

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

Muslim separatist launches new party

Communal politicking has led to incidents of violence in Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, and other parts of India.

The Indian central government finally acted to remove G. M. Shah as chief minister of the Muslim-minority state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is claimed by Pakistan. One day after his ouster, Shah amply confirmed the view held here that the Indian government's move had been none too soon. Shah glibly declared to the press that secularism was outmoded, and announced his intention to float a new Muslim communal party.

While the move is certainly a measure of Shah's own personal political desperation, it is also a pointer to certain trends in the wake of the Shah Bana verdict concerning divorced Muslim women (see this column, April 4, 1986). A wave of activism has swept the Muslim community. This activity is not necessarily all communalist, but it does present a fertile ground for dangerous political manipulations, whether directed from home or abroad.

G. M. Shah had been installed in the sensitive border state in a dubious July 1984 operation in which the ruling Congress party overthrew the state government led by Dr. Farooq Abdullah and the National Conference.

Though at the time the charge of pandering to "anti-national" and communal elements was laid at Farooq's doorstep, it took less than a year for Shah to prove himself more deserving. It is well known that pro-Pakistan sentiment is wide and deep among the Muslim majority population of the state, many of whom refer to India as a "foreign" land. But early this year, as a direct result of the former chief minister's manipulations, tension be-

tween the Muslims and the state's tiny Hindu community exploded into the first communal bloodbath in the state's history.

In December 1984, after less than six months in office, Shah called a public rally to announce the release from prison of one Syed Ali Shah Gilani, a kingpin in the pro-Pakistan, secessionist Jammata-i-Islami organization. A fundamentalist campaigning against Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India, Gilani predictably issued a call for Muslims to boycott the imminent parliamentary elections, a gambit Shah had calculated to result in an electoral victory for his splinter factor.

As it happened, the gambit failed and Shah's candidate was trounced. But it was three more months before Shah was finally forced to arrest Gilani again, and bust up his secessionist organizing. Gilani had been touring the state, holding cadre schools and eulogies for Maqbool Butt, a leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), hanged for hijacking an Indian Airlines plane several years ago.

Numerous such incidents followed over the next year, including one which drew attention in parliament in late November 1985. It seemed the Honorable Chief Minister had sought a regular visa and extension for a JKLF activist, a Pakistani national resident in London who had illegally entered Jammu and Kashmir and was sojourning in a border town, where Pakistani and Indian troops face each other.

Moreover, throughout the year, ongoing law-enforcement operations against the Khalistani terrorists repeatedly led to Jammu and Kashmir as the principal conduit for Pakistani support of the secessionists. The arrest of Mithubain Singh and the so-called Saffron Tigers, an extremist cell operating among Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Delhi, and another JKLF cell—al-Jihad—in late 1985 are indicative. Meanwhile, communal politicking has led to anti-national incidents in other parts of the country, most recently in the southern state of Kerala. The large Muslim population there has enjoyed a relationship with the Gulf countries that has made the state an entry point for Arab world intrigues.

Of concern recently was the state government's playing host to two Kuwaiti nationals whose entry into India had been banned by the central government. The two men landed in Trivandrum from Abu Dhabi as part of a delegation headed by a top UAE official.

But unlike the rest of the delegation, the two Kuwaitis—the president of the World Muslim Minorities Brotherhood and his brother—had no travel papers. In fact, the Indian Home Ministry had issued a circular that these individuals were not to be allowed entry in India under any condition, even if they presented valid papers. They are, the Home Ministry stated, vitriolic haters of India who have traveled around the world spreading the lie that Muslims are butchered in India. Their organization has been funneling money into India for a campaign to "Islamicize" the country.

The Home Ministry's orders were apparently overridden by several members of the Muslim League in the state's government, who claimed the delegation was entertained at state expense "on good faith." It was later speculated that as much as \$6 million and smuggled gold bars were distributed by the two illegals.