Amid Innova row, MNS sends toy cars to BMC headquarters

Express News Service
Mumbai, August 3

AMID THE ongoing controversy over the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)'s plan to acquire a new fleet of vehicles for the deputy mayors and various civic committee chairpersons, members from the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) sent various models of toy Innova cars to the BMC headquarters on Monday as a mark of protest. The move comes after Opposition leaders from political parties criticised the move.

At present, the leaders are using Scorpio vehicles acquired in January this year. The move for upgrading of the fleet is expected to cost BMC an additional monthly cost of Rs 20 lakh.

Last month, the civic administration floated a proposal to acquire six new Innova vehicles for deputy mayor - Sanjay Ghadi, Leader of Opposition (LoP) Kishori Pednekar and chairpersons of several statutory committees like the civic law committee and education committees. The move follows the civic administration's allotment of a high-end Innova car for Mumbai's Mayor Ritu Tawde.

Civic officials, however, maintained that the proposal is set to be formally called off.

"Our party leaders have sent toy cars to the civic administration. Since beginning we have opposed this proposal of this arbitrary expense of acquiring new vehicles for the civic corporators and committee chairpersons when already new vehicles have been taken for their usage earlier this year," Yeshwant Killedar, leader of MNS in the BMC, told The Indian Express.

According to civic sources, the toy cars were stopped at the entry gate. Leader of the House (LoH) and BJP corporator Ganesh Khankar said that he has written a formal letter to the civic administration asking them to retain the original scorpio vehicles that were allocated to them.

"Being a LoH, I never demanded any upgradation of vehicles for corporators. Some committee chairpersons and the LoP had made demands for new vehicles, to which I stated the administration to carry out a feasibility study and then allot a vehicle. Now I have asked the authorities to withdraw the earlier proposal and retain the existing vehicles," Khankar said.

PRIVATE FOREST DECLARATIONS

'Defiant approach of ignoring SC rulings': HC pulls up state

Higher authorities asked to take required measures

Omkar Gokhale
Mumbai, August 3

The Supreme Court had held that for a declaration that the land vested in the state government as 'private forest', it was required to follow procedure. FILE

EXPRESSING DISPLEASURE over the Maharashtra government's "defiant approach" of not following past Supreme Court verdicts related to the declaration of lands vested in it as "private forests", the Bombay High Court asked the state's higher authorities to take the required measures and follow the prescribed procedure.

The bench said it was "very unfortunate" that despite past verdicts by the Supreme Court and High Court requiring the government to strictly follow procedures, including the issuance of statutory notice to the landowner, the government deemed it to be an automatic right and was not ready to accept the law laid down by the SC.

A bench of Justices Bharati H Dangre and Manjusha A Deshpande, in a July 23 verdict on a batch of pleas by the landowners observing it was "really unfortunate" that the state did not follow "clear rulings" by SC.

The SC verdicts had held that for a declaration that the land vested in the state government as "private forest", it was required to follow procedure, including issuance of the notice to landowner, and the objections shall be considered by the Committee formed under the law.

The court stated that notification declaring land as a "private forest" is required to be issued only after following the procedure, failing which the "deeming effect contemplated under Section 3 of the Private Forest Act, 1975, resulting in the vesting of 'private forest' in the State Government, shall not happen".

The HC observed, "The attempt on the part of the State, which assumes that on August 30, 1975, whichever land was a 'Forest' automatically becomes 'Private Forest' and vests in the State Government is a misconception."

It raised a "serious concern" that due to the "defiant approach" of the state, the volume of pleas in the HC had increased and, despite this, the government "was not ready to still accept the law laid down by the highest court of this country".

The bench then asked the state government to follow the mandate laid down by the Supreme Court. "We must also express that though we do not take pleasure in summoning the Officers of the State Government before us and once the law has been laid down, we expect the same to be followed by one and all, as no one is above law... if it is not complied with, the Courts are not powerless to take cognisance of its breach," the HC observed.

The HC said the state's higher authorities should take a cognisance of the order and constitute a Committee to scrutinise cases which involved "private forest".

