

INSIDE TRACK



COOMI KAPOOR

SHAH'S NEW ROLE

Amit Shah's responsibilities are increasing. Apart from being Home Minister, he is also a member of all eight Cabinet committees. In addition, he spends around two-and-a-half hours a day handling party affairs. Although party working president J P Nadda is to eventually replace Shah, until now Shah continues to call the shots. Recently, Shah has taken on yet another onerous duty, a fact which has escaped the attention of most. As Home Minister, he is now in charge of the police force in Jammu and Kashmir. The state has been divided into two Union Territories and hence law and order comes under the purview of the Home

Ministry in Delhi, as in the case of other UTs such as Delhi and Puducherry.

EGALITARIAN FUNERAL

At Arun Jaitley's funeral at Delhi's Nigambodh Ghat, the VVIPs, whether chief ministers or Central ministers, did not try to pull rank but mingled freely with other mourners. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stood throughout the ceremony refusing to take the seat offered to her, as did Smriti Irani. Chief Ministers such as Devendra Fadnavis, Manohar Lal Khattar, Nitish Kumar and Vijay Rupani came without any escorts and were left to fend for themselves. A thunder storm broke out towards the end of the ceremony after the funeral pyre was lit. Amit Shah set an example by refusing to budge from his seat even though he was completely drenched. Rajnath Singh sitting next to him followed suit. Even when the chief ministers and Central ministers were leaving the venue there were few umbrellas to hand around. Khattar could be seen manfully holding up his pajamas and trying to wade through the water, while Sushil Modi sat patiently in a spot with

overhead cover waiting for the rains to subside. The egalitarianism of Modi's ministers was commendable, although at the same time one could not help wondering whether the lack of any real security was advisable in such sensitive times. Many read the rain shower, which was curiously confined only to the funeral ground and did not douse the flames of the covered pyre, as a good omen.

GRACE UNDER FIRE

Behind every great man there is usually an inspiring wife. Sangeeta Jaitley, known universally as Dolly, was Arun Jaitley's anchor who conducted herself with amazing dignity and grace during his long bout with illnesses. Despite the trials and tribulations she faced, she kept a composed front and was ever the caring hostess to the stream of visitors who came calling at her house enquiring about her husband's health. Once asked how she coped, she replied simply, "What choice do I have?" In fact, Dolly was trained to take over the responsibilities of running a politician's household early in life. At a young age she served as

political hostess for her father Girdhari Lal Dogra, a freedom fighter and an eminent Congress leader who was finance minister of J&K for 26 years.

MISSING IN ACTION

Though BJP general secretary Kajilash Vijayvargiya is in charge of the BJP's parliamentary office, it was noticeable that he was missing through much of Parliament's Budget Session, even though he has his own room next to the BJP's parliamentary office. The buzz in the BJP is that Vijayvargiya has retreated into a shell ever since the Prime Minister, at a parliamentary party meeting in which Vijayvargiya was present, lashed out at the behaviour of his son Akash, who had hit a civic official in Indore with a cricket bat. Modi said pointedly that anyone indulging in such antics should be taken to task no matter whose son he was.

NEW POSITION?

Expenditure Secretary G C Murmu, a Gujarat-cadre IAS officer, is due to retire this November. A favourite of both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home

Minister Amit Shah, Murmu is expected to be appointed to the Central Vigilance Commission, the powerful statutory apex body which monitors Central government corruption.

NIPPED IN BUD

The nascent rebellion in the BJP's Karnataka unit was nipped in the bud by Amit Shah and the party general secretary (organisation), B L Santosh. Shah made it clear to the five ministers who publicly displayed their unhappiness for not being adequately rewarded with a deputy chief minister's position, that they could be thrown out of the party. Santosh warned that the party was prepared for fresh elections. Anger in the Karnataka BJP is intense over the appointment of Laxman Savadi as a Deputy CM. Savadi is not even an MLA and gained notoriety after once being photographed watching porn in the Assembly. Since Savadi is a Lingayat, the party seems to feel he can be groomed for an important role when CM B S Yediyurappa retires. Also Savadi is from Belgaum where the BJP wants to cut to size two powerful political families.

