

Violent protests over land allotment spread across Jammu

Violent protests against cancellation of land allotment to the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) spread across the Jammu plains Wednesday and mobs defied the curfew here, burning effigies of Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and shouting anti-government slogans.

The curfew, imposed in some areas of Jammu Tuesday afternoon after at least 80 people were injured in protests, was extended to all parts of the city at 5 a.m. Wednesday. Police vehicles fitted with loudspeakers announced the imposition of curfew and a large number of local police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were deployed across the city.

However, protesters carrying posters of Hindu god Shiva took to the streets in Digiana, Gandhi Nagar, Raghunath Bazar and several other places in the city, defying the curfew and heavy police presence.

The protesters raised anti-government slogans and burnt effigies of Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad. Some threw stones at a private school owned by Minister for Higher Education Gulchain Singh Charak.

The state government Tuesday cancelled the allotment of 40 hectares of forest land to the SASB, which organises the annual Hindu pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave shrine in south Kashmir dedicated to Lord Shiva.

The decision quietened the violent protests against the allotment in Muslim-dominated Kashmir valley. Five people were killed during the protests there last week, allegedly shot by police.

But the revocation of the allotment order led to protests by Hindu groups in Jammu from Tuesday. Protesters clashed with security forces, resulting in police firing, baton charge and use of tear gas.

On Wednesday, the protests spread to the districts of Doda, Samba, Udhampur and Kathua. Police said more than 60 people were injured in clashes between protesters and security forces across the Jammu plains.

Police said five people were injured in a grenade explosion targeting protesters in the chief minister's hometown of Bhandarwah in Doda district. Authorities imposed a curfew in the town as a precautionary measure since Bhandarwah has a history of frequent Hindu-Muslim clashes since 1947.

K.A. Bhat, Doda district development commissioner, said: 'The curfew is a precautionary measure.'

A curfew was also imposed on Samba town, about 40 km from here, following violent protests.

Divisional Commissioner (Jammu) S. Pandey told reporters that the army had been put on alert and soldiers in Samba had staged a flag march on the Jammu-Pathankote highway.

The Jammu-Srinagar highway, through which all supplies are brought into the valley, continued to be blockaded by protesters for the second day Wednesday.

Truck and tanker owners also went on strike to support the protests against revocation of land allotment to the shrine board, causing a shortage in fuel supply to the valley.

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