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Sonia Gandhi central to \$100 million libel suit

SUMAN GUHA MOZUMDER
in New York

The Indian National Overseas Congress has filed a \$100 million libel lawsuit against three people for allegedly defaming Congress party president Sonia Gandhi during her October 2007 visit to New York.

The INOC, a subsidiary of the Congress party that leads the ruling United Progressive Alliance government in New Delhi, named Arish Sahani, Dr Bharat Barai and Narendra (Narain) Kataria in the lawsuit filed in the New York State Supreme Court, all of whom are allegedly affiliated with an organization that calls itself the Forum for Saving Gandhi's Heritage.

Lending political coloration to the lawsuit is the fact that Sahani and Kataria are associated with the Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party, a wing of the BJP that is the main Opposition to the Congress in India. Kataria is also president of the Indian American Intellectuals Forum.

According to court papers, the INOC has demanded judgment against the three and an award of 'actual, compensatory, special and punitive damages in the amount of \$100 million', in addition to costs and disbursements, legal fees and other further relief 'that the court deems fit, just and proper.'

The case relates to Sonia Gandhi's visit to New York to attend an informal plenary session of the United Nations General Assembly that had declared October 2, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, as the International Day of Non-Violence, and also to deliver the inaugural lecture at the event.

The till-then relatively unknown Forum for Saving Gandhi's Heritage bought a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times*, which accused Sonia Gandhi of violating multiple laws in India.

The Forum also organized a noisy protest outside the United Nations headquarters October 2 while Sonia Gandhi was inside the building delivering her plenary address.

Holding placards that read 'Sonia, get out of India,' and 'Mahatma

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a Abroad, died after a brief illness April 0