

EXPRESS NETWORK

Foreign minister, most accessible

Minister who helped Indians in distress, played perfect foil to a visible PM

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 6

IN JUNE 2016, a Twitter user tweeted to then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj that he had been sold a defective refrigerator that went kaput. She replied, on Twitter: “Brother I cannot help you in matters of a Refrigerator. I am very busy with human beings in distress.”

That was Swaraj, who had by then earned a formidable reputation in helping overseas Indians in distress; the External Affairs Minister who brought a humane touch to the otherwise distant and officious Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

Within months of taking charge, Swaraj made sure that the ministry was a responsive government institution. A system, thus, was put in place where she would respond to distress tweets from Indians stranded across the world.

“Indian Embassy is your home away from home. Whenever in trouble, please contact the Indian Embassy/Consulate. They will always help you,” she told this to many — in person, and on Twitter.

During her five years as External Affairs Minister, Swaraj made sure that she left a legacy of being a responsive minister — she once responded to distress tweets at 3 am, which became a benchmark of sorts for Indian embassies worldwide.

Handpicked by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to lead the MEA, Swaraj could have fretted and sulked since Modi made foreign policy his priority in his first term. But she was able to make her own space skillfully.

India has had a history of Prime Ministers with very strong foreign policy agenda. From Jawaharlal Nehru, who was his own foreign minister, Indira Gandhi, P V Narasimha Rao, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh, to Narendra Modi, all these leaders ran the MEA through the PMO. But undeterred, Swaraj made a mark by using social media, and made South Block accessible.

From rescuing hearing and speech-impaired Geeta from Pakistan to organising mass evacuation from Iraq, Yemen, Nepal, among other conflict-hit areas, and from pushing the Kulbhushan Jadhav case to getting Indian national Hamid Ansari back, Swaraj endeared herself to ordinary Indians.

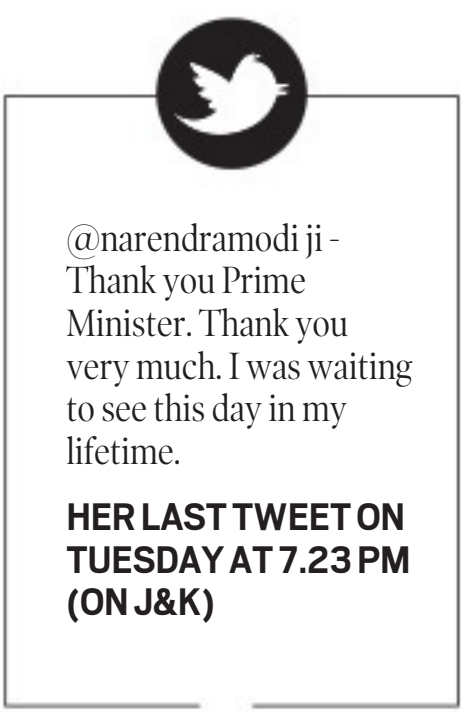
While her people-friendly image was for Indians, she played the perfect foil for the visible Prime Minister — understated, subtle, not in-your-face.

She always prepared the groundwork for Modi’s high-level visits — from her visit to Pakistan in December 2015, which was followed by Modi’s; her visit to China in 2018, setting the stage for the informal Wuhan summit; and effectively standing in for the United Nations General Assembly sessions every September-October to put across India’s point of view.

Gifted with oratory skills, both in chaste Hindi and English, she made life easy for Indian diplomats prepping for visits. “Remembering our 2 AM session with #SushmaSwaraj in Abu Dhabi on March 1. She was to



With former US President Barack Obama . *File*



@narendramodiji - Thank you Prime Minister. Thank you very much. I was waiting to see this day in my lifetime.

HER LAST TWEET ON TUESDAY AT 7.23 PM (ON J&K)

speak the next morning as Guest of Honour at OIC Foreign Ministers’ Conference. Arrived after midnight, plunged straight into work, got a bit of rest and delivered a truly memorable address,” Indian envoy to the UAE, Navdeep Suri, tweeted.

