



2026 INSC 380

**REPORTABLE**

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA**

**INHERENT JURISDICTION**

**INTERLOCUTORY APPLICATION NO. 109573 OF 2026**

**IN**

**SUO MOTO WRIT PETITION (CIVIL) NO. 2 OF 2026**

**“IN RE: ILLEGAL SAND MINING IN THE NATIONAL CHAMBAL SANCTUARY AND THREAT TO ENDANGERED AQUATIC WILDLIFE.”**

**ORDER**

**Mehta, J.**

1. The present proceedings emanate from *suo motu* cognizance taken by this Court on 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2026, in light of disturbing reports highlighting rampant illegal sand mining within the bounds of the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary, resulting in severe degradation of critical wildlife habitats, including that of the endangered Gharials. Thereafter, on 20<sup>th</sup>

March, 2026, upon preliminary consideration of the matter, this Court observed that any destruction of wildlife habitat in protected areas would attract offences and penalties under the applicable environmental protection framework, including *inter alia* the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and accordingly issued notice to the States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, through their respective Principal Secretaries, as well as to the concerned authorities including the Director Generals of Police, the Departments of Mining and Geology, Forests, and Water Resources of the said States, and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Union of India. Notice was also directed to be issued to the Central Empowered Committee<sup>1</sup> to assist the Court in the present proceedings. Shri Nikhil Goel, Senior Advocate and Ms. Rupali Samuel, Advocate, were requested to assist the Court as *Amicus Curiae*.

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<sup>1</sup> For short, “CEC”.

**2.** Thereafter, the matter came up for hearing on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2026, when this Court took on record the First Report submitted by the learned *Amicus Curiae* as well as the Report No. 8 submitted by the CEC and granted four weeks' time to the States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh to file their responses thereto. The Court also granted six weeks' time to the CEC to furnish a detailed report, while permitting the State of Madhya Pradesh and the Ministry of Environment and Forests to file their respective affidavits within four weeks. The National Board for Wild Life was directed to be impleaded as a respondent and notice was issued accordingly. Pending further consideration, this Court stayed the operation of the notification dated 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2025 issued by the State of Rajasthan under Section 18 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and further directed that Original Application No. 248 of 2022 pending before the National Green Tribunal be transferred to this Court and tagged with the present proceedings. The matter was directed to be listed on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2026.

**3.** In the interregnum, the matter came to be mentioned on 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2026 by Ms. Rupali Samuel,

learned *Amicus Curiae*, who expressed urgency in the matter in light of certain disturbing recent developments. She submitted that a proper application would be moved seeking appropriate directions to highlight emergent issues. It was, thus, directed that the application, upon being filed, be listed on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2026.

**Emergent Issues/Incidents Highlighted in the Interlocutory Application<sup>2</sup>**

**A. Murder of Forest Guard Shri Harikesh Gurjar (8<sup>th</sup> April, 2026, Morena, Madhya Pradesh)**

4. It has been brought to the notice of this Court that on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2026, a grave incident occurred in District Morena, State of Madhya Pradesh, wherein a forest guard, Shri Harikesh Gurjar, aged about 35 years, was brutally killed while discharging his official duties during an anti-illegal mining operation. The incident took place in the early hours between approximately 5:30 AM and 6:00 AM, when a patrolling team of the Forest Department attempted to intercept a tractor-trolley transporting illegally mined sand near the Ranpur village intersection on National Highway-552. Upon being signalled to stop,

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<sup>2</sup> Interlocutory Application No. 109573 of 2026.

the driver of the vehicle deliberately accelerated and ran over the said forest guard, crushing his head under the vehicle and causing his instantaneous death. The said incident highlights the brazen and violent manner in which illegal sand mining operations are being carried out, posing a direct threat to enforcement officials.

