Maha Guv denied permission to take state govt aircraft

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By Quaid Najmi

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In a piquant situation, Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari was forced to deboard from a state government aircraft at Mumbai Airport as he planned to fly to Dehradun and then go to Mussoorie for an official function, officials said here on Thursday.

Even as a massive political slugfest erupted between the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) and Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's office broke its silence on Thursday evening and pointed fingers at the Raj Bhavan.

The CMO said the government had informed Raj Bhavan on February 10 (Wednesday) that permission for the official plane had not yet been granted and thereafter, the Governor's secretariat should have properly enquired about the availability of the government aircraft.

Taking a serious note, the CMO has directed that "responsibility should be fixed" on the concerned Raj Bhavan staffers for the lapses which resulted in an embarrassment to the Governor.

The incident happened around 10 a.m. at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai when Governor Koshyari accompanied by his ADC and an OSD, sat on a flight operated by the state government.

After the Governor had boarded the aircraft, a 6-seater Cessna Citation XLS, he was informed that there was no permission for the flight, though the exact reasons are still unclear.

Unfazed, Koshyari - who hails from Uttarakhand - and his aides immediately returned to the departure lounge and booked a scheduled commercial flight to Dehradun which departed Mumbai at around 12.15 p.m. and he reached his destination after a couple of hours.

In a statement, Raj Bhavan said that the Governor was to preside over an official Valedictory Function of the 122nd Induction Training Programme of IAS Officers at the prestigious Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie on Friday morning at 10 a.m.

It said the Governor's secretariat had written to the state authorities and also informed the CMO, seeking permission for the use of the government aircraft way back on February 2.

However, declaring that the government had not erred in the matter, the CMO countered why the Raj Bhavan secretariat did not confirm the issue of permission before putting an eminent person like the Governor in such an awkward situation.

"After being informed by the CMO a day in advance, the Raj Bhavan secretariat was expected to confirm the clearances before making arrangements for the Governor to go to the airport. Since this was not done, the Governor was unable to travel to his intended destination in the government aircraft," the CMO said.

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, when asked on the matter, said he was not aware of the developments but would enquire with the concerned officials in Mantralaya before commenting.

Shiv Sena Chief Spokesperson and MP Sanjay Raut said that he had spoken with the CM and "rules were followed by the government", without elaborating.

Other senior Sena leaders like Industry Minister Subhash Desai and Transport Minister Anil Parab, Nationalist Congress Party leaders like Chhagan Bhujbal and others largely feigned ignorance, while Congress' Mumbai Guardian Minister Aslam Shaikh said, "we respect the Governor and he cannot be insulted," but wondered if there were any technical issues or the ATC process was not completed in the matter.

Several BJP leaders slammed the MVA government with the Leader of Opposition (Assembly) Devendra Fadnavis saying: "What has happened is indeed unfortunate The Governor is not a person, the Raj Bhavan is a Constitutional post. I have never seen such an egoistic government."

Others who attacked the Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress included state BJP President Chandrakant Patil, Leader of Opposition (Council) Pravin Darekar, city and state spokespersons, MPs and MLAs.