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## Issue Brief

# The First Political Dissent in Indian Occupied Kashmir

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On September 9, 2016, the former Deputy Chief Minister, Muzaffar Husain Baig from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK), spilled out his dissent in the open against the faltering government of Mehbooba Mufti. PDP is in alliance with the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). According to Baig, "We have not been able to deliver at the ground level according to the agenda of governance, which makes the cadre of the party disgruntled."<sup>1</sup> Baig, a senior party leader of PDP and a Lok Sabha MP from Baramullah asserted on the resignation of Mehbooba. Similarly, Tariq Hamid Karra, the General Secretary and a founding member of the PDP, while submitting his resignation on September 15, 2016, referred to PDP-BJP coalition as an "unnatural alliance". He termed the turnaround in Mehbooba's policies, contrary to the wishes of the people of Kashmir, as much worse treatment of her people than the Nazi forces of the Jews in Germany. "I feel still continuing with them would be equally subscribing to their administratively inhuman and politically unethical blunders,"<sup>2</sup> said Karra while addressing media persons at his Shivpora residence to announce his resignation.

In 2015, Baig along with Tariq Hamid, had refused to attend the meeting called by PDP President, Mehbooba Mufti, to get a feedback from all party office-bearers on the performance of the government and alliance with the completely ideologically divergent BJP. The meeting was held amidst the resentful ties between the two.

Earlier, in February 2016, the failure of PDP and its alliance with BJP got a strong response from the National Congress (NC) Provincial President Devender Singh Rana who said, "the high moral grandstanding on the so-called 'Agenda of Alliance' is just a facade and misleading tactic to divert the attention of the people from real problem ... PDP will have to explain nearly one-and-a-half months melodrama leading to political stalemate."<sup>3</sup>

The BJP-PDP coalition in IOK had emerged after months of negotiations between the two diametrically deviating political parties following the elections held in December 2014. PDP was able to win 28 seats and BJP 25, but none of them could capture the majority in an 87-member assembly. There remained a deadlock between the two on alliance and a governor's rule was imposed on January 9, 2015. The meeting of Mehbooba with Prime Minister Modi on March 23, re-stitched the atypical alliance.

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<sup>1</sup> Liz Mathew, Mir Ehsan, "PDP Muzaffar Hussain speaks out, says government has failed to deliver", *The Indian Express*, September 9, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> "PDP MLA Tariq Karra resigns", *Kashmir Observer*, September 15, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> "NC says PDP's inner crisis delays government formation", *United News of India*, February 16, 2016.

What drove this sudden twist in PDP's stance at the vulnerable times of BJP when it had lost elections in Delhi and had imposed a governor's rule in IOK, is vital to investigate in order to know its future.

PDP issued 11 proposals to BJP. Prominent among them were:

- a) Normalisation of relations with Pakistan,
- b) Talks with Hurriyat,
- c) Removal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act within one year,
- d) No falsification/erosion of Article 370 of the Indian constitution,
- e) Return of power projects <sup>4</sup>

PDP appreciates Pakistan's positive role in IOK and recognises Pakistan's support for Kashmiris right of self-determination. Mufti Mohammad Saeed, ex-Chief Minister of IOK and father of Mehmooda Mufti soon after the elections said, "I want to say this on record and I have told this to the Prime Minister (also) that we must credit Hurriyat, Pakistan, militant outfits for the conduct of assembly elections". This brought the first rift between PDP and BJP.

The 'Agenda of Alliance' refers to the commitment of the Union Government to "create a reconciliatory environment and bring stakes for all in the peace and development within the Sub-continent". <sup>5</sup> To assume the normalisation of relationship under the circumstances seems at a considerable distance for BJP. The backtracking of the BJP's commitment is undesirable for those who had committed themselves to the original policies of PDP. The inopportune history of relationship between Pakistan and India and a stubborn stand of BJP is deplorable for the members of PDP. BJP had agreed to the reconciliation process only to strike the alliance with PDP.

Although PDP dwells on the ideology of self-rule, it believes in the empowerment of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, along with the territoriality of Jammu and Kashmir. During the election campaign of December 2014, BJP had promised the voters from Jammu to ensure the rights of citizenship for those who had migrated to Jammu & Kashmir in 1947, 1965 and 1971, which is contrary to State Subject Law and Article 370.

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<sup>4</sup> Betwa Sharma, " PDP-BJP coalition forms government in Jammu & Kashmir", *The Huffington Post*, July 15, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Gawhar Geelani, PDP-BJP rift over Mufti Sayeed's remarks crediting Pakistan", *Dawn*, March 2, 2015.

Abrogation of Article 370 is cardinal to BJP's manifesto since it considers the Article a barrier to the "full integration of the people of Jammu and Kashmir into the national mainstream". BJP's stance on Article 370 is inflexible, though it compromised with the PDP's version. However, resettlements of Kashmiri Pundits and gated colonies for the retired armed personnel would further facilitate the popularity of BJP and its philosophy of *Hindutva* by reshaping both the demography and *Kashmiriyat* of Jammu & Kashmir. It is a practical divergence from the original commitment and falsification of the agreement on the Article. The PDP members have shown resentment on this duplicity.

BJP and PDP have failed to build confidence in the "North Pole and South Pole" alliance and Kashmir is simmering in the back drop of human rights violations since July 2016. The killing of Burhan Wani, a twenty two year old freedom fighter followed by a painstaking indigenous resistance movement, has reasserted the desire of the people of Jammu & Kashmir for freedom. So far 110 people have been killed, more than 1000 blinded and several injured in the curfew ridden state of Kashmir. The tortures of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) are borne valiantly. There seems no signs of the withdrawal of AFSPA as demanded by both human rights activists in India and Kashmiris, however, it was compromised upon by the negotiators of PDP with BJP.

Hurriyat leaders Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, Syed Ali Shah Gilaani and JKLF leaders called the role of Mehbooba Mufti as "role of obfuscation", and refused to engage in any Track Two diplomacy with them.

In an embattled zone, where a whole generation is shaped by the conflict and are identified with conflict, the trust deficit between the ruler and ruled is unnerving. BJP government has come brutally on Kashmiris. This itself is preparing grounds for rebellion and fueling further strife while turning it into a blame game on the one hand, and on the other, into a vicious cycle of insurgency and counter-insurgency. Sitting on a hot seat, how would Mehbooba Mufti justify her mandate and coalition both, under the current wave of BJP's atrocities in IOK? Historically, PDP is seen as a pro-Kashmiri party peddling a "soft separatism" and working on reconciliation with Pakistan. Rooted in the people's genuine desire for self-determination and rejection of the illegal Indian control of the region, which remained a hallmark of Indian leaders since generations, the role of Mehbooba Mufti would be defining for the fate of PDP in future. Starting from an acrimony and then entering into an uneasy espousal with BJP, rising dissents in her own party are making Mehbooba to tread on a tight rope. The dissents have an inherent ingredient of domino effect. Power is a very potent clue, understandably. However, would she stay glued to the power or return to the original cause of representing and winning the hearts and soul of Kashmiris, is a question waiting for an answer.