

Amarnath : Manufacturing Crisis

[The present turmoil, that has dangerously engulfed the whole state of Jammu & Kashmir, erupted when the State Government in May this year ordered diversion of around 800 kanals of land to Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB). Piecing together the events in a chronological order is self-revealing :]

October 2000 : Tourism Minister S S Salathia tables a bill in the State Legislature for constitution of Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB).

February 2001: State Government constitutes SASB for managing affairs of the Amarnath Yatra.

SASB asks for land

October, 2004: CEO, SASB sends Project Report to the J&K Forest Department regarding transfer of 3642 kanals of forest land to SASB at Baltal and Chandanwari.

March 2005: Forest Department grants permission vide Government Order No. 148-FST of 2005 Dated: 29-03-2005 for use of forest land by SASB in Compartment Nos. 21 and 62 of Lidder Forest Division.

May 20, 2005: Government Order No. 148-FST withdrawn on the directions of the Chief Minister vide order no. 210-FST of 2005 Dated: 20-05-2005 on the ground that while making land allotment the provisions of Forest Conservation Act were violated.

May 28, 2005: J&K High Court stays operation of Govt. Order No. 210-FST of 2005 Dated: 20-05-2005. The Division Bench of the High Court comprising Justice Nargotra and Justice V K Jhanji makes it clear that duration of the Govt. Order No. 148-FST of 2005 shall be preparatory to commencement of the Yatra and user would remain till end of the Yatra.

July 2005: Show-cause notice served to then Principal Secretary Forest Department for having issued the Govt. Order No. 148-FST of 2005 in violation of Forest Conservation Act.

November 2005: Warning issued to the Principal Secretary, Forests after the reply furnished by the officer to the show-cause notice was not found satisfactory by the Government.

Government gives land to SASB

July 12, 2007: Proposal for diversion of 39.88 hectares of forest land cleared by Forest Advisory Committee headed by the Chief Secretary.

July 17, 2007: SASB proposal submitted to the General Administration Department (GAD) for approval of the Cabinet.

February 2008: Matter placed before the Cabinet, but decision deferred.

March 2008: Committee constituted vide Govt. Order No. 108-FST Dated: 13-03-2008 to examine feasibility of diverting forest land vis-à-vis wildlife perspective for various developmental activities including construction of road at Baltal/Ranga-Domail.

May 7, 2008: Committee submits report to the Government.

May 20, 2008: Cabinet approves diversion of 39.88 hectares of forest land to SASB.

May 26, 2008: Govt. issues order no. 184-FST of 2008 diverting land to SASB.

Controversy begins

June 3, 2008: Raj Bhawan spokesman issues a statement making public the transfer of land to SASB.

June 17, 2008: Amarnath Yatra commences. SASB CEO Arun Kumar reveals at a press conference in Srinagar that land diversion was permanent.

June 18, 2008: Chief Secretary issues warning to Arun Kumar.

Row brings rival Hurriyat factions led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Umar Farooq together.

June 19, 2008: Deputy Chief Minister Muzaffar Hussain Baig, at a press conference, accuses Congress of blackmailing PDP on land allotment to SASB by threatening to stop work on Mughal Road.

NC Patron Farooq Abdullah at a press conference in Srinagar asks Government to take back forest land from SASB.

Hurriyat factions led by Sayed Ali Shah Geelani and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq issue a joint declaration in Srinagar.

June 20, 2008: BJP leader L K Advani visits Amarnath cave. Advani was briefed regarding Yatra arrangements at Raj Bhawan.

Mirwaiz talks tough on SASB calls for immediate revocation of land transfer order.

June 21, 2008: PDP Patron Mufti Mohammad Sayeed seeks cancellation of land diversion to SASB. Cabinet meet to discuss land row postponed.

June 22, 2008: State President of the BJP Ashok Khajuria threatens economic blockade of Kashmir valley at a Press Conference in Jammu, if land allotment order revoked.

June 23, 2008: Protests against land transfer begin in Kashmir valley. One person killed, 40 hurt in CRP firing on protesters at Nowhatta, Srinagar.

A record number of 53,500 Yatris paid obeisance at the Amarnath cave shrine.

Sayed Ali Shah Geelani gives a wake-up call to Kashmiris over land transfer to SASB.

JKLF Chairman Yasin Malik threatens fast unto death if land diversion order not revoked.

June 24, 2008: BJP launches counter-stir in Jammu, declares economic blockade of Kashmir.

After consulting Congress ministers, Azad says land diversion order won't be revoked.

BJP cadres led by legislator Jugal Kishore enforce economic blockade by stopping movement of vehicles on Srinagar-Jammu highway near Nagrota.

Union Water Resources Minister Prof Saif-ud-Din Soz at a public meeting at Yaripora (Kulgam) says Congress not taking PDP pullout threat seriously.

June 25, 2008: Governor N N Vohra at a press conference blames PDP ministers Muzaffar Hussain Baig and Qazi Afzal for land transfer.

Two persons killed, 200 injured in valley-wide protests. Seven persons killed in eight days of protests.

Prominent Hindu spiritual preacher, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says 800 kanals of land transferred to SASB aren't enough to accommodate lakhs of pilgrims, it's a beginning.

