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Interview

**Saddest story in Kashmir is Farooq, who was once promised the Vice-Presidency:
A.S. Dulat**



[Vidya Subrahmaniam](#)



Security personnel stand guard on the 13th day of curfew in Srinagar on Saturday, August 17, 2019. Photo: Nissar Ahmad / The Hindu.

*By an order of the President, issued on August 5, 2019, Jammu and Kashmir was stripped of its special status under Article 370, and downgraded from a full-fledged State to a Union Territory. The Valley was also placed under a lockdown that continues to this day. Amarjit Singh Dulat, former chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), and Special Adviser on Kashmir to Prime Minister, Atal Bibari Vajpayee, laments that more than the removal of the special status, which was at best a fig leaf, it was the manner in which it was done that has hurt and demeaned the Kashmiri people. In a free-wheeling interview with **Vidya Subrahmaniam, Senior Fellow at The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy**, Dulat expressed fears over the spiraling anger in Kashmir and the shape and form it could take once the lockdown is lifted. Dulat says he sees a likely parallel, not in the Emergency, but in the 1947 Partition, although he underlines that he hopes for the best and hopes he is proved wrong. He urges Delhi to 'talk and engage' with the Kashmiris and with Pakistan before things get out of control.*

In an interview to The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy as well as other media, you have consistently taken the position that Article 370, which gives Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) its special status, is a mere fig leaf, and those who ask to remove it do not understand the implications of doing so. Yet the Narendra Modi Government has gone ahead and removed the special status conferred by it. Has Article 370 which held no meaning even within Kashmir , been unnecessarily made an issue?

There was nothing in Article 370 and therefore it was best left alone. With its removal, I guess, it has become something to agitate about. The bigger question really is this: A very respected Kashmiri I know told me, 'maybe we should have expected this but what is really demeaning is that from enjoying a special status we have been reduced to a Union Territory. From where to where. This is very demeaning'. So that is what it is.

There was a time when the State Government set up an Autonomy committee whose aim was to give more autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir . We have the reverse of that now.

All this autonomy, I think the Kashmiris knew that it is not going to come. But from time to time it became important. If you remember, it was 2000 or so when the J&K assembly passed a resolution seeking restoration of autonomy¹ ,² Delhi was angry about it. Because Farooq (Farooq Abdullah, former Chief Minister of J&K and Chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference) had been telling Delhi not to worry. However, his point was that 'I have to fight an election in 2002 and

I must have something. We have always stood for autonomy. The NC stands for autonomy. What we are saying is that we have passed a resolution and we have sent it to Delhi. Please examine it, Why would you want to throw it into the dustbin like so much else has been thrown into the dustbin?' That was the issue at that point. Now coming to autonomy, I think if the Kashmiris (today) have to agitate at all seriously, as they were doing about autonomy, as seriously or more seriously actually, it must be for restoration of Statehood.



A.S. Dulat, former Special Director of the Intelligence Bureau, former chief of the Research and Analysis Wing from 1999 to 2000, and author of *The Spy Chronicles* during an interview to The Hindu in New Delhi. File photo: V.V. Krishnan

When you say autonomy, it's obviously within India and not Azadi.

Obviously. Azadi has always been out of the question. There is no question of Azadi . And every Kashmiri understood this except for a brief period between 1990 and 1992 when he thought

Pakistan will support the Kashmiris. But other than that every Kashmiri knows that there is no question of Azadi.

“Despite demanding Azadi, Kashmiris knew that they were going to get nothing. So ultimately it was about peace with honour, dignity, justice. Unfortunately, now everything is upside down.”

So what would have satisfied the Kashmiri?