It said the state "should be conscious" of the fact that "if a flaw lies at its end", there can be no declaration about any land to be 'Private Forest'.

Dahanu jewellery shop robbery 'mastermind' arrested

Manish Kumar Pathak
Mumbai, August 3

TWO WEEKS after armed men stole gold ornaments from a jewellery shop in Dahanu, police Monday arrested the alleged mastermind.

The accused, Yashwant Chaudhary, had allegedly planned the robbery to clear a Rs 20-lakh debt, police said.

Chaudhary, a Dahanu resident, was previously booked in 2009 for allegedly stealing cash from an ATM while working as its security guard and was acquitted in that case in 2016.

The incident took place on July 20 at Laxmi Jewellers on Irani Road when three accused allegedly barged into the shop and threatened the shop owner and employees at gunpoint. One of them fired a shot from a country-made 12-bore pistol. No one was injured in the firing.

The accused collected gold ornaments, packed them into two bags and fled on a motorcycle from the jewellery shop, said a police officer.

About 100 metres from the shop, their bike collided with another motorcycle carrying a couple. During the collision, one of the bags containing the stolen jewellery fell onto the road. While residents and passers-by recorded videos and photographs of the incident, none immediately alerted the police control room, officials said. Police reached the spot after receiving information and recovered the bag containing the jewellery.

The police examined the CCTV footage from the jewellery shop, videos and photographs recorded by the public, and CCTV cameras along the escape route to identify the accused. The police have recovered some of the stolen gold from Chaudhary.

He was produced before a court here which remanded him in police custody.

The remaining two accused have also been identified and police are trying their best to nab them, said a senior officer.

There will be cafes, viewing decks and cultural spaces along the riverfront, officials said.

After Dharavi, Adani firm to develop 3.3-km Mithi river waterfront

Express News Service
Mumbai, August 3

ALONG WITH the Dharavi Redevelopment Project, the Adani Navbharat Developers Private Limited (ANDPL) is also taking up the project to rejuvenate the Mithi River and construct a 3.3-kilometre riverside waterfront promenade from the Matunga culvert.

According to officials, a 15-metre wide 'Green Spine' for pedestrians and cyclists will connect the riverfront with the Central Park in Dharavi.

There will be cafes, viewing decks and cultural spaces along the riverfront, officials said and added, "The riverfront will be lined with native trees and pollution-absorbing vegetation. Permeable paving and bioswales have also been planned to improve stormwater management, increase groundwater recharge and support the long-term health of the river ecosystem."

The announcement comes on the heels of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) granting permission to cut 1,693 trees in Dharavi for the redevelopment project. Around half of them will be transplanted. Sources said a total of 8,000 trees will be felled for DRP.

Officials from ANDPL said that 40,000 trees would be rejuvenated and planted in Dharavi in five phases. Compensatory plantation will be carried out in Palghar, with 30,000 trees already planted at Chahade. The aim is to plant 75,000 trees this monsoon, said officials.

The riverfront will be lined with native trees and pollution-absorbing vegetation.

"Environmental consultancy Terracon has been appointed to carry out the plantation and maintain the trees for five years. The agency will oversee scientific planting, irrigation, protection and maintenance to improve survival rates. It will also submit mandatory survival reports every six months under the afforestation," said an official.

As compensatory afforestation for the 8,000 trees to be felled, nearly two lakh trees will be planted in MMR.

Construction for the rehabilitation homes of the Dharavi Redevelopment Project has already begun, with residents of Sector 6 being cleared out to make space for more buildings.

Siddique murder case accused allowed to attend great grandmother's funeral

Mumbai: An accused in the Baba Siddique murder case was permitted by the special court on Monday to attend the post-funeral ceremony of his 103-year-old great grandmother for a day. Chetan Paradhi sought temporary bail stating that his great grandmother passed away on July 28 and he wants to attend the post-funeral ceremony with his family between August 8 and August 16. The court stated that, on humanitarian grounds it could permit the accused to attend the ceremony in Ambernath for one day with police escort. **ENS**

Indian Vulture succeeds in 3rd attempt, completes 56 days in the wild in Nashik

J132 also successfully navigated into the core vulture habitats of the Northern Nashik region. EXPRESS

Express News Service
Mumbai, August 3

BOMBAY NATURAL History Society (BNHS) researchers recorded a unique observation in vulture conservation in Maharashtra, when one of the released Indian Vultures named 'J132' successfully spent 56 continuous days in the wild, seamlessly integrating into the natural landscape and covering over 1,618 km.

