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Bollywood actors Rashmika Mandanna and Vicky Kaushal attend the album launch of 'Chhaava', in Mumbai

Special drive on Mumbai coastal road to curb racing, noise pollution

MUMBAI: Authorities launched a special drive on Thursday to check racing and vehicular noise pollution on the newly opened coastal road in Mumbai, officials said. The move comes after a 19-year-old collegian died when a car driven by her friend overturned on the coastal road in south Mumbai on February 8. Last month, the Regional Transport Office (RTO) suspended the licences of two men for three months and seized their cars for allegedly racing on the coastal road. One of the cars hit the sidewall of a tunnel on the road during the race and its driver abandoned the vehicle and fled, causing a traffic jam. There has also been a rise in complaints from people staying near the coastal road about noise pollution from vehicles.

ZP launches water disinfection campaign in Thane to counter GBS

THANE: The Zilla Parishad in Maharashtra's Thane district has launched a water disinfection drive in rural areas amid a Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) outbreak in Pune and other parts of the state, an official said on Thursday. Water contamination is said to be the primary reason behind a spike in GBS cases in the Pune district. As part of the Thane Zilla Parishad's campaign, the authorities will inspect over 5,430 water sources at various places, including public places, gram panchayat offices, schools, Anganwadi centres and health centres, said an official release. Trained women volunteers have been handed biological field testing kits - FTK-H2S vials - to examine water quality, it said, adding that the Zilla Parishad has also set a goal to provide at least 55 litres of clean water per person a day to every rural family through tap connections under the 'Jal Jeevan Mission'.

Fire breaks out at food processing unit in Sangli district, no casualty

SANGLI: A major fire broke out at a food processing unit in Maharashtra's Sangli district on early Thursday morning and was brought under control within five hours, an official said. Nobody was injured in the incident. The fire broke out around 5.45 am at Aditi Foods, located at Nerle in Walwa tehsil, due to suspected short circuit, a local civic official said. "Multiple fire tenders and water tankers were dispatched and the flames were brought under control by 10 am," he added. The cause of the fire was being probed, he said.

School principal killed in bomb attack in Jharkhand's Deoghar

DEOGHAR: The principal of a middle school in Jharkhand's Deoghar district was on Thursday killed in a bomb attack by unidentified persons, a police officer said. Sanjay Kumar Das, principal of Mahuadabar Middle School was on his way for some work from school on a two-wheeler when unidentified persons hurled bombs at him, Sub-Divisional Police Officer (Madhurpur) Satyendra Prasad said. Das was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was declared dead by doctors. The SDPO said a police team rushed to the spot and began an investigation. The reason behind the attack and the number of perpetrators was not yet ascertained, he said. The police have launched a manhunt to trace the culprits, the officer added.

11 out of 74 women elected to present Lok Sabha from West Bengal: EC

NEW DELHI: West Bengal led the way in electing the highest number of women candidates in the Lok Sabha elections held last year, with 11 securing parliamentary seats. Out of 543 members, the present or the 18th Lok Sabha has as many as 74 women members. Uttar Pradesh elected the highest number of male candidates, at 75. While West Bengal sends 42 MPs to the lower house, Uttar Pradesh sends 80. According to the Atlas-2024 released by the Election Commission on Wednesday, in terms of women participation, Maharashtra once again led the race with 111 female candidates contesting, followed by Uttar Pradesh (80) and Tamil Nadu (77). As many as 152 constituencies across the country had no women candidates at all.

Two narcotics smugglers detained with heroin in Punjab's Amritsar

CHANDIGARH: Two persons were detained and more than a kilogramme of heroin was seized from them near the border area of Punjab's Amritsar district, a BSF official said on Thursday. Border Security Force (BSF) troops and personnel from the Punjab Police's Anti-Narcotics Task Force nabbed the duo near Chota Fatehwal village, the official said. Two packets of heroin, weighing a total 1.1 kilogrammes, were seized from the duo. Both are residents of Sarang Dev village, the BSF official said. They were involved in smuggling narcotics from Pakistan using drones, the official added.

President rule a ray of hope for Manipur: ITLF

PTI, CHURACHANDPUR: Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) leader Ginza Vualzong on Thursday said the President's rule in Manipur will give a ray of hope to the Kuki-Zo community and added that having a new Meitei chief minister is "far from comforting".

Reacting to the imposition of President's rule in Manipur on Thursday, four days after Chief Minister N. Biren Singh resigned from his position, Vualzong said the President's rule is preferable to a change of CM.

"The Kuki-Zo do not trust Meitei anymore, so a new Meitei CM is still far from comforting. The President's rule will give a ray of hope to the Kuki-Zo and we believe that it will be one step closer to our political solu-

tion," he said.

Vualzong said under the President's rule, the groundwork to end violence will begin, which will pave the way for a conducive environment for political dialogue.

