

Widening of Gangotri route won't violate SC order, says Border Roads Organisation

NIKHIL GHANEKAR NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 11

THE BORDER Roads Organisation (BRO) has said that the proposed widening of the Chardham project's Gangotri-Dharasu stretch in the Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone (BESZ) is not in violation of Supreme Court's December 2021 order, which had green lit the project conditionally with directions for environment protection.

In its September 3 letter to the Uttarkashi divisional forest officer (DFO), the BRO said that the Supreme Court (SC) had in its December 2021 judgement notified the Rishikesh-Gangotri road as a strategic road and allowed widening and rehabilitation with paved shoulders.

The government agency made this defence in response to a representation of Uttarkashi-based

civil society members sent to the Union Environment Ministry. Himalayi Nagrik Dristhi Manch, a civil society organisation, had alleged that BRO was widening the Gangotri-Dharasu stretch in the fragile BESZ without due environmental impact assessment studies and had proposed to build a bypass contrary to recommendations by the apex court appointed high-powered committee (HPC). It had sought cancellation of two proposals seeking forest clearance for components of the widening work, citing the adverse impacts of felling trees, especially Deodar trees.

The Gangotri-Dharasu stretch falls in the fragile Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone (BESZ), a 4,157 sq km expanse between Gangotri and Uttarkashi town. The BESZ was notified in 2012 to protect River Ganga's ecology and watershed near its origin.

The SC's oversight committee, tasked with assessing HPC's recommendations on environmental protection, considered the proposal to widen the Gangotri-Dharasu road in October 2022, BRO said. BRO added, "accepted that the bypass proposed on this stretch at Sukhi top, Neta, Garampani, seems more practical." However, the oversight committee also said that aspects related to hill cutting, much generation, tree cutting, transplantation, execution time, expenditure, public conveniences, and concerns need to be quantified and evaluated, the BRO noted in its response.

The HPC had recommended to the SC that the Neta bypass should be dropped due to adverse environmental and social impacts. The BRO has submitted a proposal to divert 175 hectares of forest for this bypass, which will need cut-

ting of over 2,000 trees in an untouched forest.

The BRO then stated in its letter that the oversight committee accorded approval for upgradation of Gangotri-Dharasu road on NH-34. The oversight committee, however, does not have the mandate of approving alignments, as per the SC's 2021 order. The SC had said in its order that the oversight committee "is not to undertake an environment analysis of the project afresh but to assess the implementation of the recommendations already provided by the HPC." The SC had recorded these recommendations in its order.

The Indian Express had in August reported on the BRO's submission to the environment ministry that the Gangotri-Dharasu stretch road widening does not require either EIA or an environmental clearance, which was contrary to the HPC's recommendations recorded in its order by the SC.

For Centre, time running out to utilise ₹8,000 crore grant to develop new cities

DAMINI NATH NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 11

THREE YEARS after the 15th Finance Commission recommended a Rs 8,000 crore grant for incubation of greenfield cities, the Union government is yet to select the cities as time runs out for states to utilise the funds before they lapse, The Indian Express has learnt.

The Finance Commission had in 2021 recommended Rs 8,000 crore for eight greenfield cities. The grant will lapse on March 31, 2026 with the end of the 15th Finance Commission's award period. The Finance Commission had found establishing greenfield cities runs into problems of land acquisition and rehabilitation.

"Paradoxically, these problems are more pronounced in

States that, because of their higher density of population, need such new cities more than sparsely populated States. Given these complexities, it is better to start on a pilot basis and, hence, we recommend a performance-based challenge fund of Rs 8,000 crore to States for incubation of new cities," the Finance Commission report said.

Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is yet to select the cities out of the 28 proposals received from states over a year ago, sources said. When asked about the delay, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal said at a press conference on September 30 that proposals had been presented and would be "finalised soon".

Selecting the cities was on the first 100 days' agenda of the government after it came to power in June.

3 years before Tirupati laddu row, Sabarimala temple saw a uproar over 'halal jaggery'

ANANTHAKRISHNAN G NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 11

AS A controversy rages over alleged adulteration of ghee in Tirupati temple laddus, a petition over the alleged use of "unholy and impure halal jaggery" in preparing the "naivedyam" (offering to the deity) at the Sabarimala temple is pending adjudication before the Kerala HC over the last three years.