This milestone marks a significant triumph for the vulture conservation breeding and release programme.

J132 had undergone two previous release attempts. It was initially released as part of the second batch of vultures at the Pench Tiger Reserve on December 11, 2025.

Following the first release, the bird demonstrated its flight capacity by dispersing to Nashik, covering more than 750 km in 20 days before it was recaptured due to its physical conditioning. After a second brief release in early 2026, the third was released on June 7, in Nashik, fearing whether it would learn necessary tricks to live in the wild.

Satellite telemetry data managed by researchers of BNHS shows that over the past eight weeks, the vulture has maintained a steady average daily flight distance, with a peak single-day traversal of 168 kilometers recorded on June 17. J132 also successfully navigated into the core vulture habitats of the Northern Nashik region.

Kishor Rithe, Director BNHS said, "Crucially, field monitoring teams observed J132 successfully associating with multiple wild vultures in the Dol Ohol and Deodongra areas of Nashik.".

LAW DEPT MOVE AFTER DONATION THEFT CLAIM

Report sought from Siddhivinayak trust

Trust denies allegations: 'Had requested dept for audit in May'

Alok Deshpande
Mumbai, August 3

President of Siddhivinayak Temple Trust and Minister of State Sada Sarvankar addresses mediapersons. GANESH SHIRSEKAR

THE MAHARASHTRA Law and Judiciary Department has sought a detailed financial report from the Siddhivinayak Temple Trust amid a political storm triggered by Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray's allegation that donations worth Rs 18 crore are being siphoned off from Mumbai's iconic temple every year.

The Trust, however, maintained that the department's move was initiated on its own request for a comprehensive audit submitted in May, months before the allegations surfaced.

"The Law and Judiciary Department has asked the trust administration to submit a report. Based on that report, the state government will decide the further course of action," trustee Rahul Londhe said on Monday.

The development comes after Raj Thackeray, speaking at the 20th anniversary programme of the Maharashtra Navnirman Vidyarthi Sena (MNVS) on August 1, claimed that a letter addressed to Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde alleged that Rs 18 crore was being stolen from the temple every year.

Rejecting the allegation, the Trust said no such letter had been written to Shinde. Instead, it said the trustees had approached the Law and Judiciary Department in May 2026 seeking a comprehensive audit of donations received by the temple.

Trust president and Minister of State Sada Sarvankar said it was the trustees themselves who first alerted authorities after noticing discrepancies in donation collections.

"I approached the Anti Corruption Bureau and its chief Vishwas Nangre Patil with a complaint, following which officers were deployed at the temple," Sarvankar said.

According to the Trust, one temple employee, Rajendra Pendurkar, was arrested for allegedly stealing donation money, following which eight more accused were arrested in March. Sarvankar alleged that all the accused have links with Shiv Sena (UBT), a claim the party has not responded to.

The alleged theft first came to light on March 20 after temple authorities noticed cash missing from a donation box.

Initially, the Dadar police registered an FIR for the theft of Rs 10,000. During the investigation, police said they recovered Rs 80,000.

Investigators said CCTV footage showed individuals repeatedly removing cash from a small donation box over a period of around 10 days.

Police arrested eight persons in the case and have filed a chargesheet. All the accused are currently out on bail.

Court issues order to attach PMC chief's chair, laptop

Ajay Jadhav
Pune, August 3

A LAPTOP and chair of the the Pune Municipal Commissioner was set to be attached on Monday, following an order issued by Pune's Small Cause Court over the civic body's failure to pay a difference in compensation to a plot owner for the acquisition of land in Uruli Devachi.

