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SASB Land Allotment Controversy

JAMMU OUTRAGED, UNPRECEDENTED BANDH

KS Correspondent

OUTRAGED over the revocation of the land allotment order in favour of Shri Amarnath Shrine Board and taking over the control of the Amarnathji Yatra, Jammu observed an unprecedented eight day long Bandh that witnessed massive demonstrations, violence and imposition of curfew by the administration. Two protesters were killed, hundreds injured and arrested during the bandh. The government decision was viewed as a meek surrender to the separatists and fundamentalists and infringement on the religious rights of the Hindus that only contributed to the separatists' agenda.

Demonstrations widespread:

The resentment and anger in Jammu was brewing up once the controversy was generated by the separatist-terrorist organisations and the coalition partner of Congress, PDP and National Conference joined the bandwagon. Jammu had been witnessing protest demonstrations since then and even a complete bandh was observed on 26th of June against PDP and separatists. The government was warned against any surrender. But, ignoring the warnings and in utter disregard of the sentiments of the Hindus and the Jammuites, the state government with the connivance of Governor, Vohra revoked the land allotment order and took over the control of the yatra. Jammu felt outraged and humiliated. The decision was reacted with the bandh call for one day on 1st July but the bandh was extended for eight days. The response to the bandh was spontaneous and

unprecedented.

There were widespread demonstrations and protests throughout the Jammu region. Unlike past, the demonstrations and protests were not limited to old Jammu city and few district headquarters but there were protests even in villages and Muslim majority districts like Poonch, Rajouri and Doda. Massive rallies were witnessed in the outskirts of Jammu-Muthi, Barnai, Bantalab, Anandnagar, Gangyal, RS Pura, Nagrota, Baribrahmana-Kathua, Samba, Vijaypur, Udampur, Bhaderwah, Reasi etc.

The remarkable thing to notice about these rallies and demonstrations was that the participants were the common masses, irrespective of their party affiliations. Even the Muslims joined the protests by voluntarily closing their shops and business establishments.

All trade Unions, Shopkeepers' Unions, Transport Unions have extended their support to

ongoing struggle. Muslim Federation also extended its support. To keep the agitation objective oriented and lead it to the logical conclusion, various political, social and religious organisations joined hands and constituted "Shri Amarnath Yatra Sangarsh Samiti" to spearhead the agitation. Sh. Leela Karan Sharma was elected as convenor of the Samiti. The Samiti passed resolutions for restoration of land and all powers to SASB, recall of the J&K Governor and dismissal of the state government. The Samiti also gave a clarion call to all Hindu organisations of the country to come on a single platform.

Two killed, hundreds injured:

The situation turned grave on the second day of the bandh as the cancellation of the land allotment order by the state cabinet fuelled the anger. Massive protest demonstrations were witnessed in Jammu city, outskirts and other major towns of the re-

gion. The police resorted to force and the unnerved administration imposed curfew in the city.

Police opened unprovoked firing on a procession at Muthi in which two protesters were critically injured. Thousands of people assembled on Jammu-Poonch highway and blocked the road for several hours. As the procession headed for Jammu, police resorted to cancharge and teargas shells. It was followed by firing in the air to disperse the mob. Suddenly, a cop without any provocation opened direct fire injuring two protesters including a Kashmiri Pandit. The cops' action infuriated the mob and it turned violent. The cop who had opened the fire was severely beaten up and was rescued by his colleagues in an injured condition. The injured civilians were identified as Ramesh Chander, son of Bodh Raj and Chuni Lal, son of

(Contd. on Page 8)



Jammuites protesting against the revocation of land transfer order.

Panun Kashmir and Kashmir Sentinel condole the demise of the following members of the community.

1. Sh. Prithvi Nath Raina S/o Late Sh. Prakash Ram originally resident of Trehgam Kupwara Kmr; presently residing at D-20 Muthi Migrant Camp Phase-IIInd Jammu. 15/12/2007
2. Smt. Rupawati Mattoo W/o Late Sh. R.C. Mattoo, R/o Lower Sathu Chandpora Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 32, Sector-8, Trikuta Nagar, Jammu. 15/12/2007
3. Sh. Hira Lal Fotedar S/o Late Sh. Gopi Nath Fotedar of Bul-Bul Lankar Nawakadal Sgr; presently residing at 127/3 Vivek Vihar Paloura, Jammu. 16/12/2007
4. Sh. J.N. Bali S/o Late Zanardhan Bali of Sheli Teng Habbakadal Sgr; presently residing at F-29, Shiv Nagar Behind A.G. Office Jammu. 16/12/2007
5. Sh. Janki Nath S/o Late Sh. Tika Lal Raina, R/o Chandigram Pahalgam, Kmr; presently at R/o 15-A, Ext. Janipora Colony Jammu. 17/12/2007
6. Smt. Roopawati Raina W/o Late Prem Nath Raina R/o Narparistan Fatehkadal Sgr; presently residing at H.No: F-64 Mohalla Dalpatian Jammu. 17/12/2007
7. Sh. Pushkar Nath Raina S/o Late Sh. Sri Kanth Raina R/o Namthal Chadoora Budgam Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 40, Swarn Vihar Below Sector-1 Durga Nagar Jammu. 17/12/2007
8. Sh. Jaggar Nath Thusoo S/o Late Sh. Balak Ram Thusoo R/o Gotingoo Kupwara, Kmr; presently residing at Ganesh Vihar Sangtara Morh Jammu. 17/12/2007
9. Sh. Makhan Lal Nehru S/o Late Sh. Bal Ji Nehru R/o Nehru Lane Chandapora Habbakadal Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 206-K Durga Nagar, Sector-2, Jammu. 17/12/2007
10. Sh. Kashi Nath Maghzine S/o Late Sh. Shridhar Joo Maghzine originally resident of Chattabal Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 29 Near Jagi Darbar Janipur Jammu. 18/12/2007
11. Smt. Raj Rani Bhatt W/o Late Pt. Mahadev Ram Bhatt R/o A Dina Magam Kmr; presently residing at 546-A Gandhi Nagar, Jammu. 18/12/2007
12. Sh. Naresh Kumar Jalla (Nana Ji) S/o Late Sh. Jia Lal Jalla originally resident of Kralyar Rainawari Sgr; presently resident of 31-Ashok Nagar Canal Road, Jammu. 18/12/2007
13. Sh. Jaggan Nath Ganjoo S/o Late Sh. Naranjan Nath Ganjoo of Sopore Kmr; presently residing at Bilaspur (HP). 18/12/2007
14. Sh. M.N. Raina R/o Karan Nagar Sgr; presently resident of 510-Ext-3 Bavani Vihar Trikuta Nagar Jammu. 19/12/2007
15. Sh. Brij Nath Kachroo originally resident of Vilgam Kmr; presently residing at E-411 Gama 1 Near APJ College Greater Noida. 19/12/2007
16. Smt. Danvati Pandita W/o Late Sh. Sham Lal Pandita, R/o Inder Pulwama Kmr; presently at R/o ORT No: A-2/16 Phase-I Mishriwalla Camp, Jammu. 20/12/2007
17. Sh. H.N. Darbari S/o Late Sh. Nand Lal Darbari R/o H.No: 10, Sector-7, Channi Himmat Jammu. 20/12/2007
18. Sh. Janki Nath Munshi S/o Late Sh. Balbadhar Munshi of Munshi Mohalla Alikadal Sgr; presently resident of H.No: 9 Lane No: 2, Greater Kailash Jammu. 20/12/2007
19. Pt. Jia Lal Bhat R/o Nowgam Kuthar Anantnag Kmr; presently resident of Qtr. No: 1, Phase-IIInd Mishriwalla Jammu. 20/12/2007
20. Smt. Prabhawati Bindroo W/o Late Sh. Radha Krishen Bindroo of Ramghat Baramulla Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 73, Lane No: 2 Anand Nagar, Bohri, Jammu. 21/12/2007
21. Sh. Surinder Kumar Bhat R/o Gund Gushi Kupwara Kmr; presently residing at Batal Balian Camp Udampur Qtr. No: 341, Jammu. 21/12/2007
22. Smt. Kamlwati Chandra W/o Late Jia Lal Chandra originally resident of Shallayar Habbakadal Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 37, Block-B, Roop Nagar Enclave Jammu. 22/12/2007
23. Smt. Somavati Kak W/o Late Sh. M.N. Kak R/o Upper Sathu/Shivpura Sgr; presently residing at 617, Sector-31 Faridabad. 22/12/2007
24. Sh. Jawahar Lal Bhat originally resident of Kilam Anantnag Kmr; presently at R/o H.No: 100, Sector-4, Model Town Gangyal Jammu. 22/12/2007
25. Sh. Prem Nath Bhan S/o Late Sh. Sansar Chand Bhan R/o Bana Mohalla Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 117, Sector-1A Ext. Trikuta Nagar, Jammu. 22/12/2007
26. Master Mohit Raina (Sheenu) S/o Sh. Ashok Kumar Raina, R/o 73-Patoli Mangotrian Jammu. 23/12/2007
27. Sh Omkar Nath Koul S/o Late Sh. Neel Kanth Koul original resident of Hangalgund Kokernag Kmr; presently residing at Mishriwalla Camp, Jammu. 24/12/2007
28. Smt. Shyam Rani Koul W/o Late Sh. Shyam Lal Koul R/o Khah Bazar Anantnag Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 357-A Malviya Nagar Jaipur Rajasthan. 24/12/2007
29. Sh. Janki Nath Pandita originally resident of Dal Hassanyar Habbakadal Sgr; presently resident of Z-121 Kashmiri Colony Patrawat Road Najabgarh New Delhi. 24/12/2007
30. Smt. Shobawati Gunjoo W/o Late Sh. Jagan Nath Gunjoo R/o Rughnath Mandir Sgr; presently residing at 128, Sector-II Shant Nagar, Old Janipur Jammu. 25/12/2007
31. Smt. Chooni Koul W/o Late Sh. Makhan Lal Koul originally resident of 86-Karan Nagar Sgr; presently residing at 318, Technology Apart. 24-I.P Ext. Patparganj New Delhi. 25/12/2007
32. Pt. Kashi Nath Kaw S/o Late Pt. Shiv Ram Kaw of Handwara Kmr; presently resident of H.No: 361/4 Gangyal Garden Jammu. 26/12/2007
33. Sh. Prithvi Nath Bhat Hanjura S/o Late Sh. Lakhman Joo Bhat of Village Hanjura-Chadoor Budgam Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 530 Subash Nagar, Jammu. 26/12/2007
34. Sh. Sham Lal Bhan S/o Late Sh. Maheshwar Nath Bhan R/o 7-D Nilgiri-1 Sector-34, Noida erstwhile resident of Shel-Teng Habbakadal Sgr. 27/12/2007
35. Sh. Prithvi Nath Koul S/o Late Sh. Tika Lal Koul R/o Paljan Kulgam, Kmr; presently at H.No: 73 Ne Sheel Vihar Paloura Doak, Jammu. 27/12/2007
36. Smt. Chuni Dhar W/o Sh. Moti Lal Dhar R/o 44-Balgarden Sgr; presently residing at Hazuri Bagh Talab Tillo, Jammu. 27/12/2007
37. Sh. MN Rania (Koul) resident of 510/Ext. 3 Trikuta Nagar Jammu. 28/12/2007
38. Sh. Lassa Kak Dhar R/o Hera Mohalla Anantnag Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 45, Lane-2 Pamposh Colony Janipur, Jammu. 28/12/2007
39. Smt. Rupa Koul (Naz) W/o Sh. J.N. Koul (Naz), R/o Rup Ashram F-175/A Lane No: 7, Talab Tillo Jammu and originally resident of 79-Bal Garden Sgr. 29/12/2007
40. Smt. Somawati Raina W/o Late Sh. Prem Nath Raina originally resident of Batapora Shopian Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 117, Gole Colony, Gole Puley, Talab Tillo, Jammu. 29/12/2007
41. Sh. Lambodhar Nath Raina S/o Late Sh. Nand Ram Raina R/o Kathsu Pahalgam, Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 15, Lane-01, Sector-5 Bagwati Nagar, Jammu. 29/12/2007
42. Smt. Krishna Koul W/o Sh. Rattan Lal Koul R/o H.No: 80, Lane No: 2, Patel Nagar, Talab Tillo, Jammu. 30/12/2007
43. Smt Pran Piyari Mattoo W/o Sh. Kanaya Lal Mattoo presently residing at F-20 Arya Nagar Appart. Plo No: 91, I.P. Ext. Patparganj, New Delhi, erstwhile resident of Karan Nagar, Sgr. 30/12/2007
44. Sh. Ram Jee Raina S/o Late Sh. Anand Ram Raina of Nowgam Anantnag, Kmr; presently residnig at H.No: 27, Jawala Colony Hospital Road Gangyal Jammu. 30/12/2007
45. Smt. Poshkuji W/o Bal Ji of Doonigound Tral Kmr; presently residing at 290-Y, Purkhoo Camp-II Jammu. 31/12/2007
46. Smt. Lajwanti Pandita W/o Sh. Chuni Lal Pandita ER/o Rawalpura Handwara Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 80, Gole Gujral Camp Talab Tillo, Jammu. 31/12/2007
47. Smt. Vijay Laxmi Trisal W/o Sh. AN Trisal; presently residing at Udampur. 1/1/2008
48. Sh. Soom Nath Dhar S/o Late Pt. Tara Chand Dhar of Razipora Kupwara Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 65, Lane No: J Vishwa Bharti Colony Akalpur Road, Jammu. 1/1/2008
49. Smt. Kamlawati Kou W/o Late Sh. Shamboo Nath Kaul R/o Khah Bazar Anantnag Kmr; presently residing at 564-A Subash Nagar, Jammu. 2/1/2008
50. Smt. Shobawati Koul W/o Late Sh. Ved Lal Koul of Ranbir Pura Anantnag Kmr; presently residing at Sharda Colony Patoli Brahmana Jammu. 2/1/2008
51. Sh. Sansar Chand Bhat S/o Late Sh. Aftab Ram Bhat, R/o Village Wachi Pulwama Kmr; presently residing at Purkhoo Camp, Jammu. 2/1/2008
52. Sh. Prem Nath Panjabi S/o Late Ragaw Ram Panjabi original resident of Badyar Bala Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 109-C, Lane-2, Hanjura Lane, Roop Nagar, Enclave Jammu. 2/1/2008
53. Smt. Tulsi Devi W/o Late Sh. Thakoor Joo Sumbly, R/o Badyar Payeen, Ganpathyar Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 141, Sector-4, Pamposh Colony Janipur Jammu. 3/1/2008
54. Smt. Shobawati W/o Late Sh. Hirday Nath Razdan of Wasoora Pulwama, Kmr; presently residing at MCJ-63, Lane No: 4, Ext. Buta Nagar Paloura, Jammu. 3/1/2008
55. Smt. Tarawati Bhat W/o Late Sh. Radha Krishen Bhat originally resident of Arihal Pulwama Kmr; and presently residing at 255 Vinayak Nagar, Upper Muthi Jammu. 3/1/2008
56. Smt. Shobawati Razdan of Wasoora Pulwama Kmr; and presently resident of MCJ-63, Lane No: 4 Buta Nagar Paloura, Jammu. 3/1/2008
57. Smt. Kamla Kaul W/o Late Sh. Onkar Nath Kaul originally resident of Chotta Bazar Habbakadal Sgr; presently residing at 1845-A Jain Nagar Karala, New Delhi. 4/1/2008
58. Smt. Sonabatni W/o Late Sh. Amar Nath Kochru original resident of Narparistan Bana Mohalla Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 177, Sector-2 Pamposh Colony Janipur, Jammu. 4/1/2008
59. Smt. Prabawati Kakroo W/o Late Sh. Arjan Nath Kakroo of Vicharnag Sgr and presently residing at 1326 Mohali Phase-V, Chandigarh. 4/1/2008
60. Smt. Praba Raina W/o Sh. Soom Nath Rania R/o Fatehpora/Taragam Anantnag Kmr; presently at Community Hall Battal Ballian Camp Udampur. 4/1/2008
61. Smt. Sneha Lata Parimoo W/o Sh. Bansi Lal Parimoo R/o H.No: 1999 Gulabi Bagh, New Delhi. 4/1/2008
62. Sh. Omkar Nath Trisal of Late Sh. Sudarshan Trisal R/o Village Trisal Pulwama Kmr; presently resident of 19-B Tawi Vihar Sidhra Jammu. 5/1/2008
63. Sh. Janki Nath Suri S/o Late Sh. Sham Lal Suri resident of 827 Pamposh Colony Natipora Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 338 Lane No: 4, Lakkar Mandi Old Janipur Jammu. 5/1/2008
64. Smt. Phoola Devi W/o Sh. Saroop Nath Pandit originally resident of Tiker Kupwara Kmr; presently residing at 165/B Uttam Nagar, Kunjwani By-Pass Jammu. 5/1/2008
65. Sh. Mohan Lal Bawnoo S/o Late Sh. Radha Krishen Bawnoo R/o Mattan Anantnag, Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 402, Sector-3 Gangyal Jammu. 5/1/2008
66. Sh. Pitamber Nath Koul S/o Late Sh. Shiv Jee Koul R/o Hawanand Chowalgam Kulga, Kmr; presently residing at B-46, G-4, Ext. 2nd, Shalimar Garden Sahibabad (UP). 5/1/2008
67. Smt. Prabhawati Pandita R/o Shergund Anantnag Kmr; presently residing at 315- Shivalik Puram Janipur Colony, Jammu. 5/1/2008
68. Smt. Sobhawati Moza resident of 49-Subash Nagar Ext. Jammu. 5/1/2008
69. Sh. Janki Nath of Hawal Pulwama Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 10, Sector-1 Vitasta Lane No: 2 Durga Nagar, Jammu. 6/1/2008
70. Sh. V.N. Raina S/o Late Sh. Janki Nath Rania of Karan Nagar Sgr; presently residing at 601 Ashriya Appts. 7/115 Swaroop Nagar Kanpur (UP). 6/1/2008
71. Smt. Chanchal Bhat W/o Sh. Bharat Bhushan Bhat of Sirru Dangarpora Pattan Baramulla Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 4A, Laxmi Vihar Tomal Anand Nagar Bohri, Jammu. 6/1/2008
72. Sh. Som Nath Chandra R/o Mallayar, Sgr; presently at 317/14, Hazuri Bagh Borhi, Jammu. 6/1/2008
73. Smt. Shanti Budki W/o Sh. Jia Lal Budki R/o Usha Kung M-5/1, Tulsi Manas Mandir Colony, Durga Kund Varanasi (UP). 6/1/2008
74. Sh. Udhey Chander Kachroo S/o Late Sh. Shamboo Nath Kachroo of Raghu Nath Mandir Sgr; presently at L-36, Rajeev Nagar Ext. Bigumpura Delhi. 6/1/2008
75. Sh. Pushkar Nath Trisal R/o Jeevan Sahib Ladhoo Kashmir and presently residing at H.No: 447, Lane-2, Vinayak Nagar, Muthi. 7/1/2008
76. Sh. Srikanth Bhat S/o Late Sh. Ishoo Dass Bhat of Lattishat Sopore Kmr; presently resident of Vijay Nagar, Lane-2 H.No: 57/2 Camp Road Talab Tillo Jammu. 7/1/2008
77. Sh. Nath Jee Bhat S/o Late Sh. Sarvanand Bhat of Khrew Kmr; presently residing at B-2/109, Sector-16, Rohini New Delhi. 7/1/2008
78. Sh. Shamboo Nath Tickoo originally resident of Batpura Shopian Kashmir and presently residing at 314, Shivalikpuram Janipora olony, Janipur Jammu. 8/1/2008
79. Sh. Janki Nath Ganjoo S/o Late Sh. Ganesh Dass Ganjoo R/o Wanpoh Anantnag, Kmr; presently residing at Nowabad Sunjwan Road, Jammu. 8/1/2008
80. Smt. Mohan Rani Bakshi W/o Pt. Manohar Nath Bakshi R/o Malik Angan Fateh Kadal Sgr; presently residing at H.No: 20 Sector-2 Trikuta Nagar, Jammu. 8/1/2008
81. Sh. Shivalike Pandita S/o Sh. Moti Lal Pandita originally resident of Tral Kmr; resently residing at BSF Paloura Near Silver Bills School Jammu. 9/1/2008
82. Sh. Adeep Bagati S/o Late Sh. Moti Lal Bagati R/o 46, Sector-7, Trikuta Nagar, Jammu. 9/1/2008
83. Sh. Sh. Bansi Lal Pandita S/o Late P. Prem Nath Pandita originally resident of Kharwara Shopian Kmr; present residing at Gurah Kiran Bantalab Jammu. 9/1/2008
84. Sh. Prem Nath Bhan S/o Late Sh. Raghav Bhan of Gadbugh Pulwama, Kmr; presently residing at H.No: 44-A, High Court Road, Old Janipur Jammu. 9/1/2008
85. Sh. Sham Lal Saproo of Dalseer Anantnag Kmr; presently residing at Durga Nagar Jib Udampur. 9/1/2008

EDITORIAL

TRUE VISION OF INDIA

MASSIVE upsurge in Jammu and the widespread anguish expressed by the people in the country is an indicator of the sense of hurt felt by the nation over the issue of State government's capitulation to the Talibanised class in Valley on the issue of Amarnath Yatra. The role of the state is only to facilitate the pilgrimage and stand above controversies. No state, secular or confessional, or for that matter political parties have any prerogative to impose a diktat on how the pilgrimage is to be conducted. Interests of secularism are best served by leaving the choice to the pilgrims themselves. This is precisely what has not happened in J&K on the issue of Holy Yatra to Lord Amarnath.

Taking over of the conduct of Yatra from SASB by the State government and the unseemly controversies raised by communal regional mainstream parties and Talibanised groups in Kashmir on the role of SASB and Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board tantamounts to grass interference in religious affairs of the majority community. Raking up controversies on pilgrimages for petty electoral gains or building a Talibanised society in Kashmir is a major challenge to pluralistic co-existence and democracy in J&K. The state and the civil society should stand pro-active in countering these forces of hate and exclusivism.