Petitioner SJRKumar, an engineer-turned-social worker and general convener of Sabarimala Karma Samithi, moved the HC in November 2021 after media reports about alleged "illegal actions" by temple administration "in procuring halal-certified jaggery for preparation of prasadam including Aravana and Unniyappam at Sabarimala Temple in violation of rituals and customs prevailing in the Hindu community". The jaggery was supplied by a Maharashtra-based firm for 2019-20. Aravana, a traditional sweet made from red rice, jaggery and ghee, and Unniyappam made from rice, jaggery and other ingredients and fried are the main offerings to the Sabarimala deity Lord Ayyappa.

The plea filed through advocate V Sajith Kumar said: "Firstly, use of spoiled materials would create health hazards to innocent devotees. Secondly, use of halal-certified jaggery which is prepared as per the religious practices of another religion in the temple and offering the same to the deity

would amount to serious violation of religious customs and rituals followed at the temple from time immemorial..." and "are highly illegal and violative of religious rights guaranteed under Part III of the Constitution."

On November 17, 2021, an HC bench of Justices Anil K Narendran and P G Ajithkumar asked the Sabarimala Special Commissioner to respond to the charges.

The Special Commissioner submitted that according to reports of the designated officer, food safety special squad, samples of the accumulated jaggery stock were tested in April 2021 and found to be "satisfactory". "In September 2021, it was again tested and found to be infested with insects and unsafe and the sample had a foul odour."

The report pointed out that the officer had said that the unsafe jaggery "is not used for preparation of Aravana and Appam".

The report also said that the shrine administrator Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) has taken steps to auction the "unfit" jaggery by publishing tender notification and Southern Agro Tech Pvt Ltd had emerged as the successful bidder. On the alleged use of halal-certified jaggery, the report said "it is true that on the cover of the said jaggery there is a writing that it is halal", but added that the designated officer, food safety, had "submitted that declaration of halal certificate in the cover is not against the provisions of FSSAI."

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

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Table with 5 columns: No. of Lots, Description of the property, Date of Inspection, Reserve Price, EMD Amount, Bid Increment

1) All that piece and parcel of land or ground situated at Village Kanderi, Taluka Bhusavali, District Jalgaon, Taluka Panchayat Samithi Savi, Gram Panchayat Kanderi, bearing Survey No. 160/1, Plot No.1, admeasuring 7769 Sq. meters.

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Description of the property to be sold with the names of the co-owners, Revenue assessed upon the property, Details of any other encumbrance to which property is liable, Claims if any which have been put forward to the property, and any other known particulars bearing on its nature and value

APPENDIX-IV-A - E-AUCTION-PUBLIC SALE NOTICE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES/ ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 READ WITH PROVISION TO RULE 8(B) OF THE SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002

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J&K results show people will resist attempts to subjugate them: Mirwaiz

NAVEED IQBAL SRINAGAR, OCTOBER 11

RESPONDING TO the result of the Assembly in election in Jammu and Kashmir, All Parties Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said Friday that the people of J&K have sent a "unanimous and clear message that in every manner available to them, they will resist attempts to subjugate and disempower them".

He also called on the government that will be formed to take up with the Centre the issue of releasing "political prisoners" and

repealing laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Public Safety Act (PSA). Speaking from Jamia Masjid after Friday prayers, he said that this time, "through a consolidated ballot", the people registered their "strong disapproval of the drastic, unilateral changes made in August 2019 (abrogation of special powers under Article 370)..."

Calling for the Centre to initiate engagement, Mirwaiz said the Hurriyat was peacefully striving for the rights of the people of J&K, "for which we are constantly struggling and being sent to jails."

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

Ahead of winter, Delhi reports three cases of stubble burning

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 11

DELHI HAS reported three cases of stubble burning even before the arrival of winter. The cases were reported in the North Delhi district Thursday despite a Pusa bio-decomposer spraying drive launched under the Delhi government's Winter Action Plan on October 3.

Data from the ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute shows that five stubble-burning cases were reported in Delhi in 2023, 10 in 2022, four in 2021, and nine in 2020.

The stubble burning cases were reported on a day when Delhi recorded an AQI of 132 in the 'moderate' category. However, currently, the contribution of stubble burning to air pollution is only 2 per cent, while the transport sector is the major pollutant with 11 times more contribution at 22 per cent, according to data from the Decision Support System for Air Quality Management in the Capital.

According to the Delhi Pollution Control Committee's air quality index (AQI) monitors and the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the Anand Vihar station logged the worst quality air Friday with an AQI of 343 in the 'very poor' category, closely followed by Mundka at 205 in the 'poor' category.

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