

Considering ban on mining in area 10 km around Chittorgarh Fort: Rajasthan to SC

HAMZA KHAN JAIPUR, APRIL 8

THE RAJASTHAN government on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that it is "actively considering" a complete ban on mining activities up to 10 kilometres from the outer boundary of the historic Chittorgarh Fort, seeking time to place on record its affidavit.

The statement was made by Additional Advocate General Shiv Mangal Sharma, appearing on behalf of the state, before a bench comprising Justice Pankaj Mishra and Justice S V Bharti.

The matter arises from a long-standing legal battle between Birla Corporation Limited and the State of Rajasthan and others, regarding mining operations near the Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The current proceedings relate to the Special Leave Petition (SLP) filed by Birla Corporation against the Rajasthan High Court's May 2012 order in Bhanwar Singh vs Union of India, which had prohibited all mining and blasting activities within a 10 km radius of the fort wall, directing cancellation of mining leases in the restricted zone, Sharma said.

The SC, while dealing with the matter earlier, had directed Indian School Mines, Dhanbad, to conduct a detailed scientific study on the impact of mining and blasting. In its report submitted in January 2024, the institute had concluded that controlled blasting beyond 5 km radius may be allowed, stating no significant deterioration to the environment or structural risk to the fort, as per Sharma. However, several stakeholders and experts raised seri-

ous objections to the methodology and findings of the IIT report. Key objections raised included claims that the report did not follow established protocols for blast impact and vibration studies, that it failed to analyse soil and rock structure, which is critical to understanding the propagation of vibrations, that no long-term monitoring or time-series modelling was proposed, and that the definition and effectiveness of "controlled blasting" was left undefined and unverified. Additionally, limited sampling, lack of joint institutional study, and insufficient modelling of combined effects of rainfall, temperature, and vibrations were highlighted as major shortcomings.

Sharma said that experts from institutions such as the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), Geological Survey of India (GSI), Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and even a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Mines, chaired by MP Rakesh Singh, have submitted opinions or reports broadly in favour of restrictions on mining in the vicinity of the fort. The CBRI and ASI emphasised the fragile condition of Chittorgarh Fort's structure and its vulnerability to underground vibrations and blasting activities, even if done in a controlled manner.

Environmental implications were also highlighted during the hearing. Chittorgarh district hosts eight rivers, including Bedach and Gambhiri, which flow adjacent to or through mining areas. Local testimonies gathered during public hearings have reported discharge of polluted water into rivers from mining operations, in violation of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.

TWO ARRESTED; DGP SAYS ISI, BKI BEHIND ATTACK

Grenade blast at Punjab BJP leader's house, cops point to Lawrence gang

MAN AMAN SINGH CHHINA CHANDIGARH, APRIL 8

THE PUNJAB Police claimed to have solved the case of the grenade attack on the house of BJP leader and former minister Manoranjan Kalia in Jalandhar within 12 hours with the arrest of two people.

Addressing a press conference in Chandigarh, Special DGP (Law and Order) Arpit Shukla said Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI, along with Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), was behind the attack to create communal disturbance in Punjab.

"Preliminary investigations revealed a larger conspiracy orchestrated by ISI to disrupt communal harmony in Punjab. The plot was masterminded by Zeeshan Akhtar, a close associate of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and Pakistan-based ISI-sponsored gangster Shahzad Bhatti," he said, while not ruling out the possible links of the accused with BKI mastermind Harwinder Singh alias Rinda and gangster Happy Passia.

Shukla said the two suspects have been nabbed along with the



A forensic team at the residence of former Punjab Minister Manoranjan Kalia after the blast in Jalandhar on Tuesday. (right) Kalia at his residence. Express

e-rickshaw used in the attack.

"We cannot share more details as it will hamper the investigation. We are exploring the involvement of Happy Passia and others as well as that of BKI in the matter," Shukla said, adding that an operation is underway in conjunction with central agencies.