FIFTH COLUMN



TAVLEEN SINGH

Losing the peace in Kashmir?

THE PRIME Minister of Pakistan sounds more like a jihadist preacher than a political leader these days. Since the removal of Article 370, Imran Khan has ranted and raved in all the speeches he has made. He has threatened nuclear war. Declared that the 'annexation' of Kashmir was a war crime. And, accused India of genocide and ethnic cleansing. But the speech that shocked me most was the one he made last Friday. Not just for its belligerence but for its ignorance.

In this speech, the elected leader of the Islamic Republic gave us his historical analysis of the ideology of the RSS. With Allah invoked in every other breath, he declared that the RSS ideology was based on a hatred of Muslims and on the Nazi idea of racial superiority. He compared Narendra Modi to Hitler and although, good Muslim that he is, he did not mention the Holocaust, he said that Modi wanted to do in India what Hitler had done in Germany. He wanted to make India into a country in which Hindus were first-class citizens and Muslims and Christians second-class citizens.

It was in this context that he saw the removal of Kashmir's special status. In his view, this is a fight for the rights of Muslims. Inshallah, he said, he would fight till his dying breath for the freedom of Kashmir. He announced plans to go to every international forum as 'the ambassador of Kashmir' to warn world leaders that India was now a 'fascist' nuclear power that has become a danger to the whole world. More dangerous than the Islamic Republic he serves where jihadist military men have control of the nuclear button? Really?

Pakistan has been morbidly fixated on Kashmir since 1947. Children are taught in schools that Kashmir is the 'unfinished business' of Partition and that Pakistan will not be whole till it is taken away from India. Several unsuccessful attempts have been made to do this. The most sinister of these has been the use of Islamist terrorism to change the very character of Kashmiri Islam and make it more jihadist. This is why the Valley has remained on the boil for two decades, with young Kashmiri leaders of the 'azaadi' movement now demanding the imposition of the Shariat. It was probably with this long season of unrest in the Valley in mind, that Imran Khan thought it was the right time to ask US President Donald Trump to 'mediate'. He seems not to have understood, as wiser Pakistani leaders did long ago, that Kashmir is going nowhere.

Now that Kashmir will for the foreseeable future be ruled directly from Delhi, the chances of it going anywhere have diminished dramatically. This is one reason that its special status was removed. Most Indians approve of the removal of Article 370 and believe that once the process of accession to India was complete, this special status should never have been given. So the Prime Minister did something that most Indians believe should have been done long ago.

Having said this, it is also true that our Kashmir problem is likely to become a bigger headache for Delhi than it was before. How long can this lockdown be sustained? How long can a communications blackout be sustained? Judging from the panicky manner in which a doctor was arrested last week for drawing attention to the collapse of healthcare facilities in Srinagar, these are questions that the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir has not even begun to address. Satya Pal Malik gives many interviews these days boasting about how there has not been a single death since Kashmir's political realities changed. He seems unaware that he has not yet devised a strategy to bring uncurfewed peace.

Already, despite the lockdown, reporters are going up to the Valley and meeting children who claim to have been tortured in the custody of the Indian Army and women who claim to have been threatened with rape. I find these stories hard to believe because in the Nineties, when the insurgency began, I investigated many of the stories of torture and rape and found them to be false. I remember in particular a village near Baramulla where the women laughed as they told me that every woman had been raped by Indian soldiers. A young man in jeans and sneakers who was not Kashmiri was present to orchestrate this performance.

This does not mean that these things never happen or that they are not happening now. If they are, then it would be a terrible mistake. The Prime Minister is now personally in charge of governing Kashmir so he needs to be vigilant about bad things that might be happening in his name. He needs to remember that if, as the BBC reported last week, there is a violent military crackdown underway, there is absolutely no chance of winning the peace.

