

Shiv Sena activists enter Taj, pray inside

A group of Shiv Sena activists, including three women, entered the Taj Mahal complex and prayed within the precincts Thursday. They were taken into custody and later released.

Around 10 Shiv Sena activists bought tickets and entered one by one into the Taj Mahal complex in the afternoon. They performed some kind of 'parikrama' (walked around the monument) of the main structure with folded hands. They were forced to stop when security personnel noticed them wearing saffron scarves. A minor scuffle ensued after which the police took them to the Taj Ganj thana.

They were released in the evening.

The Shiv Sena claims the 17th century monument is actually a Shiva temple.

However, senior home department and police officials in Lucknow and Agra have denied the incident.

Inspector-General of Police (Agra zone) Gurbachan Lal told IANS: 'The Central Industrial Security Force, which is in charge of Taj security, frisked some persons on suspicion and nothing objectionable was found on them.'

'Such an incident has not happened and no arrests have been made at all,' Lal categorically said. 'They were some local people and all had a valid entry ticket,' he added.

In Lucknow, Principal Secretary (Home) Mahesh Gupta and Additional Director-General of Police Brij Lal told reporters that some 'Shiv Sainiks tried to enter the mausoleum but no such incident (puja) took place inside the premises.'

The station house officer Taj Ganj, Raj Kumar Sharma, also denied any puja was performed by the Shiv Sena activists.

'Nothing of the sort happened. There is zero percent truth in their claims. District Magistrate Anil Kumar also came. The Shiv Sena group was escorted by the police and the CISF personnel. They neither performed arti nor any puja. I have apprised all the seniors of the whole affair.'

However, the Shiv Sena activists and others who saw them say the group did enter and performed whatever puja they could. Later, they interacted with the TV channel reporters there.

The police officials and the Archaeological Survey of India personnel say the people 'committed no crime' and therefore no action could be taken against them.

Conflicting reports apart, people are still not clear what the top police officials and the administrative officers, including the district magistrate, were doing at the Taj, if no such incident took place there.

The Shiv Sena had announced earlier that its activists would perform puja and aarti on every Monday during the month of Shravan, considered auspicious for the worship of Hindu god Shiva. On Monday, they were prevented from entering the Taj premises. They later performed the puja at the Taj corridor.

Vinoo Lavania, Shiv Sena chief in Agra, said they had gone to the Taj Mahal as ordinary citizens of India and felt like praying. 'So, what's wrong with that,' he asked.

R.K. Dixit, Archaeological Survey of India's in-charge of the Taj Mahal, told IANS: 'They came in a group as ordinary citizens and purchased tickets. We were with them all the time along with the Taj Ganj police station in-charge. With folded hands they went towards the mosque and went back. How could we have prevented their entry as they did nothing objectionable.'

'I don't know why such a hullabaloo is being made about it. They told me their programme is for Mondays and had come today just to see the Taj Mahal.'

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