The whole-sale religious-cleansing of Kashmiri Hindus and now the attempts to raise controversies on Amarnath issue is a link in the chain of events on the long-term designs of theofascist groups in Kashmir. What makes the Amarnath issue so potent is that it does not concern the hapless Kashmiri Hindus, whose pathetic situation is an embarrassment to all political parties and therefore, purged from memory. The Amarnath Yatra has sub-continental importance and attracts Hindus from all over the country. Of all the Indian pilgrimages, the pilgrimage to Amarnath is considered to be the most sacred. After braving journey through an arduous trek the ever-increasing number of yatis come to see the Svyambu (self-created) ice-Lingam of Lord Amarnath in all its shining glory and **'experience the impact of an invisible, yet all pervading, an incomprehensible, yet all-conveying, force of "what was, is and will be"'**. Swami Vivekananda, the greatest of Indian Sages of 19th Century, underwent a similar experience. Sister Nivedita, who accompanied him, was to record, "Never had Swami felt such a spiritual exaltation. So saturated had he become with the presence of the Great God that for days after he could speak of nothing else. Shiv was all in all; Shiv, the eternal one, the great monk, rapt in meditation, aloof from the world". Swami Vivekanda himself recounted: "I have never been to anything so beautiful, so inspiring".

Apart from spiritual dimension Lord Amarnath Yatra stands for cultural continuity and cultural unity of Indian civilisation. What do the various landmarks on the route from Pahalgam to the cave of Amarnath-Chandanwari, Pishu Ghati, Seshnag, Panchtarni—stand for? Are they not some of the most important symbols of Indian culture and beliefs? What in moments of poetic intensity, made Kalidasa see the 'laughter of Shiva' in the Himalayas and Subramania Bharati think of Kashmir as 'Crown of Mother India'? The answer to all these queries is one and only one: Kashmir, since the dawn of history, had been a part of the Indian union—a silent and serene, yet solid and strong part; an integral and inseparable part'.

Entrenchment of communal entrepreneurs and Jihadist forces on the landscape of Kashmir valley have posed serious challenges in recent times to the smooth conduct of yatra. The cultural symbolism of Amarnath has made it a target of terrorists and separatists who prefer to see Kashmir as one of a series of pan-Islamic battlegrounds, from Palestine to Iraq, Chechnya to Afghanistan. In 2000 terrorist attacks took toll of 50 yatis killed. The terrorists attacked the yatra again in 2001 and 2002 and 2008. A severe blizzard in 1996, compounded by state callousness led to the death of over 260 pilgrims. These circumstances led to the creation of SASB. Conducting of the yatra by SASB has resulted in better facilities and consequently, the increasing rush of pilgrims. Politicians with Talibanised vision, who want to create hurdles for the yatra, rake up controversies on the role of SASB. Raising irrelevant issues of 'environmental damage', 'cultural aggression', 'demographic change' etc. are the outward manifestations of this Talibanised vision.

There is yet another dimension. The massive development works undertaken by the two Boards not only along Mata Vaishno Devi Ji and Amarnath Ji tracks but launching of projects of national repute like Mata Vaishno Devi University, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence (an upcoming cancer Hospital) and proposed Sharda Peeth University are not being liked by certain Valley based political parties and extremist elements. That is why these forces have united to render the SASB irrelevant.

There have been widespread protests over Governor's action on the issue of land transfer. Parallel to these protests a new movement has taken birth. This movement seeks to discover the true vision of India and outline its true destiny and assign Kashmir its rightful place in that vision and that destiny.

LETTERS

B.N. Sapru Memoirs

Sir,

I am a regular subscriber to the "*Kashmir Sentinel*" and do get copies here—I live in DLF city, Gurgaon.

I have gone through Pt. B.N. Sapru's memoirs about his escape from Muzaffarabad.

My elder brother late Shri Shyam Kishen Tikku also happened to be posted at Muzaffarabad in the local police station as SHO during October 1947. He had to run away from his post twice to save his life, leaving behind all his belongings. Dr. Amar Nath Raina was also posted there then.

We used to live at fire station lane, Kani Kadal Srinagar (Kashir) and our respected father was Shri Nand Lal Tikku of Agriculture Department. My brother passed away in 1957.

—Piarey Lal Tikku
C/o E-461, Greater Kailash-II
New Delhi-110048

NC and PDP Role

Sir,

I am a regular reader of Kashmir Sentinel for quite sometime. Write-ups — 'Contradictions in Kashmir's Regional Politics come to the fore' and 'Did BJP leadership compromise on Kashmir', published in June, 2008 issue, made interesting reading. It is for such type of articles Kashmir Sentinel has gained prestige. This paper has been providing the readers new dimensions of Kashmir politics.

NC and PDP —the two poles of Kashmir's regional politics share some politics in common but differ on other issues. Commonalities emerge from compulsions of pursuing essentially communal regional politics. Both pursue Muslim identity politics. Their stand on Amarnath yatra, pursuing anti-Jammu, anti-Kashmiri Pandit and anti-Centre politics stem from this compulsion of communal politics.

The differences on other issues are guided by the emphasis the two parties put on Kashmiri ethnicity in the Muslim identity politics. PDP is emphasizing a line where Kashmiri Muslim subnationalism is subsumed by greater Islamic subnationalism i.e. across the LOC as well. It is seeking a supra state, away from the present arrangement. A Congress MP recently described PDP leaders as 'Separatists' in mainstream politics. In what way PDP's slogan of 'Self-Rule' is different from NC's plank of 'greater autonomy'? NC fears that in the arrangement PDP is advocating Kashmiri Muslims would lose their present pre-eminent position. Given high stakes we will see more strident positions in competitive communal identity politics from NC and PDP for the time being rather than sharper polarization

—Akshay Kaul
Faridabad

By Dr. Ajay Chrungoo

ON 25th June, 2008 Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad addressed a press conference at Srinagar on Amar Nath Yatra land transfer controversy. On this occasion the state government issued a background note on the issue pertaining to the diversion of forest land to Shri Amarnath Ji Board. The sequence of events pertaining to the controversial land transfer to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board as described in the note provides an authentic insight into the issue which has snowballed into a crisis locking Kashmir Valley and Jammu as also the Hindus and Kashmiri Muslims into confrontation whose implications can be for reaching.

Sequence of Events:

".... It was felt necessary to build sufficiently strong structures enroute the Holy Shrine which would withstand the fury of the elements during the winters in case the weather turned hostile during the course of the yatra. The need for such structures was reinforced in 1996 when a very large number of pilgrims died during a blizzard lasting 4 days..."

"....In order to institutionalize the arrangements for the smooth conduct and management of the pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine of Shri Amarnath Ji the State Legislature passed the Jammu and Kashmir Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Act 2000."

The Bill had been piloted by the Tourism Department pursuant to the cabinet decisions No: 182/16 dated 10/10/2000.... Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Act received assent of the Governor on 14th November 2000 and the act was enforced vide notification SRO 54 dated 12/2/2001 with effect from 21/2/2001."

"A Project Report was received by the State government in the Forest Department DATED 15/10/2004 from CEO Shri Amarnath Ji Board requesting for the transfer of 3642 canals of land for 7 halting places on the Baltal Amarnath Ji Shrine and Chandanwari Amarnath Ji Shrine routes".

"The matter was examined in the Forest department at various levels and the case was finally submitted to the Hon'ble Minister by the Principal Secretary of the Forest Department recommending that the proposal be approved".

"The Forest department then issued a Government Order No: 148-FST of 2005 dated 29/3/2005 granting permission to Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Board for using the forest land for constructing pre-fabricated structures for yatris in Compartments No: 21/AC, 8/AC, 6/AC of Lidder Forest Division and Compartment No: 62 of Sindh Forest Divisions."

HIDDEN AGENDA: The Anti-Yatra Campaign

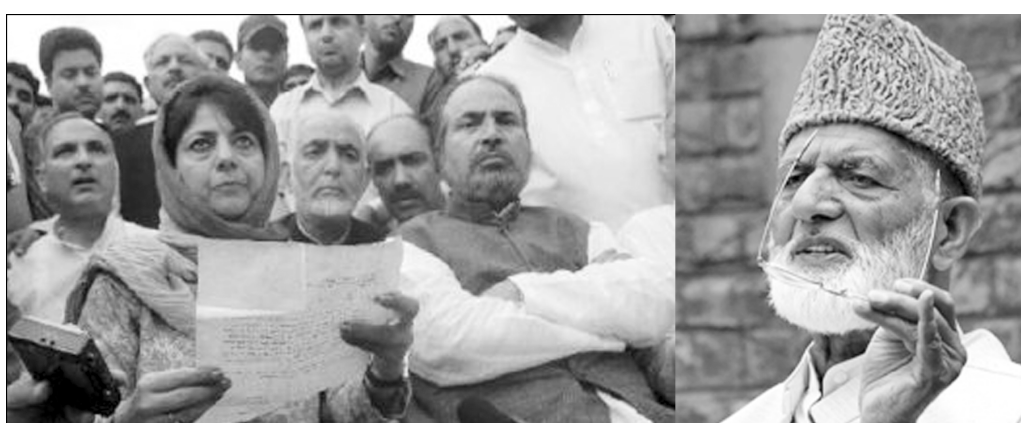
The Chief Conservator of Forests, Kashmir subsequently sought certain clarifications from Principal Chief Conservator of Forests J&K whether the land was to be allowed to be used by the Amarnath Shrine Board free of cost or on royalty basis. This

Constitution of J&K urging it to reconsider the decision to withdraw Govt. Order No: 148 FST of 2005 dated 29/3/2005."

The state cabinet considered the message from H.E the Governor in its meeting held on 7/6/2005 and desired that the copy

terms and conditions of the government.

In the meantime the Supreme Court of India had directed 'all cases where clearance was given by the Forest Advisory Committee should be placed before the Supreme Court for approval'.



(L) PDP leaders withdrawing support to coalition government. (R) Syed Ali Shah Gilani, hardline Jamaat-e-Islami and Hurriyat leader.

started the process of re-examination of the entire case of approval of land to be granted to the Amarnath Shrine Board for building of facilities for the yatris.

In the meantime the Hon'ble High Court of J&K ordered on 15/4/2005 that the 'State shall, immediately permit the use of forest land by the Board, if not already allowed...' To an appeal by the government to the Division Bench, the High Court once again confirmed the previous ruling of allotment of land to the Board by directing that, "The land to be allotted to the Board would be only for the purpose of the user and would remain limited for the duration of the yatra".

The re-examination of the case at the behest of the Principal Chief Conservator Forest J&K, lead to the withdrawal of order 148 FST of 2005 dated 24/3/2005 by the Ministry of Forest.

The Chief Secretary also sought the opinion of GAD on the issue which also opined that the, "the Hon'ble Minister of Forests was not advised properly and his observations were not considered before issuing the Govt. Order No: 148-FST of 2005 dated 29/3/2005 granting permission to SASB for using the forest land for non-forestry purposes".

"In the meanwhile H.E the Governor sent a message to the Council of Ministers on 25/5/2005 under section 44(C) of the

of reference from H.E. Governor and the memorandum of the Hon'ble Chief Minister be circulated among all the Cabinet Ministers and the matter be discussed in the next cabinet meeting...

"There is no record to indicate whether the matter came up before the cabinet for discussion as desired by it." The case however remained under correspondence between the office of Principal Chief Conservator Forests (PCCF) and the Amarnath Shrine Board. The government note further elucidated that "the land was jointly surveyed to assess the requirement of the Amarnath Ji Shrine Board on the Baltal Amarnath Shrine axis in the first instance. As a result of the joint survey an area of 39.88 hectares was recommended for being diverted for non-forestry purpose for the use of the Amarnath Ji Shrine Board in 2007".

The matter was placed before the Forest Advisory Committee which met on 12/7/2007. The opinion of chief wild life warden was taken since the proposed area was adjacent to Thajwas Sanctuary which after on the spot inspection on 27/5/2007 opined that the proposed complex, "does not seem to have any significant impact on the ecology of the Thajwas Wild Life Sanctuary". Subsequently the Forest Advisory Committee cleared the diversion of the requisitioned forest land to the Amarnath Ji Shrine Board on the standard

The opinion of state Law department on this ruling was sought which opined that since the state has its own Forest Act as well as Forest Conservation Act, the Supreme Court ruling has no implication for the state as subject of forest continues to be in the State list. Incorporating the view of the State Law Department and after obtaining the approval of the Hon'ble Minister for Forests on 17/7/2007 the Forest Department referred the memorandum to the GAD for placing the matter before the Cabinet.

After protracted consultations between the GAD and the concerned departments and ministries regarding all aspects of the transfer including legal and environmental implications the State Cabinet on 20/5/2008 vide its decision no: 94/7 approved the proposal of the Forest department for diversion of 39.88 hectares of forest land to Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Board at Baltal and Domail.

To briefly summaries all concerned organs of the state government which includes Forest Department, Forest Advisory Committee, Forest Minister, Law Minister, Advocate General, opinion of Deputy Chief Minister and expert opinions on impact of the proposed complex on ecology, and finally the State Cabinet was taken before transferring the land to the Amarnath Shrine Board.

Unanswered Questions:

Then why did People's Demo-

cratic Party choose the issue of land transfer to the Amarnath Shrine Board to jeopardize and bring down its own government? The Forest Minister, Law Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister belonging to PDP were always in the loop of decision making and without their approval the land transfer could not have taken place. Why did the State Congress party and its Central High Command tamely surrender to the dictates of PDP, Hurriyat Conference and terrorist regimes in the Valley to revoke its decision leading to a volcanic situation in the Jammu region and rest of India, particularly in an election year both in the state and the Centre.

The explanation that PDP rocked the boat of the government for increasing its appeal to the communal constituency in the Valley and winning the race of competitive communalism with its arch rival National Conference is not misplaced. But it does not explain the entire gamut of developments in Jammu and Kashmir. PDP leadership knew it very well that the entire land transfer to the Amarnath Shrine Board had taken place with the full knowledge and consent of its leadership. PDP ministers Qazi Afzal, Tariq Mohammad Qarra and Deputy Chief Minister Muzaffar Hussain Beig were part and parcel of the process which brought about the land transfer at Baltal to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board. It is understandable that they raked up the issue of land transfer or curtailment of Yatra to appear closer to communal secessionist constituencies in the Valley and more pro-Muslim than NC in an election year. But why did they rock the apple cart so hard that Congress was forced

to expose its role which it did with finesse by releasing the entire correspondence and paper work of the state government on the issue of land transfer?

The exposure caused severe credibility crisis for PDP in the Valley and an inalienable component of political mobilization there was directed against PDP. Realising the ground slipping under its feet PDP did not wait till 30th June deadline which it had proclaimed to the state government for revoking the land transfer order in lieu of its continued support to the ruling alliance. It withdrew its support a few days earlier only to arrest the frenzy which was building against it in the Valley. Or was PDP anticipating a tame capitulation from Congress party to its dictates perhaps relying too much on its support in the Congress High Command in New Delhi?

For Congress party, the controversy building on the

(Contd. on Page 5)

Hidden Agenda: The Anti-Yatra Campaign

(From Page 4)

Amarnath Yatra and the land transfer to Amarnath Shrine Board, was not bereft of a fallout on its prospects in the assembly elections not far away. And for the Congress Party in the Centre reeling under the impact of election reverses in one state after another as well as spiraling inflation controversy on Amarnath Yatra was not something which could be taken as a minor development. It dealt the whole issue in a way that it appeared surrendering in front of the upsurge of secessionist and fundamentalist sentiment in the Valley with unprecedented protests in Jammu for last more than a week, Congress has already lost its government in the state. It now has the difficult task arresting a precipitous negative fallout in the coming elections to Lok Sabha in rest of India as BJP has already declared the land transfer to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board as an electoral issue.

The happenings in the state cannot be fully understood on the basis of explanation of electoral games being played in the state by PDP in an election year, or overzealous proactive Governor seeking extension or craving to relinquish office as a Hindu hero.

The Disinformation and Communal Overtones:

The controversy about the Amarnath Yatra started with Mufti Mohd. Sayeed's assuming office in a PDP-Congress alliance in the state. Mufti wanted to curtail while Shri Amarnath Shrine Board sought to expand the scope and span of the Yatra. Mufti's initial argument of security concerns could not be sustained as his government was in the same breath seeking to promote domestic and international tourism on the premise of improving security scenario in the state. A phenomenal increase in the pilgrims to Amarnath in recent years and the need for better arrangements had already created the impetus for enlarging the role of Amarnath Shrine Board which could not be easily debunked.

PDP right from its inception had started its opposition to the very conduct of Yatra which was described at the grassroot level as a 'Hindu cultural intrusion' and an affront to the 'Muslim identity' of Kashmir. In the public realm environmental issues were raked up to camouflage the communal campaign on the ground. It was only a matter of time before separatist and fundamentalist quarters took the cue from PDP and joined the fray.

The sample of what was being preached at the grass roots

since 2003 about Shri Amarnath Yatra can be judged by the excerpts of an article written in Rising Kashmir sometime back. "From around 20,000 devotional mendicants, a Holy stick and some odd halts in the precincts of temples on the way from Srinagar to Pahalgam, Yatra, was without any intentions of showing disregard towards the religious sensibilities, nothing more than a far-out event for the people of Kashmir. For teenagers it was all about some nasty exercises that the Sadhus would perform. And all this would last only for two weeks. So it was a fortnight of watching some bizarre people performing even more kinky acts at certain places... It is no more so. It is now a civil military campaign against a people. From what would involve curiosity and excitement Yatra has been metamorphosed into a deadly monstrous phenomenon. So to save ourselves all of us must stand in defence".

The pitch of the propaganda to present Yatra as a deadly monster or against Muslims was built during the rule of Congress-PDP alliance in the state. And recently when the land transfer to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board created uproar in Valley it was not a sudden eruption. It was a carefully crafted eruption. Hurriat Conference leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq articulated the political horizons of this campaign by describing it as an attempt to "engineer a change in the demography of the Kashmir Valley on the pattern of Israeli policy in Palestine... The land which has been acquired through the nexus between SASB and the administration is going to be used in strategic manner whereby a change is being engineered in the demography of the Kashmir Valley... the SASB plans to raise structures on the acquired land as a part of a long term conspiracy".

Fully aware that the opposition to Yatra may expose the blatantly communal interventions which PDP was making into the political discourse of the Valley, its leadership raked up the environmental issues. While at the ground Amarnath Yatra was described as a threat to Muslim identity and pollution of the Islamic environment PDP leaders described the public mobilization as a public movement of the people to protect ecology of Kashmir which was being ravaged by Amarnath Yatra. The University students and teachers and other organs of the so-called civil society mobilized along a two track cause. One track built the pitch for Muslim communal stridency against the

Yatra and another sought to camouflage this blatant communalism by talking about protection of ecology. Even the ecological concerns were not devoid of communal hatred. One former insurgent leader on whom Govt. of India has invested a lot described the pilgrimage as 'Pillage'.

Ecological concerns by the crusaders against Yatra only exposed further both the communal ideology underlying the campaign as well as the tactics aimed at befuddling the civil society in rest of India. How could building of pre-fabricated shelters affect the ecology when the wildlife experts in the state had already cleared the proposal? Scores of pilgrimages and congregations involving lakhs of devotees take place at the Shrines of Hazratbal, Char-i-Sharief, Baba Rishie and dozens of other places in the Valley. Why did the civil society in Valley never rake the issues of environmental damage in such cases? The cement factory at Khrew near Srinagar as well as the stone quarries have been described as disasters to environment. The Mughal Road from Budhal to Shopian connecting Muslim majority areas of Jammu with Kashmir has led to cutting of thousands of trees and destruction of wild life. The encroachments around Dal Lake and conversion of floating gardens into permanent lands is transforming the world famous lake into a huge cesspool. The Muslim locality in Jammu city at Bhatindi has been built on forest land. The land given to railways at many places has been the forest land. As per the chief minister not less than four allotments of forest land were sanctioned by the state government on the same day the sanction for land transfer to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board was sanctioned by the state government. Arguments to protect ecology only expose a hypocrisy or tactics to promote Muslim communalism. The allegation to build a Hindu enclave of Amarnath Nagar at the Baltal site which is under snow for more than seven months and where even army shirks to build permanent shelters has been comical but aimed at communal mobilization which has been one of the main objectives of the campaign.

The Hidden Agenda:

Certain developments which have hitherto been ignored during the build up to the revocation of the land transfer order are ominous and reveal a wider pattern.

The Mirwaiz faction of Hurriat and Syed Ali Shah Geelani faction have once again resolved to

forge a unity. PDP released its self rule document in Pakistan which essentially seeks to redefine the sovereignty, borders and the identities in the state. This document seeks to divide Jammu into Muslim majority and Hindu Majority legislative spheres. It also seeks a dual currency facility in the state. The PDP visit to Pakistan and its highly publicized meeting with PPP Chief Zardari was organised by Indian High Commission in Pakistan as per reports.

Jamaat-i-Islami and Ali Shah Geelani faction was given a free hand to mobilize public in Kashmir valley during the anti-land transfer and anti-Yatra campaign. Ali Shah Geelani moved to Jama Masjid area alongwith his eight thousand supporters of Srinagar to address a public rally where he proclaimed that the revocation of land transfer to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board was merely a beginning and the real objective of the movement was withdrawal of Indian 'occupation' troops from the Valley. Around the same time the Chief of Dukhtaran-i-Millat Aisya Andrabi led a big procession from Kremchor to Budgam. These things happened while all other separatist leaders were confined to house arrest.

Why was Jamaat-i-Islami, Ali Shah Geelani's Hurriat and Dukhtaran-i-Millat given a free hand during the anti-Yatra rally in the Valley. No curfew was imposed for seven days of mass unrest in Kashmir Valley. The police officers publicly declared that they will not fire on the processionists in the Valley. This led to abandoning of pickets by security forces, loot and arson and molesting of hundreds of tourists and yatis in the Valley. The free hand given to Ali Shah Geelani raises serious questions. Just on the eve of IIIrd Round Table Conference Ali Shah Geelani was released from prison and allowed to address a rally in Srinagar where Lashkar-i-Toiba openly flaunted its banners and weapons.