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The one united struggle for freedom



DAVID BROOKS

THIRTY YEARS ago, I covered a lot of democracy rallies. They were held in the Soviet Union, Ukraine, Central Europe, South Africa and the Middle East. Last week, I covered some more, this time in Hong Kong.

In many ways the Hong Kong rallies felt exactly like the rallies I covered as a cub journalist. There was the same fervent faith in democracy, the same roiling conviction that human beings deserve to live at their full dignity — able to think what they want, read what they want, govern themselves and not simply exist half-strangled and suborned.

There was the same indignant desire not to live in a rigged economy run for the benefit of State-favoured oligarchs.

There was the same turning to America that we see at democracy rallies everywhere, the same sense that America is a beacon in the struggle for freedom, the same expectation that of course America is going to step in and help.

There were even the same tactics. Decades ago, the Czechs built "Lennon Walls", brightly covered walls where people post slogans and encouragement. Today, the Hong Kongers use those, too.

In 1989, democracy protesters across the Baltics formed a vast human chain called "The Baltic Way". Recently, 1,35,000 Hong Kongers formed "The Hong Kong Way", a chain that stretched 50 km through the city. The protesters held hands, chanted slogans. When the lights were red, they stretched from sidewalks across the streets. When the lights were green, they politely withdrew to let traffic pass.

There was the same resolute pessimism that I remember from those democracy rallies decades ago. On the one hand these people are fervently committed. On the other hand, they don't exactly see how a ragtag bunch can beat a powerful regime that has tanks. They don't see the power of the powerless, that sometimes a shift in consciousness is stronger than military might.

I asked several Hong Kong protesters how they thought this thing would end up. They were not optimistic. "We are seven million," one man told me. "They're 1.4 billion." And yet they were not going to stop protesting and putting their lives at risk.

The big difference between now and then is technology. Today's protests feel like a frenetic, online media campaign. There is a constant flow of memes, symbols and videos to keep the clicks coming: anime art, Pepe the Frog, bloody eye patches that refer to a woman who was

shot in the eye.

The protesters sample and quote from the great buzz of global culture, which is of course what they are fighting to stay part of. A quote from *Hunger Games* was popular, then some Pink Floyd lyrics. The anthem of this uprising is *Sing Hallelujah to the Lord*, a 1974 Christian song from America.

Technology allows the protesters to suddenly appear and suddenly disappear, ebb and flow — to "be water", in Bruce Lee's phrase.

The protesters have online votes about where to take their protest next. They use AirDrop to download subversive pamphlets into the phones of unsuspecting tourists from mainland China.

There's an amazing diversity of strategies. The accountants listen to speeches. The Christians sing. The radicals storm the subways.

Of course, the technology helps the Chinese government too. Years ago, we lived under the illusion that the nimble and decentralised swarms of New Power geeks would be more technologically savvy than the clunky, old power hierarchies. That's not true. China's Communist government seems to be more technologically advanced than the protesters.

There's a sense the government has the ability to surveil everything. Protesters spend enormous energy trying to go unseen. They don't use their normal subway cards for fear the State will be able to track their movements. Some protesters have been doxxed, with their private information and photos of their children splashed online. There's no pro-democracy graffiti in Hong Kong, no posters or T-shirts, no day-to-day sign that anything is happening. When they are not rallying, the protesters evaporate because even the light poles have eyes.

My guess is that if technology helps the protesters become 30 per cent more effective, it helps the State become 70 per cent more effective.

Many suspect that China will eventually crush these protests. They'll round up leaders and force businesses to fire participants. Many suspect America will never step in to help. The American right no longer believes in spreading democracy to foreigners. The American left embraces a national narrative that emphasises slavery and oppression, not that America is a beacon or an example. Neither party any longer sees America as a vanguard nation whose very mission is to advance universal democracy and human dignity.

But there's something stubborn about the Hong Kongers and deceptively powerful about their cause. Other protesters dreamed of freedom. These people have already lived it. It's part of their identity. They will prove more ferocious in defence of liberty than the sceptics imagine. Along the way they might rekindle the sense of democratic mission that used to burn so forcefully in American hearts.