**B. Murder of Forest Guard Shri Jitendra Singh Shekhawat (08-09<sup>th</sup> January, 2026, District Dholpur, Rajasthan)**

5. It is further submitted that this is not an isolated instance. On 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2026, another forest guard, Shri Jitendra Singh Shekhawat, posted at the Jhiri checkpoint in the Sarmathura subdivision of District Dholpur, State of Rajasthan, was similarly targeted while attempting to stop a vehicle engaged in illegal sand mining. He was deliberately run over by a tractor-trolley, sustaining grievous injuries, including severe trauma to his lower body. Despite being provided medical treatment, including amputation of his leg, he succumbed to his injuries on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2026. The recurrence of such fatal attacks on police officials and forest personnel underscores a pattern of organized violent and

brazen criminal activities by illegal mining operators, thereby raising serious concerns regarding law enforcement and administrative failure in the affected regions.

**C. Illegal Sand Mining Threatening Structural Integrity of Inter-State Bridge over a Chambal River Stretch**

6. Apart from the above, the Interlocutory Application also highlights continuing, large-scale and systematic illegal sand mining operations being carried out in close proximity to critical infrastructure, particularly a bridge constructed around 2016-2017 on National Highway-44 connecting the States of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan near the Morena-Dholpur border. Reports dated 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2026 indicate that heavy machinery, including excavators, tractors and dumpers, are being deployed for mineral (sand) extraction activities and that extensive excavation has been undertaken dangerously close to, and even beneath, several pillars of the said bridge, including the creation of deep pits ranging from 30 to 50 feet around certain pillars, while excavation of substantial depth has also been carried out near other supporting structures.

Such illegal, indiscriminate, and unregulated mining activity, carried out in flagrant disregard of environmental and safety norms, is likely to compromise the structural integrity of the bridge, which serves as a vital inter-State connectivity link carrying thousands of vehicles daily. It is further indicated in the application that mining directly under and around the pillars has led to the formation of large cavities, some filled with water, thereby compounding the structural vulnerability of the bridge and posing additional risks. The continued excavation in the vicinity of the bridge not only endangers public safety but also poses a serious and imminent risk of structural failure, thereby raising grave concerns regarding administrative oversight and necessitating urgent intervention by this Court.

**7.** At the hearing conducted on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2026, Shri S.V. Raju, learned Additional Solicitor General appearing on behalf of the State of Madhya Pradesh, apprised this Court that the investigation into the death of forest guard, Shri Harikesh Gurjar, is currently in progress and is being pursued in earnest, and shall be carried to its logical conclusion in accordance with law. Insofar as the issue

concerning illegal sand mining in the vicinity of the bridge on National Highway-44 is concerned, it was submitted that the State Government has constituted a fact-finding commission to inquire into the matter, which is expected to submit its report within a period of one week for appropriate consideration. It was also submitted that the report, upon being submitted, shall be placed before this Court for consideration, whereafter appropriate orders may be passed.

**8.** We have carefully perused the material placed on record, including the averments made in the Interlocutory Application, and have given our thoughtful consideration to the submissions advanced by the learned counsel appearing for the State of Madhya Pradesh, the learned *Amicus Curiae* and Shri C.P. Goyal appearing on behalf of the CEC. Upon such consideration, and in light of the facts and circumstances brought to our notice, we proceed to examine the serious issues arising in the present matter which require our immediate attention.

**9.** This Court has, time and again, taken cognizance of the rampant illegal mining activities and the grave and far-reaching environmental consequences arising therefrom. It has been

consistently observed that unregulated and indiscriminate extraction of sand and other minor minerals leads to severe disruption of riverine and ecological systems by altering natural flow patterns, degrading riverbeds, destabilizing sediment composition, and depleting groundwater reserves. Such activities not only result in erosion, channel instability, and increased flood vulnerability, but also adversely affect aquatic biodiversity, riparian habitats, agriculture, and water security. The Court has further underscored that mining operations carried out without requisite environmental clearances or scientific replenishment studies reflect a serious failure of regulatory oversight and environmental governance. The problem is further compounded by the ever-increasing demand for construction materials, giving rise to large-scale illegal mining, often carried out in an organized manner with little regard for the rule of law. In several instances, faced with the alarming scale of environmental degradation and continued non-compliance with statutory safeguards, this Court has not hesitated to direct the immediate cessation or restraint of mining activities until due process,