The Centre imposed President's rule in Manipur on Thursday, four days after Singh resigned as the chief minister of the state which is under the grip of ethnic violence since May, 2023.

A notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on Thursday said President Droupadi Murmu is of the opinion that "a situation has arisen in which the government of that state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution". "Now, therefore, in ex-

CONG SLAMS GOVT OVER 'SEVERELY DAMAGED' MANIPUR, CALLS PREZ RULE DELAYED

PTI, NEW DELHI: The Congress on Thursday said it has been demanding the imposition of President's rule in strife-torn Manipur for the last 20 months and the central government did so only after the fabric of the state's society was allowed to be "severely damaged". President's rule was imposed in Manipur on Thursday and the state assembly was put under suspended animation, days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned from his post that led to political uncertainty in the northeastern state. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the imposition of President's rule in Manipur is a belated admission by the BJP of their complete inability to govern in Manipur. "Now, PM Modi can no longer deny his direct responsibility for Manipur," he said in a post on X.

ercise of the powers conferred by Article 356 of the Constitution, and of all other powers enabling me in that behalf, I hereby proclaim that I - assume to myself as President of India all functions of the

Government of the State of Manipur and all powers vested in or exercisable by the Governor of that State," the notification said.

The assembly has been put under suspended animation, it added.

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SIDDIQUI WANTS CBI. WILL THE GOVT AGREE?

This curious turn of events in this explosive case - where the accused himself is demanding a CBI inquiry - has again brought into question the integrity of Goa Police's investigation. However, the Goa government has so far shown no signs of addressing the clamour for a central probe in a case that has raked up the names of senior politicians and police top brass.

What makes the calls for a CBI probe even stronger are Siddiqui's claims that he was tortured and held at gunpoint to shoot a viral video that claimed to implicate Opposition leaders.

Critics argue that if the allegations of custodial torture and intimidation hold any truth, the case is no longer just about land grabbing but about police impunity and political protectionism.

Senior advocate and AAP leader Amit Palekar has reiterated that Siddiqui's statement proves that the second video, which was allegedly created under duress, was fabricated. "The Goa government must act decisively to ensure a free, fair, and impartial probe. Handing over the case to a central agency like the CBI is the logical step to restore public confidence and uncover the truth," Palekar said.

Goa Congress leader Sunil Kawthankar has gone a step further, stating that the revelation exposes the "ugly side of failed law and order in the state." He has accused the police of behaving like "professional criminals" by allegedly facilitating Siddiqui's custodial escape and later coercing him to name political opponents.

VICTORY FOR PILGAO LOCALS AS HC CANCELS NIGHT ORE TRANSPORTATION

The order, written by the Directorate of Mines and Geology to the Goa State Pollution and Control Board (GSPCB), stated that the government was allowing transportation of 40 trucks per hour and not 254 truck per hour and transportation of 50 trucks per hour during night. However, the Court cancelled the transportation during night time.

After the hearing, senior Adv Norma Alvares, who argued on behalf of the Pilgao villagers, said that the High Court declined to interfere in the matter in view of the judgment passed in June last year while hearing a PIL writ petition filed by the Mulakh Khajan Farmers Association and Goa Foundation.

Adv Alvares said, "I feel that we have succeeded because the mining company cannot transport ore during night absolutely and during day time the order is to transport only 40 trucks per hour and not 254 trucks per hour."

'FRAUD' FOREX TRADING SCHEME: ED SEIZES RS 170 CORE WORTH BANK DEPOSITS

The company is alleged to have cheated many investors through a "fraud" forex trading scheme.

QFX company and its directors were running an "unregulated" deposit scheme, promising high returns on investments to the investors, the ED alleged.

The agents of QFX group of companies ran a MLM (multi-level marketing) scheme under the name of QFX investment plan and created websites, apps and social media ads etc. to attract investors promising higher rate of return in the name of forex trading, as per the agency.

After the police FIRs were filed, the ED found, the name of the QFX scheme was changed to YFX (Yorker Fx) with same modus operandi "duping innocent investors by luring high rate of returns under the guise of forex trading."

"In addition to QFX more fraudulent investment schemes are being run and controlled by Nawab Ali alias Lavish Chaudhary such as BotBro, TLC Coin, Yorker FX projecting them as forex trading apps/websites," it said.

The ED found various events were organised in India and Dubai to lure more customers.

Probe found that multiple bank accounts of NPay Box Private Limited, Capter Money Solutions Private Limited and Tiger Digital Services Private Limited are being used for "collection of funds" from investors.

The agency claimed these were "shell" or dummy companies which were being "used" by the masterminds of QFX/YFX scheme for receiving deposits from public for investment in forex trading.

