

MAHARASHTRA GOVERNOR STOPS HIS SPEECH, LEAVES

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BJP MLAs protest on the first day of budget session of the Maharashtra Assembly on Thursday. EMMANUAL YOGINI EMMANUAL YOGINI | Photo Credit: EMMANUAL YOGINI

In an unprecedented move, Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari stopped his address on the opening day of the budget session of the Assembly in less than a minute and left amid sloganeering by the Opposition BJP MLAs who were demanding the resignation of Cabinet Minister Nawab Malik.

Mr. Malik is in the custody of the Enforcement Directorate for alleged involvement in money laundering cases linked to fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim.

The chaos began as soon as Mr. Koshiyari entered the hall. MLAs from the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) started raising slogans hailing Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in an attempt to highlight the Governor's controversial comment on the Maratha king a few days back. However, when the Governor rose to deliver his speech, BJP MLAs displayed posters of Dawood Ibrahim and Nawab Malik inside the House demanding Mr. Malik's ouster.

At a loss

Mr. Koshiyari barely spoke three lines, tabled the speech, closed his file and left the venue, leaving the ruling side stunned. Both Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar appeared at a loss. As ruling party MLAs gathered around them, the national anthem, traditionally played after the Governor's address, was started.

The ruling MVA condemned the Governor's abrupt departure and also slammed the BJP for disrupting the speech.

Speaking to reporters later, State Environment Minister Aaditya Thackeray termed the incident unfortunate and questioned Mr. Koshiyari's action in not delivering his address or waiting for the national anthem.

NCP condemns action

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) State unit president and Irrigation Minister Jayant Patil said, "There was no reason for him to cut the speech. Disrespecting national anthem is unthinkable. This is unparliamentary and we condemn it."

The MVA said there was no question of asking Mr. Malik to resign as all allegations against him were politically motivated.

The Congress State unit president Nana Patole also said the party might move a resolution asking the President of India to recall Mr. Koshiyari.

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