including environmental clearances and scientific assessments, is duly undertaken. The cumulative impact of these practices has been recognized as causing irreversible ecological damage, undermining sustainable development, and posing a significant threat to environmental integrity, thereby necessitating strict enforcement measures and timely judicial intervention.<sup>3</sup>

**10.** Having regard to the magnitude and seriousness of the issues involved in the present matter, as well as the *prima facie* lackadaisical approach adopted by the States concerned, this Court cannot remain a silent spectator. Despite repeated directions issued from time to time, both on the judicial as well as administrative side, no effective or meaningful steps appear to have been taken thus far to address the continuing illegal sand mining activities and the resultant ecological degradation, more so when such activities are being carried out within a protected area, namely, a wildlife sanctuary,

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<sup>3</sup> See, ***Deepak Kumar v. State of Haryana***, (2012) 4 SCC 629; ***State (NCT of Delhi) v. Sanjay***, (2014) 9 SCC 772; ***Naveen Sharma v. State of Rajasthan***, 2017 SCC Online SC 2087; ***Bajri Lease LoI Holders Welfare Society v. State of Rajasthan***, 2020 SCC OnLine SC 1295; and ***Bajri Lease LoI Holders Welfare Society v. State of Rajasthan***, (2022) 16 SCC 581.

thereby exacerbating the gravity of the situation. In such glaring circumstances, the situation warrants immediate and decisive intervention. Accordingly, this Court is of the considered opinion that it is necessary to assume a more proactive role in the matter and to issue appropriate directions to ensure effective compliance with the environmental protection regime and to safeguard the fragile ecosystem in question.

**11.** It is indeed a matter of grave and serious concern that the State authorities, who are entrusted with the solemn duty of enforcing the rule of law and protecting public resources, appear to have abdicated, if not altogether abandoned, their statutory and constitutional responsibilities. The circumstances, taken as a whole, may even warrant an inference of tacit connivance. The material placed before us discloses a disturbing pattern of inaction and administrative indifference, despite the issue having been repeatedly highlighted before various *fora*. Notably, the National Green Tribunal has been grappling with the issue since the year 2022, *albeit* without any significant success. The continuing illegal mining activities, coupled with the grave

incidents brought on record, reflect not merely isolated lapses but a systemic and institutional failure to discharge obligations cast upon the State under law. Such apathy, particularly in the face of escalating environmental degradation and threats to human life, is both indefensible and wholly unacceptable in a constitutional democracy governed by the rule of law.

**12.** What is even more startling and disquieting is the fact brought to our notice that, in an affidavit filed before the National Green Tribunal, it has been stated on behalf of the State of Madhya Pradesh that forest officials do not possess the necessary equipment, more specifically, adequate weaponry, to effectively deal with the sand *mafia*, who are reportedly armed with superior weaponry and modern vehicles. This disclosure, far from justifying inaction, exposes a shocking state of unpreparedness and a lack of institutional will on the part of the State machinery in tackling unlawful and organized illegal mining activities. The State cannot be permitted to plead helplessness or take shelter under its own inadequacies, particularly when such inadequacies directly contribute to the perpetuation of illegality,

violence, loss of human life, and the irreversible destruction of habitats vital to critically endangered species.

**13.** The aforesaid circumstances, in our considered view, demonstrate a complete and manifest apathy on the part of the States of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan towards the discharge of their fundamental constitutional obligations, namely, the maintenance of public order and the prevention of unlawful and unruly activities having a deleterious impact on the public at large and the fragile ecosystem involved. The failure to equip enforcement personnel adequately and to ensure their safety while discharging official duties strikes at the very root of governance and the rule of law. This Court is, therefore, constrained to observe that such an approach not only emboldens the perpetrators of the crime but also erodes public confidence in the State's ability to uphold law and order, thereby necessitating immediate, concrete, and accountable corrective measures at the highest levels of administration.