Funds worth Rs 170 crore kept in about 30 bank accounts have been frozen as the directors of the company could not explain the source of funds, the ED said.

Cash of about Rs 90 lakh was separately seized following searches against an agent of QFX/YFX, it said.

HANDS JOINED IN HUMAN SHIELD TO SAVE THEIR LANDS

When villagers formed human shields to protect their land, they found themselves facing not just construction machinery but also an increasingly large police force—the same law enforcement meant to protect their rights.

"We weren't even allowed to enter our own homes," said one resident, highlighting the surreal situation where authorities were effectively barring citizens from accessing their own property.

"Authorities used brute police force to subdue the local villagers of Velsao," another resident added in anger.

The morning confrontation reached a critical point when the Verna PI, upon questioning RVNL officials, discovered they couldn't produce the land title ownership documents. This led to a temporary halt in construction around 1.30 pm, following intervention from Leader of Opposition (LoP) Yuri Alemoa, who spoke to the PI on the phone.

Yet, in what locals describe as a cruel joke, the authorities' word proved worthless. Despite police assurances that no further work would be conducted that day, RVNL brazenly resumed operations at 4 pm, dumping two truckloads of material in front of the residence of Sandra Rodrigues—this time with full police protection.

Incidentally, Sandra has filed complaints to all the authorities, including the police, seeking justice and relief.

The human cost of this bureaucratic maze is perhaps best illustrated by the tragedy that befell the Rodrigues family.

Orville Dourado Rodrigues, Founder of Goencho Ekvott (GE) said, "The very tragic part is that Sandra's ailing father, Agostinho Diniz, was residing with her, and about eight days ago, since he could not bear all the commotion outside their residence, she relocated him to her sister's place in Margao, where he eventually passed away six days ago! This gentleman was in love with Velsao and died a crestfallen, humble human being. And instead of mourning the demise of their parent, the family is literally on the road battling it out with the authorities. What can be more tragic than this?"

He said, "Instead of mourning their parent's death, the family finds themselves literally on the road battling authorities. What could be more tragic than this?"

Locals added that the pattern of institutional failure runs deep.

First, there was the South Goa Additional Collector, who recently withdrew a stop work order on technical grounds regarding the unknown identity of the respondent—while simultaneously acknowledging RVNL's response to the notice.

Then there was the local police force, who, rather than investigating the legitimacy of land ownership claims, are standing guard as RVNL continues its work.

Even as locals wave court documents showing pending cases-with hearings scheduled for February 17, 2025, at both the Inspector of Survey and Land Records (ISLR) Court and the District Court in Margao-construction proceeds unabated.

"Are we fools?" questioned one resident, their voice heavy with the exhaustion of fighting a system that seems rigged against them. While RVNL claims superseding authority under Section 11 of the Railways Act, 1989, locals brandish their land ownership documents and two centuries of history, only to find their evidence ignored by those in power.

Meanwhile, the Velsao-Pale-Issorcim Village Panchayat has stood firm, arguing that blocking motorable access to villagers' houses constitutes a human rights violation. However, their stop work order, like many other official protests, appears to carry little weight against the railway authorities' determination to proceed.

As evening fell on Velsao, the community that has called this land home for generations watched in despair as more construction material was dumped near their homes. Their fight continues, but with each passing day, their faith in the system meant to protect them erodes further, replaced by the bitter realisation that justice seems to favour those with power rather than those with proof.

BUREAUCRATIC MAZE

*RVNL tried to resume construction work, despite ongoing court cases

*Villagers, who formed human shields to protect their land, faced construction machinery and large police force

*Claim they were allowed to enter our own homes

*Complained that the authorities used brute police force to subdue them

*Verna PI discovered RVNL couldn't produce the land ownership documents, it led to a temporary halt in construction

*Despite police assurances that no further work would be conducted, RVNL brazenly dumped two truckloads of material in front of Sandra Rodrigues' house with police protection

PREZ RULE IMPOSED IN MANIPUR

It further said: "Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 356 of the Constitution, and of all other powers enabling me in that behalf, I hereby proclaim that I - assume to myself as President of India all functions of the government of the state of Manipur and all powers vested in or exercisable by the Governor of that State."

The notification said powers of the legislature of the State shall be exercisable by or under the authority of Parliament.

It also said any reference in the Constitution to the Governor shall, in relation to Manipur be construed as a reference to the President.

The decision to impose the President's rule by the BJP-led Centre came as the party failed to have a consensus chief ministerial candidate despite having several rounds of discussions between party's northeast in-charge Sam-

Manipur CPI(M) demands to revoke Prez rule, calls for fresh polls

PTI, IMPHAL: Manipur CPI(M) unit said President's rule should be immediately revoked and fresh elections be held at the earliest.

President's rule was imposed in the state on Thursday, days after chief minister N Biren Singh resigned from his position. The assembly has also been put under suspended animation.

