

Kashmir land transfer controversy: Malik threatens fast unto death

Kashmiri Separatist leader Yasin Malik Monday threatened to fast unto death if the government failed to rescind the allotment of forest land to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB).

The police have also put some separatist leaders under house arrest in order to prevent protest demonstrations against the controversial allotment of the land to SASB, the board that manages the annual pilgrimage to the Hindu cave shrine of Amarnath in south Kashmir.

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.

Addressing his first media conference here after his Pakistan visit, Malik said the transfer of forest land to SASB would disturb the highly delicate ecology in the valley.

'All of us must jointly work out a programme to protest this move. We shall engage the civil society to mobilise our protests,' said Malik, the chairman of the pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) .

'If the normal protests do not bear any fruit, I shall sit on a fast unto death here to protest against the allotment of the forest land to the shrine board.'

The Tehreek-e-Hurriyat of Syed Ali Shah Geelani had called for protest demonstrations against the issue, which prompted the government to restrict the movement of some of the separatist leaders.

'We have supported the protest call given by Syed Ali Shah Geelani 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.

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.

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.

Malik, who was recently in Pakistan, told the media: 'Kashmir is not a border dispute between India and Pakistan. There are of course many influential persons in Pakistan who want to relegate this problem to the backburner, but we won't accept any solution unless it has the people's seal on it.'

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