

'Violence a threat to states' goodwill'

Chandigarh: Expressing concern over the violence that erupted in certain areas of Haryana, Punjab and border areas of Delhi on Friday following the conviction of the Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, ASSOCHAM has urged state governments to take strict action against perpetrators.

"Incidents of violence with people taking law into their own hands causing significant human and property loss pose grave threat not only to the goodwill and image of the states but might also impact trading and business," said an ASSOCHAM spokesperson.

"We urge the state governments to take immediate steps to restore peace and win the confidence of traders and business community," he added. TNN

Ensure strict action against perpetrators: ASSOCHAM to state govts

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

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The Pioneer (Chandigarh)

PANCHKULA BURNING, DERAS SUPPORTERS RUN RIOTS

Unprecedented violence erupts in Panchkula

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Manohar Lal Khattar Government in Haryana appeared powerless to contain the escalating violent protest by the followers of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmehar Ram Rahim, who was convicted in a rape case by a special CBI court in Panchkula on Friday.

The BJP-led State Government, once again failed to sense the gravity of the situation and could not stop thousands of followers to gather at Panchkula in the past four days even as "high alert" was issued and prohibitory orders were clamped in Haryana.

Thousands of dera chief followers, who had gathered at Panchkula went on a rampage in the city after Ram Rahim was convicted in the rape case leaving many people dead, injured and damaging public and private property.

In no time, it was complete anarchy in and around Panchkula town, adjoining Chandigarh after the verdict was pronounced. Witnesses and residents said about more than 150 vehicles and Government buildings were set on fire in Panchkula, sending huge plumes of smoke rising into the sky.

Panchkula residents said that the crowds had invaded and tried to set fire to a bakery, a cinema theatre and a hotel besides torching scores of cars and two-wheelers. Residents shut themselves inside their

homes throughout the day.

The vasty outnumbered security forces were seen running for cover in some places as thousands of Dera supporters pelted them mercilessly with stones.

The Dera followers, in thousands had gathered in Panchkula from various areas of Punjab and Haryana ahead of Friday's court verdict, in a brazen violation of orders banning the assembly of more than four people in Haryana.

While para-military forces and State police were deployed in the district, it was a repeat of last year's Jat agitation like violence in Haryana. Not only Panchkula, reports of violence were also received from Karnal and Sirsa, where the dera has its main headquarters.

Even as the Government was wary of a repeat of the 2016 Jat agitation like situation and 2014 situation when police had to resort to force to control Rohak's Baba Rampal followers, who had taken up arms to evade Rampal's arrest, the BJP Government just remained dependent on a

series of appeals made by its Ministers and Dera chief himself to maintain peace in the State.

It is for the third time that the debutant BJP Government led by Manohar Lal Khattar in Haryana has shown political and administrative ineptness in dealing with violence.

From the incident of self-styled Godman Rampal, who



Dera Sacha Sauda sect members overturn an OB van on the streets of Panchkula on Friday

AP

was arrested in a criminal case after a fortnight long stand-off between police and his supporters in 2014 to the violent Jat reservation agitation 2016, the Haryana Government had in the past failed to prevent and control violence in the state.

31 people had died and more than 200 were injured during the 2016 violent Jat protest while more than 150

people were injured in violent clashes between Sant Rampal followers and State police in 2014. Both the incidents had hit national headlines and caused a lot of embarrassment to the Haryana Government.

The BJP led State Government's approach to the present crisis was exactly the same. As thousands of dera followers thronged Panchkula

ahead of Friday's verdict, the State authorities appeared clueless and without any intelligence inputs.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Manohar Lal had asked Ram Rahim's followers to maintain peace. "Once the verdict comes, whatever situation arises, to deal with that, every possible arrangement has been made," Khattar had said in a

video message.

As the law and order situation remained tensed and curfew was clamped in some districts in Haryana after the verdict, a series of meetings were held in New Delhi and Chandigarh to review the law and order situation in the State.

Later in the evening after apprising Home Minister Rajnath Singh about the violence, CM Manohar Lal tweeted, "Briefed @rajinathsinh ji. Situation is being monitored extensively, strict action will be taken against those who try to disrupt peace."

Defending his Government, the Chief Minister said that some anti-social elements got mixed up with the followers of Dera Sacha Sauda after the delivery of the verdict by the CBI court and resorted to violence and disrupted the peace.

"Strict action is being taken against these persons. No one is above the law and strict action will be taken against anyone who tries to take the law into his hands," he said.

On the other hand, Haryana Home Secretary Ram Nivas said that the State Government is taking steps to contain the agitators.

"Those who indulge in violence have been identified. We have footage of most of them and we will take strong action. The anti-social elements have been taken out from the main areas of the city and the remaining will be pushed out by the evening," he added.

Reactions

Former Haryana Chief Minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda appealed to the people of Haryana to maintain peace and order and said it was the State Government's responsibility to maintain law and order. "The priority now is to maintain law and order and peace. I appeal to the people of Haryana to keep calm and see that there is no loss of life or damage to property," he told reporters shortly after violence broke out in various parts of the region. Hooda said though it was not time for appointing blame, he felt the Government should have prepared and taken steps well in advance to have ensured law and order. Haryana has already suffered because of the Government's "weakness" in the past in times of agitations, he added.

Leader of opposition in Haryana and INLD's senior leader Abhay Singh Chauhan lashed out at the BJP led Haryana Government saying that it is the third time that State is burning and the Khattar Government is responsible for this. Earlier also, the State had to face the hurt for the failure of BJP Government during Jat protest. He also made an appeal to the people to maintain peace in Haryana.

Kiran Choudhry, Leader of the Haryana Congress Legislature Party, flayed the BJP Government, led by Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, for "abdicating its responsibility and leaving the people to the care of goons" during the violence that rocked Panchkula and resulted in the killing of more than five persons and injuries to scores of others. It is the third such occasion when the Khattar Government has badly let down the people. "The way things happened point to total failure of the State Government which has developed a pechant for playing truant when required to be in action," she added.

BJP in-charge for Haryana Affairs Anil Jain said that the Haryana Government will not leave anyone untended to maintain peace in Haryana. Everything that could be done for the law and order situation was done by the State Government I appeal to the people to maintain peace in the State.

Industry body ASSOCHAM Expressing concern over incidents of violence that erupted in certain areas of Haryana, Punjab and border areas of Delhi, apparel industry body ASSOCHAM has urged the State Governments to take strict action against perpetrators. "Incidents of violence with people taking law in their own hands causing significant human and property loss pose grave threat not only to the goodwill and image of the State but might also impact economic activity," said a ASSOCHAM spokesperson.