**14.** Resultantly, this Court is of the considered opinion that the first and foremost step required to be undertaken is the strengthening of the

surveillance and monitoring framework so as to effectively curb and deter illegal sand mining activities. A robust, coordinated, and technology-driven mechanism, ensuring real-time monitoring and prompt enforcement, is essential to prevent the continued perpetration of such unlawful activities and to restore the rule of law in the affected regions.

**15.** In this regard, Shri C.P. Goyal, appearing on behalf of the CEC, submitted that the CEC has held discussions with the concerned authorities of the States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. It was stated that, pursuant to such deliberations, a decision has been taken to augment surveillance and strengthen enforcement mechanisms, including by deploying high-resolution cameras on high masts along routes predominantly used for illegal sand mining and transportation, with a view to ensuring more effective tracking of vehicles and persons involved in such activities. Such measures, it is submitted, would enable real-time monitoring, facilitate effective identification and tracking of vehicles and the individuals involved, and act as a strong deterrent against the continuation of

illegal mining activities, thereby contributing towards more robust enforcement of the law.

**16.** We are conscious of the fact that, *vide* order dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2026, this Court had granted time till 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2026 to the States concerned to file their respective affidavits in response to the reports submitted by the learned *Amicus Curiae* as well as the CEC, and that the matter is presently at a stage where such responses are awaited. Ordinarily, in keeping with settled judicial practice and principles of procedural fairness, this Court would have been inclined to await the completion of pleadings and afford the parties adequate opportunity to place their stand on record before proceeding further in the matter. However, the material placed before us, including the recent incidents brought to our notice, discloses a continuing and unabated course of illegal activities, which not only undermines the rule of law but also poses serious and escalating threats to human life, public safety, and ecological integrity. In such circumstances, this Court cannot permit the situation to persist unchecked and is of the considered view that the prevailing conditions warrant immediate and urgent measures.

**17.** Having regard to the aforesaid, and in view of the grave and emergent nature of the situation, and bearing in mind the constitutional obligation of this Court to protect the rule of law and ensure effective enforcement of environmental safeguards, we are of the considered opinion that immediate intervention is warranted. Accordingly, without prejudice to the rights and contentions of the parties, and in exercise of our powers under Article 142 of the Constitution of India, we deem it appropriate to issue certain interim directions so as to arrest the ongoing damage, ensure accountability, and put in place an effective mechanism for prevention and control of illegal sand mining activities in the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary.

**18.** In view of the foregoing discussion and having regard to the exigencies of the situation, the following directions are hereby issued for immediate compliance: -

- A.** The States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shall ensure the installation of high-resolution, Wi-Fi enabled CCTV cameras, mounted on appropriately elevated poles/masts, at all routes frequently used for

illegal sand mining as well as along vulnerable stretches of the river where such activities are prevalent. The concerned authorities shall undertake a detailed assessment with regard to the positioning and placement of such CCTV cameras, in consultation with the Central Empowered Committee, so as to ensure that the installation is carried out in a manner that minimizes ecological disturbance and complies with all applicable environmental regulations, particularly those relating to non-disturbance of the riverbed and surrounding forest areas, to the greatest extent possible.

**B.** The live feed of such surveillance cameras installed in terms of Direction (A) shall be placed under the direct control, supervision, and operational oversight of the Superintendent of Police/Senior Superintendent of Police of the concerned district and the Divisional Forest Officer, who shall ensure continuous and effective monitoring by designating appropriate officers, not below the rank of Sub-Inspector/Station House Officer and an appropriately ranked forest official, for the said

purpose. In the event of detection of any instance of illegal mining or allied unlawful activity through such surveillance, the concerned officer/s shall be under a mandatory obligation to initiate prompt and appropriate action in accordance with law, including the mobilisation of enforcement teams and initiation of necessary legal proceedings, so as to ensure effective deterrence and prevention of such activities.

