

Border row sparks tension again in both States

There have been attempts by Marathi, Kannada groups to blacken boards and stone vehicles in Kolhapur and Belagavi

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Tensions at the border of Karnataka and Maharashtra are back again, this time with Kannada and Marathi groups targeting vehicles and shops belonging to other language groups.

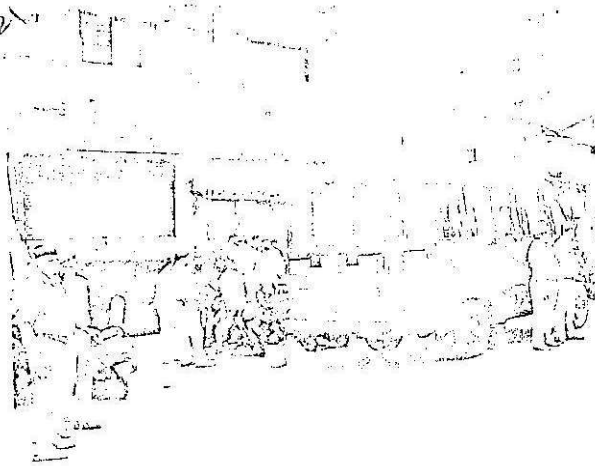
There have been attempts by Marathi and Kannada groups at blackening of boards and stoning of vehicles in Belagavi and Kolhapur.

The problem got complicated with the Shiv Sena openly supporting Marathi groups in Belagavi, while Kannada groups in Belagavi like Karnataka Rakshana Vedithe, who are leading the protest, do not have any political party backing them directly.

On Sunday, the State transport undertakings in Karnataka and Maharashtra stopped bus services between the States, as they were apprehensive of damage to their vehicles if violence escalated.

Sometime ago, the hoisting of the Kannada flag on the premises of Belagavi civic body office had led to skirmishes between the two groups.

Kannada organisations are now accusing Shiv Sena of trying to utilise the border dispute for political purposes of strengthening the



Police personnel providing security to the Shiv Sena office in Belagavi. ■ FILE PHOTO

party in Belagavi and Karnataka.

The Shiv Sena-led government in Maharashtra recently released a book on the border dispute and released a 50-year-old video documentary on the subject. Uddhav Thackeray, Chief Minister, made statements that raked up the old border controversy.

Kannada activists suspect this stems from Maharashtra's politics where the Shiv Sena is trying to strengthen the party and its linguistic identity at the cost of other Marathi parties like the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti in Belagavi. Ashok Chandaragi, convener of Kannada organ-

isations in the district, argued that Mr. Thackeray was sending out signals that the Shiv Sena wants to be in Belagavi politics directly. "All these years, they were acting through outfits like the MES. But now they want to enter the fray directly," he argued. Not very long ago, Mr. Thackeray had chided the MES leaders for infighting and accused them of being responsible for Marathi interests being harmed in Belagavi. "Mr. Thackeray wants to strengthen his party here, by directly backing the border issue," Mr. Chandaragi said.

Mehboob Makandar, another activist, held that

Fearing violence, corporations bring bus services to a halt

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
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Senior police officers of Karnataka and Maharashtra are likely to meet on Monday, to put in place a plan to ensure law and order at the Karnataka - Maharashtra border that has been disturbed by differences between Kannada and Marathi groups in Belagavi and Kolhapur.

Raghavendra Suhas, Inspector General of Police (northern range), told journalists in Belagavi on Sunday that the officers will discuss ways to resume the bus service between the States and other issues. Superintendents of Police of both districts are likely to participate.

Bus services between the States were stopped after officers of the State

Transport undertakings felt that the tense situation at the border could damage vehicles.

NWKRRTC stopped buses from the border districts - Belagavi, Vijayapura, Kalaburagi and Bidar. Around 200 trips were stopped by Sunday morning, officers said. The buses would ply if the situation returns to normal, they said.

Hundreds of passengers waited at Belagavi central bus stand to go across the border. They were disappointed to know that most buses would return from the border at Nippani.

This follows attempts by Marathi and Kannada groups at blackening of boards and pasting stickers and stoning of vehicles and boards before shops in Belagavi and Kolhapur. This

was a response to the blackening of Kannada boards in Kolhapur in Maharashtra by some Marathi groups last week. Kannada groups in Belagavi retorted by tearing away and blackening Marathi boards in Belagavi this week.

NWKRRTC officers said bus services would be resumed once the situation returned to normal by Monday.

Cases booked

The Belagavi district police have booked four cases against administrators of various social media handles following some provocative posts about the border issue.

This is being done to ensure that peace and harmony prevails, the IGP said.

the Shiv Sena was timing its activities just before the Belagavi City Corporation elections. However, the focus is not welfare of Marathi people, he said. "I have been part of Kannada agitations since the 1980s. But I have

never seen any Maharashtra leader raise issues like education, health or employment or problems of farmers across the border. They speak only of a transfer of some land to Maharashtra," Mr. Makandar said.

Maharashtra leadership was quiet about the large number of government Marathi-medium schools in Karnataka and welfare measures like setting up of the Maratha development corporation, he pointed out.

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