I think Kashmiris have gradually come round to accepting the status quo. All they needed Delhi to talk about, and that is a term I repeatedly use, was not even autonomy, it was accommodation. The Kashmiri expects that if he is treated as part of the country, he should be treated like the rest of India. Why is he treated differently? That is the issue or that was the issue: ‘Ultimately we are going to get nothing. So let’s have peace with honour, dignity, justice.’ Those were the things that Delhi needed to talk about. Now everything is upside down. Now we have to see what will happen. But I anticipate that on the question of statehood there would be some protests, here, there, and in courts etc. If Delhi were to look at Kashmir a little more sympathetically, this would be a good way out. You’ve removed Ladakh and made it into a Union Territory, all right. You thought that was the best way to deal with the State. If that be so, J&K could remain a State.

What was the point of turning J&K into a UT? Why could it not have remained a State? Is it to keep the police under Delhi’s control?

This is to keep clipping their [Kashmiris] wings. Actually, there’s been a feeling (in sections of Kashmir) that it has always been a UT since Sheikh’s (Sheikh Abdullah, former Chief Minister of J&K and a member of the Constituent Assembly of India) arrest in August 1953. After that it has always been ...

Centrally administered? Or governed by proxy even when not under Governor’s Rule?

Yeah. Except for one exception. That was Farooq’s term from 1982 to 84, which lasted about a year and a half, till he was dismissed. Also some people talk highly of Sadiq Saab and Qasim Saab (former

Chief Minister Ghulam Mohamamd Sadiq and former Chief Minister Syed Mir Qasim). But ultimately in the Kashmiri mind everybody who was there, has been there, has functioned at Delhi's bidding. In that sense they say, 'eh UT tho hamesha hi thi, isme kya hai?' (Kashmir was always a UT, so what's new?) Lekin (however), the difference is, now you are rubbing it in. As I said about 370, what is the need, you are only rubbing the Kashmiri nose into the ground. Otherwise why would you want to do it?

Now with UT status, policing has come under the Centre.

Ask Arvind Kejriwal (Delhi Chief Minister). They have to find a Kejriwal now.

Every decision Kejriwal has taken has been vetoed by the Centre. Unless the Chief Minister of J&K is their own man, and says and does exactly what they want, the problem will continue, won't it?

There is a problem with their own man also. They have had so many of their men and they have had problems with all of them. So even your own man doesn't come up to your expectations.

“When we talk about reactions, we do not know what is going to happen. What the boys were doing in Srinagar, God alone knows where they will be doing henceforth.”

One of the problems in Kashmir which we never realised, because we look at everything in black and white, is that in Kashmir most things are grey. That grey we don't understand. Why is it not like this (snaps his fingers)? When we say it should be like this, it should be like this, no? What is this greyness all about? As Brajesh Mishra (Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's principal secretary and National Security Adviser) once told me, 'Dulal you go on talking about Kashmir. The only thing straight in Kashmir is the poplar tree.' There are endless stories on Kashmir. My only fear is that, the real fear is that, this (removal of special status and reduction to UT) will have reactions. I hope I'm absolutely wrong. Because when we talk about reactions, we do not know what is going to happen. When a new form of terrorism erupts, it tends to move outwards. So what the boys were doing in Srinagar, God alone knows where they will be doing (henceforth).

How does it make sense to detain Farooq Abdullah who was seen as following the Delhi line, seen even as a stooge?

Actually that is the saddest story in Kashmir. Of course, let me admit that that I'm a Farooq Abdullah fan, I have the highest respect for him. Having said that, Delhi has never tried to understand Farooq. Here is a man who has been Chief Minister thrice, who's been a Union Minister and who was promised at one stage the Vice-Presidency of India, and who might well have been the President of India today if luck had favoured him.

A Kashmiri Muslim? Perhaps in a different regime?

Why not? He may have been President instead of ..

Abdul Kalam?

No that was the time he was promised the Vice-Presidency. Vajpayee's Government had promised him the Vice-Presidency. I was serving in that Government and I'm witness to it. Farooq being Farooq doesn't talk about it now. But at that point of time, he was quite bitter. That Delhi was not sincere. But look at the other irony. Farooq has not even got a Padmashri all these years. Actually, he would have made an outstanding Foreign minister. But then for that you have to be trusted by Delhi. I think Delhi has treated him very shabbily.