- C.** The concerned authorities/departments of the States of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan shall, on a pilot basis, ensure that GPS tracking devices are mandatorily installed in all vehicles and machinery, including dredgers, loaders, excavators, tractors, and any other equipment or machinery used in mining activities, registered/operating within District Morena, Madhya Pradesh and District Dholpur, Rajasthan, so as to enable real-time monitoring, effective surveillance, and complete traceability of their movement. The implementation shall be carried out through the respective Departments of Transport of the States, and the data

generated shall be made accessible to the District Magistrates and the police authorities for enforcement purposes. Based on the outcome and effectiveness of the said pilot implementation, appropriate steps shall be taken for its phased extension to other districts falling within or adjoining the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary. Appropriate publicity shall be given to the above direction, stipulating that any non-compliance shall result in the immediate seizure of the vehicle or machinery concerned, with no possibility of release except with the express permission of this Court.

**D.** The States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shall, by the next date of hearing, place on record a detailed report indicating the feasibility of establishing dedicated control rooms in each district falling within or adjoining the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary, wherein the live CCTV feeds and data collected through surveillance mechanisms, including GPS tracking systems, may be centrally received, monitored, and analysed. The report shall also indicate the proposed framework for

coordination between the concerned departments and enforcement agencies, so as to ensure that timely and effective action is taken in accordance with law on the basis of such real-time inputs.

**E.** The concerned authorities/departments of the States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shall ensure that any vehicle or machinery found to be involved in illegal sand mining is immediately seized, and that the driver, owner, and all persons involved are prosecuted in accordance with applicable laws, including the relevant environmental protection, conservation, and mining regulation statutes. Appropriate proceedings for confiscation of such vehicles and machinery shall also be initiated and diligently pursued in accordance with law, so as to ensure effective deterrence against such illegal activities.

**F.** The concerned authorities including the State Pollution Control Boards of the States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shall initiate appropriate, time-bound proceedings for the assessment, imposition, and

recovery of environmental compensation from all violators, strictly in accordance with the “Polluter Pays” principle, so as to ensure restitution as well as remediation of the ecological damage caused by illegal sand mining activities. Such exercise shall be undertaken in a scientific, transparent and objective manner, having due regard to the extent of environmental degradation, and shall be effectively enforced to serve both compensatory and deterrent purposes.

**G.** The States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shall constitute dedicated and fully operational and well-equipped joint patrol teams in each district falling within or adjoining the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary, comprising officials from the police and forest departments. The States shall ensure that an adequate and well-trained strength of support security personnel is deployed for such patrols on a continuous and round-the-clock basis, particularly in vulnerable and high-risk areas. It shall further be ensured that such teams are equipped with modern surveillance and

communication equipment, protective gear, and appropriate arms, so as to enable them to effectively prevent illegal mining activities, respond swiftly to emergent situations, and safely handle instances involving resistance and violence by organized groups engaged in such activities.

**H.** At all existing or newly established check points, whether permanent or set up on the basis of specific intelligence inputs, the officers deployed shall be provided with adequate and modern equipment, including protective gear, communication devices, surveillance aids, and necessary arms, so as to ensure that they are fully equipped, both in terms of safety and operational capability, to effectively deal with unlawful and potentially dangerous illegal mining activities. The States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shall further ensure that such personnel are appropriately trained and supported, so as to enable them to respond swiftly and efficiently to any emergent situation arising at such check points.