Second Additional Judge of the Small Causes Court, Pune, Nikhil Gosavi on June 29 issued a warrant to attach movable property of the Pune civic chief over failure to pay the difference of compensation despite the court order passed.

"The Pune civic body has given a bond in writing to pay the difference in compensation by August 11 to owners of property acquired by PMC. Thus, the attachment of laptop and chair of municipal chief has been avoided," said Nihil More, deputy municipal commissioner, PMC.

According to the court, PMC has to pay Rs. 4.14 crore to the applicant as a difference in the compensation amount.

ABVP flags paper leaks in 3 Opp states and Bihar; backs education reforms

Express News Service
New Delhi, August 3

UNDERLINING THAT every student has the right to a "fair, transparent, credible and merit-based" examination process, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on Monday extended support to students' movements against alleged question paper leaks in recruitment examinations conducted by the Jharkhand, Bihar, Karnataka and Punjab public service commissions.

It also announced it would submit a comprehensive set of recommendations to the high-powered committee, led by Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani, which was announced by PM Narendra Modi last week, to look into next-generation reforms for the education sector.

At its two-day Central Working Committee meeting in Kerala's Ernakulam, the RSS-affiliated student organisation said recurring paper leaks had raised serious concerns over the credibility of the country's examination system.

Significantly, three of the exams flagged by the ABVP — conducted by the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC), Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) and Punjab recruitment authorities — are all in states ruled by non-BJP parties or alliances.

The organisation also linked its proposed reforms to the high-powered committee constituted by the Centre following alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG 2026 exam.

ABVP national general secretary, Virendra Singh Solanki, said the organisation would place detailed institutional reform proposals before the committee to strengthen the country's examination framework and eliminate malpractices. The organisation also appealed to student bodies, educationists and civil society groups to join, what it described, as a nationwide movement for exam reforms.

This comes days after ABVP took a nuanced stand on the CJP-led protests in Delhi over alleged exam irregularities. While condemning the clashes between students and security personnel and acknowledging that concerns over the credibility of competitive exams were genuine, ABVP stopped short of backing the agitation by Abhijeet Dipke-founded CJP. It argued that exam reforms should not be politicised and called for institutional measures to restore confidence in the recruitment system.

The CWC also resolved to expand ABVP's nationwide "Screen Time to Activity Time" campaign, which encourages students to reduce time spent on digital devices and devote at least 30 minutes a day to physical activities, sports, outdoor engagements and community participation. The organisation also said it would intensify its "Campus to Campus Vande Mataram" campaign, particularly in Kerala, where the meeting was held.

PROTESTS AGAINST PAPER LEAK

Close cases against protesters except those booked earlier for heinous, grave crimes: SC

Express News Service
New Delhi, August 3

IN A key development that could bring relief to students booked for participating in protests against paper leaks in Delhi and other states, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Monday said the respective state governments can close or withdraw such cases. This relief, however, would not extend to those named in "grave and heinous" criminal cases in the past, the bench underlined.

The bench — comprising CJI and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana — is hearing a batch of pleas alleging police excesses during the July 20 Sansad Chalo march to Parliament. The march, spearheaded by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), left many protesters and security personnel injured as clashes ensued. The court is also hearing petitions by families of injured police personnel and some journalists who were allegedly attacked.

Monday's clarification comes after a three-judge bench led by the CJI ruled on July 28, "Delhi and other states may proceed with the investigation of the FIRs registered; however, no coercive measures shall be taken against the protesting students. Such protection, nonetheless, shall not be extended to the persons with criminal antecedents."

The court's latest remarks were in response to the concerns raised by some petitioners that the July 28 order may block the withdrawal of cases against protesters who do not have a criminal record. "With reference to the order dated July 28, it is pointed out that clauses 4 and 5 of Para 8 to some extent, are being misunderstood...it is clarified that NCT of Delhi or any other state shall be at liberty to close/withdraw the criminal cases in accordance with law...Similarly in Para 8 Clause 5, it is clarified that the term criminal antecedents in the order is clarified to mean grave and heinous offences...", the bench said on Monday.

