

LAND IN GULMARG, SONAMARG NOTIFIED AS 'STRATEGIC AREAS'

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The Jammu and Kashmir government has declared around 1,358 *kanals* (169.75 acres) as "strategic areas" in the tourist hotspots of Gulmarg and Sonamarg in north and central Kashmir.

According to an order issued by the Tourism Department, 1,034 *kanals* and six *marlas* of land in Gulmarg and 354 *kanals* in Sonamarg have been notified as strategic areas by the authorities, while exercising powers under the Jammu and Kashmir Development Act.

It said the Corps Commander must ensure strict adherence to the environment laws.

"The Corps Commander shall ensure that no other applicable law in force in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is observed in breach," said the order.

This is for the first time since the Control of Building Operations Act, 1988, and the J&K Development Act, 1970 were amended in 2020 that the government has issued such a notification.

As per the amendments, the government can notify "strategic areas" for use by the armed forces and regulating construction through a "special dispensation".

The government said a special mechanism needed to be put in place for such strategic infrastructure needs.

The government noted that the notified "strategic areas" were within the existing armed forces land.

Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti tweeted, "Allocating thousands of *kanals* to armed forces, that too in tourist areas, confirms GOI's intention to convert J&K into a military garrison. Under the 'state land' pretext, our land is up for grabs and, to add insult to injury, locals are being evicted from their homes."

CPI(M) leader M.Y. Tarigami asked the government "to review its decision".

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