- I.** The States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shall, in close coordination with one another, formulate and implement a comprehensive, uniform, and time-bound Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to effectively deal with incidents involving illegal sand mining, particularly those involving organized, violent, or armed resistance by persons engaged in such activities. The SOP shall, *inter alia*, lay down clear operational protocols for interception, seizure, arrest, and emergency response, including safeguards for the safety of enforcement personnel. It shall further provide for robust inter-State coordination and communication mechanisms, including real-time information sharing, joint operations, and coordinated response strategies, so as to effectively address situations having inter-State and cross-border ramifications and to ensure seamless enforcement across territorial boundaries.
- J.** Any dereliction of duty, negligence, inaction, or failure to comply with the directions of this Court shall be viewed with utmost seriousness.

The officers concerned would be held personally accountable and shall be liable to appropriate action, including initiation of contempt proceedings before this Court. Such action shall be taken without exception so as to ensure strict compliance and to uphold the authority of law and the orders of this Court.

**K.** The States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shall, by the next date of hearing, place on record comprehensive affidavits indicating the progress made in compliance with the directions issued by this Court, along with a detailed plan of action outlining the further steps proposed to be undertaken and the timelines for achieving full and effective compliance with the aforesaid directions.

**19.** It cannot be gainsaid that the issues involved are of grave concern inasmuch as, the rampant illegal mining activities in the riverbed have created an environmental crisis and havoc in the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary, causing a grave risk to the very project of Gharial preservation, of which the State Governments themselves were proponents and

were under an obligation to foster and promote. The utter failure of the State Governments in discharging this duty is writ large on the face of record. The lackadaisical response of the States in the proceedings before the National Green Tribunal gives rise to a genuine apprehension in our mind regarding the very intent of the State Governments to act as the protectors of environment. The statutory framework is well-armed to deal with the mining *mafias* but apparently the administrative authorities are dragging their feet, for reasons which are not difficult to discern. We feel that under such grave circumstances, the State Governments concerned would be well advised to invoke the provisions relating to preventive detention, seizure and confiscation of immovable properties and machinery, and to undertake effective and stringent prosecutions, so as to bring the offenders to book and ensure protection of the environment.

**20.** We, therefore, expect the States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh to come out with concrete and effective measures for tackling the illegal mining activities, failing which this Court will be constrained to invoke its extraordinary

jurisdiction for issuing appropriate directions, including the deployment of paramilitary forces or the Central Reserved Police Force; directing a complete ban on sand mining in the States of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan; and imposing heavy penalties on the said States for failing to safeguard critical habitats and the river ecosystem vital for sustaining all forms of life. In case effective and positive steps are not taken by the next date of hearing, this Court shall be constrained to pass urgent and stringent directions to deal with the situation.

**21.** The directions issued hereinabove are in furtherance of this Court's constitutional obligation to uphold the rule of law and to ensure effective protection of the environment, which forms an integral facet of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The issues arising in the present matter transcend mere questions of regulatory compliance and strike at the very heart of environmental governance. The protection of natural resources and fragile ecosystems is not only a statutory obligation but a constitutional imperative. The continued degradation of natural resources and

fragile ecosystems for short-term gains and greed, coupled with administrative indifference, cannot be countenanced in a system governed by the rule of law. It is, therefore, incumbent upon all concerned authorities to act with a sense of responsibility, urgency, and commitment, so as to ensure that the balance between development and environmental preservation is meaningfully sustained for present and future generations.

**22.** The States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shall file appropriate affidavits, by the next date of hearing, in compliance with the order dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2026, as well as the directions issued hereinabove.

**23.** The Registry is directed to forthwith transmit a copy of this order to the Principal Secretaries of the States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, so as to ensure due compliance with the directions issued *vide* this order.

**24.** In view of the aforesaid, Interlocutory Application No. 109573 of 2026 shall stand disposed of.

**25.** List the main matter on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2026, for further consideration and passing appropriate directions.

.....**J.**  
**(VIKRAM NATH)**

.....**J.**  
**(SANDEEP MEHTA)**

**NEW DELHI;**  
**APRIL 17, 2026.**