Talking to reporters, CPI(M) state committee secretary Ksh Shanta said the party along with other like-minded parties will stand for the state's territorial integrity during President Rule.

"CPI(M) and all aligned parties will stand for the territorial integrity of the state during President's rule and any attempt to break the state will not be allowed," Shanta added.

She asserted that the selfish quest for power among legislators brought the state to such a situation.

Senior BJP leader Sambit

Patra rushed to the CM's secretariat after central rule was announced and stayed there for 40 minutes. However, it is not known if he met Singh.

Meanwhile, announcing the proclamation of the central rule, a notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs said President Droupadi Murmu is of the opinion that "a situation has arisen in which the government of that state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution".

"Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 356 of the Constitution, and of all other powers enabling me in that behalf, I hereby proclaim that I - assume to myself as President of India all functions of the Government of the State of Manipur and all powers vested in or exercisable by the Governor of that State," the notification said.

bit Patra and party legislators.

Patra had met Bhalla a few times before Thursday's decision by the Central government that comes at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in the US.

The Governor has already declared the seventh session of the 12th Manipur Legislative assembly, which was set to commence on February 10, as null and void.

Singh's tenure as chief minister was marked by a number of controversies, primarily centered on his handling of ethnic violence, allegations of instigating conflict, and questions regarding his governance.

Singh, who started as a footballer and then became a journalist before entering politics, served as the chief minister for two terms - 2017 and 2022. He represents the Heingang Assembly constituency in Imphal East district.

In 2022, he managed to win the approval of his party to get a second term as chief minister.

The journey since then has been not without hiccups.

One of the most significant controversies of Singh's tenure was the ethnic violence that erupted in May 2023, that finally cost him the key post.

The ethnic strife, which saw brutal clashes between the majority Meitei community in the Imphal Valley and the Kuki-Zo tribal groups in the surrounding hills, resulted in over 250 deaths and displaced thousands of people. The State's inability to contain it raised serious concerns about Singh's leadership.

Singh's response to the violence, however, included a public apology in December 2023, where he expressed regret for the deaths and displacement caused by the unrest.

He called for reconciliation, urging the various communities to forgive past mistakes and work toward rebuilding a peaceful Manipur.

In February, a new controversy erupted when audio tapes allegedly featuring Singh were leaked, in which he was purportedly heard discussing how the ethnic violence was instigated with his approval.

Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR), a vocal critic of Singh's handling of the ethnic conflict, sought a court-monitored investigation into the authenticity of the tapes.

This led to a Supreme Court ruling ordering the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) to verify the tapes' authenticity and submit a report.

Singh's resignation came amidst dwindling support among BJP MLAs, many of whom have met party leaders in Delhi to convey their unhappiness with his continuation and had expressed the hope that his stepping down will help boost the Central government's efforts to broker peace between the two main ethnic communities in the State.

Meanwhile, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) said President's rule will give a ray of hope to the Kuki-Zo community.

"The Kuki-Zo do not trust Meiteis anymore, so a new Meitei chief minister is still far from comforting. President's Rule will give a ray of hope to the Kuki-Zo, and we believe that it will be one step closer to our political solution," ITLF leader Ginza Vualzong said.

'TECH SUPPORT': MUSK CALLS FOR US TO 'DELETE ENTIRE AGENCIES' FROM FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

He was referring to Trump's dismantling of the US Agency for International Development. "There's like the National Endowment for Democracy. But I'm like, Okay, well, how much democracy have they achieved lately?"

He added that the US under Trump is "less interested in interfering with the affairs of other countries."

There are "times the United States has been kind of pushy in international affairs, which may resonate with some members of the audience," Musk said, speaking to the crowd in the UAE, an autocratically ruled nation of seven sheikhdoms.

"Basically, America should mind its own business, rather than push for regime change all over the place," he said.

He also noted the Trump administration's focus on eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion work, at one point linking it to AI.

"If hypothetically, AI is designed for DEI, you know, diversity at all costs, it could decide that there's too many men in power and execute them," Musk said.

On AI, Musk said he believed X's newly updated AI chatbot, Grok 3, would be ready in about two weeks, calling it at one point "kind of scary."

He criticised Sam Altman's management of OpenAI, which Musk just led a USD 97.4 billion takeover bid for, describing it as akin to a nonprofit aimed at saving the Amazon rainforest becoming a "lumber company that chops down the trees."

Musk also announced plans for a "Dubai Loop" project in line with his work in the Boring Company - which is digging tunnels in Las Vegas to speed transit.

A later statement from Dubai's crown prince, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Maktoum, said the city-state and the Boring Company "will explore the development" of a 17-kilometre underground network with 11 stations that could transport over 20,000 passengers an hour. He offered no financial terms for the deal.