While she kept a distance from the media during her stint as the External Affairs Minister, Swaraj hosted an annual winter lunch, with Indian cuisine and cultural performance on the lawns of Jawaharlal Nehru Bhavan, and during which she easily mingled with journalists, appreciating work of even those not very charitable to her.

Although she used Twitter to help people, she also had some moments where she faced criticism for handling of issues.

Once, when a doormat depicting the Indian flag sold by a third-party reseller in Canada caught her attention, she demanded a public apology from Amazon and threatened to rescind Indian visas for Amazon employees.

Even though she was embroiled in the Lalit Modi controversy, there was a point when one discovered how her relationships cut across party lines. In June-July 2015, she also got a lot of flak for helping fugitive Lalit Modi get travel documents. But while she got criticism from all across, Opposition leaders had such respect for her that in Parliament they stopped short of asking for her resignation.

At the French National Day in July 2015, asked why the Opposition was not seeking her resignation, one Opposition leader said, “She is one of our old socialist friends.”

While she won over her rivals that day, over the last five years she possibly won the hearts of many she helped and came across as someone who was the “People’s Foreign Minister”.



(Clockwise from top) Sushma Swaraj; with BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi; with L K Advani; and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. *Express Archive*

She suffered heart attack at home, was rushed to AIIMS

MALLICA JOSHI & AMIL BHATNAGAR
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 6

SENIOR BJP leader and former External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj died at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Tuesday night. She was 67.

Swaraj, who suffered a heart attack and collapsed at her home on Jantar Mantar Road, was brought to the hospital at 9.35 pm. According to the AIIMS statement, a team of doctors performed CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) for around 70-80 minutes. She

was declared dead at 10.50 pm.

Cutting across party lines, several senior leaders reached the hospital amid heavy security. Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, BJP working president J P Nadda, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal and Congress MP Ghulam Nabi Azad were among those present.

“I am in shock. We have lost a very tall leader,” said Prasad, adding that he had spoken to her last week, after the triple talaq Bill was passed in Parliament. “She was an able leader, a brilliant administrator, a phenomenal ora-



tor and a wonderful teacher. I have no words,” he said. Azad said he had shared a cordial relationship with Swaraj, despite their ideological and political differences. “She was a wonderful person and a good politician. I have lost a sister today,” he said. “Sushmaji was always dedicated to the nation. She showed how to conduct oneself in politics while serving the nation to the fullest,” said Nadda.

In 2016, Swaraj underwent a kidney transplant at AIIMS in a nearly six-hour-long surgery. She is survived by her husband Swaraj Kaushal and daughter Bansuri.

FROM PAGE ONE



Outside AIIMS on Tuesday night. *Tashi Tobgyal*

just ahead of the 1998 assembly elections. The sky-rocketing onion prices, however, put paid to BJP hopes in the state as the Congress won the elections and Sheila Dikshit replaced her, only to continue for the next 15 years. But Swaraj did not lose heart. She jumped into the electoral

‘PEOPLE’S MINISTER’



Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, Congress MP Ghulam Nabi Azad and BJP leader Shahnawaz Hussain outside AIIMS on Tuesday. *Mallica Joshi*

A glorious chapter in Indian politics comes to an end. India grieves the demise of a remarkable leader who devoted her life to public service and bettering lives of the poor. Sushma Swaraj ji was one of her kind, who was a source of inspiration for crores of people.

NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER

She left an imprint in Indian politics as a fierce orator, a disciplined worker, popular representative and a sincere minister.

AMIT SHAH, HOME MINISTER & BJP PRESIDENT

She was a seasoned Parliamentarian and widely respected, cutting across party lines. Her demise is a monumental loss for us. Sushmaji rose through the ranks to become the External Affairs Minister...She introduced a new sensitivity and sensibility in the functioning of the MEA. She was known as the People’s Minister... Her contribution to the nation and the party will always be remembered.

RAJNATH SINGH, DEFENCE MINISTER

Difficult to accept this news. The whole nation grieves, the Foreign Ministry even more so.

