

## Omar asks governor to withdraw land allotment request

National Conference president Omar Abdullah Thursday asked Jammu and Kashmir's newly-installed Governor N.N. Vohra to withdraw a request his predecessor made for forestland allotment to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB).

'I have today called on Governor N.N. Vohra along with my party legislators and asked him to formally withdraw the request made by his predecessor as head of the SASB for land allotment,' Abdullah told a media conference here.

Vohra took oath of office Wednesday, succeeding Lt. Gen. (retd) S.K. Sinha.

A plot of 40 hectares of forest land was allotted by the state government to the SASB, which manages the Hindu cave shrine of Amarnath, to create temporary facilities for pilgrims. The move has led to widespread protests in the Kashmir Valley, and to counter demonstrations in Jammu against any move to rescind the allotment.

'Since the agitation against the land allotment has triggered a communal divide, the withdrawal of the request is a possible way out of the imbroglio,' Omar Abdullah said.

He also condemned the alleged police firing on protesters and attacks by agitated mobs on Amarnath pilgrims and tourists.

The National Conference president squarely blamed his political rivals in the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which partners the Congress in the ruling coalition, for the present mess.

'The forest minister and the law minister are two important signatories to the forest land allotment in favour of the SASB, and both these portfolios are with the PDP,' he said.

Abdullah also wondered why the SASB went ahead with a formal requisition for land allotment since the same had been in their use for years.

He also rejected Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad's proposal to convene an all-party meet on the contentious issue.

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