

March 16, 2019

# Rahul Gandhi event comes under scanner

## Report sought on Stella Maris interaction

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Congress president Rahul Gandhi's interaction with the students of Stella Maris College in Chennai on Wednesday has triggered a controversy, with Director of Collegiate Education R. Sarumathi on Friday seeking details of the circumstances under which the meeting was arranged as the Model Code of Conduct is in place for the Lok Sabha polls.

In a letter to the Regional Joint Director of Collegiate Education, Ms. Sarumathi said it was brought to her notice that a meeting of a political leader was held on the college premises on March 13. "Since the Model Code of Conduct is in place, you are requested to enquire into the circumstances under which this meeting was held and how permission was granted for it, immediately, and submit a report," she said. Meanwhile, two FIRs were filed for violation of the Model Code of Conduct during Mr. Gandhi's visit to Chennai. Sources in the District Election Office said FIRs were registered for defacement of walls near the venue, and for putting up banners and posters without permission. The FIRs have been registered against two Congress members and the printer of the digital banner.

Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president K.S. Alagiri said Mr. Gandhi's interaction with the students was fixed

months ago. In a statement, Mr. Alagiri said, "The Students' Union of the College had decided to invite Mr. Rahul Gandhi a few months ago itself. It was decided that he will interact with the students when he visits Chennai and hence the interaction happened on March 13." Mr. Alagiri also referred to Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo's comments, on the same day when Mr. Gandhi addressed the students, that the meeting would not constitute a violation since prior permission was sought for the meeting and it was the college that invited him to speak to the students.

### What the rules say

Mr. Alagiri questioned the authority of the State government to raise a complaint on the issue. "If the Tamil Nadu government plans to take any action against a reputed college like Stella Maris for holding the event, it would have to face severe consequences," he warned. The EC's guidelines for political parties during the operation of the Model Code of Conduct prohibit the use of educational institutions for political meetings.

A former EC official said that generally, political parties are told to keep off college campuses as they are not public places. If an institution gets government funding or grants, political parties are encouraged not to hold meetings there.