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Artist to defy bar on Sabarmati play

BASANT RAWAT

Ahmedabad, Feb. 4: The river has something to say but the censor board refuses to listen.

Three days before *Suno Nadi Kya Kehti Hai* is scheduled to go on stage, the Gujarat State Cultural Censor Board has told director Hiren Gandhi the play will not be cleared till he revises certain sections of the script.

The play highlights the plight of 10,000 urban poor families — living on a nine-km stretch on the banks the Sabarmati — who will be displaced by the state government's controversial riverfront beautification project.

A shopping-cum-recreation centre for the rich is supposed to come up there.

But Gandhi, who received a letter from the censor board yesterday, refuses to be cowed. Vowing to stage the play as scheduled on Friday at H.K. Hall without any changes, he said he would not be "dictated" by the censor board.

[X]

"The script cannot be revised as that would change the core message of the play... the show will go on," Gandhi, also a city-based social activist, said today.

Several artists and eminent personalities — including actress Nandita Das, filmmaker Anand Patwardhan and theatre personality Habib Tanvir — are rallying behind Gandhi.

They have signed a memorandum condemning "the move by the Gujarat government to deny the right to protest" by involving the "draconian" censor board.

Gujarat and Maharashtra are the only two states where theatre is subject to censorship. Only after the censor board clears plays do police grant the licence to stage them.

Several cultural activists, including Gandhi, have long been demanding that the board be disbanded.

The script of *Suno Nadi Kya Kehti Hai* — written by poet-playwright Sarup Dhruv — was submitted to the censor board over a month ago. A large part of the play comprises hard-hitting dialogues on the riverfront project, globalisation, the communal riots and the anti-terror law.

The riverfront project is the brainchild of the state government and is now backed by the Congress as well as some non-government organisations that initially opposed it. Some NGO still against the project concede they are fighting a losing battle.



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