NYT

HISTORY HEADLINE

United colours of a flag



MUZAMIL JALEEL

THE TAKING down of the Jammu and Kashmir flag from Srinagar's Secretariat building on August 25 formally completed the end of the state's special status, which entitled it to, among other things, a separate flag and a Constitution of its own.

In the exact words of the J&K Constitution, the state flag was "rectangular in shape and red in colour with three rectangular white vertical strips of equal width next to the staff and white plough in the middle with (its) handle facing the strips. The ratio of the length of the flag to its width shall be 3:2".

The three strips represented J&K's regions, Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh; and the plough the long struggle of the peasantry to free itself from the shackles of Dogra rule, which lasted 101 years.

The founder of the Dogra dynasty, Gulab Singh, had bought Kashmir, its land and people in 1846 from the East India Company for a meagre 75 lakh *Nanak Shahi* rupees (the currency of the Sikh empire) and an annual token of one horse, 12 shawls of goats of approved breed (six male, six female) and three pairs of Cashmere shawls, under a notorious sale deed called the Treaty of Amritsar. Gulab Singh had earlier been made the Raja of Jammu in 1822 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, as a reward for his services to the Sikh army that he had joined in 1809.

While the people's struggle against Dogra rule had substantial influence of the Left, because of the pre-eminence of the National Conference and its popular leader Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in it, the red in J&K's flag had a deeper significance. It alluded to the bloody event of July 13, 1931, when 21 Kashmiri protesters were killed by Dogra soldiers in Srinagar. There are accounts of bodies of the protesters being carried by a procession where "a blood-drenched shirt of a martyr was tied to a pole" and raised as a flag. The killings led to an uprising, and hastened the fall of the Dogra autocrats, while July 13 came to be observed as Martyrs' Day in J&K.

The J&K flag had another important but lesser-known aspect. In 1932, spearheading the movement against Dogra rule, Sheikh Abdullah had joined hands with Mirwaiz Yusuf Shah (Hurriyat leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq's grand-uncle) and influential Jammu leader Choudhary Ghulam Abbas to form the All J&K Muslim Conference. The party adopted a green flag with a crescent and a star, similar to the flag of the Muslim League.

But, as the divide between the Congress and Muslim League in the rest of India grew, fissures also appeared within the All J&K Muslim Conference. Sheikh Abdullah was influenced by Jawaharlal Nehru (a



J&K flag over Secretariat building, Srinagar. Sheikh Abdullah's condition while backing India was a J&K flag, that would in "no way rival" Tricolour. Shuaib Masoodi

Kashmiri Pandit), and consequently the Congress, as well as progressive leaders and the Kashmiri Pandit intelligentsia. Eventually, in 1939, Abdullah changed the name of the Muslim Conference to National Conference (NC), arguing that the movement against the Dogra autocrats had to be all-encompassing and secular.

The other two prominent leaders of the party, Mirwaiz and Abbas, didn't agree and parted ways. But, Abdullah's grip over Kashmir politics was so deep and strong that this major political and ideological shift didn't make a dent in his popularity in the Valley. However, in Jammu, the change in Abdullah's stance had devastating consequences. In November 1947, anti-Muslim riots broke out across Jammu in which tens of thousands (estimates vary from 70,000 to two lakh) people were killed and Muslims of the region displaced.

The Muslim Conference was then headquartered at Mujahid Manzil, and as soon as it became the NC on June 11, 1939, it adopted a new flag — a white plough on red. The idea came from two NC leaders. While Prem Nath Dhar suggested a red flag with a chinar leaf, Roop Lal Vakil sought the plough in place of the chinar leaf. This flag was called the National flag.

The conversion of the Muslim Conference, the first-ever political party of the majority Muslim population of J&K, into the NC brought the region's Hindu and Sikh population, especially Kashmiri Pandits, into the fold of the movement. Consequently, Abdullah and the NC rejected the two-nation theory and supported India against Pakistan during Partition. Abdullah also ensured that the elder Mirwaiz and Abbas were exiled to Pakistan, thus ending all opposition to his leadership within the

Muslim-majority J&K.

