

PUBLIC? SAFETY?

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Indian Constitution - Features & Significant Provisions related to The Preamble, Union & its Territories and The Citizenship

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The government's decision to wield the Public Safety Act (PSA) against former Jammu & Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah beggars belief. How the National Conference leader, Lok Sabha member from Srinagar constituency, former Rajya Sabha member and former Union Minister for Renewable Energy turned into a case for a law used against terrorists, that too while he was in detention for five weeks, should be for the Centre to explain. Just two days prior to his August 5 house arrest under preventive sections of the CrPc, Abdullah and his son Omar, also a former chief minister, met Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) at his home along with a National Conference delegation. After all this, the application of the PSA on Abdullah, hours before the Supreme Court was due to hear a habeas corpus petition for his production filed by MDMK leader and Rajya Sabha member Vaiko, says more about the government than about a man who was the face of moderate politics in Kashmir, apart from being the standard bearer for India on the Kashmir issue.

Abdullah — and his son Omar — may have many a question to answer when it comes to their record of governance in the state but not the question of fealty to the Indian Constitution. Indeed, 25 years ago, during the height of Pakistan-sponsored militancy in Kashmir, it was Abdullah that the Centre fielded to defend India against allegations of human rights violations in the Valley. He also risked his life and political future by going along with the Centre's push for Assembly elections in 1996, winning the election that saw a good turnout despite a boycott call by the Hurriyat. His six-year term was a period in which militancy gradually decreased to virtual irrelevance by 2002. It is ironic that as India faces a fresh round of international concern and allegations for its arbitrary detentions and communications blockade in the Valley, the same leader who, despite some faux pas, acted as a reliable bridge between Kashmir and the Centre, has now been detained under a law that does not require him to be produced before a court for up to two years. It is astonishing that the Court accepted this without question.

Since August 5, when the government abrogated the state's special status, split it into two Union Territories, picked up hundreds, and imposed a lockdown, all has been justified in the name of keeping the peace. A full 43 days have passed. It is not just odd, it is a matter of increasing concern that the government appears to have made little progress on a plan of engaging with the Kashmiri people other than through saturation security presence, arbitrary arrests, a communication blockade and now using a draconian act against a key political leader.

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