He is not well at all.

He is not well. He is getting on in age. He is in his mid-80s. He has had a kidney transplant. And his heart is not in the best condition. He is also diabetic. He has multiple problems except that he is a gutsy guy.

But why detain him?

God knows why he has been detained. It makes no sense. I know for a fact, because I spoke to him, that he was supposed to go to London on August 8. His wife lives there and he goes to London

every summer to be with her. She comes here in the winter. I was told that he has again recently not been in the best of health and he was due an angiography on August 6 or 7, just after all this happened. I hope he is all right.

Starting 2014, Modi has been doing the unthinkable. The BJP formed a government with the People's Democratic Party (PDP) headed by Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and then by Mehbooba Mufti. It seemed as if they really wanted a solution to the problem. And then the party dumped Mehbooba. Now, four years later, they have arrested Mehbooba with whom they ran a government and who was their Chief Minister. From being joint Chief Minister to being put in jail, what a fall for her.

As you must be aware, the BJP-PDP alliance came about during Mufti Saab's time and Mufti was very keen on it and rightly so. His options were very limited. In a house of 87, he had 28 seats, the BJP was close behind with 25 seats. The others were down the ladder. It was the most obvious alliance. People criticised him for aligning with the BJP but he had no realistic option because he needed the numbers and he also needed Delhi on his side.

It didn't worry him that the alliance would alienate him in the Valley?

He didn't look at it that way. I have said this before. I think he underestimated the PM and overestimated himself. That's where the problems began.

One of the reasons cited by the BJP for breaking the alliance was that Mehbooba was dallying with extremist elements while being in alliance with the BJP. This was unacceptable to the BJP.

I think the story is slightly different. The story was that it was pre-empt versus pre-empt versus pre-empt. (laughs).

So Omar (former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah) and Mehbooba got together because they sensed the BJP was going to ditch her.

The story was that Delhi was keen to have Sajjad Lone as CM. Lone has been close to Delhi and then the PDP got wind of it. Omar and Mehbooba decided to pre-empt the BJP move by coming together. We don't know who proposed it. Must be Mehbooba because she was more desperate and together they had the numbers. And the story goes, they sent a message to Raj Bhavan and the Governor said his (fax) machine was not working. In Kashmir if a machine doesn't work, everything else can work (laughs). And so we had Governor's rule. And peculiarly Omar was one of the first to laud it. He said at this point of time there's no better solution for Kashmir. Technically he was right but I did say at the time that Governor's Rule must not be for more than six months. Then Governors become rulers and they don't like to leave. People get used to it and forget that there was a democratically elected Government or that there is a need for a democratic government. If you recall from 1990 to 96, we had Governor's rule in Kashmir. Three or four Governors came one after the other. It was only the genius of Narasimha Rao that realised that this will not do and the most important thing is to revive the democratic process. We must have elections. That is how the 1996 elections took place. That election was a masterstroke because it gave the separatists a shock, (because they didn't expect) to have another elected government. It was a setback to have an elected Government (that could defy them).

Why arrest Mehbooba and Omar? The even bigger irony in all this is the arrest of Sajjad Lone, isn't it?

Unlike Farooq, Omar and Mehbooba are young and can cope. As for Sajjad, he had to be kept somewhere. Everybody has been kept somewhere.

He was their own man. They could have got him to support the removal of the special status.

How could he have supported it? As a Kashmiri how can he support it? No Kashmiri can support it. Actually he is better off inside than outside. Outside he would have been branded an absolute traitor

apart from being a stooge. He will be a player when the political game begins again. As I think our friend Shah Faesal would be a player.

You think so?

I think so. It's time for the younger lot. I think the best way to do it is to (pick up from) August 4, when there was a so-called All- Party meeting before the shut down happened. I think when the shut down is lifted, all those parties and all those leaders need to meet again. And then decide what to do.

What to do about elections?

