

MLAs stage five-hour sit-in on Raj Bhavan lawns as Governor stalls decision

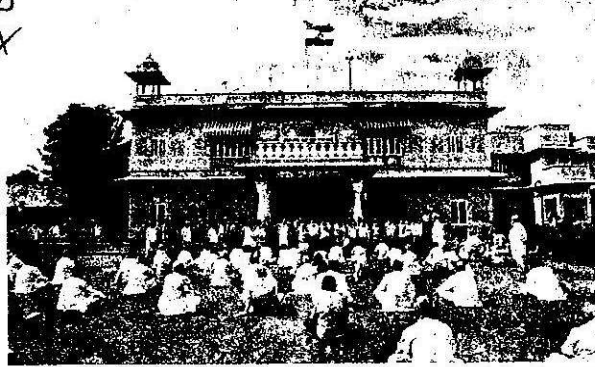
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
JAIPUR

After the Rajasthan High Court ordered status quo to be maintained in the disqualification proceedings against rebel leader Sachin Pilot and dissident MLAs, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot along with his legislators supporting him staged a sit-in on the lawns of Raj Bhawan here on Friday, demanding that the Governor give approval for convening a session of the State Assembly.

"We want an Assembly session from Monday. The [State] Cabinet has taken a decision on this," Mr. Gehlot told journalists outside the Raj Bhawan, while accusing Governor Kalraj Mishra of not giving the go-ahead "under some pressure from above". He said he wanted to go to the floor of the House and prove his majority.

## Court relief

Earlier in the day, the 19 dissident Congress MLAs of the Pilot camp got partial relief from the High Court, which ordered maintenance of status quo on the disqualification notices issued by Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi to them. The court order has essentially put the disqualification procedure on hold.



**For a hearing:** Congress MLAs supporting Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot protesting at the Raj Bhavan in Jaipur on Friday. •PTI

No action will be taken against the legislators until the Supreme Court resumes the hearing on the Speaker's special leave petition on July 27.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Indrajit Mahanty and Justice Prakash Gupta passed the interim order after agreeing to a request by the Pilot camp to make the Union government a party to the writ petition challenging the notices.

The caveat plea said no *ex parte* should be passed by the court. It said prior notice should be given to the legislators' designated lawyers so that they can be present in case of any hearing.

Unprecedented scenes of the MLAs raising slogans supporting Mr. Gehlot and

demanding the Assembly session be held were witnessed in Raj Bhawan after members of the Gehlot camp gathered. The legislators raised the slogans: "Call a session now" and "We want justice".

The dharna ended after about five hours with a decision taken to hold a Cabinet meeting later in evening. Health Minister Raghu Sharma said a list of 102 MLAs was submitted to the Governor with the claim of a clear majority in the 200-member Assembly and with the plea that a floor test had been suggested during the recent court hearings on the Speaker's disqualification notices.

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## Sibal criticises Rajasthan Governor

In a sharp criticism of the Rajasthan HC order and of Governor Kalraj Mishra for refusing to act on the advice of the State government, former Law Minister and Congress leader Kapil Sibal said the nation is "witnessing a new definition of democracy". He accused the Governor of "acting at the Centre's behest". ► PAGE 9

## Shekhawat should go, says Congress

After a court in Jaipur ordered a probe into Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat's alleged role in a multi-crore scam involving Sanjivani Credit Cooperative Society, the Congress on Friday again demanded his resignation. The party had earlier alleged that Mr. Shekhawat was behind efforts to topple the Gehlot government. ► PAGE 9

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## Gehlot stages dharna for Assembly session

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Before heading to the Raj Bhawan, Mr. Gehlot addressed a Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting at the hotel and said the Governor, as the Constitutional head of the State, was bound by the Cabinet's decision on convening a session.

If the Assembly session was not called and people from the entire State laid siege to Raj Bhawan, the government would not be responsible, he said.

Amid the show of strength by the agitating MLAs, Mr. Mishra came out to meet them and assured them of taking an early decision.

### Fresh proposal

According to sources in the Raj Bhawan, the Governor, who had earlier sought a legal opinion on whether an Assembly session could be allowed when the Supreme Court was seized of the disqualification matter, would consider a fresh proposal to be sent by the Cabinet after its meeting.

The Cabinet's earlier proposal, received on Thursday, was not very clear and had not mentioned the agenda for the session, said the sources.

Pradesh Congress Committee president Govind

Singh Dotasra said party workers would stage demonstrations at all district headquarters on Saturday against the BJP's "conspiracy" to bring down the Ashok Gehlot government.

"While the people want the elected government to complete its term, some invisible powers sitting in Delhi are trying to influence the Governor," he said.

### Under 10th Schedule

The High Court had earlier asked the Speaker to wait for its verdict before taking any action on his notices. The court admitted the petition, while framing 12 legal questions to be examined, and said it would hear arguments on the prayers to quash the show cause notices and declare the anti-defection law under the Tenth Schedule unconstitutional.

The notices were issued to the MLAs on a plea made by Congress Chief Whip Mahesh Joshi, who said that Mr. Pilot and his supporters did not attend CLP meetings despite the whip issued. The Pilot camp contended that a party whip applied only when the Assembly was in session.

The Supreme Court had on Thursday refused to intervene in the matter pending in the High Court and allowed the Division Bench to pass orders on the petition. However, the apex court had stated that orders would be subject to the outcome of the petition moved before it.