

## Kashmir land row: Protestors block Jammu-Srinagar highway

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) activists here Tuesday blocked the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway asking the government not to cancel the controversial order of land allotment to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB).

The BJP workers, led by their sole lawmaker in Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly Jugal Kishore, raised anti-government slogans and forced the closure of the only motorable road link to the Kashmir Valley at Nagrota, 13 kms north of here. The blockade caused huge traffic snarls as all the vehicles to Katra, the base camp of Vaishno Devi, a Hindu shrine, also pass through the area.

The protestors warned the government against rescinding the controversial order of transfer of forest land to SASB, the board that manages the annual pilgrimage to the Hindu cave shrine of Amarnath in south Kashmir.

Kishore told his supporters: 'Any such step would be dealt with severely.' He said the government should not interfere in the matter of faith.

Later, the protestors burnt effigies of Peoples Democratic Party patron and former chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, Deputy Chief Minister Muzaffar Hussain Baig and National Conference patron Farooq Abdullah. These leaders from the Kashmir Valley have been demanding the revocation of the order.

The issue has snow-balled into an unrelenting controversy with the Kashmir Valley witnessing violent protests against it since the past few days.

Critics, including the mainstream and separatist politicians from the valley, suspect the land would be used to change the Muslim-majority status of the Kashmir Valley and erection of permanent structures in the forest area would disturb the ecological balance. They have been demanding the withdrawal of the land transfer orders.

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