While Ali Shah Geelani saw the anti-Yatra campaign as a beginning of withdrawal of Indian security forces, PDP President Mehbooba Mufti saw the entire mobilization aimed at 'Internal Sovereignty of Jammu and Kashmir'. Like Geelani and Jamaat the PDP partner in the government has been spearheading the campaign for demilitarization.

The outgoing governor openly blamed the Congress High Command for 'undermining its own chief minister' in the state and described the revocation of land transfer as a victory for

'separatists, secessionists and fundamentalists'. Even Azad has many times given vent to his frustration about the support which Mufti enjoys in Congress party in New Delhi.

The cue to what has been happening during recent days was provided by NC Chief Farooq Abdullah well before the controversy exploded on the national scene. He expressed his frustration about the stalemate in the Working Group on Centre State relations and opined that Justice Sagir, being an Indian Muslim, should not have been the chairman of the Working Group because he could not give a favourable report for the fear of reprisal against Indian Muslims.

Well before assuming the reigns by the new Governor both NC and PDP revealed that Mr. Vohra would ensure the return of the land allotted to Shrine Board by the state government, which he did after assuming the office. Mr NN Vohra had supported the Wajahat formula presented to the Working Group on Centre-State relations.

Even while giving due importance to the electoral posturing and games as important elements behind the anti-Amarnath Yatra upsurge in Kashmir Valley, one should not ignore the fact that UPA government behaved in such a way as to provide ample opportunity for mass frenzy to buildup in the Valley. Its permissiveness to provide space to Ali Shah Geelani, Jamaat-i-Islami and PDP raises serious doubts about a section of its leaders and think tanks.

In the past also Congress had flirted with Jamaat Islami. Mir Qasim facilitated the election of 5 Jamaat representatives to State Assembly in 1971. In 1979 when anti-Jamaat riots took place Congress came to Jamaat's rescue. Now given the fact that Congress thinktanks have persons who are favourably disposed to Musharraf solution or PDP line it should not be beyond imagination to suspect that a coterie in Congress has facilitated the anti-Yatra campaign eventually to push forward the peace process which seems to have entered a phase of stalemate, particularly when PDP and NC formulations were effectively countered in Working Group on Centre State relations. The bloated publicity which national electronic media gave to the separatist led anti-yatra demonstrations indicates that anti-yatra campaigns had patrons in Delhi as well.

*(The author heads Panun Kashmir)

What's the hullabaloo about?

By M L Kotru

What's the hullabaloo about? Why are some so-called mainstream Kashmir valley parties crying themselves hoarse? Why are they trying to project a minor administrative manouevre as if some unknown spacemen or their ilk had seized the entire valley, endangering, as it were, the very peace the valley has been seeking ever since Pakistan launched, aided and abetted an insurrectionary movement in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.

How come the Deputy Chief Minister of the State and his mentor, party chief and former Chief Minister, Mufti Sayeed is seeing some hidden ghosts planted by some unscrupulous Indians in the jungles of Baltal, near Sonmarg? Why do these stalwarts see the temporary allotment of some forest land to a body whose job it is, so I learn, to facilitate the annual pilgrimage to Amarnath, famed cave home of the ice Shiva linga.

Baltal offers a shorter route to the cave, from the more familiar Pahalgam route, and for this purpose the body managing the "yatra" was given use on temporary lease, I presume, land to set up temporary camps for the pilgrims to walk up and down the mountain tracks to the cave and back. The Shrine Board has been arguing that it is not planning to build permanent structures on the forest land, only temporary structures; they have also agreed to plant more than the number of trees that are felled. I don't see any reason why the so-called mainstream parties should join the separatist. Hurriyat conference in painting the temporary allotment of land as it were an act of aggression committed by an enemy nation.

In the bargain a mainstream party, the People's Democratic Party of the Mufti father-daughter duo, has managed to bring the extremist Geelani and moderate Mirwaiz factions back to a common anti-India platform and also encouraged students of Kashmir University to take to the streets to expose the Shrine Board's "covert attempt to illegally occupy land" that does not belong to it. The party's legal eagle and Deputy Chief Minister in the Congress led State Government, Muzzafar Baig was so outraged by the Shrine Board Chief Executive, a senior IAS Officer, that he demanded his removal and Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad agreed to an official probe into the case of land "usurpation" by the Shrine Board.

I would not have been surprised if the Hurriyat had raised objection to the allotment, albeit temporary, of the land to the Board. But for a constituent of the ruling alliance to object to it leaves me cold. It's not half as bad as the Indian Government subsidising the Haj pilgrimage (running into several thousand rupees per head) of Muslim citizens or the construction of both pucca and temporary Haj homes at all important points of departure in India for the pilgrims, or the extraordinary pains the Indian mission in Riyadh is expected to take to look after the convenience of Muslim pilgrims. I hate making a reference to the Haj pilgrims, but must our politicians make mountains out of molehills because they don't have any other issue.

I for one have never been to Amarnath nor do I have any intention to do so now. I remember having sharply criticized the just retired Governor S K Sinha for having extended the duration of the pilgrimage from the original fortnight to two months. At least on six occasions I have in this space referred to my spoilt holidays in Pahalgam, one of the State's best known tourist centres, which I must have visited almost 200 times during the past sixty years, at least twice a year, even as wandering correspondent for my Delhi and London based papers.

My objection was to Sinha insisting on extending the duration of the pilgrimage. Mufti Sayeed incidentally was the Chief Minister at the time. I had based my objection mainly on the extended pilgrimage having destroyed Pahalgam as a tourist destination. I had mentioned how on my last five visits to Pahalgam I, like any other visitor or even local resident of the town, had to suffer the indignity of having the car searched, bonnet to boot, walk past metal detectors et al before being flagged on. There were other physical checks as well and the worst sufferers were those travelling by buses; they usually preferred to foot it for a mile or so till the bus caught up with them again after the usual check-up.

It's not that one minded the security checks, given the backdrop of the terrorist attacks on

pilgrim camps in Pahalgam, but to inflict such indignity and for such a prolonged period- from June to early August-on ordinary tourists, including local tourists, seemed odd.

Why did the Mufti, then the Chief Minister succumb to the Governor's pressure on an issue which was unnecessary and avoidable? The melt down of the ice lingam last year was a direct consequence of the extended two-month darshan at the cave.

One must remember that the number of Amarnath pilgrims is growing with each passing year and the Baltal route which is shorter should be used more ex-

other issue to fan the fires of conflict.

True, it's the beginning of the poll season in the State but should that necessarily mark the beginning of the season when India - baiting is considered just what the doctor ordered. A very thin line it seems divides the Muftis' PDP and the Hurriyat. Like, both of them do believe that but for India's tardiness, good times should have been upon them already, thanks to Gen. Musharraf.

Curiously the PDP would like to take credit for everything that is positive and is happening to the State, say, a return to more

peaceable times, the running of trans LOC buses, the growing economic activity, and blame for the rest the present Chief Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad with whose party, the PDP shares power, National Conference meanwhile is having a ball, riding all available horses, even two

horses at the same time. But, for all his earlier failures Farooq Abdullah failures, is treading a careful path.

India-baiting, though, continues to be the going 'mantra' for the valley politics. Which to me at least sounds strange. Yes, I know most Kashmiri leaders have turned to this ritual whenever things so wrong for them. Of Sheikh Abdullah of some four decades ago it used to be said that his speeches are like pre-recorded LPs, one for Srinagar and the other for Delhi. This appears to have become a norm in the subsequent years. And yet it is a fact that most politicians have never had it so good as during the last decade or two. Each, even those of the Hurriyat, has overnight grown many times over materially, with mensions vehicles et al thrown in. The mainstreamers are doing even better. The Chief Ministers I am told are entitled to retain their official residences even after demitting office. No wonder even their "chamchas too have dreamt and realized their dreams.

What wouldn't I do to get myself a lake-side villa or one of those British colonial type steepled houses on Gupkar Road in Srinagar. I couldn't, of course,

live with those massive security details with the latest gadgetry that must precede a VIP or a former Chief Minister every time he stirs out of his mansion.

Most significantly, the opposition to the allotment of some 50-odd hectares to the Shrine Board, we now learn, has not as much to do with the ecological concerns of the "agitated" separatist and mainstreamwallahs as it has with their openly expressed fear of a demographic "aggression". Now, anyone who knows the Baltal terrain will tell you that the area is virtually uninhabitable throughout the long winter months. There is no question of permanent settlements being made their.

And, then, how many Hindus, as Yasin Malik, one of the original separatists wants us to believe, would find permanent "residence" in the jungles. Mufti Sayeed and the Hurriyat leaders also fear a demographic change in the region as a consequence of the transfer of the impugned land to the Shrine Board. How about the nearly half million Kashmiri Pandits who were forced out of the valley from early 90s onwards, their properties usurped or purchased by local Muslims. And, pray, will the PDP or its alliance partner, tell us what proportion of the hundreds of crores put in the pipeline by New Delhi for rehabilitation of the Pandits, has been used for the intended purpose. And don't tell me of the tokenism so very manifest in the few residential blocks built near Budgam, Mattan and another place whose name I cannot recall.

The Kashmiri Pandits, some of whom have been crying for a separate homeland within the valley, would surely not be thinking in terms of using the 50-hectare forest area as the possible "homeland". For one thing it would not accommodate even a fraction of them and if some of them did indeed move in, they would surely not survive the first Baltal winter. Forget the separatist groups, the mainstreamwallahs who have thrived over these past 60 years, would do well to draw their electoral battlelines at places other than Baltal. It's an insignificant issue. That's if it is not communalised the way it has been so far. One of the ring leaders has already described the land deal as a covert attempt to create a "Hindu Society at Baltal". The man must be insane.

*(The author is a veteran journalist based in New Delhi.)

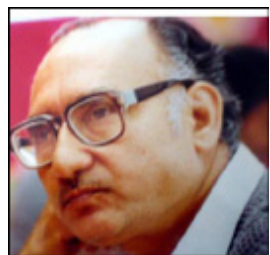


Fundamentalists staging anti-Yatra protest in Lal Chowk, Srinagar.

tensively. The construction of temporary pilgrim facilities should not be curtailed, never mind the paranoid valley politicians. More importantly, and it has many aspects to it, the duration of the pilgrimage should be restricted to the original fortnight. It would prove less stressful for the security agencies, help places like Pahalgam to regain their primacy as a tourist attraction, help the local economy of Pahalgam and above all we must not lose sight of the environmental degradation which an extended pilgrimage, involving several lakhs of pilgrims and hundreds of security personnel who must make the routes on either side their home for even longer, causes. A shorter version of the pilgrimage would offer a more satisfactory solution to the problem.

So far as the State politicians are concerned the less said of them the better. Surprisingly though the mainstream parties are becoming more strident, particularly in the valley, to play on local sentiments. It's odd though that the average Kashmiri Muslim living in the valley seems to be more at peace with himself and his surroundings; it is the politicians who find one or the

Fundamentalists derail pilgrims' progress in Kashmir



By J N Raina

THE divisive politics in Jammu and Kashmir has taken a turn for the worst. The communal outrage, as never so before, is outpouring on the streets in the Kashmir valley, on a mere pretext of the diversion of 39.88 hectares of forest land, to Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board, for pilgrims' welfare.

The Muslim fundamentalists and leaders of mainstream political outfits, like the People's Democratic Party (PDP), behave like demagogues. They befool people, making the entire situation confusing. The separatist politics has had its devastating effect on the masses. The outcome: The PDP, led by former Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayed, and his maverick daughter Ms Mehbooba Mufti, has withdrawn support to the Congress-led coalition Government, just a few months before the six-year-term of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly was to expire and fresh elections are due, possibly in October.

In a befogged situation, Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, has

been forced to rescind the land transfer order by the fundamentalists, leading to enhanced violence in the Hindu-dominated Jammu province. Before the new Governor N N Vohra-- replacing Lt General (Retired) S K Sinha-- was just cooling his heels, he as Board Chairman, was asked to give an 'undertaking' that the Board had given up its claim on the contentious forest land. The entire state has got divided on communal lines.

The most amusing part of the iridescence of some mainstream parties, including the National Conference, led by Farooq Abdullah; and loquaciousness of the Kashmiri leaders, is how they beguile people and make them believe that transfer of forest land to the Board will lead to 'demographic aggression' in the valley. Because of the idiocy of the mainstream and separatist leadership, the people are being instilled with a fear psychosis that if the Amarnath Shrine Board accomplished the task of creating temporary shelters for the onrush of pilgrims, it will destroy "Muslim majority character" of the state. It is mind-boggling. The PDP, the National Conference, the separatist Hurriyat Conference and other smaller political groups emerged on a single platform, shoulder-to-shoulder with the diehard Jamaat-e-Islami chief Syed Ali Shah Geelani, in demanding revocation of the land transfer. They mislead people that the Shrine Board would use the proposed structures as a housing complex to settle non-Kashmiri Hindus, and it would thereby change the ma-

jority Muslim character of the valley, according to their feigned and misconceived notions. Such nauseating utterances can have grave repercussions in the Hindu-dominated region of Jammu.

The history is witness to massive demographic changes in the valley during the past few centuries. Before partition, the population of Kashmiri Hindus was 15 per cent. The Muslim fundamentalists are responsible for hounding out half a million Hindus from the valley at the point of gun in 1990.

The terrain where the temporary structures were meant to be raised, is almost barren and rugged. The hills

OPINION

are denuded. Any kind of permanent settlement is impossible, because of inhospitable weather. The area remains snow-bound for nearly eight months. Some national dailies have quoted the Hurriyat Conference Chief Mirwaiz Umar Farooq as saying: "This illegal transfer (of nearly 40 hectares of forest land) is a pre-planned conspiracy of the Government to change the demography of the state. India has unleashed cultural aggression on Kashmir through many means." This is the height of mediocrity and egoism. The Mirwaiz and his henchmen are suffering from the worst kind of parochialism. In contrast to this kind of xenophobic violence exhibited in the valley during the week till the land transfer order was revoked, there was hardly any murmur when 250 families of Tibetan Muslims (now they have

multiplied into several thousand) were settled permanently in Srinagar, in 1959. They were granted Indian citizenship soon after.

A number of these families are engaged in fine embroidery work on Kashmiri carpets. Some have own businesses. Scores of them can be seen selling garments, precious stones, artifacts, spices etc on the pavements in Srinagar's Lal Chowk area. But they still regard Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama as their leader, no doubt their faith is different. Many of the Tibetan Muslims have also settled in Leh, Ladakh. A total of 6700 Tibetan Muslims and Buddhists have been living there, since China's invasion of Tibet. They are now Indian citizens.

The PDP has blamed the Congress on the land transfer issue. But in fact it was Forest Minister Qazi Afzal and Deputy Chief Minister Muzaffar Husain Beig (both of them have now resigned following PDP's withdrawal of support), who had cleared the process of land transfer. But when the secessionists lodged a protest against the land transfer to the Board, the PDP revolted and asked the Chief Minister to rescind the order, in view of the vote bank policy. The former Ministers had rightly turned down baseless arguments put forward by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests that the "uncontrolled flow of pilgrims will cause pollution, which will have some impact on the wildlife, if no mitigating measures are initiated by the Shrine Board". His other argument is that the area is habitat of the endangered brown bear, leopard and

panthers. One would like to ask him, who is responsible for the annihilation of 2000 to 3000 Kashmir stag (hangul) in Dachigam sanctuary near Srinagar? Once upon a time the world was proud of them. Now only 149 of them remain.

However, it was Beig himself who took the final decision regarding the land transfer. Later he bowed to the wishes of the separatists and cancelled the order. But the agitation still goes on in the valley.

Beig had in February this year blamed the "fundamentalists in the mainstream political parties" for derailing the move to allow outsiders buy land for infrastructure development in the state. He had then stated that he would 'go ahead' with its plan to allow 'private players' from outside to buy land in Jammu and Kashmir. To quote him he had said: "Let me dispel the myth that people in other parts of the country cannot buy land in Jammu and Kashmir. There are provisions in our Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir Constitution) by virtue of which non-state subjects can buy land in the state."

He has also made it clear that "they (private players) can invest in tourism, health, education and industries". To cap it all, Beig has revealed that such a plan was shelved in 2006 because there were many 'fundamentalist politicians' who oppose development of the state. They are scared of militants.

**(The author is a veteran journalist based in Pune)*

Kashmiriyat has revealed its true colours

By KN Pandit

The real motive behind the violent protests in Kashmir is terrifyingly sinister

Recent events have once again exposed the much-touted 'secular' credentials of mainstream political parties in the Kashmir Valley. It would be incorrect to link the response of these parties to the Government's decision, which now stands cancelled, of temporarily allotting land to the Sri Amarnath Shrine Board to this year's Assembly election in Jammu & Kashmir.

On hindsight, the PDP, a coalition partner in the Congress-led Government in the State till it pulled out on Saturday, has hardly been cooperative after it handed over power to the latter three years ago. Its performance during the first three years of the coalition's tenure hardly bears testimony to its claimed non-partisan style of governance.

Under the guise of 'respect for the wishes of the people', the PDP has in the past blatantly played the pro-separatist card on issues such as demilitarisation of Jammu & Kashmir, joint regional council with Pakistan occupied Kashmir, inflow of Pakistani currency, lifting of all restrictions on trans-border movement, etc.

Under the much-touted cover of providing a 'healing touch', militants were set free from prisons by the PDP. They

were given financial and other forms of support without eliciting their commitment of laying down arms and joining the national mainstream. In doing so, PDP patron Mufti Mohammed Saeed has created a formidable constituency on which he and his party now bank.

It is inadvisable to treat the ongoing phenomenon as either a political manoeuvre or a sadist desire on part of the PDP to pull down the Congress-led Government. The motive is far deeper than that.

The statements issued by the PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti and the Mufti himself show that Kashmiri leaders of all hues have forged a common understanding among themselves to fight Indian presence in the Valley along with Pakistan-sponsored outfits. The statements of National Conference leaders, Mr Farooq Abdullah and Mr Omar Abdullah, have brought little solace to the tense situation that prevails in the Valley. Curiously, Mr Omar Abdullah has described the anti-Government demonstrations as an expression of "Kashmiri nationalism".

He has thus drawn a line between Indian nationalism and Kashmir nationalism. In other words providing for Haj complexes in various parts of the country is 'Indian nationalism' and denying

Amarnath pilgrims some relief facilities is 'Kashmiri nationalism'.

The people in the Valley have to understand that politicians are manipulating their religious feelings under the garb of 'Kashmiri nationalism'. This is a new approach to the old practice of whipping up religious sentiments at the time of Assembly elections. The National Conference is notorious for brandishing green handkerchiefs and rock salt in its election rallies. These have now been replaced by slogans promoting 'Kashmiri nationalism'.

VIEW POINT

Incidentally, the ideology of Kashmiriyat, to which the Kashmiri political leadership and intelligentsia have stuck tenaciously for more than two decades, has also revealed its true colours. In April, Ali Shah Geelani, the veteran separatist leader, while speaking at a public rally in Sopor, said it was a fallacy to label Nund rishi as an outstanding rishi or sufi saint of 14th century. He said Sheikh Nooru'd-Din (not Nund Rishi) was a zealous Muslim missionary who contributed enormously to the spread of Islamic culture and faith in the Valley during his time.

Contemporary Kashmiri historians have now joined Mr Geelani's voice. Those who were till the other day brandishing Kashmiriyat as a manifestation

of Kashmir's sense of communal harmony and peaceful co-existence, are now rejecting Kashmiriyat as a mischievous attempt by Indians to impose 'cultural hegemony' on Jammu & Kashmir.

The current row over allotment of land to the Sri Amarnath Shrine Board has shown that the majority of Kashmiri leaders believes that secessionist struggle should be carried out by political parties in a manner that is subtle and an erosion of Indian presence in Kashmir should be effected. This should serve as a warning to the Indian political leaders that something serious could happen once elections are held in October and the Assembly sits down to do business. It should expect no quarter from any of the mainstream political parties, including the State Congress in the Valley. New Delhi would also be well advised to think of the dangers inherent in the policy of divide and rule. That lesson should have been learnt long ago when the conspiracy of replacing Mr Farooq Abdullah with Mr GM Shah was masterminded.

Jammu & Kashmir's political situation has come to a critical point. Any mishandling, any unrealistic and euphoric response to the situation will be fraught with the gravest of consequences.

**(The writer is the former Director of the Centre of Central Asian Studies, Kashmir University.)*

SASB Land Allotment Controversy

(Contd. from Page 1)

Govind Ram, resident of Muthi. As the incident was telecast on TV channels, it further turned the demonstrations violent and the people fought pitched battles with the police. The administration imposed curfew initially in Jammu which was subsequently extended to Samba, Bhaderwah and Kathua. The police action and high-handedness of the administration resulted in more vigoured demonstrations.

On July 2, a massive protest demonstration was held in Bhaderwah. As the procession reached Seri Bazar and amidst sloganeering and burning of effigies, a bomb was lobbed on the crowd in which 21 persons, including two jawans, were injured. Eight of the injured were airlifted to Government Medical College, Jammu; one of the injured Manjit Singh succumbed to his injuries later.

In continuation of their action against protesters, police chased a 23 year youth Romesh Kumar in Pir Mitha. To escape the police wrath, the youth jumped from a roof and succumbed to his injuries in GMC, Jammu taking death toll to two.

Enraged by the police action, the demonstrators even defied curfew and fought pitched battles with the police throughout the region. They also turned

heat on some Jammu based ministers, Congress MLAs and PDP, Congress and National Conference leaders and stone pelted their residences and the party offices. Some police vehicles were also damaged by the furious mob. The irked mob, particularly in Samba and Kathua, removed foundation stones and damaged hoardings having name or figure of any Congress or PDP leader. Most of these leaders avoided public appearance fearing wrath. A large number of second rung leadership of PDP resigned.

Hundreds of people were injured in police action. Police also arrested hundreds of people including some political leaders and activists and registered FIRs. While some have been released on bail, many others are reportedly in jails. Jammu Bar Association, that is playing leading role in the agitation, provides free legal assistance.

