

## Kashmir land transfer controversy: Separatists under house arrest

The police here Monday put some Kashmiri separatist leaders under house arrest in order to prevent protest demonstrations against the allotment of forest land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB).

'We have supported the protest call given by Syed Ali Shah Geelani's Tehreek-e-Hurriyat for today (Monday), but the administration put us under house arrest in order to prevent our participation in these protests,' Nayeem Khan, chairman of the National Front, told IANS on phone.

Transfer of the forest land to SASB, the board that manages the annual pilgrimage to the Hindu cave shrine of Amarnath in south Kashmir, has snow-balled into an unrelenting controversy.

The land was transferred to SASB to build temporary facilities for pilgrims. But the critics, including mainstream and separatist political parties, allege that the shrine board would use the land to raise permanent structures to settle non-Kashmiris, changing the Muslim-majority character of the Kashmir Valley.

Other separatist leaders whose movements were restricted include Shabir Shah, chairman of the Democratic Freedom Party, Javaid Ahmad Mir, chief of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Forum, and Muhammad Ashraf Sehrai of the Tehreek-e-Hurriyat.

Senior separatist leader, Syed Ali Geelani had, however, reportedly left his home Sunday apprehending the restrictions.

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Abdul Gani Bhat and Bilal Lone of the moderate faction of the Hurriyat Conference are presently visiting Pakistan.

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