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PAPER CLIPPINGS

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Disqualification pleas: Goa Speaker to rule on April 20

Supreme Court schedules hearing for the day after

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Nudged by the Supreme Court, the Goa Assembly Speaker on Tuesday agreed to advance the date of his decision on the disqualification petitions filed against 10 former Congress MLAs who 'merged' with the BJP in 2019 from April 29 to April 20.

Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who appeared for the Speaker's office, whether the initial date of April 29 was fixed with an eye on the fact that he would retire on April 23.

"You want the matter to go to another Bench, which will have to hear the case all over again," Chief Justice

Bobde, who heads the three-judge Bench hearing the case, asked the law officer.

"It was never that idea... Have it on April 21-22?" Mr. Mehta said.

The court said the Speaker had reserved the disqualification proceedings for orders on February 26... April 29 is not acceptable by this Bench... Ask him [Speaker] to dispose of the petition preferably this week itself," Chief Justice Bobde told Mr. Mehta. The Solicitor General said the Speaker was a constitutional authority who should be free to exercise his discretion in these issues.

But senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the petitioner and the Congress party, said the Speaker was

"making a mockery of the whole process" under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution. "He has not decided the petitions for the past 19 months. There is a judgment of this court which says the Speaker should decide in four months..." Mr. Sibal argued.

Finally, after receiving instructions, Mr. Mehta informed the court that the Speaker would decide on April 20. The court scheduled a hearing on April 21.

On January 4, the CJI had orally observed that "nobody can have a vested right to delay" a plea filed by Goa Congress leader Girish Chodankar challenging the Speaker's delay of over 19 months.