Bandh suspended, Protests to Continue:-

After the fall of the Azad government, Baba Amarnath Yatra Sangarsh Samiti unanimously decided to suspend the bandh for a week and served an ultimatum to the government to concede the demands by that time. Addressing a press conference, Samiti convenor Leela Karan Sharma said that it will resume the agitation with more vigour if their demand for recall of Gover-



Protesters in Nagrota damage a SRTC bus.

nor and restoration of land and powers to SASB was not conceded. However, as decided by the Samiti, the protests and demonstration continue in the region. To express their resentment people are organising Prabhat Pheries, torchlight processions and "Beating of Thali" has emerged as a new weapon to express anger and solidarity.

Reactions:

The cancellation of land allotment order in favour of SASB, generated widespread resentment in Jammu. Barring Congress, PDP and National Conference, almost all political, social and religious organisations across the spectrum condemned the government decision. The decision was termed as anti-Jammu, anti Hindu and anti-national and tame surrender to separatist and fundamentalist forces.

The state unit of Bharatiya Janta Party termed the government decision unconstitutional that has hurt the sentiments of crores of Hindus. Terming the decision as unconstitutional, state BJP President Ashok Khajuria said that the government has been reduced to minority and cannot take any decision. "How can this government revoke its previous decision when Governor, NN Vohra has asked Chief Minister to prove his majority?" asked Mr. Khajuria. The BJP leader said, "The J&K Government has hurt the sentiments of crores of Hindus with its decision and present agitation will take a form of nation-wide movement". Mr Khajuria also demanded sacking of the J&K Governor.

BJP vice-president and

spokesperson, Prof. Hari Om termed the controversy as an off shoot of Kashmir-Centric politics and revocation of order as outcome of deal struck between Delhi and fundamentalists in Valley. "NC, PDP, Congress and separatists have made Jammu subjugate to Kashmiri politics since independence of which SASB land controversy is an off shoot," said Mr Om. He asserted that BJP has taken it as a mission to repulse it with all the might. Accusing Centre and Vohra for their role in revocation of order, Prof. Hari Om said, "The way Vohra consented to return the land transferred to SASB looks more as an expression of a deal struck between fundamentalists in the Valley and powers that be in Delhi".

Professor Hari Om accused Vohra of furthering the agenda of Wajahat Habibullah on Kashmir who wants to divide J&K in five parts on communal lines.

BJP National President Rajnath Singh, who visited Jammu alongwith Arun Jaitley, termed the government decision as unfortunate and shameful and surrender to separatists and terrorists. "It is unfortunate and shameful. It is not a tragedy for J&K but for the entire country. By revoking the decision on allotment of land, this government has bowed before the pressure of separatists and terrorists," Singh lamented. Taking a dig at the Central government, Rajnath Singh said that the UPA government can't absolve itself of the responsibility as the J&K government has taken the decision with its consent. BJP leader asserted that BJP would cancel the order and transfer the land in favour of SASB if it came to power. Mr Singh termed the decision a

part of larger conspiracy of PDP and Congress.

Jammu Kashmir National Panthers Party termed the revocation order illegal and accused PDP and Congress of pursuing political agenda to revive BJP in Jammu. "Azad government is in minority and has to pass test on July 7. Till then no order of government is valid or legal. Therefore, revocation of land diversion order cannot be held valid," opined Sh. Bhim Singh. Prof Bhim Singh accused PDP and Congress of raising bogey of land transfer by misrepresenting the facts and giving political agenda to revive BJP in Jammu region. The Panthers leader also accused BJP of communalising the situation. JKNPP leader demanded dissolution of the government and imposition of Governor's Rule to save the state from communal hurricanes and the country from disaster. The party also petitioned the Apex Court on the cancellation order but the court refused to intervene.

Decrying the decision, J&K Praja Parishad turned heat on PDP and termed lawful and judicious delimitation of Assembly as a means to get rid of the politics of blackmail. The party termed Sh. NN Vohra as ill suited for the responsible post. President J&K Praja Parishad, Chander Mohan Sharma said that PDP should be ashamed of its conduct as it resulted in attack on yatis and communal violence. Mr. Sharma demanded social boycott of Jammu based PDP leaders if they stuck to the communal outfit. Mr Sharma added that disproportionate

(Contd. on Page 19)



Rapid Action Force (RAF) being deployed in Jammu to deal with the protests.

Gen. (Retd.) SK Sinha dubs PDP as 'anti-national'

KS Correspondent

GEN. SINHA, till recently Governor of J&K, dubbed PDP as anti-national and accused the party and its patron Mufti Mohammed Sayeed of being 'hand in glove' with separatists and fundamentalists. In an interview to PTI he minced no words in admitting that his relations with PDP patron, who was Chief Minister from 2002-2005, had been "very bad from the very beginning". He said that Sayeed played the "most sinister role in reviving communalism in the Valley" using the ploy of transfer of 100 acres of land in the Valley which was to be used to provide facility for Amarnath Pilgrims.

Gen. Sinha disclosed that two of the PDP ministers in the cabinet were involved in the decision to direct this forest land at Baltal but Sayeed had used the issue to 'promote his agenda'. He said, "He (Sayeed) wanted to take electoral advantage of the developing situation but I think it has rebounded on him. The people have found out the duplicity of his party".

He denied that he had put any pressure on the state government for the transfer of land and said that the proposal was lying with it for the last three years. Nailing the propaganda circulated by secessionists as well as PDP the former Governor remarked, "On the one hand sanctioning the diversion of forest

land at Baltal through its two ministers and on the other they flare up communal passions. They (PDP) were trying to hunt with the hound and run with the hare. Their duplicity stands exposed and their effigies have been burnt in the streets of Srinagar".

General Sinha regretted the revocation order and termed it as a "policy of appeasement and total surrender followed by the State government and done with 'total lack of grace'. "What was worse, to appease the fundamentalists...They (State) have virtually wound up the Amarnath Shrine Board. This move has had very serious reactions in Jammu and elsewhere in the country", he said.

The former Governor claimed that "Kashmiriyat" only speaks of brotherhood and his attempts to revive it invited *fatwas* from terrorist groups. He said the separatists chose a 'non-issue', namely diversion of forest land to Shrine Board, which has been the traditional camping site for yatra for years. The state government gave sanction after examining for three years and for constructing temporary shelters for the pilgrims and nothing else, he added. He said that the secessionists and PDP sought to 'fan communal feelings by coming with an absurd canard that the Shrine Board was going to put up Hindu township at Baltal and holy cave with a view to

change the demography of the state".

General Sinha asked, "Is it possible to put up a township at those heights which are covered by snow for 7-8 months in a year. Do the pilgrims go to shrine for settling down there..Can a township be put up in 100 acres of



land...The fundamentalists unleashed the most vicious communal propaganda. The PDP, whose ministers had been part of the decision of transferring land, were in the forefront of this agitation along with the likes of Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Mirwaiz Umer Farooq".

The former Governor was unsparing in his criticism for Central leadership of Congress. He said, "PDP has performed a very anti-national role in Kashmir and the pity is that PDP, for all these years, has been enjoying patronage of Delhi to the extent that Congress High Command has even undermined the position of party's Chief Minister Ghulam

Nabi Azad". He said that he had been informing the Centre about the activities of Sayeed from time to time but the "Centre goes ahead by keeping it with the government for long".

General Sinha also hit hard on the Valley Press by observing, "The Press in the Valley indulged in yellow journalism of the highest order in a manner there was no political party who could swim against the surging tide of communal passion".

In a separate interview to an electronic TV channel General Sinha said that revocation of land transfer order was a victory of secessionists. He observed, "If it is a victory, it is a victory of secessionist forces, fundamentalists and anti-national forces and defeat of the silent majority of the moderate Muslims in Kashmir who cannot open their mouth for fear of terrorists attacks. I maintain that the clash is not between Hindus and Muslims as such. It's not a communal divide". He added, "I do not for a moment suggest that revocation of order diverting the land to the Shrine Board was wrong but the Congress could have done it in a better way, by saying that it was doing so to prevent further hurt to the sentiments of people. Virtual disbanding of the Shrine Board was uncalled for and was not even demanded. It is an overdrive of appeasement". He de-

scribed talk of disbanding MVDSB as unfortunate.

Soon after the resignation of Chief Minister GN Azad General Sinha addressed a press conference in New Delhi. Describing Mr. Azad's resignation as a "tragedy" he said PDP has sacrificed the State's development to further its political objectives. He also termed Mr Azad as a true secularist and lashed out at PDP by charging it with being a pawn in the hands of fundamentalist forces and terrorists backed by Pakistan.

General Sinha defended his stand of using weapon of "Kashmiriat" to take on fundamentalist forces. He said he was "not sorry for a moment" for whatever he had done during his stint in the state. He observed, "I have been pro-active in terms of performing my legitimate duties as the head of the state....I am not sorry for a moment for what all I did".

Sinha's disclosures about PDP role has put Congress High Command in an embarrassing position. The Central leadership is still reluctant to abandon PDP as its ally despite its duplicity, communal and pro-separatist role. Instead it has chosen to attack Lt. General Sinha. Its spokesperson Jayanti Natarajan even upbraided Sinha's recommendations on countering infiltration of Bangladeshis into India.

Yatris narrate horrible experiences

KS Correspondent

IN a brazen act of violence on July 1, 14 Amarnath yatris hailing from Lucknow, Meerut and New Delhi including women were mercilessly beaten-up, their vehicles damaged and clothes torn off by a group of locals at Banihal town on Srinagar-Jammu national highway.

The yatris were forced to take shelter in petrol tankers and trucks and reached Udhampur in miserable condition. They were provided shelter and food by the local people and helped to board trains.

The state administration had not taken measures to provide adequate security to the yatris. Official sources revealed that three TATA Sumos and Tavera vehicles, carrying pilgrims back from the holy cave, were intercepted at Banihal in the evening. The mob, belonging to the majority community, subjected the vehicles to heavy stone pelting. Later, the pilgrims were brought down from the vehicles and thrashed mercilessly. The large number of police personnel watched it as mute spectators. Clothes of some pilgrims were torn, a woman pilgrim Shakuntala Narang had her right leg badly fractured. Other pilgrims too sustained bruises over their bodies. The thrashing continued for 15 minutes. The yatris were

asked to raise anti-India slogans.

It was only after civil administration persuaded a local Imam to intervene that the yatris were freed. The police has yet to arrest any of the 14 accused, who have been identified by the locals.

Earlier, there was an attack on yatris on June 25. On June 25 a tourists bus was attacked near Dalgate at Srinagar, leaving several tourists injured.

The yatris have complained that the pilgrims were being charged exorbitant prices for shelter and other necessities. A bottle of water was sold at Rs 46, while 250 ml milk bottle was given for Rs 40. The pilgrims complained that no official of the state government was present to redress to their grievances.

The yatris had to pay Rs 500 to Rs 1000 per person for getting shelter in a tent near the cave on June 29. Mr. Jasdeep Singh Malhotra, a correspondent of Hindustan Times in his first person account of visit to the holy cave said Pony-Wallahs were charging double the rate—Rs 5-6 thousand from Pahalgam side and Rs 2500 from

Baltal side. Many of the pilgrims were all praise for Army, BSF and CRPF for giving them all possible help.



An injured yatri in Banihal being evacuated.

Who has won and Who has lost?

Who has won and who has lost in the forest land transfer controversy? Almost every leader has burnt his or her fingers. The noble concept of religious tolerance has been treated with scant respect. Secessionists have left no doubt at all that they are pursuing a fundamentalist agenda. Even those among them who carry “a Jammuwallah” and “a Kashmiri Pandit” on their bandwagon to flaunt their secular credentials have been found woefully wanting. A common man is left bewildered why a piece of land allotted to a body devoted to a religious cause in out-of-the-way hills should raise a storm. The Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) is an organisation created by an Act of the Legislature. It is not a foreign or what many of us are fond of saying a non-State subject element. Why can’t it have a piece of land to create facilities for thousands of pilgrims paying obeisance at the holy Himalayan cave? The new Governor, Mr N.N. Vohra, has taken just four days to conclude that the Board no longer requires the land at Baltal (the entire process of the allotment itself had taken three years). He does not care to consult anybody in this regard except for meeting a beleaguered Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and the leaders like National Conference president Omar Abdullah who had already publicised their stance. Mr Vohra does not feel it necessary either to take into confidence either the members of the Board or consult non-aligned public figures. Actually, the curtain has been sought to be rung down on this affair in a manner that indicates a well-orchestrated drama both by the Governor taking advantage of his position as the SASB Chairman and the State Government caught in a maze of its own making. The two have exhibited an unseemly hurry without regard for the sentiments of the minorities in the State. It is unfortunate that the Chief Minister has observed that “some people” in Jammu have been trying to create “communal tension with sinister design”. He has blamed them (without mentioning any name though) for indulging in propaganda that the SASB is being abolished. This region has in reality been an oasis of communal harmony. It would have made sense had Mr Azad reserved his ire for communal forces that have played havoc with harmonious human ties right under his nose in the Valley. No accusing finger can be pointed in the direction of the inhabitants of Jammu who have shown exemplary patience and spirit of accommodation from 1989 onwards.

On political front the fall-out has been ungainly and unprecedented. For the first time we have been exposed to the spectacle of the top-most political functionary openly parting with official papers to show the major coalition partner, People’s Democratic Party (PDP), as a villain. How has it helped the principles of secrecy and joint responsibility? There are no two opinions that the PDP has been caught trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Having not only acquiesced but also facilitated the allot-

ment of the land to the SASB it chose to wash its hands off without realising that the truth can’t be hidden all the more so when all records are in black and white. In striving to ride two horses at the same time it has fallen flat on its face. It has ceased to be a partner in power — a role that has won it a lot of respectability in its brief existence. Worse, its credibility in popular eyes is seriously dented at a time when it was being recognised as a reckonable force beyond its original turf in the south of the Kashmir region. Former Deputy Chief Minister Muzaffar Hussain Baig’s plea that the Congress had blackmailed the party into giving land to the SASB in exchange for the construction of the Mughal Road is a panic reaction. There is no link between the two. This does not mean that the Congress is a gainer in any way. It has failed to stand up to the onslaught of communal forces in the Valley where in any case it is not considered much of a force. An adverse consequence for the party is that its support base in the Jammu region has become suspect. It has always drawn its political sustenance from this province including in the 2002 elections. It has queered its pitch with its climb-down now. As for as the National Conference is concerned it is placed no better than the PDP. The State’s premier political outfit seems to be suffering from fits of forgetfulness about its history of successfully encountering fundamentalists of all hues in the Kashmir Valley. By opting to swim with the current rather than taking a reasoned stand it has played a second fiddle in the Valley, which for long has been its home stretch, and damaged its prospects on this side of the Pir Panjal.

The spontaneity of bandh in this region on Monday reveals how anguished the people are. Nobody believes that the SASB has given up its claim to the forest land. Instead, the feeling is — and rightly so — that it has been forced to do so with the new Governor offering no resistance worth the name and the State Government too wilting. By all means the people of this region have a right to express their sentiments. They are entitled to exercise all democratic options available to them. While doing so, however, they must ensure that they don’t take the law into their own hands. They should conscientiously avoid a tit-for-tat approach. It will not serve any purpose if take out their anger on any individual or hold out threats of cutting off supplies of essential commodities to the Valley. It needs to be remembered that those who have pelted the vehicles of Amarnath pilgrims with stones in the Valley can’t endear themselves to anybody. There is absolutely no necessity of emulating them. There is only one point that has to be made effectively: we are equal stakeholders in the State and can’t be bullied into submission by any regional or religious consideration. It has to be done politely but firmly and with the full knowledge that there are no winners either in the Valley.

--Daily Excelsior

Capitulation in J&K

Congress bows before Islamic fanatics

IT would be erroneous to believe that the situation in Jammu & Kashmir, so severely disturbed this past week by separatists on the rampage and their political patrons of various shades, will become ‘normal’ now that Governor NN Vohra has ‘returned’ the land which had been leased to the Sri Amarnath Shrine Board. The PDP, which was looking for an excuse to break free of restraints that come with being in power, has walked out on its partner, the Congress. The All-Party Hurriyat Conference, which needed an issue to revert to true form, has achieved its objective. And, those elements of Kashmiri society who abhor the idea of any Hindu presence in the Valley and for whom the annual yatra to the Amarnath Shrine is akin to desecration of their “culture” are celebrating their victory over the ‘secular’ state. Meanwhile, the Congress has egg on its face, although it is reluctant to admit as much, instead choosing to blame former Governor SK Sinha! But such calumny cannot hide the truth. Let there be no mistake: What we have witnessed in Jammu & Kashmir is a pathetic and shameful capitulation, though not for the first

time, by the Indian state before Muslim fanatics. For, contrary to what the PDP, the Hurriyat and assorted separatists have been alleging, there never was any alienation of land nor was there any proposal to erect permanent structures on the leased land. By forcing the Government to beat a retreat, those who had taken to the streets have sent out a clear, though chilling message: In ‘secular’ India, Hindu pilgrims have no right to basic facilities and amenities. This is in sharp contrast to the huge expense incurred by the Union Government and the State Governments to provide every possible facility both at home and in Saudi Arabia to Haj pilgrims. The ‘Haj Houses’ and ‘Haj Terminals’ — permanent brick-and-mortar structures as compared to the prefabricated structures that were planned for yatris travelling to Amarnath — are two examples of how tax payers are made to foot the bill of pilgrimage to Mecca by Muslims. What if people were to find them unacceptable and a “threat to the environment”? Would the Government then demolish them? Must Islamic fanatics in Kashmir Valley be mollified in so crass a man-

ner?

There is no percentage in trying to rationalise either the protests or the Government’s jelly-kneed response to pretend that last week’s violence was no more than a proverbial storm in the tea cup. Nor shall any purpose be served by blaming those on the fringe of Kashmiri Muslim society, and claiming that ‘Kashmiriyat’ is all-embracing and does not discriminate between Muslims and Hindus. That’s so much balderdash, and we all know it. The cleansing of Kashmir Valley, which began with jihadis forcing Kashmiri Pandits to flee their ancestral land, is an incomplete project — the successful resistance to facilities for Hindu pilgrims highlights this point in the most lurid fashion. One way of dealing with Sunday’s denouement is to treat the Islamic fanatics with contempt and the Congress with pity. The other way is to stand up and be counted: In secular and democratic India, of which Jammu & Kashmir is an inseparable part, pandering to the dark and menacing forces of Muslim separatism is unacceptable.

--The Daily Pioneer

Provocative action

Use of brute force impairs the situation

Unprovoked police firing on the protesters in Muthi Domana resulting in serious injuries to three people on the second day of Jammu Bandh on Tuesday has once again demonstrated the state administration’s incompetence to handle the turbulent yet sensitive situation. For the past over one week, different parts of the state have been witnessing violent demonstrations on the issue of land transfer to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB) but the administrative apparatus as usual has dismally failed to promptly respond to the situation in the desired manner. This is regrettable that the administration finds the use of force as the only and easy option to tackle this sensitive yet volatile situation thus worsening the turn of events with the repression of peaceful demonstrators at many places in a brutal manner. Restrained use of force may be genuine where the violent demonstrators go berserk but that should be only in extreme conditions when the situation literally goes out of control. But this was certainly not the situation at Muthi and many other places in Jammu region where the security personnel resorted to brutal lathicharge and other repressive measures leaving behind over hundred injured. At all those places, where the people had come out on streets to protest peacefully against the revocation of land transfer order, the use of force in any form was uncalled for and provocative for the people. More so the right to protest is a fundamental right which the citizens can avail whenever they feel aggrieved. But the use of force further angered the protesters and created sullenness among them which is finding reflection in the worsened situation. This has happened in Jammu while earlier this was witnessed in the Valley which till Tuesday was in flames on the land transfer row, which even claimed six precious lives there besides leaving hundreds of people injured. Unfortunately after the revocation of land transfer order while the semblance of peace has been restored in the Valley, the turbulence has gripped entire Jammu region where in the wake of inept handling the situation has worsened to the extent that the administration has to clamp curfew in many districts. Unprovoked police firing in Muthi and brutal lathicharge at peaceful protesters in many areas in Jammu, Nagrota, Jatalwal etc further impaired the situation. No doubt, during this turbulence, the vested interests are making all out efforts to add fuel to the fire but by promptly resorting to use of force, the administration aggravates the situation. Infact during the turbulent circumstances, the restraint should be the catch word which certainly works, while suppression by brutal means only worsens the situation. --The Kashmir Times

...To say that the PDP is raking up this issue with an eye on the forthcoming assembly elections is viewing the matter in too simplistic terms. The design is more sinister. They want to erase the Hindu heritage of Kashmir. PDP leader Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and his daughter have earlier also demanded that the Amarnath Yatra should be held at abeyance for “sometime”. They play crass communal politics. Few months ago they demanded Pak currency in Kashmir. They often work hand in glove with the separatists. And they happen to be the bosom friends of Sonia Gandhi. The CPM and the NC are not far behind in stoking communal divide in the Valley.

The terrorists who have taken to the streets and fasts unto death for “saving” the forests should actually take up the cause of vanishing forests of Kashmir at the hands of the vandals in the state. Acres of forest lands are being cleared to reap timber which is being smuggled outside the state, according to reports. These protesters were not seen in action when recently a bear and then a leopard which had strayed out of their habitats were roasted alive and stoned to death by a mob in Kashmir. Nor are they protesting the stink that the Dal Lake, the pride of Kashmir, has become. So much for environmental activism. They are the real enemies of development and Kashmiriyat.

These terrorists had no qualms when they occupied the homes of Kashmiri Hindus who had been driven away. In fact it is the fear of having to part with these properties that is goading them into opposing the return of the Hindus to the valley....

--Organiser

LESSONS FROM KASHMIR

“.....both the Congress and the PDP practiced incendiary politics and pandered to communalism....”

The Hindu—July8,2008

Controversy over Amarnath land allotment poll gimmick?

By Rajeev Deshpande

NEW DELHI, June 28: The storm in the Kashmir Valley over allocation of 100 acres of land to the Amarnath Shrine Board seems to have seen PDP and hardline separatists coming together to paint a plan to build temporary pre-fabricated shelters for pilgrims as a devious plot to alter the state's "demographics".

Violent protests in the Valley have seen police opening fire on protesters demanding that the land allotted to the Board be withdrawn.

Apart from Hurriyat factions fuelling protests, what has added to tensions is the role of PDP, which despite being a partner in the government, has joined the stir.