When asked about the repeated grenade attacks in Punjab over the past few months, Shukla

said most cases have been solved.

Earlier in the day, Jalandhar police commissioner Dhanpreet Kaur had said that they received reports of the blast around 1 am on Tuesday. "Our team arrived at the scene promptly and began the investigation. The forensic team examined the situation, and also reviewed CCTV footage.

DCP Manpreet Singh, who also visited the spot, said that a

side door near the entrance was damaged in the blast. CCTV footage revealed that the attacker arrived on an e-rickshaw, threw the grenade and fled in the same vehicle, he said. Police have deployed heavy force and also cordoned off the entire area.

Meanwhile, reacting to the development, Manoranjan Kalia told the media that if the Punjab Police were satisfied with the probe, so was he. Kalia said the police must also investigate if the people they have arrested also carried out attacks in other parts of Punjab.

"Ever since the AAP has come to power in Punjab the law and order situation in the state has deteriorated. Pakistan will always try to create trouble in Punjab, but the Punjab Police have the primary responsibility to maintain peace. Unfortunately, it has not been the case for the past three years," he said. In the day, Kalia had said that he heard a loud noise around 1 am. "I was asleep when I heard the sound, and I thought it was thunder. Later, I was informed that it was a blast."

WITHENS JALANDHAR

IIM-Rohtak director sent on leave until probe is over

RITIKA CHOPRA NEW DELHI, APRIL 8



IIM-Rohtak Director Dheeraj Sharma

FOLLOWING THE Union Government's decision to launch an inquiry against IIM-Rohtak Director Dheeraj Sharma, the institute's Board of Governors (BoG), in a meeting held last month, "unanimously decided" to send him on leave and to "instruct" him to move out of the campus until the inquiry is over, The Indian Express has learnt.

As first reported by The Indian Express on February 24, the Centre had sought President Droupadi Murmu's approval to launch an inquiry into the "misappropriation of public funds" at IIM-Rohtak during Sharma's tenure, including the use of "manipulated figures" to pay "huge amounts" of variable salary to him.

The inquiry order was issued on March 5, and IIM-Mumbai Director Professor Manoj Tiwari has been asked to submit his report within three months.

With Sharma under scrutiny for allegedly misrepresenting his educational qualifications to secure his initial term as IIM-Rohtak Director in 2017, the institute's failure to send Sharma's degree certificate to the Ministry of Education despite "repeated" requests will also be probed.

According to the minutes of the BoG meeting held on March 20, the Board took up the matter of the Visitorial inquiry against Sharma after receiving two letters from the Ministry of Education on March 13 and March 19. The Board then decided to send him on leave "till the completion of the inquiry" and to also ask him to stay away from all campuses/rented areas of IIM-Rohtak until further orders. The minutes also state that Sharma would be given "reasonable time" to move out.

The proceedings of the last BoG meeting were submitted by Additional Solicitor General of India Satyapal Jain in the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which is currently hearing a case challenging Sharma's appointment as the IIM-Rohtak director.

It is learnt that the BoG resolution will only be implemented after the Court's go-ahead, since the matter is sub-judice. The Visitorial inquiry against

Sharma is the first such action since amendments to the IIM Act in 2023 gave the education ministry greater control over the IIMs. According to the ministry, the inquiry has been launched based on an earlier probe by its principal chief controller of accounts, which had found "serious irregularities and grave misappropriation of public funds at IIM-Rohtak".

The alleged irregularities, according to the order, included: "Wrongfully inflating the financial health of the institute and using such manipulated figures to pay huge amount of variable pay (more than Rs 1 crore for each year) to the Director of IIM-Rohtak, for the years from 2018-19 onwards; violating General Financial Rules 2017 in managing the finances of the institute; and procuring and gifting mobile phones and other inducements to unnamed persons."