Appearing for the Centre and Delhi government, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said "that's how we have also understood" the July 28 order. Mehta told the bench that the "semantics" of withdrawing cases can be worked out if the leaders of the protestors can be in touch with the government.

The CJP, which led the protests at Jantar Mantar, had reached an understanding with the Centre that no action would be taken against the protesters in Delhi and elsewhere — one of the key demands for the withdrawal of the protest. Gradually, governments in Delhi, Bihar, Assam, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu said they would withdraw such cases.

Following the July 28 SC order, CJP spokesperson Saurav Das had also said the court's directions contradicted the government's assurance that no protester would be directly or indirectly targeted for participating in the peaceful movement.

On Monday, Mehta told the court that they would take more time to respond to the concerns of the petitioners. He also said that police had found that 2,738 people, who have cases of murder, rape and child abuse against them, visited the protest site at Delhi's Jantar Mantar.

Senior Advocate N Hariharan, appearing for a petitioner, said that such identification could have been possible only using face recognition tools and that it raises questions of privacy and personal liberty.

The SC will now hear the matter on August 18.

At the site of the protest in Jantar Mantar. FILE

Jantar Mantar suitable as protest venue? SC sends notice to Centre

New Delhi: Is Jantar Mantar a suitable protest venue? A three-judge bench of the Supreme Court — presided by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant — on Monday agreed to examine a plea that urged that Jantar Mantar should not be allowed for protests as commuters face hassles in navigating the area.

The bench issued a notice to the Centre on the PIL, which sought an alternate site for protests other than Jantar Mantar and asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to seek instructions from the government on the prayers. "It has been stated in the plea that Jantar Mantar is not a proper site anymore for such protests due to ingress and egress issues, supply of medical essentials, etc. I think this is important," the CJI said.

The counsel appearing for the petitioner, Satish Chand Kaushik, referred to a protest called by AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal against E20 policy and march to the PM's residence on Tuesday.

The petitioner urged the court to avoid a repeat of what happened on July 20 during the Sansad Chalo march organised by the CJP. ENS

'Stop hounding': Mother of girl who abused PM says forced to shift house

Alok Singh & Pragynesh
New Delhi, August 3

"SHE MADE a blunder and has apologised for it. The Prime Minister has also forgiven her. Please stop hounding us."

This was the plea from the mother of a 15-year-old girl who became embroiled in a controversy over alleged derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a protest by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) at Delhi's Jantar Mantar.

"Why has the case been transferred from Noida to Delhi? What if the Delhi Police come and harass us in the future?" she asked. Last week, the Noida Police registered a Zero FIR against the girl. It was later transferred to the Delhi Police, who said the case may not be pursued further.

Two days ago, the woman and the daughter left their rented home in Noida as the family was facing "constant harassment" with police and strangers turning up at their door. "I'm raising my daughter alone. My husband died in an accident in 2019, and my younger son lives with my in-laws. How can we continue living there when people and the police keep coming to our house?" she told *The Indian Express*, appealing to authorities and the public to stop hounding her family.

In a video on August 1, the girl apologised and said it was her "first and last mistake", adding that she had been influenced by groups at the protest. "... I am so ashamed of saying those things... I apologise to the whole nation for it....," she was heard saying in the video. The Delhi Police said they have neither registered a regular FIR nor converted the Zero FIR into one.

According to an officer, "Since it is a Zero FIR, it may not be converted into a regular FIR. The girl has also apologised. However, legal opinion is being sought."

The woman stressed her daughter was born in 2011. The Zero FIR mentioned her year of birth as 1994. "I got married in 2010. She was born in 2011, and my son was born in 2014. She is just a child. Please forgive her and let us live like everyone else," the mother pleaded.

"Neighbours tell me people are still coming to our house in black vehicles. The UP Police are also still visiting our house. My daughter and I have shifted to another location. She studies in Class 10, and I used to teach students. I don't know what our future holds now," she said.

On Monday, *The Indian Express* visited the Noida society where the family lives. A guard said, "The house is locked... after the matter came out in the media, the woman and her daughter left."