S JAISHANKAR, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER

An extraordinary political leader, a gifted orator & an exceptional Parliamentarian, with friendships across party lines.

RAHUL GANDHI, CONGRESS

I knew her since the 1990s. Even though our ideologies differed, we shared many cordial times in Parliament. An outstanding politician, leader, good human being.

MAMATA BANERJEE, WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

She served her party and the country with loyalty, devotion and distinction.

P CHIDAMBARAM, CONGRESS

An astute parliamentarian, an effective orator & an excellent humane leader... Hers was a story of hard work to heights.

PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER PRESIDENT

Sushma Swaraj no more

Starting her political career under the Janata Party, Swaraj was elected to the Haryana assembly in 1977 and became a state minister at age 25. She was again elected to the assembly in 1987 when Devi Lal ousted the Congress from power that triggered an electoral cascade which eventually saw the Congress lose power at the Centre in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections.

She came into national limelight because of her ideologically fierce oratory in Lok Sabha, especially during the 1996 trust vote. Her political articulation, drawn from India’s mythological traditions, endeared her to the common man who could grasp her arguments.

Her career was an inspiration for many a woman politician —

she graduated from student politics to state politics to national politics and became an icon. Her rise within the BJP, considered a party of conservatives, was testimony to her political acumen, courage and mass appeal.

At the end of a long innings, she opted out of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and was left out of the new Cabinet. She remained politically senior to every important position-holder in the current BJP government. She was part of Vajpayee’s 13-day government in 1996.

A disciplined party worker, Swaraj was politically combative, never hesitating to wage a good battle for the sake of the party. She displayed this when the party deputed her to Delhi as its first woman Chief Minister

fray against Congress president Sonia Gandhi, heading to Bellary in Karnataka during the 1999 Lok Sabha elections. She learnt a smattering of Kannada to connect with Bellary, forcing a keen contest. She lost narrowly, by a margin of less than 60,000 votes. Groomed by party patriarch

This happened after the CJI asked Jain to confine his arguments to the civil dispute and told him that he could skip reading what was not necessary. This prompted Dhavan to say that he hoped there would not be any curtailment of arguments.

The CJI replied that Dhavan would get his chance and asked him “do you have any doubt”?

Dhavan answered that he was only answering the question put to him by the CJI.

CJI Gogoi then told him that he should remember that he was also an officer of the court and should keep the dignity of the court. “Then don’t ask me such questions,” said Dhavan.

The CJI told him “but there is a way to answer”. An adamant Dhavan replied, “Well, this is my answer”. The CJI went on to clarify that “all I want to say is that we won’t curtail anyone.” And Dhavan’s response, “I hope so.”

and S A Nazeer questioned whether the Akhara had filed its original suit within the period of limitation.

The court wanted to know what was the final order from which the limitation period was counted.

Jain said there was no final order and the period was counted from the date on which the complex which had been in its exclusive possession was attached and possession handed over to the receiver.

He also recalled that the Akhara was a well-known one and had protected the Rani of Jhansi after the battle of Jhansi.

The bench also posed questions to the lawyer to understand the map of the complex and disputed area.

The hearing also witnessed some heated exchanges between the CJI and senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan, who is appearing for a Muslim petitioner.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 6

AS DAY to day hearings on appeals challenging the September 2010 ruling of the Allahabad High Court on the Ayodhya dispute began in the Supreme Court Tuesday, the Nirmohi Akhara, seeking control of the disputed 2.77 acres, stated that Muslims had stopped offering Namaz at the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid complex in 1934, and only Hindus had been allowed to offer prayers there.

The SC had ordered day to day hearing as its efforts to find an amicable solution to the dispute through mediation had failed to make any headway. The day’s proceedings began with the court rejecting a plea by former RSS ideologue K N Govindacharya to allow audio recording of the hearing or pre-

pare its transcripts.