Given the populist sentiments sweeping the Valley, almost all political outfits have had to echo the militant line that giving land to the Board would pave the way for "Israel-type settlements"

aimed at diluting the Muslim majority character of the state. Former governor Lt-Gen (retd) S K Sinha has been attacked for having authored the plan during his recently-concluded tenure.

Sources close to the general point out that the proposal was neither recent nor unique. And that though Gen Sinha had energetically backed the move, the intent was to improve facilities for pilgrims who have had to make do with primitive amenities like trench toilets separated by gunny bags. The area in question at Baltal was the last base camp, 14 km from the shrine.

While PDP leaders Mufti Mohammed Sayeed and his daughter Mehbooba were claiming that they had been in the dark, the Board's request was before the government for three years since 2005. The proposal was examined by the law department and an empowered committee of the Supreme Court. Not just that, the current forest minister and his predecessor were

both from the PDP.

The state cabinet had considered the proposal and forest minister Qazi Afzal and deputy CM Muzaffar Beig did not raise any objections. Yet now the Mufti and Mehbooba have sought to put chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad in the dock. Just as the "ignorance" plea was an afterthought, environmental arguments also appear to be belated attempts to build a case against the land transfer.

It is pointed out while a threat to a nearby wildlife sanctuary had been quoted, no such concerns were aired with regard to the construction of the "Mughal road" expected to connect Poonch and Rajouri sections with the Valley. "There are something like 10,000 trees that will be felled. The plot at Baltal in comparison is bare, with no trees. The agenda of those opposing the Amarnath case is obvious," the sources said.

The theory that setting up facilities for pilgrims was actually

a covert attempt to settle non-Muslims stretches credulity. The area is hardly hospitable and it would be hard to persuade any population, however deprived, to settle in the area. The Board wanted to construct bunds, besides the shelters, to keep snow slides from damaging equipment.

The pre-fabricated shelters are also not a new proposal. In fact, the base camp has been in regular use for several years. Pilgrims have been put up there before the arduous last leg of the journey to the Amarnath cave, which is open to pilgrims two months of the year.

The well springs of the current agitation seem to lie in PDP's poll calculus and a certain unease among separatists and their jihadi backers over the success of initiatives like the recently-opened centre for South Asian studies and the reception accorded to Pakistani band Junoon despite a boycott call. With elections round the corner, PDP is looking to strum up sentiments

in the Valley while putting Congress in a fix as withdrawing the land order could result in a backlash in Jammu.

It is apparent that Azad, who unlike the Mufti did not object to the transfer of land to the Board, is in a bind. Congress relies on its presence in Jammu while the fight in the Valley is largely between PDP and National Conference.

The PDP leadership, which has chaffed at having to hand over power to Congress in mid-term, is finding it expedient to use the Amarnath controversy for its ends.

Communalising the issue suits separatists and Pakistani agencies as this leads to an upsurge of an "us versus them" sentiment. A lack of a clearer appreciation of facts has clouded the debate. Transfer of forest land is not rare. This has been done for private telecom operators and railways.

--Source: Times of India

The mechanics of chauvinist rage

While secessionists might have set off violence, NC workers are fanning the flames

Praveen Swami

SRINAGAR: It's been called an Intifada: a spontaneous expression of focussed rage against the Jammu and Kashmir government's decision to allow Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board to use 39.88 hectares of land to house Hindu pilgrims.

Last week, without dispute, saw the largest popular mobilisation since the long jihad in the State began two decades ago. But while secessionists might have set off the ugly, chauvinist fires now raging across Jammu and Kashmir, National Conference (NC) workers control the tempo.

Both the scale and intensity of the protests are greater than the demonstrated capabilities of Islamist secessionist groups.

Till June 20, when the shrine board protests exploded, secessionist leaders like the Tehreek-i-Hurriyat's Syed Ali Shah Geelani, typically had audiences fewer than 500 people. Islamist leader Asiya Andrabi's Forum Against Social Evils, like a March assault on romantic couples at the Srinagar Botanical Park, rarely drew more than a few dozen cadres.

How have such large mobilisations suddenly occurred? Some clues lie in the fact that large crowds have come from Srinagar neighbourhoods where secessionists have no presence at all. Srinagar's Shivpora area, around XV Corps Headquarters at Badami Bagh, is home to several important politicians and bureaucrats and has long been an NC stronghold. So too is Rajbagh, which saw large crowds come out on Friday.

Led by block and mohalla-level NC leaders, the crowds did not advertise their party affiliations but made their sympathies clear in other ways. No secessionist leader addressed the estimated 10,000-15,000 people who milled around Srinagar's Lal Chowk on Friday. A meeting addressed by Mr. Geelani at his home drew fewer than a thousand people; second-rung Islamist leaders Masrat Alam and Shabbir Shah could attract just a few hundreds.

Elsewhere, the links between the NC and mobs have been even more obvious. On January 24, the party workers attacked the home of Forest Minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) leader Qazi Afzal, whose claims to fame include defeating the former Minister of State of External Affairs

Omar Abdullah in 2002 and now ensuring the passage of the shrine board land grant. In Anantnag, PDP billboards were vandalised the same day.

Unfocussed rage Interestingly, the protests haven't quite been the focussed assertions of anger on the shrine board issue as some commentators have claimed. Mobs which attacked the Punjab National Bank at Lal Chowk in Anantnag on Thursday, for example, were angered by a decision to hike interest rates on taxis. Protesters also attacked the Jammu and Kashmir Bank's branch at Lal Chowk, after having tried to ransack HDFC Bank's offices on the Khanabal-Pahalgam road a day earlier.

Often, the urban poor have used the cover provided by the cause for economic gain, a common feature of mob violence the world over. In Srinagar, groups of protesters detached themselves from a June 26 procession led by JKLF chairman Yasin Malik, and attempted to pillage an HDFC Bank ATM near Bud Shah Chowk. A grocery store near Dalgate was robbed of its stock of potato chips by teenage

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A monument to hate in Chhatterhama

Inflamed by the Shrine Board issue, people of a village in central Kashmir build a shrine for Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists.

By Praveen Swami

BRIGHT pink plastic flowers and lurid crepe-paper wreaths adorn Jammu and Kashmir's first shrine to the Lashkar-e-Taiba. Last month, two Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists from Pakistan were shot dead in the forests next to the village of Chhatterhama, 30 kilometres from the central Kashmir town of Ganderbal. Mired in the communally-charged, region-wide agitation against land-use rights granted to the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board, the local community saw the terrorists as soldiers who had died for their cause.

"Here was India conspiring to seize our land and hand it over to infidels," says local businessman Zahoor Ahmad, "and here were these two foreigners who had given their lives to save Islam in Kashmir. One of them was just 14 or 15, no older than my brother. And so, we gathered Rs.11,000 to give these martyrs the kind of burial they deserved."

"May god's mercy and the blessings of Mohammad always be with you; I shall always pray for you to be blessed by the eternal rest of paradise," reads the poetic Urdu-language inscription on the gravestones, which identify the two terrorists by their code-names Abu Hurrera and Abu Saria. Both were buried at the highest point of the village graveyard, in an especially fenced-off section.

Ethnic-Kashmiri jihadists killed in Jammu and Kashmir have often been buried after elaborate funeral processions in special "martyrs' graveyards." However, no shrines or special memorials have ever been built to mark the death of Pakistani jihadists operating in Jammu and Kashmir. In some cases, rural communities have even refused to take responsibility for their burial.

Chhatterhama isn't a likely location for a shrine celebrating the Lashkar's Islamist cause. Not a single Chhatterhama resident joined the jihadist movement in Jammu and Kashmir. Its residents — most of them Shawl Bafs, or artisans who hand-embroider shawls — were supporters of the National Conference. Few would offer even ethnic-Kashmiri jihadist groups like the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen shelter or support. As a result, Chhatterhama never once saw an exchange of fire between jihadists and the police or the army. But when the Shrine Board agitation began, the village embraced a cause it had long

(Contd. on Page 12)

Sreeram Chaulia

.....That a temporary land transfer for a Hindu pilgrimage could be painted by separatist politicians as a devious plot of the Indian government to alter the demography of Kashmir shows how communalized has become in the valley. This is the third and most potent explanation for the movement that rocked Jammu and Kashmir. While alienation of Muslims amid a lull in terrorist violence and machinations of democratic politics partially account for the crisis, neither of these could galvanize the public without the wholesale Islamization of Kashmir, a land ironically mythologized as a cradle of eclectic Sufism. The same drivers of Taliban-style enforcement of strict moral codes on Kashmiris, especially women, are at the forefront in the anti-land transfer movement.

So mainstreamed is the influence of intolerant Islamist ideology in Kashmir that there is barely a squeal of anguish regarding restoration of properties of nearly half-a-million Kashmiri Hindus ("Pandits"), who were hounded out of the valley by terrorists in 1988-1989. The restitution of Hindu properties that were destroyed and taken over is a genuine grievance for which Islamists show no sympathy. Islamists have also never condemned terrorist attacks that,

over the years, have killed dozens of Hindu pilgrims whose simple ambition in life was to pay their respects to a supernatural phenomenon in Amarnath.

While the reality on the ground is that the demography of the Kashmir Valley has been forcibly redrawn through the killing of Hindus, the mass movement that erupted in June was based on fictitious claims of the land transfer being a diabolical conspiracy for Hindus to deluge the valley. There is little evidence to prove that India's Kashmir policy mimics Chinese internal colonization solutions that have changed the population profile of Tibet in favor of Han Chinese. While the Tibetan upheavals this year against Chinese high-handedness had a legitimate basis, the anti-land transfer ruckus in Kashmir rests on concocted charges.

..... Terrorist violence in Kashmir may wax and wane and state-level elections may come and go every five years, but the seeds of Islamist hatred continue to sprout and augur ill for peace. The liberation of Kashmir from jihadi mentality remains an uphill task.

(The author is a researcher on international affairs at the Maxwell School of Citizenship at Syracuse University, New York.)

—(Source: Asia Times)

Balbir Punj, Columnist

.....All sorts of exaggerated outcome of the land transfer were marketed by the "secularists" to justify the violent protests. The PDP (certified as "secular" by the rest of the "secular pack") after first agreeing to the land transfer changed its tune with the message that the Islamic character of Kashmir was in danger. The silence on the part of the self-appointed guardians of secularism like the CPI(M), the various NGOs, the "liberal" press and academics on an orgy of separatist violence, was a pronounced endorsement of the PDP brand of "secular politics.....

Sandhya Jain, Columnist

....The shocking and unexpected intolerance towards Hindu pilgrims is widely perceived in India as an attempt to put an end to the yatra itself, as Gen Sinha has been replaced by a supine bureaucrat who obediently 'requested' the State Government to cancel the land allotment and take over the arrangements for the pilgrims. India now has to face the religious identity-cum-civilisational issue head-on. The so-called Nehruvian consensus (actually imposition) is dead and cannot be restored....

Vinod Sharma

.....That agents provocateur could project the diversion of a mere 100 acres as a conspiracy to change the Valley's demography is a collective failure of the political class on either side of the divide. On the face of it, the PDP pullout indicates that Mufti Sayeed and his daughter Mehbooba are desperate to insulate themselves from popular outrage over an issue they should have helped place in the right perspective. It's an irony that the party led by the country's former home minister chose expediency over its duty to fight a falsehood misleading people. In fact, the Valley-based party decided to quit ahead of its own June 30 deadline to obfuscate - in the changed situation - the role of its leaders in the issue.....

—(The author is Associate Editor Hindustan Times)

Praful Bidwai, Columnist

....Rather than make a gesture of generosity to religious Hindus, in keeping with Kashmir's syncretic culture, the Hurriyat leaders and JKLF chief Yasin Malik falsely depicted the land transfer as a means of forcibly settling Hindus in the Valley and an assault on the Kashmiri identity. This was patently absurd given the tiny size of the plot and the makeshift prefabricated structures being erected on it. They gave a religious-communal colour to the issue by deliberately organising processions to and from the Jama Masjid and the Hazratbal shrine. This falsified their claim to the "nationalist" mantle. They also tried to present the protests as spontaneous eruptions of popular anger against India's Kashmir policy and the heavy presence of security forces. They maligned the peace process itself as a way of perpetuating the Kashmir status quo. This was the Hurriyat's way of regaining its lost relevance. In reality, the protests were driven by the same narrow-minded and parochial motives as were evident in the earlier mob violence over the "sex scandal" issue, in which vigilante squads went on the rampage and burnt down the house of a woman suspected to be responsible for it. The protests caused great hardship to the public by disrupting the movement of essential supplies, including food and fuel.....

BG Verghese

....The extension of the period of yatra was infeasible as it would tie down a substantial body of troops on Yatra security duty for double the normal period, thereby weakening the counter-terrorism grid. However, the land use at Baltal was sanctioned, providing a trigger a wholly misplaced agitation on the ground that the land had been "transferred" and would result in environmental damage and demographic change. The fact is that only temporary usage was granted for a few months and there was no permanent transfer of land to the Shrine Board. This was strangely not immediately and forcefully clarified. The fear of demographic change was an absurd canard while any environmental damage would be the same and marginal in terms of usage irrespective of land title.....

—(The author is former Editor Hindustan Times)

The mechanics of chauvinist rage

(From Page 11)

members of a mob, while the historic clock on the Ghanta Ghar was vandalised.

Elsewhere, mobs have sought to enforce what the religious right believes to be an appropriate social order. In Srinagar, crowds sought to destroy Highlander Bar in the Shivpora area, a facility first attacked by Islamists back in 1990, at the beginning of the long jihad. Protesters in Anantnag also destroyed the Pamposh Hotel, which caters for travellers on the Jammu-Srinagar highway. Its crime? Serving alcohol, the protesters claimed, to truck drivers.

This isn't the first time chauvinism has been leveraged for political profit.

Facing a serious challenge from the Jamaat-e-Islami and Janata Party alliance in 1977, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah argued that a vote for his opponents would help those whose hands were still red with the blood of Muslims. Potential voters were even administered oaths on the Koran. In the end, the NC won 47 of 75 seats in the Assembly.

Since then the NC has often adopted chauvinist positions to corral its flock. In 1999, the Report of the State Autonomy Committee advocated redistribution of Jammu and Kashmir into administrative blocs that would mirror its religious fault-lines reflecting Pakistan-backed proposals for a division of pre-Partition Jammu and Kashmir into the Muslim-majority areas to the north of the Chenab, and the Hindu-majority areas to its south.

Early this month, when the PDP threw its weight behind the shrine board protests, the party did so to ensure that Islamists did not erode its electoral base among Kashmiri Muslims. Now, the NC has shown that more than one can play the hate-politics game.

(Source: The Hindu)

A monument to hate in Chhatterhama

(From Page 11)

resisted. Local authorities and political parties had done nothing to challenge rumours spread by Islamist groups that a large-scale plot was under way to give away land to outsiders — to outsiders, moreover, hostile to Islam. As a result, the jihad in Jammu and Kashmir acquired a new legitimacy.

On June 23, one day after the terrorists' killing, Chhatterhama villagers marched to the main crossroads at Batpora to express their outrage on the Shrine Board issue. Work on the Lashkar shrine began the same afternoon. And the following Friday, Chhatterhama observed the two terrorists' Rasm-e-Chaharrum death-rites alongside another protest march against the Shrine Board.

Why was Chhatterhama so quick to join the Islamist cause? One reason might be the growth of neo-conser-

vative religious groups in the area, which until recently had almost no rural reach. "Most people here used to worship at shrines," says local Jamaat-e-Islami activist Bashir Ahmad Bhat, "and followed practices that were Hindu in origin. But my generation has learned to read, and thus discovered the true Islam."

It is also likely that the new chauvinism has been propelled by the stresses of economic change. Shawl-Bafs have been hit hard by competition from cheap machine-embroidered shawls, often made in Ludhiana and Jalandhar. Embroidering shawls, moreover, is killing work: wages run as low as Rs. 80 a day for work which leaves many Shawl Bafs half-blind and arthritic before they turn 40.

But few young people in Chhatterhama, despite the spread of school and college education, have the kind of specialist skills needed to get new-economy jobs in the service or information-technology

sectors. Even fewer have the kind of capital needed to set up independent businesses — or pay the bribes often needed to get a government job. All of these frustrations seem to have fed the anti-Shrine Board protest in Chhatterhama. Local clerics from the Jamaat Ahl-e-Hadis, Jamaat-e-Islami activists and National Conference workers all saw reason to fuel the chauvinist fears which underpinned the protests, seeing in them a possibility to expand their constituency. All of them seem to have won.

Ironic twist

Have jihadists like the Lashkar also gained? The shrine in Chhatterhama would seem to suggest so — but the evidence is more ambiguous than the memorial suggests.

Notably, Lashkar ideologues most likely won't approve of the Chhatterhama shrine. Jamaat Ahl-e-Hadis' theological tradition — from which the Lashkar draws

its legitimacy — disproves of the veneration of shrines and relics, seeing them as heretical borrowings from Hinduism. In general, Lashkar jihadists' graves consist of nothing more elaborate than a un-inscribed stone marker.

Indeed, Salafists — of whom the Ahl-e-Hadis are a subset — have often carried their hatred of shrine worship to great lengths. When the followers of the ultra-right Saudi Arabian cleric, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, captured the cities of Mecca and Medina in 1803-1804, they destroyed several shrines including one built over the tomb of the Prophet Mohammad's daughter, Fatima Zehra.

"In Kashmir, everything eventually turns into a shrine," says Mr. Ahmed, a wry smile on his face. "Come back here in a few years' time, and you might just see people telling you that they have come here to pray for sons at the grave of a famous Pir [godman]".

(Source: The Hindu)

CONTINUATION

Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, (Congress) former Chief Minister:

"Any issue which is made to divide communities is extremely difficult to resolve. I don't want to take an emotional and hasty decision. I want a permanent solution"....(June 25,2008)

"Interested parties got money from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to sustain the violent agitation against Amarnath land transfer in the valley for 10 days".....(July,13,2008)

Mr. NN Vohra, Governor, J&K:

"We can review what is to be done. We can go for an amendment as well. It is not good that they (people) are taking to the streets. This way all the good work will be rolled back. There are certain problems, certain sensitivities and we will look in to them.".... (June 25, 2008)

Mr. LK Advani, BJP, Leader of Opposition:

"Congress CM GN Azad in J&K wants the yatra to go on, but the resistance was from his coalition partner. The grouse of the Congress coalition partners seems to be that the former Governor of that state had made Vaishno Devi a model pilgrimage centre attracting lakhs of pilgrims and they are resenting this."..(June23,2008)

"The J&K Govt.'s decision to take back the land allotted to the Board is communal and a part of vote-bank politics.".... (June30, 2008)

"Respecting every religion and tradition is secularism. But not caring about feelings and facilities of majority is a sign of perverted secularism. J&K Govt.

decided to revoke the land allotment to the Amarnath Shrine Board under pressure from the UPA Govt. I do not see why the Shrine Board set up in respect of Vaishno Devi should be given all kinds of facilities and (the)shrine board relating to Amarnath in the valley should not be given similar facilities."....(July 1,2008)

Mr. Raj Nath Singh, President National BJP:

"By revoking the decision on allotment of land, this govt. has bowed before the pressure of separatists and terrorists. The Amaranth land row is a creation of ruling alliance.".....(July5,2008)

Mr. Veerappa Moily, AICC Media Cell Chairman:

"Running away from a problem will not resolve it and will not bring credit to any political party including the PDP. At the fag end of the term, they should not have withdrawn from the govt. The decision on the shrine board was a collective decision. The withdrawal of support does not augur well for both the parties.".... (June28, 2008)

Mr. Shameem Faizee, Secretary National Council of CPI:

"The job of providing facilities to pilgrims should be assigned to the State Tourism Deptt. Job opportunities resulting from the project of provision of facilities to pilgrims should be offered to locals on a priority basis."

Dr. Arun Kumar, former CEO of SASB:

The land has not been transferred to the Board but it has been diverted for non-forest use and Shrine Board has paid Rs. 2.5 crore to the State Govt. for it."..... (June17, 2008)

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Hurriyat and Jamaat Islami leader:

"Cancellation of allotment of 100 acres of land to SASB has rejuvenated the spirit of Kashmiri people to raise voice against 'occupation of 8 lakh Kanals of land by armed forces."

Yasin Malik, Separatist leader (JKLF):

"Transfer of land to the SASB is a big threat to ecology and it should be withdrawn forthwith. If it is not done, I will not hesitate to end my life by going on a fast unto death. SASB is endangering communal harmony in J&K and trying to create a Hindu society in Baltal" (June 23,2008)

Mr. Abdul Gani Vakil (Congress), former Cabinet Minister in Azad-led Coalition:

"9- day agitation against land diversion by them (Geelani and Mirwaiz) prove that the separatist amalgam is not fighting for secessionist ideas but for strengthening Article 370. We have brought a change in their thinking, credit should go to us". (at Baramulla on July5,2008 as reported in Greater Kashmir)

Mr. Muzaffar Hussain Beig (PDP), Deputy CM:

"We are happy that Hurriyat is getting united. But I will request them to search for some other issue to launch agitation. It is no issue. We have not transferred any land to the Shrine Board."

(June 19,2008)

Mufti Mohammed Syed (PDP), Former CM :

"I am pained at the turn of events and would advise caution to all the stake holders in State's ecology, environment and cultural identity as also the govt. and the SASB... We also need to have a re-look at the desirability of having a separate board for the Amarnath Yatra which has generated controversies more than the amenities for the Yatries. The State Legislature should have a re-look at the legislation that led to the creation of the SASB in 2000."

(June21', 2008)

Ms. Mehbooba Mufti, (PDP), MP:

"The Azad govt. had deviated from the healing touch policy. The Prime Minister always supported Mufti's policies. It was the PM who set up a panel to look in to our demand of troop withdrawal after the idea was opposed by Azad."

