

Raj Thackeray's remarks spark violence, probe ordered

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray's controversial remarks on north Indian people led to clashes in parts of Maharashtra Sunday. While the state government ordered a high-level probe into the violence, a group called for a protest shutdown in [Mumbai](#) Monday.

Deputy Chief Minister R.R. Patil announced late Sunday that the state's director general of police and Mumbai's police commissioner will probe the violence.

The Uttar Bharatiya Development Forum, an umbrella organisation of various groups of north Indians in the city, called for a protest closure.

In Nashik, MNS activists barged into a cinema house exhibiting a Bhojpuri movie and damaged the theatre and assaulted some of the people watching a matinee show.

MNS activists allegedly indulged in throwing stones at north Indian business establishments and homes in some parts of Raigad district, south of Mumbai.

Police resorted to cane-charge when over a thousand MNS supporters attacked some north Indians at Dadar in central Mumbai Sunday afternoon.

In the ensuing scuffle, several food and vegetable stalls run by north Indians were damaged or destroyed.

The MNS activists also targeted taxis sporting Samajwadi Party flags and damaged at least two taxis in the area and assaulted a cabbie.

Late in the evening, a cinema house in Thane near here was also targeted.

In the last few days, Raj, the estranged nephew of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, has repeatedly ridiculed people from north India settled in Mumbai and also Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan, who is close to the Samajwadi Party, the leading opposition party in Uttar Pradesh.

Meanwhile, Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav held a rally here that was also addressed by other leaders of the United National Progressive Alliance (UNPA), including Telugu Desam Party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu, National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah and Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh and his party's Maharashtra unit chief Abu Asim Azmi.

Yadav pointed out that all Indians have a right to live and work anywhere in the country. 'The Samajwadi Party will give a fitting reply to anybody who dares to stop them.'

Deputy Commissioner of Police Niket Kaushik told IANS that police had stepped up security measures following widespread rumours that MNS activists would attack north Indians arriving by trains at the Lokmanya Tilak Terminus near the Bandra-Kurla Complex.

Last week, on several fora, Raj Thackeray lashed out at the north Indians on different issues, including performing Chhath Puja, a festival especially popular in Bihar. He demanded that they must celebrate only Maharashtrian festivals.

Raj ridiculed Amitabh Bachchan's decision to promote Uttar Pradesh as its brand ambassador earlier. 'Since he has lived and flourished in Maharashtra, why can't he promote this state?' he said.

He also questioned the move to construct a girls school in Uttar Pradesh named after Amitabh Bachchan's daughter-in-law and film star Aishwarya Rai, for which the foundation stone was laid last Sunday.

'Are there no girls in Maharashtra? Why can't they construct a school here?' he asked.

While the star has refrained from replying to him, his wife and actor Jaya Bachchan said: 'For me, Shri Bal Thackeray is a like a father and (his son) Uddhav is like a son. I don't know any other Thackeray.'

When reporters asked her about the school project, Jaya Bachchan said the Bachchans would gladly construct a school in Maharashtra too if Raj was willing to donate land.

Abu Asim Azmi, the president of the Maharashtra unit of Samajwadi Party, and some of his supporters were arrested late in the evening.

They had gone to meet Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh at his residence in south Mumbai, said city Samajwadi Party youth president Farooq Ghosi, who too was among those arrested.

When Deshmukh declined to meet them, the angry delegation squatted in protest outside Varsha, the chief minister's official residence at the Malabar Hill.

When they refused to disperse, police took them into custody for unlawful assembly in a high-security VIP zone.

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