Fourteen appeals have been filed in the apex court against the 2010 Allahabad High Court judgment, delivered in four civil suits, that the 2.77-acre land in Ayodhya be partitioned equally among the three parties — the Sunni Waqf Board, the Nirmohi Akhara and Ram Lalla.

Senior Advocate Sushil Jain, representing the Akhara which is seeking management and possession of the area, told a five-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi that there was no dispute regarding the outer courtyard until the Sunni Wafk Board filed a suit in 1961.

He said that the inner courtyard, as well as the Janmasthan, was always been in the possession of the Akhara. “We were in possession of inner courtyard and Ram Janmasthan for hundreds of years. Outer courtyard having ‘Sita Rasoi’, ‘Chabutra’,



‘Bhandar Grah’ were in our possession and it was never a part of dispute in any case,” Jain told the bench.

He said that the absence of a provision for ‘wuzu’, where Muslims wash their hands and body before Namaz, at the disputed site was interpreted by the High Court to conclude that prayers were not being offered there since long and thus it had ceased to be a mosque.

Jain read from the September 31 order of the Allahabad High Court even as the bench also comprising Justices S A Bobde, D Y Chandrachud, Ashok Bhushan

Need 16 yrs to pinpoint encroachment: Forest Survey of India to top court

ANANTHAKRISHNAN G
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 6

ASKED TO do a survey of the country’s forests to decide on claims of forest-dwelling communities and pin-point encroachments, the Forest Survey of India (FSI) has told the Supreme Court that it will take about 16 years to complete the process given its current staff strength and infrastructure.

In an affidavit filed in the apex court, the FSI said that land parcels of 11,91,327 rejected claims of Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDSTs) and “other traditional forest dwellers (OTFDs)” for forest land from across the country needs to be analysed.

The FSI said although it has the expertise, “the quantum of work involved in analysing” them is “not commensurate to

the existing strength of officers and staff, and limited infrastructure available with” it.

The agency said, “...it will take about 16 years to complete the analysis by FSI if 20 analysts are put on the job, which only is possible with the existing strength of officers, staff and infrastructure.”

It also stated, “If the time-frame for the work is to be shortened to 5 to 6 years, then the team of analysts will have to be increased by three times and accordingly infrastructure and additional strength of officers for supervision, quality check, etc will have to be created.”

Creating the additional strength and infrastructure will require a further Rs 48 crore, the FSI stated in the affidavit.

The affidavit was filed in response to the top court’s February 28 direction asking it to “make a satellite survey and

place on record the encroachment positions, and also state the positions after the eviction as far as possible.”

The direction came as the court stayed its February 13 order, by way of which it had ordered eviction of lakhs of FDSTs and OTFDs whose claims under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, were rejected.

The order had led to widespread concerns, as the direction was likely to affect nearly 11 lakh people. Subsequently, the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry and the Gujarat government approached SC, seeking modification of the order. Hearing it on February 28, a bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra stayed its February 13 order and asked states to file affidavits explaining how it went about processing the claims, and whether the rejections were justified.

‘Stateswoman, contribution to Haryana won’t be forgotten’

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 6

POLITICAL LEADERS from across the political spectrum condoled the death of former Union minister Sushma Swaraj, with Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar describing her as an “astute stateswoman” whose “contributions for Haryana and India will never be forgotten”.

Expressing shock and sadness at her death, Khattar tweeted, “My deepest condolences to her bereaved family members and May God give her eternal peace”.

His Punjab counterpart Amarinder Singh tweeted, “...I will always remember her as a dynamic and sensitive leader with the ability to empathise with the common people...”

Former Haryana CM and senior Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda stated, “Tall leader, former Union minister and my sister Sushma Swaraj-ji’s death has left me shocked. She always fulfilled relationships outside the domain of politics...”

Union minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal stated, “Today, India lost a great leader, the world lost an exemplary human being and I lost an elder sister. The void left by the passing of former external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj ji can never be filled.”

Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri said, “Extremely shocked and deeply saddened at the sudden and untimely demise of our senior leader and former EAM, Smt Sushma Swaraj ji...”