The land transfer order forbids raising permanent structures

Government of Jammu and Kashmir

Civil Sectt: Forest Department

Subject: Diversion of 39.88 ha of forest land to Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board at Baltal and Domail for raising Buliding/Structures in Sindh Forest Division

Reference: Cabinet Decision No. 94/7 dated 20.05.2008 Sanction is accorded to the diversion of forest land measuring 39.88 ha... in Block Kullán, Range Sindh, Sindh Forest Division, for raising pre-fabricated structures only for camping purposes of pilgrims, without going in for construction of permanent structures at Baltal and Domail, by Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board on following terms and conditions:

1. The proprietary status of forest land shall remain unchanged.
2. The land so diverted shall be utilised only for the purpose for which it has been diverted.
3. The land so diverted shall not be mortgaged, re-assigned or sub-leased by the user agency.
4. The user agency shall pay Net Present Value of the forest land to the tune of Rs 2,31,30,400/
5. The user agency shall pay Rs 19,94,000/ on account of compensatory afforestation to be carried over 79.76 ha ...
9. The user agency shall construct complete retaining/ breast walls on the both side of the road/railway line/earth work/tunneling etc... so as to minimise soil erosion/land slips.

The proposal stands cleared/approve by the advisory committee in its 39th meeting held under the chairmanship of the chief secretary on 12th July, 2007 Sd/- Principal Secretary to Government, Forest Department Dated: 26.05.2008

Prof. Hari Om, BJP Spokesman :

" Since the Central Govt. failed in its tactics to install Wajahat Habibullah in the State, it sent NN Vohra here to pursue the fundamentalist ideology of Kashmir leaders".

Dr. Nirmal Singh, former State President BJP:

"Amarnath controversy is one of the several similar (demands of de-militarization, self-rule, joint management, dual currency) issues raked up by the Pak-centric mindset of Mufti Mohammed Sayeed and Muzaffar Hussain Beig to create a separatist ideology for Kashmir. The militants sheltered by the govt. have already confiscated 80% of the land in Kashmir belonging to Hindus and Amarnath land controversy was a deliberate attempt to affect complete cleansing."

Omar Abdullah

Over the last few days the National Conference has made it's position clear on where it stands with regard to the transfer of land to the SASB.

The question of the creation or structure or functioning of the SASB is a larger one perhaps handled at a later stage once the violence has ended and calm has returned to the streets of Srinagar and the other towns and villages that have been agitating for the last five days over this issue.

The issue is not about the yatra, its not about religion and its not a regional issue between Jammu and Kashmir even though some vested interests (particularly in Jammu) have tried to paint it as such. The issue is about the land, its about Kashmiri nationalism. Here I disagree with those who try and suggest that it is about separatism because there is a difference between a nationalist and a separatist. I am a Kashmiri Nationalist but I am not a separatist.

My party met the Governor in Srinagar yesterday and we made a proposal to him that we felt would help resolve the situation and bring an end to the violence. It is not only disappointing it is also worrying that more than 24 hours after our meeting with him we have not had any forward movement on the proposal and the valley continues to remain tense.

The National Conference has not been a part of the protests till date but that doesn't mean we will not take to the streets in the next few days if we find that our suggestions for an end to this trouble have been ignored. The National Conference did not give the land. The land was given by the PDP ministers as a part of the Government decision so we cannot be the ones to cancel the allocation either but we are a party with elected representatives and we have more options that can accompany the public protests to make our voices heard even louder. I only hope that the voice of reason and logic that we took to Raj Bhavan is heard. —Omar Abdullah, President NC

This entry was posted on blog on June 27th, 2008.

"Religious fundamentalism is at the root of separatism in Kashmir. This fundamentalism manifests itself in many ways. One of these is the demand for Kashmiri nationhood. What is Kashmiri nationhood? I fail to understand. The separatists are negating history by saying they are close to Central Asia, not to India."

——Lt. Gen.(Retd.) SK Sinha
(Source: The Hindustan Times)

By M. M. Munshi

AT the head of the Sind Valley in Kashmir, flanked on the North by great Himalayan range and Sachkach (Sasakat) mountains in the south is located the holy Tirtha of Amar Nath Ji Cave "Amreshvara". (340.12' : 750.01') at an altitude of 12,720 ft. (3878m) where Suaymbhu (self-created) the only Ice linga in the world, has been worshipped since early historic if not prehistoric times. The earliest references pertaining to Holy Amar Nath Ji Cave are found in Bhrngish Samhita (1) Nilmat Purana (2) Kalhana's Raj Tarangni (3) Mahatmayas of Amarnatha (4) and Amreshvara Kalpa (5).

Mahatmayas:

According to Bhrngish Samhita the Mahakala approached the "Devatas" and told them that they would have to die. The devtas were troubled at this threat and proceeded to the abode of Swami Surji (Lord Shiva) and entreated his protection. Shiva appeared to them with bright countenance, showered upon them great favour and enquired about the cause of their distress. The devtas explained that Mahakala was about to destroy them and they dreaded his Power upon which Shiva with his great mercy and kindness bestowed upon them the water of immortality by which the "devtas" were freed from the persecution of Mahakala. After the devtas left, Shiva resumed his devotional abstractions and when he was again sought by the devtas they could not see him. They were, therefore, in great distress and lifted their hands in prayer and entreated him to show Himself. Shiva appeared in the form of ice linga and hence began the pilgrimage and prayers at Amreshvara.

The other view pertaining to the formation of Ice Linga is that Shiva's consort Parvati was eager to learn the secrets of life and immortality. She prayed to her lord to reveal the same to her. While moving with the Parvati over the Himalayas, Shiva rested in a cave and revealed the secrets of life to Parvati and got himself transformed into the Ice Linga. A pair of snow pigeons over-heard Shiva's discourse and became immortal. According to Bhrngish Samhita a person who bathes in the waters of Amur Veth (Amuravati) and rubs himself with the ashes gets Moksha. A person who performs Amarnath Ji Yatra after observing ablutions along the traditional approach route gets the same boons as one gets from Ashvamedha Yagya.

TIRTHA OF AMRESHVARA

A pilgrim who performs ablutions at the sangam of Amur Veth and Panjtarnagini in Kalyug, gets pardon for crores of sins. Pilgrimage to Amarnath Ji is considered several times more auspicious than the pilgrimage to Kashi or Triveni. How Amarnath Ji cave could have been originally discovered I quote from the life of Swami Vivekananda; "I can well imagine how this cave was first discovered. A party of shepherds, one summer day must have lost their flocks and wandered here in search of them. What must have been their feeling as they found themselves unexpectedly before this unmelting ice lingam of white camphor, with the vault itself dripping offerings of water over it for centuries unseen of mortal eyes? When they came home they whispered to other shepherds in the valleys how they had suddenly come upon Mahadeva".

Physiography:

The mountain ranges in the area include Great Himalaya trending North West-South East isolating Sindu (Indus) basin (represented by Suru river) from that of Vitasta or Jhelum (represented by Sind and Lidar rivers), and Chandarbaga or Chenab basin (represented by Batkol-Marwah rivers). Saraibal a south westerly spur of great Himalaya isolates Jhelum from Chenab basin. Another spur called Sachhkach (Sasakat) of the Himalayas, bifurcating near Mushran, forms a water-parting between Sind and Lidar rivers. The Sachkach also follows a south-westerly trend and a Drun Nar or Hangsatu immediately below Sonamarg is traversed by the Sind river forming a narrow gorge beyond which it is known as Sogput or North Kashmir range isolating Kishenganga from the Kashmir Valley. The triangular mass of mountains is bounded on the north by Sind Valley, on the east and south by Lidar Valley and on the west by main valley of Kashmir with peaks of Kolahi or Gashbrar, Mahadev and Suresvari. The latter, over looking Dal Lake with lakes of Tarsar, Marsar and Hodsar has no modern name but was known in ancient times as Dudavana.

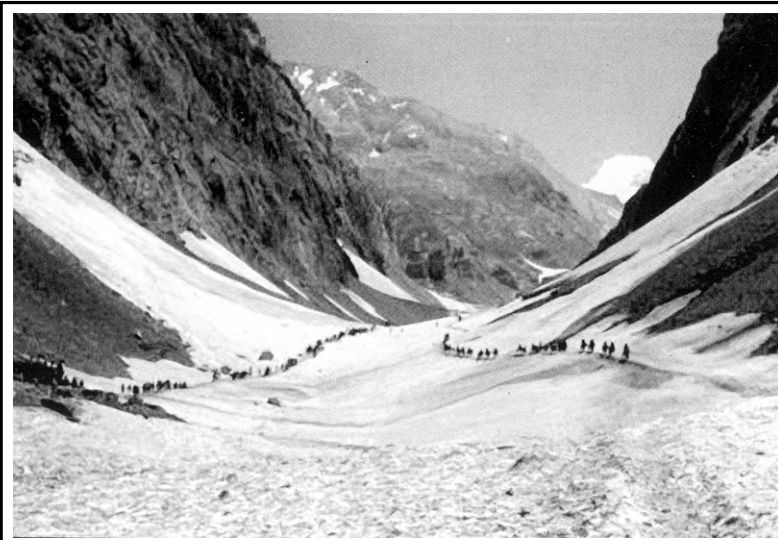
A number of pilgrims and authors in the past and recent times have wrongly referred to the

snow beds and snow fields along the Sind Valley, Chandanwari near Panjtarangni (Panjtarni), and Amravati as Glaciers. These snow beds (Sheendob) are nothing but fresh snow accumulated in depressions by snow fall snow creep, avlanches and drift snow in winter.

A glacier (Handar in Kashmiri) is a solid mass of ice moving down the slope along the valley

Route Map of Amarnath

(Mattan). Ganeshbal (Ganeshpora, 6,800 ft.) Mameshwar (Mamal 7,300 ft.) Nilganga. Chandanwari (9,220 ft.) Shushshram Naga (Sheshnag 11,330 ft.), Panjtarangni (Panjtarni, 12,611 ft.) and Amuravati. Between Sheshnag and Panjtarni the pilgrims crossed from Lidar to Sind Val-



On the way to Amarnath.

The photographs of the Holy Cave on Page 14 & 15 were taken in 1897 during Swami Vivekanand's Amarnath Yatra.

with an average velocity of 1 to 3 feet per day.

However, the vertical 'U' shaped profiles of almost all the valleys in the upper reaches of Kashmir, including Sind and Lidar and their tributaries, have been carved by glaciers during pliestocene times. The glaciers have since retreated to higher levels, some have disappeared, while a few still remain like Kolahi, Koenjhar in the South East of Sheshnag, Machoi near Zojilla pass, Harmukata (Harmukh) in upper reaches of Sind and Amuravati near Mushran. In the area under review during the pliestocene times glaciers extended much below down stream of Gagganjir and Pahalgam in Sind and Lidar valleys respectively.

Routes:

The holy Amar Nath Ji cave though located in the Sind Valley beside a small tributary of Sind river called Amur Veth or Amuravati (Amar Nath Nar) has been approached traditionally from the Lidhari (Lidar) valley. According to Amreshvara Mahatmaya some of the important places where pilgrims had to perform ablutions while on pilgrimage where Anantnaga, Mach Bhawan

ley at the pass of Vayujana or Mahagnus (VOWJAN) 13835 ft. The Sind valley route bifurcating from Srinagar - Leh Highway at Baltal was used in the past in early summers. During the late summers it used to become very difficult and sometimes impossible due to melting of snow bridges over the Sind river. But with the construction of a bridge recently by the army and border roads organisation this route has become negotiable throughout the summer. Amarnath Ji cave is also approachable by a very short foot track from Zojilla pass which descends near the cave from the side of Amarnath Peak. Another track branching off from Kishtwar-Suru-route, Via Marwah-Wardwan Batkol Valley. Lidar valley via Gulol gati between Shesh Nag and Mahagnus (along which the redoubtable Wazir Zorawar singh passed several times between 1834 to 1841 during the Dogra conquest of Ladakh, Baltistan and parts of Western Tibet) enters. The least known route through Saeki Pantsal Pass is the most difficult route and has never been used by pilgrims.

History

Like the mention of glaciers along the Amarnath Ji route, the

history of Amarnath Ji has also been wrongly documented. Numerous writers in the recent past have maintained that Amarnath Ji cave was lost for a very long time (like one saying 'for thousands of years') till it was rediscovered by Maliks of Batkot. It is said to have been 'rediscovered' according to some in 1775 C.E. and according to others by about 1600 C.E., quoting old Kashmiri Pandits and Maliks of Batkot without any authentic documentary evidence. Some have tried to give credit to the Maliks of Batkot for having originally discovered the holy cave for the first time in the middle of 18th Century C.E.

According to Kalhana's Rajtarangni, Tarang II, Samdimat (Arya Raja) 34 BCE-17 C.E. a great devotee of Shiva who rose from the position of Minister to be the King of Kashmir "used to worship a Linga of snow above the forests, which is not to be found elsewhere in the whole world during the delightful Kashmir Summers," He abandoned his kingship and retired to Nandiksethra (Nandkul) Sind Valley to join a hermitage where he was welcomed by old sages.

Kalhana further in Tarang I of Rajtarangni narrates the legend of Naga Suravas who bestowed his daughter Chandralekha upon a Brahmin youth who had helped the Naga in partaking the part of harvest from the fields. King Nara whose domain flourished around Chakardara (Tsakdar) near vijeshvara (Vijbror) cast an evil eye on the young Brahmin's Naga wife, which aroused the wrath of Naga Suravas resulting in death of Nara and destruction of later's kingdom. After completing the frightful carnage the Naga took his son-in-law (Zamatur, in Kashmiri) along and carved a place for him besides his own abode, Shushram Naga (Shesh nag). Kalhana says : "It is seen to this day (i.e. 1148-49 C.E.) by pilgrims proceeding to Amreshvara". Upstream of Shushramnaga towards Koenjnar glacier is located a smaller lake cased Jamtarsaras (Zamtirag) the residence of this Brahmin son-in-law transformed into a Naga. The full translation of the verse 267 Book I of Kalhana's Rajtarangni, reproduced below leaves no doubt about the continuation of the pilgrimage to Amarnath Ji during the middle of 12th Century.

'The lake of dazzling witness (resembling) a sea of Milk, which he created (for himself as residence) on a far off mountain, is to the present day seen by the

(Contd. on Page 15)

(Contd. from Page 14)

people on the pilgrimage to Amreshvara' Stein's, Translation.

The fact that Kind Zain-ul-abdin (1420-70 C.E.) the pious Muslim ruler of Kashmir, besides visiting a number of Hindu shrines, also visited Amarnath Ji cave, has been documented by his chronicler Jonaraja.

Francios Bernier, was the French Physician who accompanied Emperor Aurangzeb to Kashmir in 1663. After visiting Trisandiya, Verinag, Achabal, Wular lake, Sangsafed in front of Harmukh, he was just after two-days' march from some place in Sind Valley, in a magnificent cave full of wonderful congelations"; apparently Amarnath Ji cave. When he was called back by Aurangzeb. The relevant para of the Bernier's book "Travels in Moghul Empire" is reproduced here. "I was pursuing journey to a grotta full of wonderful congelations, two days journey from Sangsafed when I received intelligence that my Nawab felt very impatient and uneasy on account of my long absence".

The 2nd edition of Bernier's book has been edited by vincient A Smith who has observed, "The grotta full of wonderful congelations is the Amarnath cave, where blocks of ice, stalagmites formed by dripping water from roof are worshipped by many Hindoos who resort here, as images of Shiva; glaciers surround the which is considerably to the South East of ..."

Pilgrimage:

Vigne in his book "Travels in Kashmir, Ladakh and Iskardu" (1842) says; "The ceremony at the cave of Amarnath takes place on the 15th of the Hindu month of Sawan, 28th July . . . not only Hindoos of Kashmir but those from Hindoostan of every rank and caste can be seen, collecting together and travelling up the valley of Lidar towards the celebrated cave, which from his description must have been the place which Bernier intended to visit but was prevented."

Vigne himself, after returning from Ladakh and Tibet by 1840-41, during the rule of Maharaja Sher Singh son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab attempted to visit Amarnath Ji cave along the traditional route via Sheshnag in late season, but was forced to return from Vowjan pass due to bad weather. He has given a beautiful description of the pilgrimage, gathered from others, which indicates that pilgrimage was in good vogue before 1840-41. From his narrative we can easily conclude that pilgrims from the plains, outside

Kashmir, visited Amarnath in great numbers.

From this it is clear that Amar Nath has been visited in regular memory, the Yatra has been continuously undertaken not only by Kashmiris but also Hindus from other parts of India. Even if it is assumed that the holy shrine was 'rediscovered' by Maliks of Batkot, for which no authentic document is available it can be easily surmised that Amarnath Ji cave was not 'lost' for 'thousands of years. The pilgrimage may have been disrupted due to political upheavals and persecution of Hindus during Muslim rule in Kashmir for a period varying at the most from 50 to 125 years.

Lawrence in Valley of Kashmir mentions that pilgrims to Amarnath were joined by Brahmins of Mattan and further up at Batkot the Maliks used to take charge of the pilgrimage. According to Lawrence the Maliks were supposed to keep the track in order, guide, escort the pilgrims and carry sick ones and ensure nothing was stolen, and received one third of the offerings at the Amarnath Ji Shrine. The other two shares used to go to Pandits of Mattan and Giri Mahants of Amritsar who used to and still lead the pilgrimage with Chari Mubarak, Lawrence does not mention any where that share of offerings to Maliks was in lieu of their having discovered/rediscovered' the cave. There is no mention of receipt of ransom rahdhari from pilgrims nor grants from the State Govt. for the services rendered by Maliks. Apparently the share seems to have been received by Maliks for the services rendered.

'Rediscovery'

Besides Lawrence, earlier travellers and authors in Kashmir have also not mentioned about 'rediscovery' of Amarnath Ji cave by Maliks. It is not difficult to conclude that Amarnath Ji cave could not have been lost during the short span of 50 to 125 years during which the yatra might not have seen the traditional pomp and show, and may have remained a low-key affair in view of the adverse political climate.

The theory that the Maliks having 'discovered' or 'redis-

covered' the Amarnath Ji cave in or around 1775 C.E. is also constrained by the adversity of that time. At that time Kashmir was ruled by Afghans (1753-1819 C.E.) who persecuted Kashmiris in general and Hindus in particular. Afghans would not have taken kindly to Maliks, or anybody else, claiming to have 'rediscovered' any Hindu or Buddhist shrine. Such a 'discovery' even if it had been made would

tween 1750-1775. All these claims are contradictory and can not be accepted as factual. As already indicated pilgrimage was going on during the Sikh rule long before Gulab Singh appeared on the scene.

Maliks:

In order to arrive at a logical conclusion we have to understand the history and background of the institution of Maliks. According to Baron Von

Hugel, Malik is a title of honour and distinction given to successors of Deva patis, Margesas (later called Magres) holding charge of watch-cum-military stations on feudal basis on the important routes and passes, entering and leaving Kashmir, by the independent Sultans of Kashmir and also to other clans like Chaks, Rainas, Dars for latter's loyal service. After the annexation of Kashmir by Mughals in 1586 C.E. most of the Maliks of Raina,

Magrey and Chak clans etc. who had fought against the former were hunted out killed and banished from Kashmir. Some of them escaped to remote and inaccessible hills and valleys to avoid persecution. But those who later submitted themselves before Akbar and took the oath of loyalty were allowed to resume the duty of guarding the routes, administration and even judiciary. All routes except the Baramulla-Muzafarabad route remained closed during the Afghan's rule.

With the advent of Dogra rule in 1846, opening up of all the routes and gradual establishment of police posts at vulnerable places, the ancestral occupation of Maliks came to end. Since the latter part of 19th century the Maliks had to content themselves with guiding, and escorting the pilgrims to Amarnath Ji, Harmukh, probably to Sharda in Kishenganga valley and other places of pilgrimage. The allotment of a part of offerings, as at the Amarnath shrine, could have been in lieu of these services.

Since all the arrangements including maintenance of track, erection of sheds enroute, medi-

cal care and protection for pilgrims are now made by the government and several voluntarily non-government organisations, the receipt of the one third of the offerings by the Maliks is a historical relic, comparable to now abolished Jagirdaris and privy purses. Further research would have to be carried out as to how old was the settlement to Maliks at Batkot as it is located on an unimportant route through which no invasions of Kashmir were attempted or expected nor trade carried out.

Prof. Chrungoo in his article has stated that "some people interested in anthropological or geological research have said that it is an encrustation of lime; chalcedony and archeological research by Pandit Anand Koul has revealed otherwise." It is true that several observations made by people about Amarnath Ji cave are not factual including one in "Tirtha" published by CMC Ltd. (11) that Amarnath is an ice covered linga, "Similarly chalcedony is a variety of silica with waxy lustre and can not get assimilated by water or ice under any circumstances.

However scientifically speaking ice linga is somewhat like an icicle and may contain dissolved bicarbonate of calcium (lime) which cannot be visually seen. Anthropology is the science of physiological, physiosocio logical and racial study of man while as archeology deals with things used, or made, by man from pre-historic to medieval times both having absolutely no scope for research at Amarnath Ji cave.

A news item under the caption, "Another cave Shiva temple in upper Pahalgam" appeared in the Daily Excelsior of 28th August 2001 stating that another cave not far away from the Amarnathji cave, which is being visited by over one hundred thousand pilgrims every year, had been discovered. The news report reiterated that old Amarnath Ji cave was discovered by Maliks in 1775 and ruins, besides the (new) cave, suggest that a Dogra Governor of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule attempted to build a Shiva temple at the spot in 18th century. Firstly the presumption of a Dogra Governor having built a temple during the 18th Century is the height of imagination of the correspondent. All the governors during the Sikh rule in Kashmir without exception were Sikhs or Punjabi muslims; Sikhs ruled Kashmir between 1819-46 that is 19th century and not 18th century.

(Contd. on Page 17)



The Holy Ice-Linga at the Cave.



