

*Jehlum Post News Network/Jammu /Apr 08, 2015/Facing flak from opposition parties and separatists, Jammu and Kashmir government Wednesday made a U-turn on the controversial plans for composite townships in the Valley*

*for displaced Kashmiri Pandits, saying they would be settled at their native places and "not as an isolated community". The PDP-BJP Government yesterday assured the Centre that it will soon acquire and provide land at the earliest for creating "composite townships" for displaced Kashmiri migrants in the Valley. The assurance was given by Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed when he called on Home Minister Rajnath Singh in Delhi for the first time after taking oath on March one. The main opposition party National Conference(NC) and the Valley-based political leaders and separatist groups had flayed the state government and the Centre for the move. "It's clear that the Kashmiri pandits are a part and parcel of the traditional Kashmiri ethos and they would be reintegrated into their native place as a part of the society and not as an isolated community," a state government spokesman said in a release this evening. On the composite townships, the spokesman claimed that it was meant for only those people of the community who have no land and properties left in Kashmir. These people "can be accommodated in the composite township, if they desire so," the spokesman said. The spokesman discounted as "misconstrued, misconceived and mischievous" the impression being created by certain quarters regarding establishment of exclusive habitations for Kashmiri pandits.*

*"The society and the Government is committed to facilitate reintegration of migrant pandits in their homeland with honour and dignity without compartmentalizing them as an isolated community," he said. He said the creation of exclusive enclaves for migrants, as was done at Sheikhpora, Budgam, has not worked as most of the pandits who wanted to return to the Valley preferred to resettle at their ancestral places. "The Government is keenly awaiting the return of migrants and they will be resettled at their original places of inhabitation with honour and dignity," the spokesman said. As has been already made clear by the Chief Minister, the migrant pandits are most welcome to return and resettle at the places of their choice, and various initiatives have already been taken by the State Government to bring them back with honour and dignity, the spokesman said. He said braving the hazards of turmoil in Kashmir, several Kashmiri pandit families continue to live harmoniously with their Muslim brethren in various parts of the Valley. "The Kashmiri pandits have every right to return to their ancestral land and get reintegrated in the society to revive the age-old tradition of brotherhood and amity," he said and added that any facility for the purpose won't be either religion or community-specific. Sayeed, while replying to the motion of thanks on Governor's address in the state assembly, had also said that he will construct Jagti-type flats for Kashmiri pandits in the Valley, a statement which had been criticised by NC working President and former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah.*

*Earlier, major opposition parties and separatist groups had slammed the government over the plans for composite townships in the Valley. National Conference said the party was against any separate "homeland" within the Valley. "We don't believe in separate homeland and National Conference (NC) does not support it. Centre's decision is not important. What is the purpose if it creates differences among the people of the Valley," senior NC leader Ali Mohammed Sagar said. NC spokesman said that the party was against any ghettos as they will be prone to attacks from militant groups. "Why do you want to create a spate of cantonment type colonies in the Valley?" the spokesman asked. JKLF chairman Yasin Malik said separatist groups have always appealed to Kashmiri pandits to return to the Valley. "We will not allow the government to build separate settlements for Kashmiri pandits. This is an Israeli ploy and RSS has taken inspiration from that. They want to create walls of hatred here, spread fire and divide the people," he told reporters. Hardline Hurriyat Conference termed setting up of proposed separate townships for Kashmiri pandits as "surrender by Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed before the Centre."*

*"The surrender of Sayeed before Home Minister Rajnath Singh over setting up of separate townships for Kashmiri pandits is surprising and unfortunate," Hurriyat chairman Syed Ali Shah Geelani said in a statement. The issue figured in Jammu and Kashmir Assembly which saw some ugly scenes with independent MLA Engineer Rashid storming the well protesting against the plans of the state and central governments. "We will not let Kashmir become another Gaza and Palestine. We will not tolerate separate townships for the pandit community in Kashmir," he said but made it clear that he would welcome the return of the community to their native places. CPM leader and MLA Mohammed Yusuf Tarigami raised the issue during Zero Hour demanding that the government should take the Assembly into confidence. Moderate faction of Hurriyat Conference led by Mirwaiz Umer Farooq also termed the government proposal as a ploy to divide the people of Kashmir on communal lines. "Rather than dividing the people on communal lines, the government should take steps for the honourable return of Kashmiri Pandits," Hurriyat said in Srinagar. Agency*