K C Singh, former diplomat and strategic affairs expert, tweeted, “Terrible news. She was my junior at Law Department, Panjab University. We got along well during Vajpayee government but she never forgave me for lambasting her over Lalit Modi affair. Poor health and intrusive PMO kept her from shining as EAM but she became minister who cared for aam aadmi. RIP”

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Ayodhya: Nirmohi Akhara seeks control of entire disputed site

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New Delhi: In a sedate beginning to the day-to-day hearing in the Supreme Court on appeals over ownership of the 2.77 acre Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid land in Ayodhya, Nirmohi Akhara on Tuesday sought possession of the entire disputed plot and a declaration on its right to continue worship at the site as a distinct religious denomination.

The Allahabad HC in its September 30, 2010, judgment on title suits had ordered the disputed land to be divided into three equal parts among Ram Lalla (idol), Nirmohi Akhara and Sunni Waqf Board. Both Hindu and Muslim parties have challenged it in SC.

A bench of CJI Ranjan Gogoi and Justices S.A. Bobde, D.Y. Chandrachud, Ashok Bhushan and S. Abdul Nazeer had decided to commence day-to-day hearing on the appeals after a mediation panel, appointed by it and comprising ex-SC judge F.M.I. Kalifulla, renowned mediator Sriram Panchu and spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravishankar, reported to the SC after 155 days of negotiations that it was unable to bring hardliners, including Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind and VHP-backed Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, to the negotiating table. Before reporting failure, the panel was close to success with most stakeholders, barring a few, in favour of its proposals such as Muslims giving up their claim on the site where Hindus want to build a Ram temple, Mus-



NO END TO LEGAL TANGLE?

lims getting an alternative site for a mosque and funds to construct it, mosques in Ayodhya to be repaired, all parties to ensure implementation of the law protecting all places of worship as of 1947, framing of suitable criteria to enable worship at mosques, temples and others places of religion without disturbing control of Archaeological Survey of India.

Commencing arguments, Akhara's counsel Sushil Jain told the CJI-led bench that Nirmohis were worshippers of Lord Ram and had moved to Ayodhya between 1734-1800 AD. They had been in possession of the disputed site since long till they were dispossessed on January 5, 1950, by the district magistrate's order. The DM had ordered locking of the disputed structure fearing law and order problems after idols were put inside on the night of December 22, 1949. He had appointed a receiver and allowed only the priest to go into the structure for puja purposes but barred the entry of public.

Full report on www.toi.in

Maintain decorum: CJI Gogoi to senior counsel after run-in

Dhananjay.Mahapatra
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New Delhi: Irrepressible senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan, appearing for Muslim parties in the Ayodhya land dispute case in the SC, on Tuesday had a run-in with CJI Ranjan Gogoi, who in turn told him that as an officer of the court, he must strive to maintain decorum.



An hour into the arguments, when senior advocate Sushil Jain was making submissions on behalf of Nirmohi Akhara, CJI Gogoi told him that he needed to argue his best points to substantiate his claim for possession of the entire disputed land rather than foraying into the subject matter of other title suits. "These are not important for your case," the CJI said, adding that when the other appeals were argued, Jain could counter them then. But Dhavan asked, "Is the CJI saying these are not important? I will place them when I argue." The CJI told him that he could place them when his turn came.

"We said no one's arguments will be curtailed. You (Dhavan) will have full opportunity to place documents before the court when your turn comes," the CJI said. Dhavan replied, "I hope so." The CJI asked, "Do you doubt?" Not to

be put down, Dhavan retorted, "Yes, some."

The CJI told Dhavan that he must not forget that he was an officer of the court and must keep the dignity of the court in mind. Dhavan said, "I am an officer of the court and I answered questions which fell from the court." The CJI said, "There are ways of answering questions." Dhavan said, "That is my answer." But, throughout the day, Dhavan sat quiet. During the earlier hearing on the Ayodhya dispute before a three-judge bench, Dhavan and other counsel had annoyed the then CJI by questioning his hurry to hear the appeals and had made efforts for its adjournment till general elections were over.