I don't think elections can happen so fast. First you have to lift the shut down which is obviously going to happen very gradually. Very carefully. Then you have to see the reactions. Also when you talk about a shut down, this is a government shut down. After this could follow a people's shut down.

“You can force people to close their shops but you can't force people to open their shops.”

From accounts emerging from the Valley, this is happening already.

That's exactly my point. So, we don't know what's going to happen. You can force people to close their shops but you can't force people to open their shops. That will require some doing. It is not the happiest situation to be in -- neither for Kashmiris nor for Delhi. It needs to be handled very tactfully and the only way, the only tact you can employ is to talk, to engage.

So far we haven't seen much tact. Over 7000 people have been detained. There are daily reports of protests and pellet injuries during protest and sustained even by by-standers.

Hopefully, a time will come or, hopefully, I will be proved a moron and proved wrong. Hopefully my fear (about spiraling Kashmiri anger) will turn out to be absolute rubbish. But something has to

happen, right? What I'm thinking, or what I always thought, was that the best way to deal with any problem, any people, is to engage with them even in the worst circumstances.

After all this, will people be in a mood to engage?

Obviously it will not be easy but we have done it in the past, as when we started talking to the militants or terrorists or people (of that persuasion). Their reaction was what is there to talk to you about? I used to say let's talk about talking.. let us sit across the table and talk about talking. So it requires some doing, you know.

So what was it that happened that Delhi had to take these steps.? You remove special status under 370 and Statehood and then invite people affected by it for talks?

I never took it (the threat to remove special status under 370) seriously as a lot of Kashmiris didn't take it seriously. But if you look at it the other way, it is part of their (BJP's) manifesto, it is part of their agenda, it was in the offing. Add to this this kind of thumping majority that leads to a bit of arrogance, and there's an inevitability about it. After all, they have to think about Nagpur (RSS Headquarters) also.

"I don't know whether Vajpayee would have recognised this BJP... today even he is persona non grata."

But the same BJP under Vajpayee took a different line.

That was a different BJP. This BJP doesn't recognise that BJP. I don't know whether Vajpayee would have recognised this BJP. I only knew Vajpayee's BJP. I saw that great man from close quarters.

Vajpayee made that iconic, immortal call to Insaniyat, Jhamooriyat, Kashmiriyat

Kashmiris still remember him and his words. If there is one Indian leader who is even these days loved in Kashmir it is Vajpayee.

Do you think what is happening in Kashmir goes beyond Kashmir, that it is part of the BJP's Hindutva project? Is this the muscular Indian state asserting itself nationally and internationally?

How do you say internationally?

“I personally feel that from India's point of view, Imran is the best person we can deal with now.”

Everyone is celebrating the fact that our diplomats did a splendid job in defending the Indian Government's moves. That they showed Pakistan its place. That internationally we have battled for Kashmir in a way that Pakistan could not. This is a spin of course. Modi's foreign trips are always projected as a success. To what extent have we scored internationally?

I do not know at all whether we scored internationally or not. But something which struck me before all this happened. I was in London then and I used to read the local papers there. I was still in London when Imran (Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan) went to Washington. The Pakistani version, although I heard the same thing from an Englishman as well, was that Imran's trip went off extremely well. I said good for him. I personally feel that from India's point of view, Imran is the best person we can deal with now. And the team of Bajwa (Pakistan's Army chief, General Qamar Bajwa) and Imran, now that Bajwa has got an extension, I think is the best team to deal with. People say that Imran is a stooge of the army, this and that. I think Imran is very much his own man. If he has a good equation with the Pakistani army so much the better. Because we know that without the army nothing functions in Pakistan. So if you have a Prime Minister with a great relationship with the army then that's the best we can have.

But India says Kashmir, more so in the context of Article 370, is an internal matter. This is a scaling down from our position that it is a bilateral matter.

We have said it is bilateral and we have also somewhere referred to the Simla Agreement and said that (if needed) we will go back to the Simla Agreement.

But Amit Shah has said it is an internal matter and Pakistan has nothing to do with it.