SEEKING FREE TIBET: Tibetan refugees protest against China's 'Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress' in Mumbai on Monday. GANESH SHIRSEKAR

Live-in relationship a reality, law on cruelty to partner applies: SC

Ananthakrishnan G
New Delhi, August 3

UNDERLINING THAT "live-in relationships are today, more or less, a reality", the Supreme Court ruled Monday that not only husbands but men in live-in relations and their relatives too can be prosecuted under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code for cruelty to their partners where such relationship is between two consenting adults.

The bench of Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice N K Singh said the provision is applicable to "live-in relationships" that qualify as "relationships in the nature of marriage" with "the intent to marry being established as an intrinsic part thereof".

The bench said a woman in a "relationship in the nature of marriage" shall be protected under Section 498A, giving the word "husband" a purposive interpretation, keeping in view "the reformative, corrective and socially beneficial intent of the Section".

"Cruelty, any which way, does not check at the door, whether the house it enters is that of a married woman or not. Once it enters, its propensity to destroy is aggravated," it said.

The bench also directed that the guidelines laid down against arbitrary arrests in Arnesh Kumar vs State of Bihar case be "strictly applied" and no accused or his relative in such a case "shall be arrested without preliminary enquiries".

The judgment came on an appeal challenging a November 18, 2025 Karnataka High Court order which rejected a plea by a man seeking quashing of the case initiated against him at the instance of the woman he was allegedly married to in 2010. Although they were living together since then, the appellant Lokesh B H contended that they were not married and, hence, Section 498A would not apply.

According to the FIR, the woman alleged that the appellant suppressed information of his prior marriage from her and she, along with his family members, harassed her for dowry and also caused physical injuries to her.

Refusing to quash the proceedings, the Supreme Court said, "Whether or not this actually happened is a matter of trial. When the allegations are taken at face value, it cannot be said that they do not prima facie constitute an offence, not disclosing a cognisable offence."

The appellant argued before the top court that Section 498A being a penal provision must be interpreted strictly, confined only to a husband married to a woman in the traditional sense. The bench, however, rejected this.

Writing for the bench, Justice Karol said, "The purpose of penalising cruelty by a husband and his relatives was to introduce a factor of deterrence against the reprehensible behaviour that was exhibited by such family members toward a married woman, which was not addressed by the existing laws at the time. The objective, quite obviously, was reformative, cloaked with punishment."

"Since the provision was aimed at solving a societal issue, it is this larger objective of securing equality for women, stepping away from the superiority of males that is an inheritance from bygone days, that has to inform the understanding in interpretation and implementation of the Section. Given this purpose, implementation necessarily has to be not literal/conservative or technical but instead informed and aware of the objective. So, while it is true that penal statutes have to receive strict construction, the light of that principle cannot dim the objective of one part of the statute," the bench said.

"It has also to be understood that forty-three years ago, when this provision was introduced in 1983, there were only two laws dealing specifically with domestic cruelty. One being the general law of the IPC and the other, the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. Hence, short of introducing an entirely new legislation, this one Section, as an option, it appears, in the hands of the legislative branch was duly exercised. The interpretation given to this penal provision must be an interpretation which keeps in view the reformative objective, or else its mandate will be defeated," it said.

"When the objective of the Section 498A was to provide coverage to those cases where harassment by husband or in-laws through wilful conduct causing mental or physical injury or driving the woman to suicide, then to say that such harassment can only be caused when they are married and not before that, in our considered view, would be a case of over simplification. Whether or not the woman in question is married or not, in the present day, does not have a proximate link to the objective of the Section, which is to prevent cruelty in such a household setting. It may have been the case four decades ago and as such the law was then, truly well intentioned, but law, by its very nature, is organic and responds to change in society in some cases and leads to change in society in other cases," it said.

"The present case is of the former kind, where it is responding to the change. 'Live-in relationships' are today, more or less, a reality – primarily in urban areas (be it for whatever reason), where an increasingly large section of the population resides, and the law must adapt itself to serve those who choose this form," the bench said.

It also flagged the misuse of the provision saying it "troubles us".