The ministry's order said it had "repeatedly sought" Sharma's degree certificate during his first term as Director, but this was not sent by IIM-Rohtak "till the fag end of his tenure". Sharma first served as IIM-Rohtak Director from 2017 to 2022. In 2022, he was reappointed for a second term, which is to end in 2027. According to the order, the inquiry will look into the "omission/commission of acts" with respect to the "irregularities" mentioned and will also cover the method of storing and verifying the degree certificates of the Director and other faculty at IIM-Rohtak, as well as the procedure followed in "sending/withholding replies" including queries raised by the Ministry of Education.

The inquiry comes almost three years after the ministry told the Punjab and Haryana HC in 2022 that Sharma had allegedly "misrepresented" his credentials, leading to his illegal appointment. According to the ministry, a first-class Bachelor's degree was necessary for appointment as Director, but Sharma only had a second division at the undergraduate level.

DELHI L-G DEFAMATION CASE

Court grants Medha Patkar 1-yr probation, reduces fine

NIRBHAY THAKUR NEW DELHI, APRIL 8



Medha Patkar, Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena

A DELHI court on Tuesday granted one-year probation to social activist Medha Patkar in a 24-year-old defamation case moved against her by Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G) V K Saxena.

Noting that Patkar, the leader of Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), had received multiple awards for her work, Additional Sessions Judge Vishal Singh of

Saket court released her on probation for good conduct as the offence committed by her was not grave to warrant imprison-

ment. Probation refers to non-institutional treatment of offenders on the discretion of the court if the convict has met cer-

tain criteria such as good conduct. The court also reduced the fine of Rs 10 lakh imposed on the 70-year-old activist to Rs 1 lakh to be paid to Saxena.

Last Wednesday, the court had dismissed Patkar's appeal against her conviction in the defamation case filed in 2000 where she had allegedly called Saxena - who headed an NGO in Gujarat at the time - a "coward" and alleged his involvement in hawala transactions. A magistrate court, on May 24, 2024, had held Patkar's statements defamatory and sentenced her to a five-month jail term on July 1. However, Additional Sessions Judge Singh had suspended Patkar's sentence and granted her bail on July 29 last year. The defamation case stems from a press release issued by Patkar on November 25, 2000, titled "True Face of Patriot".

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'Drunk' driver held for crashing into 10 vehicles in Vadodara

A 30-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly driving in an inebriated condition and crashing a Maruti SUV into at least 10 vehicles in Vadodara city's Warasiya area Monday, said police Tuesday. No casualties have been reported in the incident.

According to the police, the accused, identified as Mitesh Baria (30), crashed a Maruti Brezza into an auto and at least eight stationary two-wheelers parked along the roadside on a 50 meter stretch in Warasiya Monday night and finally came to a halt after colliding with a two-wheeler, throwing off two riders to the ground.

Assistant Commissioner of Police, G Division, MP Bhojani told The Indian Express, "No casualties took place (during the incident) but some people sustained minor injuries. One of the injured persons lodged an FIR on the intervening night on Tuesday". "The accused driver was first arrested in a case of Prohibition and released on bail as per provisions and the process of re-arresting him in the case of rash driving is on. Since both sections are bailable offences, the bail will be granted as per the provisions of the law," said the ACP.

Bhojani added that primary investigation had revealed that the accused worked as a part-time driver for a Dabhoi-based doctor and was driving the doctor's car to Bhayli in Vadodara city when the accident occurred.

"The car-owner, a doctor, had instructed the accused to pick his family from Bhayli and take them for the ongoing Namada Parikrama in Namada district... We have learnt that before crashing into about 10 two-wheelers and an auto, he also collided with a BMW car at a petrol pump near the earlier junction... We have also recovered a bottle of alcohol from the car," said the ACP.

While the alleged accident spot is reportedly not covered by the CCTV cameras, videos of the incident recorded by bystanders shows the white Maruti Brezza with a damaged left side ramming into the two-wheeler and throwing off the riders.