I think at the diplomatic level the position is that it is a bilateral matter and if necessary we will go back and reopen the Simla Agreement. But coming to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), it is confirmed that both PMs are going there. It is also confirmed that Imran will speak before Modi. I am sure Trump (United States President Donald Trump) has something to do with all this. He is not just saying I will mediate because at the UNGA he will be the big dad. Let's see what happens. (Since this interview was recorded, Modi has met Trump and reasserted India's position that Kashmir is a bilateral issue and India does not need third-party intervention).

Then there is the thing about PoK. (Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) Amit Shah spoke of taking it back. TV channels are also talking about taking PoK back. One of them aired a show headlined, 'Is it time for us to take back Pok?' As if TV panellists can sit together and annexe it. Obviously it is just a lot of rhetoric, isn't it?

Let it remain a rhetoric. If there is a solution, if there ever was a solution, everybody knows that solution lies in the Line of control (LoC), what General Musharraf (Pervez Musharraf, former President of Pakistan and former Chief of Army Staff) and Dr. Manmohan Singh agreed to but did not sign.

Do you know why they couldn't go through with it?

Too much time was taken. There was a window of opportunity between 2006-2007. It did not happen in that period for whatever reason, some people say it was because of the Congress party, some people blame Sonia (Gandhi) for it. There is no evidence but the fact of the matter is, it took a lot of time. Maybe there were some sticking points. The other side of the story is that Musharraf kept waiting for Dr. Singh to go to Pakistan to sign the agreement but he could never go to Pakistan.

Was this because of domestic pressure?

Yes of course. Dr. Singh is such a good man and I don't know if it is his fault at all. He was under so much pressure from his own party. His own people. (Significantly) this is (agreement on LoC) exactly the same thing that Farooq has been saying. I've been hearing it from him for more than 30 years. There was a time when he used to say, 'we should go and blast Pakistan, destroy their camps' etc. But when it came to a settlement, he always said that the only settlement possible is on the LoC. And that is what Musharraf had agreed to in his four-point formula. Plus a little bit of cosmetics. ...

Would Vajpayee have accepted something like that?

I'm sure he would have. May not have been the same four points of Musharraf. I think even Dr. Singh may not have been willing to accept all the four points.

Can we go over the four points?

Broadly it consisted of a settlement on the LOC: gradual withdrawal of troops, open border which would make going and coming easier, trade between the two Kashmirs and also autonomy and home rule on both sides.

According to a Wikileaks cable cited by a September 3, 2011 Times of India report, Manmohan Singh told a United States delegation that met him in April 2009 that Delhi and Islamabad had made great progress (on the four-point formula) prior to February 2007 but that Musharraf ran into trouble ³.

If Musharraf ran into trouble, why did we wait till that happened? Why wasn't the agreement concluded before it reached that point? We are talking about 2006-2007, much before even the Mumbai 2008 terror attack. That was the perfect time to do it.

After that there was no question that we could have agreed to anything

After Mumbai we had excuses. Before that the excuses were very vague.

Did you hear Prime Minister Modi's August 15 speech? Did you think there was a reaching out to Kashmiris?

People say he reached out

But Kashmir could not hear him say that because of the lockdown. Also what kind of a reaching out without the elected government?

Maybe it was not meant for them (Kashmiris). But people say there was a reaching out. Let me take you back to 2014. A lot of things started at that time. If you remember that was the time Arun Jaitley (the late Union Defence and Finance Minister) went to Srinagar and spoke about Mission 44: 'We are going to win 44 seats and we are going to form the government'. At that time there was talk, and naturally so, that if the BJP formed a government, there would be a Hindu Chief Minister. But getting 44 seats was easier said than done. The arithmetic of J&K was such – now of course it can be changed through delimitation -- that the Valley always had predominance over the rest of the state.

Now if there's delimitation of J&K, do you envisage a Hindu CM?