THE separatists in Kashmir and their “secular” supporters are trying to spread the myth that the Amaranth Yatra is of a recent origin. They claim that it started only after a Muslim shepherd of Batakot, a certain Buta Malik, originally “discovered” the Amarnath cave when he lost his flock and found that it had strayed into the sacred spot some 150 years ago. There is no documentary proof of this so-called discovery, the story having probably been concocted to give credit to Muslims for having started the most popular Hindu pilgrimage of Kashmir. There is ample and conclusive historical evidence, on the other hand, to prove that the holy cave and the ice lingam were known to the people since very ancient times and have been continuously and regularly visited by pilgrims not only from Kashmir but also from different parts of India. While the earliest reference to Amarnath can be seen in the Nilamata Purana (v.1324), a 6th century Sanskrit text which depicts the religious and cultural life of early Kashmiris and gives Kashmir’s own creation myth, the pilgrimage to the holy cave has been described with full topographical details in the Bhringish Samhita and the Amarnatha Mahatmya, both ancient texts said to have been composed even earlier. References to Amarnath, known have also been made in historical chronicles like the Rajatarangini and its sequels and several Western travellers’ accounts also leaving no doubt about the fact that the holy cave has been known to people for centuries. The original name of the tirtha, as given in the ancient texts, is of course Amareshwara, Amarnath being a name given later to it.

Giving the legend of the Naga Sushruvas, who in his fury burnt to ashes the kingdom of King Nara when he tried to abduct his daughter already married to a Brahmin youth, and after the carnage took his abode in the lake now known as Sheshnag (Kashmiri Sushramnag), Kalahana writes:

“The lake of dazzling whiteness [resembling] a sea of milk (Sheshnag), which he created [for himself as residence] on a far off mountain, is to the present day seen by the people on the pilgrimage to Amareshwara.” (Rajatarangini, Book I v. 267. Translation: M. A. Stein).

This makes it very clear that pilgrims continued to visit the holy Amarnath cave in the 12th century, for Kalhana wrote his chronicle in the years 1148-49.

At another place in the Rajatarangini (Book II v. 138), Kalhana says that King Samdhitmat Aryaraja (34 BCE-17CE) used to spend “the most delightful Kashmir summer” in worshipping a linga formed of snow “in the regions above the forests”. This too appears to be a reference to the ice linga at Amarnath.

HISTORY OF THE AMARNATH PILGRIMAGE

There is yet another reference to Amareshwara or Amarnath in the Rajatarangini (Book VII v.183). According to Kalhana, Queen Suryamati, the wife of King Ananta (1028-1063), “granted under her husband’s name agraharas at Amareshwara, and arranged for the consecration of trishulas, banalingas and other [sacred emblems]”.

In his Chronicle of Kashmir, a sequel

garden Nishat laid out by Asif Khan. The King of gods Indra himself, he says, comes here to pay obeisance to Lord Shiva”.

As we well know Francois Bernier, a French physician accompanied Emperor Aurangzeb during his visit to Kashmir in 1663. In his book “Travels in Mughal Empire” he writes while giving an account the places he visited in Kashmir that he

time and was undertaken with great enthusiasm.

Again, the great Sikh Guru Arjan Dev is said to have granted land in Amritsar for the ceremonial departure of Chari, the holy mace of Lord Shiva which marks the beginning of the Yatra to the Holy Cave. In 1819, the year in which the Afghan rule came to an end in Kashmir, Pandit Hardas Tiku “founded the Chhawani Anmarnath at Ram Bagh in Srinagar where the Sadhus from the plains assembled and where he gave them free rations for the journey, both ways from his own private resources”, as the noted Kashmiri naturalist Pandit Samsar Chand Kaul has pointed out in his booklet titled “The Mysterious cave of Amarnath”. Not only this, Amarnath is deeply enshrined in the Kashmiri folklore also as stories like that of Soda Wony clearly show. One can, therefore, conclude without any doubt that the Amaranth Yatra has been going on continuously for centuries along the traditional route of the Lidder valley and not a century and a half affair. May be during the Afghan rule when religious persecution of the Kashmiri Hindus was at its height and they were not allowed to visit their places of worship the pilgrimage was discontinued for about fifty or sixty years and during this period the flock of some shepherd may have strayed into the holy cave, but that in no way makes it of a recent origin or a show window of so-called Kashmiriat.

The temple is reported to be about 5,000 years old[1] and was mentioned in ancient Hindu texts. The exact manner of discovery of the cave is not known.

The Amarnath Yatra, according to Hindu belief, begins on Ashadha Purnima (day of the Full Moon in the Hindu Month of Ashadha) and ends on Shrawana Purnima (day of the full moon in the Hindu month of Shrawana).

--(Source: Wikipedia)

--EDITOR'S NOTE--

In November 1675, Kashmiri Pandits under the leadership of Pt. Kripa Ram Dutt met at the Holy Cave of Amarnath to chalkout strategy to escape religious persecution of Governor Ifitkhar Khan in Kashmir. One of the Pandits had Darshana of Lord Shiva who directed them to approach Guru Teg Bahadur. Consequently they went to Anandpur Sahib to approach Guru Tegh Bahadur.



to Kalhana’s Rajatarangini, Jonaraja relates that that Sultan Zainu’l-abidin (1420-1470) paid a visit to the sacred tirtha of Amarnath while constructing a canal on the left bank of the river Lidder (vv.1232-1234). The canal is now known as Shah Kol.

In the Fourth Chronicle named Rajavalipataka, which was begun by Prjayabhatta and completed by Shuka, there is a clear and detailed reference to the pilgrimage to the sacred site (v.841, vv. 847-849). According to it, in a reply to Akbar’s query about Kashmir Yusuf Khan, the Mughal governor of Kashmir at that time, described among other things the Amarnath Yatra in full detail. His description shows that the not only was the pilgrimage in vogue in Akbar’s time – Akbar annexed Kashmir in 1586 – but the phenomenon of waxing and waning of the ice linga was also well known.

Amareshwar (Amarnath) was a famous pilgrimage place in the time of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan also. In his eulogy of Shah Jahan’s father-in-law Asif Khan, titled “Asaf Vilas”, the famous Sanskrit scholar and aesthete Panditrag Jagannath makes clear mention of Amareshwara (Amarnath) while describing the Mughal

was “pursuing journey to a grotto full of wonderful congelations, two days journey from Sangsafed” when he “received intelligence that my Nawab felt very impatient and uneasy on account of my long absence”. The “grotto” he refers to is obviously the Amarnath cave as the editor of the second edition of the English translation of the book, Vincient A. Smith makes clear in his introduction. He writes: “The grotto full of wonderful congelations is the Amarnath cave, where blocks of ice, stalagmites formed by dripping water from the roof are worshipped by many Hindus who resort here as images of Shiva.....”

Another traveler, Vigne, in his book “Travels in Kashmir, Ladakh and Iskardu” writes about the pilgrimage to the sacred spot in detail, clearly mentioning that “the ceremony at the cave of Amarnath takes place on the 15th of the Hindoo month of Sawan” and that “not only Hindoos of every rank and caste can be seen collecting together and traveling up the valley of Liddar towards the celebrated cave.....” Vigne visited Kashmir after his return from Ladakh in 1840-41 and published his book in 1842. His book makes it very clear that the Amarnath Yatra drew pilgrims from the whole of India in his

Amaresvara Tradition in Kashmir Valley

By Dr. Ramesh Kumar

PILGRIMAGE to the holy cave of Lord Amarnath in the upper Sindh Valley is as old as the dawn of history in Kashmir. Amaresvara tradition has remained fairly strong in Kashmir. Many Kashmiris who could not brave the arduous terrain recreated symbols of Siva Amaresvara at different places in the Valley for worship.

Amburher:

One such place has been the large village of Amburher, 4 miles to the north of Srinagar city. The village lies to the west of Zakura (old Juskapura), on the shore of Anchar lake towards Sindh Valley. The old name for Amburher is Amresvara (Rajatarangini), Amaresvara (Jonaraja) and Amaresvara (Pt. Sahib Ram's Tirath Samgraha).

The village derives its name from the shrine of Siva Amresvara. In this temple Amaresvara Linga was worshipped. Sir Aurel Stein visited this place in June 1895 and found ancient slabs and sculptured fragments in and around the Ziarat of Farrukhzad Sahib. He

says these remains possibly belong to this temple

The temple of Amburher is very old. In old times the pilgrimage to the holy cave of Amarnath would start with pilgrims praying at the shrine of Siva Amresa at Amburher.

There are two types of references to Amburher in Rajatarangini. One, on Queen Suryamati's endowing the shrine of Amresa with Agraharas and a Matha in 1005-1006 AD. The second reference refers to the military operations at the village during the reign of King Sussala in 1112-1120 AD. The strategic importance of village Amburher lay in its being located on the high road connecting the Sindh Valley with the capital.

Suryamati was Queen of King Ananta (1028-1063), the last of Sahi Princes. There are two references in Rajatarangini linking her to the shrine of Amresa at Amburher:

In 7th Taranga Kalhana records "She founded two maths by the side of shrines of Vijayesa and Amaresa under the names of her brother Sillana and of her

husband respectively" (verse 183).

"She also granted under her husband's name Agraharas at Amaresvara and arranged for the consecration for Trisulas, Banalingas and other sacred emblems" (verse 185).

References to the military operations in which King Sussala was besieged by rebels are found in 8th Taranga of Rajatarangini in verses 506-590 and 1124.

Amri in Lolab Valley:

In the picturesque Lolab Valley lies the village of Sewer where many Kashmiri Pandit families lived before 1990. About 2½ miles from Sewer lies the village of Afaan. This village is inhabited mostly by Kashmiris. A few Gujjar families also live here.

2½ kms uphill journey through Deodar forests leads to a small meadow. In this meadow is the cave of 'Amri' (Amresvara). For entering the cave one has to descend down 20 ft over steps cut in Deodar pole. A small (10 ft x 10 ft) space down has three pathways leading from it. When

one stands on the pathways on the right or left side lot of noise is heard. No noise is heard on the central pathway. There are no reliefs in the cave.

As per local lore 150 years ago a Gujjar had gone to tend his flock of sheep at the meadow. He saw a hermit (*sadhu*) milking goat in a coconut cup near a spring, a little away from 'Amri' cave. The small spring had a tiny tea shrub near it. The spring is no longer extant. The Gujjar was highly impressed with this scene. The hermit blessed Gujjar and asked him not to reveal what he had seen. Soon the Gujjar grew very rich. This invited jealousy from his fellow villagers, who asked him to reveal the secret of his quick affluence. The Gujjar with great reluctance revealed what he had seen at 'Amri' cave. Sometime later he had climbed on a tree. A bear emerged and tore out eyes of the Gujjar. The latter fell down from the tree and succumbed to his injuries. It is quite possible that 'Amri' cave might have been the site of holy pilgrimage in olden times.

Siva Amresvara Darsana:

Saint Mukund Ram Tikoo was spiritual guru of Pt. Krishan Joo Razdan, Kashmir's famous Leela poet. Pt. Mukand Ram had his estate in Sindh Valley. One day he had gone to Baltal area (in 1879s) in the company of his disciple, Pt. Iswar Munshi. On seeing a milky white stream, Pt. Mukund Ram asked Pt. Iswar Munshi to accompany him to trace the source of this stream. They trekked along the stream and reached the holy cave of Amarnath. This is how Baltal route was discovered. At the holy cave Saint Mukand Ram was blessed with darsana of Siva Amresvara. On his return to Srinagar Pt. Mukand Ram asked famous portrait painter, Pt. Vasudev Garyali to make painting of Siva Amresvara. What he saw at the cave he conveyed the description to the painter in 8 verses. This painting, forbidden from photography, is worshipped on the day of Sivratra (Salaam) at Muthi Jammu.

Tirtha of Amreshvara

(Contd. from Page 15)

As already discussed Amarnath Ji cave was known centuries before 1775.

Return Halt :

Prevez Dewan has hypothesised that the newly rediscovered Shiva cave temple near Hapatgund could have been a base camp for Amarnathji yatra. That postulation too, does not stand scrutiny, as the new cave is not located along the traditional route along which lie the different tirthas at which performance of ablutions was a must for a merit-ful yatra. According to Vigne (1842) and Gates (1872) the pilgrims used to approach Amarnathji cave from Panjtarni and Bhairobal and after having darshan returned passing down the Amurveth upto its Sangam with Sind, from where they found their way back to Pahalgam by a different route from the one by which they arrived via Hatiara Talab (where scores) of pilgrims have perished. They crossed the water shed between Sind and Lidar valleys by a pass West of Sachkach (sasakot) peak, Astanmarg and Zanin, The Hapatgund cave temple which lies along this route could have

been a halting place on the return journey. The spring described by Parvez Dewan is well known and is shown on the survey map of the area. Swami Vivekananda also returned via this route in 1895 and described the Hatiara Talav as celebrated lake of death. This route was abandoned in early 20th Century for being the most difficult and dangerous one.

Regarding newly discovered temple at Hapatgund (Slaiv Van) the identification of top-knot on the head and serpent coiled round the neck of the idol, and presumably a trisual and a yoni shaped tank some distance away from the caves, leaves no doubt that the cave houses an ancient Shiva temple.

Since the idols according to Pervez Dewan are in situ i.e. rocks in original position, not transported by natural or human agencies and presence of such a large number of Shivlings in a limited space and their damage by water indicate the possibility of the idols and shivlings being natural stalagmites formed by percolation of calcium bicarbonate bearing water and subsequently sculptured by man. Wind

action can carve rock shelters and not caves in areas under review which receive moderate to high rain or snowfall. Neither the caves nor the rocks inside can be carved by wind but mostly by percolation of carbon dioxide laden water and occasionally by joining and fracturing. The sculpturing and carving of idols inside the pre-existing caves and construction of yoni shaped tank might have been possibly

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done as a token of thanks giving by pilgrims returning from a successful yatra of Amarnathji. A number of temples built at Wangat in Sind Valley by pilgrims, after returning from Harmukh shows that such, indeed, was the practice.

Present Status :

Despite the turmoil of militancy prevailing for more than a decade, Amarnathji continues to be one of the most popular Tirthas of Kashmir, and lakhs of Pilgrims from all parts of the country visit the shrine in spite of the fact that a few of them fall victim to militant attacks. The number of aspirants for pilgrimage has always been more than

the Government does allow for security reasons.

Conclusion :

The only Ice Linga in the whole world, at the Amarnathji cave, has been visited and worshipped by pilgrims since early historic if not prehistoric times. There is conclusive historic evidence that pilgrims were regularly proceeding to the holy cave via Sheshnag during the middle of 12th century and in middle of 15th century. The Shrine was well known even during the rule of Aurangzeb when Bernier attempted to visit it but was prevented. There is no evidence to prove that the Amarnath Ji cave was 'lost' for thousands of years until it was 'rediscovered' by Malik of Batkot some time between 1750-75.

The pilgrimage to Amarnathji might have been disrupted during the political upheavals for period varying between 50 to 125 years. Full pilgrimage was resumed after annexation of Kashmir by Sikhs and since then the Giri Mahants of Amritsar have been associated with the Yatra; the track might have been retraced by Malik. Malik has been receiving one-third of the offerings of the shrine for keeping the track in order, guiding

and escorting the pilgrims etc. rather than for 'discovering' or 'rediscovering' the cave.

The newly discovered Lord Shiva's cave temple near Hapatgund could not have been a base camp for Amarnath Yatra but a halting place on the return journey. The cave temples are man-made only to the extent of sculpturing of pre-existing stalagmites.

Despite the disturbed condition prevailing in Kashmir pilgrims in large numbers still throng the Shrine.

*(The author is a renowned researcher on the historiography of Holy Amarnath Cave).

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June 11, 2008 to July 10, 2008

- June 11: Terrorists gunned down a civilian in Kangan. A terrorist was killed in an encounter at Pattan, Baramulla. A separatist leader and former confidant of Mirwaiz Umar, Yaqub Vakil joined PDP. After Junoon, two more musical groups of Pakistan performed in the Valley. Dr. Farooq Abdullah describes autonomy as the only viable solution.
- June 12: Divided Hurriyat gets united over the issue of allotment of land to SASB as Geelani described that there were "sinister designs" behind the allotment. SMVDSB withdraws paid Darshan.
- June 13: A Lt. Col and two PSOs were among five securitymen killed by terrorists in an ambush near Sinthan Top; the terrorists escaped with AK rifles of the slain PSOs. Army and police destroyed a hideout at Jantroon, Thathri (Doda) and recovered arms and ammunition. Seven civilians were injured in a grenade attack in Baramulla town. An encounter took place between terrorists and army in Rajwar, Baramulla. A woman who had eloped with her paramour to PoK returned with her minor child. A jawan shot himself to death in Reasi.
- June 14: Janbaz, who was responsible for the killing of two Kashmiri jawans of CRPF, was among the two HM terrorists killed in South Kashmir. Marking their presence in the capital city of Srinagar, terrorists engineered three blasts in which four people were injured. Three terrorists of HM were arrested soon after their infiltration in Ramgarh sector. IGP Jammu, K Rajendra said that there was possibility of South Kashmir ultras' involvement in yesterday's attack near Simthan top in Kishtwar. Accusing some elements of indulging in politicking, Forest Minister Qazi Afzal justified transfer of forest land to SASB. Alleging that some forces want to sabotage election in J&K, Union Defence Minister AK Antony didn't rule out more insurgency and violence in J&K.
- June 15: A boy was injured in a grenade blast in Kulgam. BJP national President Rajnath Singh termed article 370 as root cause of terrorism and unemployment and added that UPA government has done nothing to contain terror. Afghanistan president Hamid Karzai threatened attack on terrorist networks in Pakistan.
- June 16: Police arrested three terrorists of JeM and four terrorists of LeT and busted the organisations' module of lobbing grenades at Public places. A powerful IED was defused in Doda. Yasin Malik met Pak PM who described Kashmir as cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy. Relief organisation issued forms for return of Displaced Kashmiris. A Hindu family crossed over to PoK via Chakkan Da Bagh to meet their cousin, Khurshid Ahmed at Samoi Garoon in PoK.
- June 17: The terrorists arrested recently in Ramgarh sector have revealed that, at least, 35 terrorists were being trained at Lehri Kalan Camp in Sialkot by Pakistani army for launching them via Ramgarh sector into India. First batch of yatris perform darshan at Amarnath Cave. Governor visited Sheshnag and Pahalgam and decried misleading propaganda on Amarnath Yatra. Meanwhile, Panun Kashmir also took serious exception to vicious campaign against the Yatra.
- June 18: Defence Minister AK Antony asked security forces to be more vigilant as there could be more violence.
- June 19: Four terrorists were killed in Kashmir Valley. One person was injured as a shell exploded in his house at Shuglipora, Budgam; the injured was a scrap collector. As land allotment row becomes murkier, PDP filed a petition against Governor's aide and Deputy Chief Minister Baig threatened widespread agitation. Blaming the state government for yatra row, National Conference patron Mr Farooq Abdullah said that NC will reverse the order if voted to power.
- June 20: A terrorist was killed in an encounter at Khoipora in Handwara; one more terrorist was reportedly killed in another encounter near LoC in Kupwara district. The Amarnath Shrine Board land allotment row in Kashmir evoked widespread condemnation in Jammu.
- June 21: Four infiltrators were killed in Keran sector. Terrorists launched grenade attack on the only women's police station in Kashmir at Rambagh but failed to cause any damage. A Barat had a providential escape as an IED was defused on Doda-Bharat road minutes before its crossing the road. Hurriyat delegation in Pakistan said that they were happy on Indo-Pak dialogue but there was need for involvement of representatives of Kashmiri People in talks. As Mufti Sayeed demanded cancellation of forest land to SASB messengers Hakim Yasin, MY Tariqami, Ghulam Hassan Mir rejected the constitution of three member panel framed to analyse CEO's press meet by the government.
- June 22: LeT's Rajouri-Poonch Div. 'Commander' Abu Mohammed was among four terrorists killed in two fierce encounters in the Valley; one CRPF jawan was also killed in one of the encounters. International general secretary of VHP, Praveen Bhai Togadia accused Muzaffar Hussain Baigh of spreading 'Jehad' under the garb of constitution.
- June 23: A major tragedy was averted by the timely detection of three IEDs near a field on Srinagar-Leh national highway enroute to Baltal, base camp of Amarnath Yatra. A youth, Ashraf Sheikh was reportedly murdered in cold blood by JAKLI, dubbing him as terrorist. Record number of yatris 53,500 perform darshan in one day at Amarnath Cave. Pakistan has reportedly cold shouldered Hurriyat's role in Kashmir talks.
- June 24: Large quantity of arms and ammunition was recovered from a terrorist hideout in Gandoh, Doda. 50 cops were among 120 people injured in Srinagar and Ganderbal as people took to streets on the allotment of land to SASB. National Highway blocked at Nagrota as people protest against politicising the land allotment.
- June 25: A huge cache of arms including 45 kg RDX and 28 grenades was seized in Darhal Rajouri. Two persons were killed and 75 others injured during demonstrations in Kashmir valley on land allotment. Jammu protests against the politicising of the issue. CM released official record to show the involvement of PDP ministers in land diversion meet. Azad calls for all party meet but the proposal was instantly rejected by Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. NN Vohra was sworn in as Governor of J&K.
- June 26: Two employees of Primary Health Centre of Bharat, Doda were arrested with hawala money. A BSF jawan committed suicide in Kupwara. Body of a civilian was recovered from Mazbugh, Baramulla. As Jammu observed complete bandh against the demand of revocation of land allotment to SASB, PDP threatened to quit government if the order was not cancelled by 30th June. Governor Vohra appealed for peace and calm saying that all issues of public importance can be resolved amicably in a conciliatory manner.
- June 27: Two LeT terrorists and two soldiers were killed in a day long encounter at Khachpathri, Kangan. Body of a Hindu youth Veerji was fished out from Jhelum at Kandizal in Awantipora. Body of a lady was recovered from Sindh near Prang in Ganderbal. A jawan committed suicide in Nowshera. As the demonstrations continued in the Valley over SASB land allotment, CM met Governor NN Vohra and Mr Saifudin Soz met Prime Minister to discuss the issue. BJP threatened of serious implications if the land allotment order was cancelled. A meeting of Indo-Pak leaders in London asked for addressing terrorism and easing border curbs to resolve Kashmir issue.
- June 28: Terrorists killed a SPO in Gool while Army and Police recovered large quantity of arms and ammunition in Poonch. Azad government falls in minority as PDP withdrew support on the land issue. 80 people were injured as violence continued on land issue in the Valley; mass protests continue in Jammu as saffron parties warned against revocation of land transfer.
- June 29: Three terrorists and two jawans were killed in Kashmir valley. Large cache of arms was recovered in Rajouri. Government resumed control of Amarnath Ji Yatra arrangements as Governor abandoned SASB's claim over land at Baltal. Jammuites and pilgrims resent government decision as Sangh Parivar and Shiv Sena gave call for Jammu Bandh.
- June 30: Jammu observed complete bandh as massive demonstrations were held across the region on the land issue; 135 people were arrested and 20 injured. Shri Amarnath Yatra Sangarsh Samiti was constituted to take the agitation to logical conclusion as Bandh call was extended for two more days. Mr LK Advani said that Amarnath land will be a poll issue. 176 cross LoC via Chakkan-Da-Bagh.
- July 1: An Army officer and two intruders were killed in an encounter in Karnah sector. A hideout was busted and large quantity of arms and ammunition recovered in Poonch. State government cancelled allotment of land to SASB and shifted it to tourism department. Amidst massive protests in Jammu, police resorted to violence and opened firing at a procession at Muthi. 60 people were injured including two in police firing at Muthi. Administration imposed curfew in the city. Kashmir Valley 'celebrated' the cancellation order and AC TL asked Kashmiris to resume business. BJP, VHP call for "Bharat Bandh" on July 3.
- July 2: A JCO and 11 terrorists were killed in two fierce encounters in Kupwara. There are reports that around 900 terrorists belonging to three terrorists organisations have regained base and logistics in PoK and are ready for infiltration. Curfew clamped in Samba and Bhaderwah as demonstrations spread to every nook and corner of the region. 21 people were injured as terrorists throw a grenade on the protesters in Bhaderwah. A women was among 14 yatris beaten up at Banihal by Muslim fundamentalists in the presence of police which reportedly watched the hooliganism as mute spectators; police lodged a FIR but no arrests were made.
- July 3: A dreaded LeT terrorist Abu Atif was killed alongwith his body guard at Niana, Batpora in Pulwama; Abu Atif was involved in Rampur and Bangalore terrorist attacks. Staying firm on cancellation order, Mr Azad wanted Jammu people to celebrate the decision by distribution of 'ladooos'. Sangarsh Samiti extended bandh for three more days as the administration resorted to violence, arrested 200 demonstrators and moved. Four companies of "Rapid Action Force" and extended curfew to Kathua also. India observed a bandh on the Yatra issue as four people were killed in violence in Indore.
- July 4: Five soldiers and a terrorist were killed raising the toll to 18 in four day long encounter and search operations in Kupwara. A terrorist was killed in Kupwara. Demonstrations continued in Jammu; 220 people were arrested from different parts of the region. Azad spoke to opp. leaders on phone and asked for their help in peace. Separatist leader Shabir Shah was injured in Hazratbal; he had gone there to 'celebrate' the land revocation order as Geelani had called for 'Hazratbal Chalo'. SC refused to interfere in Amarnath land row.
- July 5: A top LeT terrorist was killed in Doda. Large quantity of arms and ammunition was recovered from Khari, Banihal in Ramban. 20 people were injured and 75 arrested as demonstrations continued across the region even after imposition of curfew in major towns. BJP President visited GMC, Jammu to enquire about the injured of Bhaderwah blast and others. Demanding the revocation of the land cancellation order, BJP president accused the government of bowing before separatists. 29 people were injured in clashes after a blast in a shrine at Soura.
- July 6: Tension erupted in Bhaderwah as a blast victim Manjit Singh succumbed to his injuries. A youth Romesh Kumar fell from a roof top in Pir Mitha after being chased by police; the youth died in the hospital. Police-public clashes continued across Jammu as 30 people were injured. Soz's efigy was burnt and house attacked in Delhi.
- July 7: A jawan was shot dead by his colleagues near LoC in Kupwara in case of mistaken identity. Mr Azad resigned after withdrawing trust motion. Protests continue in Jammu. Former Governor Lt. Gen SK Sinha accused PDP of playing in the hands of terrorists.
- July 8: Two terrorists were killed in Kupwara; three others managed to escape. A jawan was found dead near his barrack at Nagrota. Giving ultimatum to the government for restoration of land to SASB and recall of Governor NN Vohra, BAYSS suspended bandh for a week but said that the demonstrations and protests will continue.
- July 9: A cop was killed and another injured in grenade attack at Kralgund. A terrorist was killed in Bandipore. People in Tangmarg protested the killing of a youth in cross-firing at Kralgund, Kupwara. Bar Association took out a protest rally and joined Sangarsh Samiti and staged dharna outside Raj Bhawan.
- July 10: Police arrested seven top HUII terrorists and claimed breakthrough in GREF killings at Simthan Top. Sangarsh Samiti decided to intensify agitation. Governors rule imposed in J&K.