Despite the hype over commencement of day-to-day hearing on the appeals against a 2010 verdict of Allahabad HC, lack of enthusiasm for the proceedings was palpable with very few 'sants' attending the hearing. Even the crowd inside the courtroom was thin on Tuesday.

There were a large number of court officials to assist the court in making available original documents cited before the HC during arguments on the title suits and evidence led during the proceedings, all of which were kept inside six big steel trunks.

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She brought the exalted foreign ministry down to the aam aadmi

For Many In Distress, Sushma Was Ray Of Hope

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

When Sushma Swaraj was named foreign minister by the first Narendra Modi government, there were political ripples within the BJP ecosystem. She did not enjoy the close relationship with Modi that some others did, but was a top-level BJP leader in her own right.

Over the next few months, Sushma reinvented herself. With Modi himself taking a huge interest in foreign affairs, she soon carved out a unique space for herself in the foreign ministry that made the most of her political and people skills.

She took to social media as if she was born to it. She brought the exalted foreign minister down to the average Indian, particularly one in distress or in need, stranded in a foreign land. She responded directly to calls for help on Twitter —

whether it was a worker in a Gulf state, duped by unscrupulous agents, or out of money; a honeymoon couple stranded without visas, or a family struggling to bring back the body of a loved one from a foreign land.

In the process, she gave the otherwise snooty foreign ministry a homey, embracing feel. All of Twitter shared a laugh with her when she responded to one desperate citizen whose refrigerator needed fixing: "Brother I cannot help you in matters of a Refrigerator. I am very busy with human beings in distress."

She worked closely with Harish Salve to get the Kulbhushan Jadhav case going in the ICJ. Salve may have been fighting the case at The Hague, but Sushma was providing emotional support to his family. In fact, after the verdict, Jadhav's family called on Sushma, who was no longer the foreign minister, but a family mentor. Salve said he was supposed to collect his fees of Re 1 that he charged for the Jadhav case from her tomorrow.

During one of those difficult periods between India and Pakistan when all conversation had stopped, Sushma kept her own back

42-YEAR POLITICAL JOURNEY

1977-82 & 1987-90: Member, Haryana legislative assembly

1977-79 & 1987-90: Cabinet minister, Haryana

1990: Elected to Rajya Sabha

1996: Elected to 11th Lok Sabha

May-Jun, 1996: Cabinet minister (I&B)

1998: Re-elected to 12th Lok Sabha

Mar-Oct, 1998: Cabinet minister (I&B) and telecom (addl charge)

Oct-Dec, 1998: Chief minister, Delhi

Apr 2000: Re-elected to Rajya Sabha

Sep 2000-Jan 2003: Cabinet minister (I&B)

Jan 2003-May 2004: Cabinet minister (health and family welfare and parliamentary affairs)

Apr 2006: Re-elected to Rajya Sabha

2009: Re-elected to 15th Lok Sabha

Dec 2009: Leader of opposition, Lok Sabha

May 2014: Re-elected to 16th Lok Sabha

May '14-May '19: Cabinet minister (external affairs)

May '14-May '19: Cabinet minister (external affairs)

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Woman recalls 'Jhansi ki Rani' who saved her son from Pak jail

Bella.Jaisinghani
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Mumbai: Fauzia Ansari, the mother of Versova engineer Hamid Ansari who was released from prison in Pakistan in December, broke down at the news of Sushma Swaraj's death. Swaraj as foreign minister had taken multiple steps to seek consular access and secure Ansari's freedom. Fauzia said, "How can I ever repay her debt in getting my son released? She was so proactive that my family and I are ever indebted to her. She was my Jhansi ki Rani. That is how I addressed her. How she would laugh!"

The Ansari couple, Nehal and Fauzia, met her seven or eight times in the course of their campaign, often without appointment. Swaraj never turned them away, always hosted them with warmth.

