

## Kashmir continues to simmer over land row

Massive demonstrations were held across [Srinagar](#) Friday and the entire Kashmir Valley observed a complete shutdown as protests against the land allotment to the Amarnath shrine authorities entered the fifth day.

Thousands of people marched through the city centre Lal Chowk, shouting pro-freedom and anti-India slogans. Protesters hoisted flags on the Clock Tower, an important landmark of the city.

Several other processions led by Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chairman Yasin Malik and other separatist leaders passed through Lal Chowk that became the centre of the protests, reminiscent of the early days of militancy.

A number of Imams (Islamic clerics) also led marches from various parts of the city that passed through Lal Chowk after the weekly Friday prayers. But despite the huge demonstrations, the city centre remained free of violence.

In other localities, however, angry protesters burnt tyres and pelted stones at police and paramilitary forces, who resorted to baton charge and used tear gas shells to disperse mobs.

At Khanyar in the old city, security forces had a tough time in controlling stone pelting mobs and residents alleged that many people were roughed up.

Security personnel had to use force to quell violent protests in many areas like Newshehra, Soura, Rainawari, Braripora, Rambagh, Tengpora, Noorbagh and Eidgah.

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) troopers opened fire at a mob at Rainawari in old city after Friday prayers, injuring two people. This led to considerable panic and tension in the area.

There were reports of protests in towns like Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipore and Ganderbal in north Kashmir; from Anantnag and Pulwama in the south and from central Kashmir's Budgam district.

The shutdown Friday was called by the joint action committee comprising bar association members, chamber of commerce and industry, and the local traders' federation.

Kashmir Inspector General of Police S.M.Sahai said security forces have been directed to exercise maximum restraint while dealing with the situation.

The state cabinet March 5 allotted 40 hectares of forest land in Baltal of north Kashmir to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) for facilities of pilgrims.

Board chief executive Arun Kumar said the SASB would make concrete structures on the allotted land which now was under the board's proprietorship.

The state government rebutted his claim and said the land had not been allotted to the board but temporarily diverted to it without any authority to build permanent structures there.

Since then there has been an raging controversy that has snow-balled into major protests both in

the Valley and the Jammu region over the issue which has assumed communal overtones.

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