Abdullah's only condition while supporting India was that J&K would enjoy special status, and have its own Constitution, prime minister, an elected *sadre-riyasat* (president), and flag, and that the state's official language would be Urdu. Once Hari Singh had signed the Instrument of Accession with Abdullah's support, the J&K Constituent Assembly was convened in 1951, which adopted the state flag with a few modifications to the NC one. Providing a context to the flag, Sheikh Abdullah said, "... it was the 13th July 1931 when for the first time the people of Kashmir raised their voices against the system which had trampled upon their hopes and desires... the symbol of all the desires and aspirations of a country is its flag. The red colour represents the working classes. The prominent and salient symbol of a peasant is his plough and that is why the plough must form a part of the flag."

He also made it clear that J&K's flag is in "no way rival" to the Tricolour, "to which we continue our allegiance as a part of the Union and will occupy (a) supremely distinctive place in the state". Subsequently, the J&K flag always stayed subservient to the Tricolour. This is why separatists never attached any political or emotional value to it and for them it existed only as a relic of Abdullah's "betrayal" in 1939.

On August 5, 2019, when New Delhi unilaterally abrogated J&K's special status, the J&K flag too went down with it. It is unlikely to be hoisted any more. The pro-India political camp in Kashmir point to the irony in this: 80 years ago, the flag's creators had conceived it as a symbol of unity — across classes, and religions.

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OUT OF MY MIND



MEGHNAD DESAI

ARUN JAITLEY was a man for all seasons and a friend for hundreds he knew and helped.

Through a political and public life spread over 44 years from the Emergency to his retirement from Cabinet, he was a confidant of many, Narendra Modi perhaps being his longest political friend. Over the years, as politics in India changed from the hegemonic position of the

Jaitley, a politician like none other

Congress to its decline, while the Jana Sangh became the BJP and rose to pre-eminence, Arun not only had a ringside seat but his enormous talents as a lawyer, parliamentarian and a pivotal leader in the complex task of policy design across all questions facing the first BJP government with a majority, played a vital role often behind but lately in front of the curtain. It would severely exercise minds and memories to find another politician who can lay claim to such a status.

The story of the changeover from the Congress to the BJP from 1975 to 2014 will be told someday. It happened at first because of the draconian imposition of the Emergency. The incarceration of MPs, the bullying of Supreme Court judges, the

high-handed behaviour of an unelected son of the prime minister were an example of deep self-harm by the Congress. But for a young, fiery, idealistic president of the ABVP, it was an opportunity — to establish the image of his party as one fighting for freedom, to reverse the old criticism of the ruling party that the Hindu nationalists were a dangerous lot not to be trusted by the people, especially the Muslims. Tell that to the million Muslim men sterilised forcibly by Sanjay Gandhi.

Arun was the quintessential political professional who spoke with every side, every person seeking conversation. He was the person to go to for solving not just complex political questions but even one's private worries. In this, he was

somewhat like Atal Bihari Vajpayee who was Ajatshatru.

The last 20 years saw the full flowering of Arun's talents. Leading his party in the Rajya Sabha both in the Opposition and in power, his face became more publicly seen. His extraordinarily deep knowledge of the Constitution, of the working of Parliament and his mastery over the conduct of business could be admired. But it was his role in the Modi.1 government which was the full revelation of his ability to provide the hard wiring for the vision of Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas. The BJP had tried in its first term between 1999-2004 to demonstrate that it was a modern, technologically savvy party. But alas, the people of India voted them out.

In the 2014-2019 government, the BJP was able to establish and renew its popular position. It was not just a Hindu nationalist party but also a party which could modernise India and make it an economic success story. Each budget which Arun presented was a landmark, particularly when the Ayushman Bharat scheme was presented. It will last for decades as the best healthcare scheme starting with the deprived 40 per cent and spreading later its coverage to all. The GST lays down for the first time after 70 years of Independence the possibility of making India a single economic entity, a Common Market.

His departure leaves a huge gap in India's economy and polity.