

Greater Kashmir

Army porters demand regularization

Army porters, who lug ammunition and ration to hostile heights to augment the operational capability of Army during 1999 Kargil war have threatened to take up arms, if they will not be provided justice from the government.

Fighting from last 15 years under the banner of All India Porter Union (AIPU) for adjustment in regular army or its other civil wings, the porters this afternoon staged a massive protest in Jammu.

Talking to Greater Kashmir, Narainder Kumar, president of AIPU's Punjab unit said that during war (1999-Kargil) army appointed over 5000 people from Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh to help regular army, adding, "Our people lug ammunition to challenging heights of Tiger Hill and Tololing. We carried giant guns, ration, medicines and other store items on shoulders by risking lives but post war Army abandoned us".

"If a soldier or officer got injured during war in those heights, it was the porters who carry them down," he said, adding, "We evacuated many soldiers and officers amid firing from both sides, while many of our colleagues also died and injured in the war but soldiers were awarded while no one cared about porters," he alleged.

"We were very young when army appointed us on the promise of providing regular jobs," said Ramesh Kumar, AIPU president Jammu and Kashmir.

He added after war they were disengaged and ordered to go back to the respective native places with certificate and verbally assured preference in army recruitment and other government jobs. "But over the years our certificates have been rendered to a piece of paper only" he added.

He said that the state government has framed rehabilitation and employment policy for surrendered militants 'but ignored us (porters) who participated in victorious Operation Vijay'.

"We feel proud to be a part of the war winning troops and don't want conflict with the defence forces, but if our genuine demands are not met to we will take up arms and show government the consequences of ignoring patriotic youth" he threatened. "We will take up arms instead of

pelting stones if the present government continue to ignore the porters” he said further.

Pertinently, Supreme Court of India this July had asked Defence Ministry to regularize civilian porters engaged with Army.

The apex court gave the Centre Government three weeks to prepare a draft of a scheme to regularise services of Army porters.

The court suggested that those who had completed 10 years in the service of the Army be considered for regularization with all benefits, including insurance policies and compensation.

As per reports, on an average over 12,000 porters serve the Army in forward areas in a year. These porters are being engaged to streamline supply lines to forward areas where vehicle movement is not possible throughout the year. The porters also used as labours to construct bunkers, dig roads and clear landslides or snow.