

BJP asks PM not to cancel Amarnath land allotment

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Rajnath Singh has written to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asking him not to cancel the land allotted to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) in Jammu and Kashmir, an issue that has led to violence in the valley.

'Recent media reports indicate that the government might consider revoking the allotment on this issue. Such a decision could lead to serious implications, which in turn can vitiate the atmosphere of communal harmony throughout the country,' Rajnath stated in a letter sent to the prime minister.

Reminding the prime minister that the decision to allot the land was taken by the Jammu and Kashmir cabinet early this year, Rajnath said a decision to cancel it would give the impression that the government had 'buckled under pressure' and surrendered to the pressure tactics of 'certain separatist and anti-social elements within the state'.

The valley has been gripped by protests after Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad's government transferred 40 hectares of forestland to the SASB, which organises the pilgrimage to the cave shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, for pilgrim facilities like of prefabricated huts and toilets.

But Kashmiri Muslims are opposed to the deal, saying the SASB would use the land to construct permanent structures.

At least four people have been shot dead by the police and scores injured as the police battle to control the pockets of violence that have erupted in major and minor towns in the valley, which is predominantly Muslim.

'If there is no opposition to the Haj subsidy being provided by the government, how can the government even appear to vacillate on such a sensitive issue of allotting land to SASB?' Rajnath stated in the letter. 'The government needs to ensure that it does not discriminate between any region or community.'

Failure to end the current impasse may snowball into a bigger controversy and strengthen elements inimical to the country, he warned.

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