Separatists asks Bihari Labourers to quit Kashmir

KS Correspondent

After stoking communal passions over Amarnath Yatra the separatists and other communal outfits in Kashmir Valley have asked poor Bihari Labourers, in particular those belonging to a community, to leave the Valley immediately. In the beginning of June Syed Ali Shah Geelani and later People's Political Party, a separatist outfit served an ultimatum to Bihari labourers to leave the Valley immediately.

In the beginning the labourers did not take the warning seriously. But when anti-Yatra protestors started targeting hamlets of labourers the latter had to revise their decision. By first week of July more than five thousand labourers had quit the Valley. The exodus continues. The attacks on hamlets were witnessed mostly outside Srinagar city. The labourers described the life of past 20 days as a nightmare for them. On 27th June a labourer was assaulted seriously in Kulgam, sustaining serious dental injuries. Nearly two dozen labourers working in Kulgam left the same night with bag and baggage. Most of the labourers say they would never come again to Kashmir.

Labourers quoted a senior member of Kashmir Bar Association leader as saying that the turn of Bihari labourers to leave would come after anti-Yatra stir cools down. The member is said to have remarked forcing labourers' issue simultaneously would invite serious charges of communalism. The labourers said that their masters were persuading them to leave Kashmir.

Ultimatum to labourers and stoking communal passions over yatra issue are being seen here as part of a single conspiracy—to create imaginary fears among Kashmiri Muslims that they were facing a "demographic assault" and stoke communal passions in an attempt to create destabilisation. Last year also a similar ultimatum was served to these labourers.

JK Police wakes up to counter disinformation Campaign

KS Correspondent

SRINAGA, July 12: The 'unknown' graves in the northern Kashmir, had become source of recent controversy in the Kashmir valley. The anti-national elements and some interested groups had been using the controversy to create confusion in the minds of people. Lately, European Union moved a resolution asking India to investigate into mass graves issue.

The JK Police woke up from slumber to retort the charges. Soon after reports of graves appeared the state police had undertaken a detailed investigation. The enquiry revealed that in Sub-Division there were 202 such graves (97 in Bijhama, 75 in Boniyar and 30 in Uri) and these belonged to the terrorists including foreigners, killed during different encounters with security forces. These cases have been supported by necessary records in the form of FIR spelling out the date and place of occurrence, name of counter-insurgency unit involved in action and reference whether the terrorist was identified or otherwise. Moreover, the burials of such bodies were carried out by the locals of the respective areas.

Since it is not possible to identify all terrorists in such encounters in some cases identification process was done through word of mouth, identity cards, communication between terrorists or through media. 15 such persons identified as local terrorists were even exhumed and handed over to their legal heirs. However, many of the terrorists were of foreign origin, mostly known by their code/fake names. The police spokesman said, "so the question of identifying them by any one, either by the government agency or independent agency becomes a moot point".

An organisation has been levelling baseless accusations on so called 'Disappeared Persons' to defame India. Following these accusations, the JK Police investigated the allegations. Majority of the cases of 'Disappeared persons' were traced as cases of voluntary or motivated disappearance who had joined terrorist ranks. The police has asked people to remain vigilant over the misinformation campaign launched by anti-national elements.

NEWS

SASB Land Allotment Controversy

(Contd. from Page 8)

allocation of Assembly seats in favour of Kashmir Valley is costing dearer to the people of country and only "lawful and judicious delimitation" can bring peace, justice and prosperity in the state. Describing Mr. Vohra as ill suited for the responsibility, Mr Sharma maintained, "succumbing of Vohra before communal forces has proved him as meek and weak Governor not suitable to care the secular minded and minorities of the state".

The Jammu State Morcha-Progressive (JSM-P) described the revocation of land allotment order of the government as succumbing to the pressure of fundamentalists, communal anti-Jammu and anti-India forces. Professor Virender Gupta, President JSM-P, said that PDP leaders in league with Hurriyat Conference and other secessionist forces are solely responsible for raising communal and parochial emotions and hype among Kashmiri masses. He added that misleading masses on the allotment of land to SASB is "a mischievous design to disturb the peace in the state and create a situation that may be beneficial to PDP in the forthcoming Assembly election".

Baba Amarnath Yatri Niyas termed the revocation of land order by the state government with the connivance of the J&K Governor as a conspiracy of UPA to grab Hindu shrines in the Valley. The Niyas demanded sacking of Sh. NN Vohra for his decision to handover the arrangements of the Yatra to govern-

ment. RSS leader and a functionary of BAYN, Brig (retd...) Suchet Singh described this as a conspiracy of UPA chairperson, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to grab the Hindu Shrines in Valley but asserted that it will not be allowed at any cost. VHP state chief Dr Rama Kant Dubey termed the Governor's action as an insult to Hindu Samaj and chided the state government for its failure to take action against those in Valley who raised pro-Pak slogans and displayed Pakistani flags.

Four Shiv Senas and Kranti Dal merged to Form "Hindu United Forum" to take on separatists and extended full cooperation to the Sangarsh Samiti in the ongoing agitation. Addressing a Press Conference, President Shiv Sena Balasaheb Thakrey, Rajesh Gupta, Shiv Sena Hindustan Chief Dimple Kohli, President Hindu Shiv Sena Krishen Manhas, President Shiv Sena United-Rajesh Kesri and Chairman Kranti Dal, Anan Sharma expressed concern over the land revocation order. They lambasted PDP, NC and other Kashmiri leaders for unnecessarily raking up the land allotment issue and vowed to take on separatists and other Kashmir based parties that have sown the seeds of hatred and communal divide in the state.

The Jammu Bar Association that took an active part in present agitation, termed the decision illegal. JBA President, Sh. BS Slathia said that the recommendations made by the Governor of J&K in his capacity

as Chairman SASB that led to the revocation of the order as unlawful as he neither convened the meeting nor took the members in confidence. Mr Slathia quoted sections and subsections of the Act to justify his opinion. The Bar President also appealed all political, social, religious, transport, business and student organisations to join hands to fight decisively the battle of discrimination meted out to the people of Jammu by Kashmir Centric politicians, including the separatists and fundamentalists Shri Amar Nath Shrine Board Convenor, Leela

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Karan Sharma termed the government decision as an attack on Hindu faith and said that it will not be tolerated at any cost.

All India Brahmin Federation also condemned the government decision and appealed the Brahmin community to support the agitational programme launched for protection of Hindu rights National President of the AIBF, Prof. Devinder Sharma said that Brahmins have always been on the vanguard for protecting religious rights of Hindus from times immemorial and hence they should give lead and fully participate in any movement aimed at upholding and safeguarding Hindu interests and their religious sentiments. He, however, maintained that fight for the protection of the religious rights of Hindus in no way clashes with the

religious rights of any other community.

Senior advocate of J&K High Court SS Anand Leher termed revocation of land order unlawful and accused the government of succumbing to separatist forces. He demanded arrest of Mehbooba Mufti and Muzaffar Hussain Baig and asked for debarment PDP from contesting polls. He said that the act is unjustified as the land was transferred to SASB by the state cabinet after unanimous decision. He opined that the government decision is unlawful as the decision was taken when the government was in minority. He accused the state government of succumbing to separatist forces, to appease the leaders of so-called mainstream and fundamentalists.

Jammu Municipal Corporation passed a resolution opposing the cancellation of land transfer order and has sought the dismissal of the state government. The resolution was moved by BJP councillor, Sanjay Gupta. Congress councillors staged walk out after the resolution was moved while NC councillors were absent from the meeting.

The Muslim Federation Jammu also criticised the government action. President MFJ, Abdul Majid Khan criticised the government and different political parties for creating a messy situation for their narrow political interests over the grant of land to SASB. MFJ President described it as worst sort of political immorality to sit in cabinet and approve a decision and subse-

quently back out from such decision. He appreciated communal harmony in Jammu and asked Kashmiri Muslims to stand true to their secular approach and ensure safety and security of the yatris.

Sikh organisations like youth Akali Dal, All India Sikh Students Federation, Sikh Welfare Forum, J&K Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Board expressed grave concern over communalising of the allotment of land to SASB by separatists and PDP. The Sikh leaders lambasted Mufti Mohammad Sayeed for trying to hoodwink and befool the innocent people on the issue of transfer of land to SASB.

Peoples Revolutionary Movement condemned the revocation of land allotment order and accused Congress of selling the honour of Jammuites. PRM President Rajinder Jamwal said, "National Conference and PDP being Kashmir based parties and having no base in Jammu are in consonance with separatists is under standable. But, the Congress has base in Jammu as well as in Kashmir, though for name sake. Why it sold the honour of Jammuites by succumbing to their pressure?" He added that people of Jammu have gathered on one platform for the first time and no political party will be allowed to take political mileage out of the on going strike.

Congress leaders tried to lay the blame on the doorsteps of PDP and appealed for calm in the region.



Brahmins have always been leaders of the Sanatan, says Prof. Devender Sharma

"ALL India Brahmin Federation (AIBF) is an organisation of Brahmins all over India. Prof. Devender Sharma is presently President of the Federation. Born in Hiranagar, Jammu, Mr Sharma joined Technical Education Department after doing his engineering from Tamil Nadu and retired as Principal of Govt. Polytechnic, Srinagar. Prof. Sharma has been associated with socio-religious organisations and has remained a good sportsman. He was president of Dogra Brahmin Sabha, Jammu from 1990 to 1995. He had been founder member of AIBF and President of the federation since 2005 *Kashmir Sentinel* spoke to Prof. Devender Sharma about the establishment, activities and future programmes of the **All India Brahmin Federation** and current issues. Excerpts of the interview are reproduced as under:

—Editor

KS: Why and when was AIBF established?"

DS: The All India Brahmin Federation was established in

1984. In fact, there was Brahmin Maha Sabha, Delhi in early 1980s. It had influence in the North India only. The South India Brahmins also wanted to be associated with it. As such, AIBF was established to give it a national representative character.

KS: What are the main objectives of the AIBF?"

DS: All India Brahmin Federation has been established to bring unity among the Brahmins and the Hindu Samaj at large. Its objective is to fight for the rights of the Brahmins. It is the only non-political organisation that has taken up the issue of reservations. The reservation issue is not a social but a political issue and has hurt the interests of the Brahmins. No political party does favour the Brahmins' point of view. AIBF was launched to highlight the issue.

KS: Who are the members of the Federation?"

DS: AIBF is, in fact, a conglomerate of the State Brahmin Sabhas and the state bodies are our members. There are five executive members from each state. And the states that have no units, one member from the affiliate units has been taken. The country has been divided in five zones—North, South, East, West and the Central Zone. Presently, 18 states are

affiliated with the Federation and the units are functional in all the zones except the East. All the social and religious needs are fulfilled through the State Brahmin Sabhas.

KS: How does the Federation Coordinate?"

DS: The Brahmins have the distinction of being the only community living in all the states of India. The Maha Samelan of the Federation is organised annually at different places in the country. The Samelan is organised by the state Sabhas and the best Sabha bears the expenses. Thousands of Brahmins all over India participate in these Sammelans. These Sammelans give an opportunity to share one another's thoughts.

KS: What does AIBF do for the over all unity of the Hindu Samaj?"

DS: Brahmins have always been leaders of the Sanatan. We are conscious of the fact that all Hindus are looking to the Brahmin community for lead and guidance. We have taken steps to bring all these different sections of Sanatan Dharma together. We are preaching that the customs and rites which took us apart be done away with. On the initiative of the federation the temples that allowed entry of Brahmins only were thrown open to all the Hindus irrespective of their

caste. But, we oppose the interference in Sanatan rights and oppose the entry of other faiths. In South, the community kitchens at every temple, run by the Brahmins, were open to the Brahmins only. With the intervention of the Federation, they have been opened for all the Hindus. These initiatives are aimed at the unity of the Hindu Samaj.

KS: What do you feel are the achievements of the AIBF and its future plans?"

DS: 25 years is too small a time to unite Brahmins of different languages, customs and costumes. We have been able to unite them and bring them on one platform. It is a major achievement. We are planning an educational set-up at Delhi to impart Brahmanical knowledge. We are also planning a Brahmin House for NRI Brahmins.

KS: Recently, there has been controversy over the Amarnath pilgrimage. How does the Brahmin Federation view it?"

DS: We consider the conspiracy unfortunate, unwanted, ill managed and ill conceived. The Federation had been trying for more and more pilgrims to the Lord Shiva abode at Amarnath. From that point of view, we feel disappointed as present circumstances would halt that process. The Federation is actively support-

ing the Baba Amarnath Sangarsh Samiti, spearheading the agitation against the acts of the government and the Governor. We feel that the Hindu sentiment has been badly hurt and there is urgent need for corrective measures by the government as well as the Shrine Board.

KS: How do you view the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from the Valley."

DS: The forced exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus from the Valley was, perhaps, the most unfortunate event of the 20th Century. It is a slap on the democratic governance of the country and an episode that should have awakened the Hindus lying in slumber. The federation has all along from the year 1990 to this day representing the Central government and the state governments to do all they can in rehabilitating the Kashmiri Pandit community. We are glad to know that public in states like Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka etc. have acceded to our demand and are giving helping hand. I am personally very much disappointed over the rehabilitation of Pandits settled in Jammu and lukewarm efforts of the state government for their rehabilitation, welfare and above all return to the Valley.

Land Controversy: A Broader Design of Islamic Fundamentalists—Panun Kashmir

KS Correspondent

Panun Kashmir described the controversy over the allotment of land to "Shri Amarnath Shrine Board" as a broader design of the Islamic fundamentalists and separatist forces and the revocation of the allotment of land by the state government with the connivance of the State Governor as a reflection of the mindset of the Indian State that has contributed to the secessionist and fundamentalist agenda in the state through its ill conceived policies. The organisation, however, feels that the unprecedented and spontaneous reaction to the controversy in the Jammu region is an assertion of the nationalist civil society that any compromise by the Indian state will not be acceptable to the nation as a fait accompli.

Once the controversy was fuelled in the Valley, Panun Kashmir organised a press conference at Jammu and described the campaign as a reflection of the communalisation of the social and public discourse in the Valley that has dented the public commitment of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to promote secularism and rule of law in J&K State. Addressing the press conference, Panun Kashmir Chairman, Dr Ajay Chrungoo said, "the motivated campaign against the yatra to holy Amarnath Cave in the Valley brings to the fore the communalisation of the social milieu and public discourse in Kashmir Valley that has torn the policy of Manmohan Singh to promote secularism and rule of law in J&K to smithereens". Dr. Chrungoo described the controversy as a continuation of Religious cleansing in which the communal forces entrenched within the government, mainstream political establishment and outside are pursuing relentlessly to snap all the Hindu links of Kashmir. "Taking over of Hindu property by the state government under the pretext of building public utility facilities. Replacing

the names of places with Islamic names and the campaign against the Amarnath Yatra are all facets of a well coordinated religious cleansing process," lamented the PK leader.

Accusing Indian political establishment of legitimising the communal forces, Dr. Chrungoo said, "The legitimacy which the communal politics of PDP has got first at the hands of NDA and later by the Congress by cohabiting with it is destroying the already

smoke screen to further the agenda of fundamentalism and secessionism. "The so-called civil society in the Valley once again has revealed its regressive and communal face by selectively targeting the yatra but remained silent on the other religious congregations that witness assembly of lakhs not once but many times during the year," questioned Mr Trisal. The Pandit leader further added that the civil

fundamentalist forces and the revocation of the land allotment order by the State government with connivance of the Governor and the concurrence of the Centre under line the same fact," said Dr. Chrungoo. He added that from humiliation of Maharaja Hari Singh to the reported abandonment of Mr Azad speak about the same legacy.

Dr. Chrungoo asserted that the present reaction in Jammu in particular and the country in general is a reflection of the assertion of Hindu Samaj and the nationalist civil society that they are not going to accept any assault on the faith or national integration as a fact accomplished but will force the Indian state to protect the interests of the nationalist society. Panun Kashmir leader underscored the need of sustenance of the struggle.

Reacting to the government decision, Chairman Advisory Panun Kashmir, Prof. MK Teng regretted that the Indian state has always sided with the Muslim fundamentalist forces and the governor's action as chairman of the Shrine Board is continuation of the same process. He described the nature of present struggle inevitable to save the Indian nation and the society.

Prof. ML Koul, Member Advisor PK, termed the government decision as continuation of presenting of land interference in the religious matters of Hindus even by the democratic dispensations. He said that Hindus were persecuted in the Islamic regimes and yatras were banned even even Hindus were not allowed to cremate their dead in the cremation grounds by the Sikandar Butshiken and the present order is reflection for that legacy. Prof. Koul said that the Amarnath Yatra has documented history of hundreds of years and to credit the discovery of the cave to Malik is the distortion of history.



Leaders of Panun Kashmir addressing press conference in Jammu.

shrinking spaces of accommodation and pluralism.

Terming the campaign against yatra as a big 'No' to the values of co-existence and pluralism, PK Chairman said that creation of Panun Kashmir in the Valley has become an imperative to save Kashmir from forces of intolerance, regression and religious bigotry.

Sh. O.N. Trisal, President All State Kashmiri Pandit Solidarity Conference, described the environmental concerns as a

society never raised its concern over the nexus between Jihadi and Timber Mafia which is plundering the forest cover, Mughal road that is being built at the cost of destruction of forest wealth or the shrinking of Wular and Dal Lakes.

Reacting to the revocation of the land allotment order, Panun Kashmir Chairman, Dr. Ajay Chrungoo said that the Indian state has succumbed to the secessionist and fundamentalist forces. "The Indian state has a history of contributing to the cause of Islamic