

Land row is not communal agitation: Mirwaiz

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, chairman of the moderate Hurriyat group, Saturday cautioned against communalising the agitation against the controversial land transfer to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) in Kashmir.

The Mirwaiz returned here Saturday after a visit to Pakistan and immediately went to the uptown Hyderpora residence of the hardline separatist leader Syed Ali Geelani. They remained closeted for nearly an hour.

Addressing a media conference later, the Mirwaiz said: 'The present agitation is part of the ongoing freedom struggle in Kashmir and nobody should be allowed to give a communal overtone to the situation.'

The state government March 5 allotted 40 hectares of forest land to the SASB that manages the annual pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave shrine in south Kashmir. The shrine houses a 'lingam' or a stalagmite structure that is seen as a symbol of Lord Shiva, one of the Hindu trinity.

Muslims in the Kashmir Valley are opposed to the allotment alleging the board would use the land to settle 'outsiders' in the area and thus change the region's demography.

The valley has witnessed unrelenting protests since Monday. Four people have been killed and scores injured in clashes with the police.

The Mirwaiz squarely blamed the opposition National Conference and the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for the 'mess'.

'The National Conference started the fire by forming the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board and the PDP took it to logical conclusion by allotting land to it.'

The Mirwaiz said the protests would continue till the forest land order was rescinded by the state government.

He also said his group would support the decisions taken by the committee set up by Geelani's Tehreek-e-Hurriyat over the issue.

Meanwhile, Yusuf Tarigami, the state secretary of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and state Transport Minister Hakim Yaseen met Governor N.N. Vohra Saturday. They requested the governor to withdraw the land requisition made to the state government by his predecessor S.K. Sinha as the chairman of the SASB.

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