No, not immediately. That will lead to more problems. As you know, polarisation has grown since 2008. It started then with the fight over the Amarnath land use issue and it never fully piped down. That polarisation has grown since then. Mufti Saab when he decided to align with the BJP understood all this. That is why he called it an alliance between the North pole and the South pole.

You said that Kashmiris know that Pakistan is not an option. Do you think that feeling might have changed in the new circumstances?

No, Pakistan is not an option even now. There could be some Kashmiris who feel so. Kashmiris who have relatives in Pakistan, who have a part of their families in Pakistan. You know what

happened at the time of Partition. Families got divided. If because of that (lingering feeling) some Kashmiris decide to go to Pakistan and are accepted there, that's a different thing.

I didn't mean that it will happen. But in the context of what's happened, the sense of humiliation in the Valley over the downsizing of the state, could that anger translate into a feeling of longing, wishful thinking?

I don't think so. It's like this. It's a strange kind of thing and it's difficult to explain because Pakistan had been so obsessive about Kashmir and Kashmiris had also been looking to Pakistan. But over the years, the Kashmiri has lost faith in Pakistan. And Pakistan has also lost interest in Kashmir. Pakistan had begun to realise, during Mushrraf's time, that they had lost out in Kashmir. And it is time to settle. I don't think that position has changed very much. That position remains the same. If since then Pakistan has made a slight come back, it's only due to what happened post-July 2016. Do you remember 2016, the time of Burhan Wani's killing, and what is referred to as the BJP's muscular policy in that period? That angered the Kashmiris, particularly the youth in the South. That allowed Pakistan to again come back via the Lashkar, Jaish (Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad) and so on.

Now diplomatically they seem to have got a new lease of life.

Diplomacy is another thing. We have to wait and watch. I think this time the UNGA will be interesting to watch.

India is celebrating its 'victory' over Kashmir. This kind of mass celebration, what is it about? Is this happening because this is majority thinking. Are people drawing sanction from the government's muscular policy?

The rejoicing is obviously about Hindutva, if Hindutva is dominating. Hindutva won the BJP the (2014 and 2019) elections and so there are celebrations. There are lots of people celebrating. Actually one shouldn't only blame Hindutva. It goes back in time. People have been saying for a long time now, 'why does Kashmir enjoy a special status?' This kind of talk has been happening. But

nobody gave expression to it in action before this government. Therefore there's celebration now. Most of India also thinks that this is the best government.

We saw what happened during the Emergency when political leaders across the country were picked up and fundamental rights were suspended. Do you see any parallels between the two situations?

My fear is that, more than a comparison with the Emergency, the situation today compares with the Partition of the country. We like to look at Kashmiris and Indians as separate entities, and yet there were great friendships between the two. So how will this play out in the course of time? Like I said about Farooq... I didn't see the video clip where he was seen crying, but I saw his photograph pleading for help and to see him in that sort of a state ... Here's a man with the largest heart, who has always helped anybody who needed help, and now he's pleading for help and not one person has said one word in his favour. Isn't that sad?

Yes it is very sad. No one has mentioned him.

I'm saying again, Farooq is a great man. He is by far the tallest of Kashmiri leaders who has stood by India. Not only here, you'd recall he went to the United Nations along with Vajpayee and supported India's cause. And between Vajpayee and Farooq they won the day for India.

But today even Vajpayee is persona non grata.

To go back to the Emergency comparison..

Emergency was a different thing. Here we have come back to the old Hindu-Muslim thing. That in a sense is reminiscent more of Partition. Again I hope and pray that nothing like that happens. Hope people go to Kashmir out of the same kind of love they had before and not to grab land. I hope they go and play golf, go and enjoy their summer vacation. But we don't know what the reaction is going to be. I fear most about what the reaction is going to be. Delhi is pretty confident and I hope Delhi is right: 'A little bit here and there but we will not allow the situation to get out of control.' But then I also think, how long are you going to keep the people locked up?

“Trump is Trump. He is already saying it is a Hindu-Muslim issue and I’m saying I’m apprehending it.”

