

## Kashmir leaders welcome land order, separatists guarded

The Jammu and Kashmir government's decision Tuesday to cancel land allotment to Amarnath shrine authorities was welcomed in the Valley by mainstream leaders though separatists remained guarded in their response.

'It is a victory for the people of Jammu and Kashmir who have been on the streets all these days,' said Mahbooba Mufti, president of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) that withdrew from the Congress-led coalition government Saturday to protest the land allotment.

'We will not be joining the government despite this order,' she added.

Omar Abdullah, president of the main opposition National Conference, said: "I hope good sense prevails and the people understand that the issue has been finally settled.'

'Unfortunately, the government took so long to decide that persons interested in prolonging the trouble are now speaking of lands allotted to security forces and so on as the state readies for the elections here. The BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) are looking at the whole issue from their political prism," he added.

Senior National Conference leader Ali Muhammad Sagar welcomed the decision. "It should have been announced much earlier. The decision will definitely ease the heightened situation in the Valley. The government must give compensation to the next of kin of the persons who lost their precious lives here during the last eight days.'

However, separatist leaders preferred to study the government decision before reacting to it.

Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, chairman of the moderate Hurriyat group who has been put under house arrest in his Nigeen home, told reporters by phone: 'It is the success of the sacrifices made by the people and the result of their unity. It proves what the people can achieve through their unity.'

Asked whether the Hurriyat leaders would now withdraw the eight-day long protest shutdown call, he said: 'We will examine the government order and then decide.'

Syed Ali Geelani, the hardline separatist leader and chairman of the breakaway Hurriyat group, said: 'Our party will meet tomorrow at 11 a.m. at my residence and we will examine the government order and frame our response to it.'

Mian Qayoom, senior lawyer heading an action committee against the land allotment to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB), said, 'We will examine the order before we comment on our future course of action in this regard.'

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