Azad proposes all-party meet on land row, PDP rejects.

June 26, 2008: PDP sets June 30 deadline for pullout from Coalition Government if land diversion order not revoked.

NC President Omar Abdullah at a press conference calls for revocation of land diversion order.

June 27, 2008: Government orders attachment of Governor's Principal Secretary Arun Kumar. B B Vyas appointed new Principal Secretary to Governor.

Shiv Sena leader Sham Lal Langar at a press conference in Jammu threatens to block the national highway as well as supply of essential commodities to Srinagar, if land diversion order revoked.

June 28, 2008: PDP pulls out of the Coalition Govt.

June 29, 2008: SASB surrenders claim over land as the State Govt. agrees to take over Yatra arrangements.

Jammu erupts

June 30, 2008: Protests erupt in Jammu. BJP, Shiv Sena, VHP and Bajrang Dal activists block Jammu-Lakhanpur National Highway.

Shri Amarnath Sangarsh Samiti (SASS) constituted in Jammu with Leela Karan as its convener.

BJP leader L K Advani announces in Bhopal (MP) that Amarnath Land issue would be major national electoral agenda for BJP.

Government cancels order

July 1, 2008: State cabinet cancels land order but it continues to be under SASB use.

Action Committee against Transfer of Land (ACTL) calls off agitation in Kashmir.

Curfew imposed in Jammu following widespread protests over revocation order.

BJP, VHP calls for July 3 Bharat Bandh. "If there is no Amarnath yatra, there would be no Haj also," VHP General Secretary Praveen Togadia declares in Delhi. VHP also called for boycott of all Kashmiri products and goods all over India. "Kashmiri Handicrafts such as carpets, kurtas, scarf, shawls, Kashmiri saffron (Kesar), Kashmiri Apricots (Akhrot) etc. shouldn't be purchased by the people," Togadia said.

Petrol Tankers Association President Anand Sharma announces stoppage of petrol supplies to Kashmir valley.

Pro-Jammu political and social organizations hold joint meeting at Duggar Pradesh Party headquarters in Jammu to discuss the modalities of forming a common platform to strengthen struggle for statehood to Jammu region.

BJP State President Ashok Khajuria announces boycott of Kashmiri politicians at a press conference in Jammu.

Economic Blockade

July 2, 2008: Economic blockade begins. BJP, VHP and Bajrang Dal block Jammu-Lakhanpur highway at various places.

SASS convener Leela Karan at a press conference in Jammu declares Samiti's support for economic blockade of Kashmir and also calls for a separate Jammu State.

July 3, 2008: Normal life disrupted in several states following Bharat Bandh by BJP and VHP over Amarnath land row.

Gladni Grid station in Jammu, major supplier of power to the region, suffers extensive damage in a fire incident.

July 4, 2008: Supreme Court refuses to intervene in the revocation of land transfer order while hearing a PIL filed by the Panthers Party supreme Prof Bhim Singh.

July 5, 2008: BJP national President Rajnath Singh and senior leader Arun Jaitley arrive in Jammu and extend support to the agitation launched by SASS in protest against the cancellation of land allotted to SASB.

July 6, 2008: SASS asks public representatives from Jammu to resign from the Assembly and Parliament and join the movement launched by it.

Azad Government falls

July 7, 2008: Azad skips floor test, resigns as Chief Minister.

July 8, 2008: Curfew lifted from whole Jammu following improvement in situation.

July 10, 2008: Governor's rule imposed, assembly dissolved.

July 23, 2008: A protester allegedly commits suicide in Jammu demanding restoration of land to SASB; situation gets out of control in Jammu.

August 1, 2008: Governor calls all-party meet in Jammu. Mehbooba Mufti, Farooq Abdullah attacked.

August 6, 2008: PM presides over another all-party meet. BJP's demand for governor's recall rejected.

Home Minister arrives

August 9, 2008: Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil arrives in Jammu with all-party Parliamentary delegation for talks. Farooq Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti and Saif-ud-Din Soz kept out of the meeting after objection by SASS.

August 10, 2008: Shivraj Patil arrives in Srinagar, meets leaders of political parties while denying audience to fruit growers and other trade organizations spearheading Muzafara-bad Chalo programme.

Muzafarabad Chalo

August 11, 2008: Kashmir traders, Hurriyat and PDP call for Muzaffarabad march to protest blockade; eight persons including separatist leader Sheikh Abdul Aziz killed.

PDP extends support to Muzafarabad Chalo programme of fruit growers.

More killings

August 12, 2008: Twenty-one persons killed across Kashmir valley and Kishtwar as law enforcing agencies open fire on protesters at several places across Kashmir valley.

August 14, 2008: Protests continue. Another youth shot dead at Safakadal, Srinagar.

August 16, 2008: Lakhs of people swarm Pampore to participate in fourth day mourning of Hurriyat leader Sheikh Abdul Aziz.

August 17, 2008: NC Patron Omar Abdullah threatens to give up his Parliament seat if use of force against Kashmiris not stopped.

And there still seems no end in sight... □□□

[Courtesy : Greater Kashmir Political Bureau]