Trump has also said that he sees Kashmir as a Hindu-Muslim issue.

Trump is Trump. He is already saying it and I’m saying I’m apprehending it. Some years ago, Jaswant Singh was interviewed by Karan Thapar. And Jaswant said 'the trouble with Partition is we don't know how many times we can have it.' Yes, that's what it is. We are still proud of being a secular nation but unfortunately we are doing things that are the opposite.

As we discussed earlier, some kind of people's curfew seems to have started. People are keeping shops shut and not sending children to school. 'You have decided that everything is normal but we have decided that it is not.'

That is the flip side of it. Firstly you don't want to release anybody in a hurry. Then you'll have a situation where the Kashmiri doesn't want to be released as a mark of protest. (Laughs) 'Why should I open my shop? For what? There are no tourists here anyway. There are no buyers.'

Isn't this lockdown unprecedented? What does your experience say?

Yes never before. And here's where the complication lies. On the one hand, you are confident that everything is hunky dory and everything is under control. On the other hand, you cannot still let anybody out after more than a fortnight.

Where do you see all this going?

Very difficult to say where it is headed but I fear that there will be a reaction. Let's hope before the reaction gets out of control, we start talking, we start engaging.

Engaging with whom? They are all under arrest.

As you start letting them out or even before you start letting them out. There's no ban on the government meeting or talking to Mehbooba or Omar. You can still talk if you want to talk. We

talked in the 90s with the separatists, they were only let out in 1993. For three years we were talking to them when they were in jail. It is easier to talk when the other person is restricted. I'm not worried about the mainstream leaders or the separatists. The scary part is the youngsters who have been blowing themselves up. After all, one of our own boys did Pulwama. If somebody can do that, try and think ..

A commentator said sometime ago, at the time of Burhan Wani, that now the boys have no fear of death.

Exactly. You can have the best of intelligence, the best of security but if somebody goes mad and is prepared to die, then what can you do? After 9/11 in America, we have seen attacks in Britain, we've seen attacks all over Europe and in other parts of the world for so long. The Americans thought that since we have got rid of Osama bin Laden, the Al Queda is over. That terrorism is over. What difference did it make? Osama was only a name.

So one has to keep one's fingers crossed and hope for the best. And my only plea to Delhi is, please talk. And this is also a very good time, I think, to talk to Pakistan.

Ever since Imran became Prime Minister he had been making conciliatory noises. It is only now that he has really hardened his stand.

Yes, yes, now he has started [sounding tough]. But I think we can go back to the conciliatory Imran. Let's go back to that Imran. And if Delhi can't do it send Sidhu. (Navjot Singh Sidhu, former Punjab minister and sitting MLA) When Sidhu came back after that hug in Lahore, he made the most remarkable statement. I heard him say it at the Kasauli Lit Fest in last October. 'Tihettar saal baad ek Farishta aaya hai, mera yaar Imran Khan' (after 73 years, an angel has come, my friend Imran Khan).

He got roasted for that

I don't know why, the Congress party, in contrast to the BJP ... Of course BJP is in command and control – but there is still a Congress party. But it is either doing nothing or doing it in slow motion.

Where is the Congress? Whatever is there is divided. The BJP is clear ideologically and it has guts

I think Madam (Sonia Gandhi) should make a difference once she starts working on it. Like Omar Abdullah said once, what we need is an Opposition to the BJP, not a B Team of the BJP.

Now every Opposition party is a B Team

See five years is a long time. My theory has been, and I have seen this for a long time, that every Prime Minister is tested with a crisis. Modi ji has been lucky,

There has been crisis after crisis. Economic slowdown, Demonetisation

No, no. Nothing very serious so far. Vajpayee had many. After Kargil, Agra summit failed and then there was the attack on Parliament, the hijacking of Air-India plane. These are the tests. Dr. Manmohan Singh had 26/11. These are big tests. Modi's test when it came, it helped him and that was Pulwama. You have to be big and have luck. Vajpayee was very big but luck and time ran out on him.

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