Fauzia said, "I recall my first meeting with her. It was the day she took office as the MEA. Throngs of party workers and commoners had gathered outside her bungalow to greet her. I rushed ahead amidst the crowd and followed her to her car. I said I was carrying no flowers no gifts to greet her, my tears were my only present. As she heard that, she turned and drew me to her in embrace. She said, meet me in my office at 4.00pm. I was stunned, I said this very evening? She said yes, this evening."

Fauzia arrived at the ministry at the appointed hour. "As I presented my letter to her, she scanned it with her eyes and said, 'I remember seeing this letter in my office this morning'. She was so sharp. I had indeed dropped off a copy earlier in the day."

Over the months and years, Fauzia and Nehal approached her numerous times — until the day dawned when Hamid was released and came home December 18. They went to Delhi to thank Swaraj.

She said on Tuesday, "Sushmaji was a rare Parliamentarian whom even the Pakistanis respected."

'Forceful voice of BJP' silenced forever

► Continued from P 1

An acute diabetic, the BJP leader had tweeted about her kidney failure in 2016. She was admitted to AIIMS on November 7. After she made public her health condition on social media, several people offered their kidneys to her.

There was an outpouring of condolences, with PM Narendra Modi tweeting, "India grieves the demise of a remarkable leader who devoted her life to public service... Sushma Swarajji was one of her kind, who was a source of inspiration for crores of people."

BJP chief Amit Shah condoled her death and called it an "irreparable" loss. He recalled her role as leader of opposition in Lok Sabha, saying she was a "forceful voice of BJP" in the

House. "A powerful orator, she left an indelible mark as a popular leader," he added.

Swaraj's long-term colleague and former finance minister Arun Jaitley said he was "saddened, pained and broken on demise of Sushmaji". "She was one of the most outstanding politicians in the present era. She distinguished in all positions. She

leaves behind a void which is difficult to fill," he added. Other BJP leaders and those from the opposition expressed shock and grief. President Ram Nath Kovind also offered his condolences.

Swaraj did not contest the 2019 Lok Sabha polls having ruled herself out of electoral politics. Her health and the decision to bid goodbye to the electoral

arena were seen to be reasons for her exclusion from the new Modi cabinet that took oath after BJP repeated its feat of scoring a majority.

She continued to follow current events closely and congratulated the government for its success in nullifying the provisions of Article 370. Soon after LS approved the measure on Tues-

day, she tweeted, **'ONE OF HER KIND'**

"Thank you very much. I was waiting to see this day in my lifetime." Ironically, she was rushed to AIIMS after a medical emergency hours later. The doctors worked to revive her but failed and finally declared that she had passed away.

Swaraj had a glittering political career, beginning as an MLA in Haryana in 1977. A native of Ambala,

she started as a socialist but gravitated towards BJP where she rose swiftly to become an effective campaigner and public speaker, much in demand at poll time. She held portfolios at the Centre, being I&B and parliamentary affairs minister in the Vajpayee government.

Swaraj was seen as a key member of BJP's Gennex after A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani along with leaders like Pramod Mahajan, Arun Jaitley, Ananth Kumar, Venkaiah Naidu and Narendra Modi in the 1990s. In the years that BJP was in the opposition, Swaraj was also a spokesperson, engaging with journalists with an ease that marked her as a skilled communicator. Her 1996 speech in Lok Sabha on the trust vote ranks as one of the best speeches in Parliament.

Full report on www.toi.in

Woman lawyer found dead with 5 bullet injuries

Agra: A woman lawyer was found dead with five bullet injuries at her home in Police Lines Extension in Etah on Tuesday. The victim, identified as Nutan Yadav (35), was serving as an assistant prosecution officer at the ACJM I court in Jalestar. According to police, the lawyer's helper found her dead on the bed on Tuesday morning. Etah SP said, "Her autopsy has confirmed that she was shot five times. There is no evidence of any rape attempt." **TNN**

Merc clocks 214 kmph on Yamuna e-way

Agra: Throwing traffic rules out of the window, the driver of a Pudukcherry-registered Mercedes S450 was found cruising at 214.40 kmph, the highest ever recorded on the Yamuna expressway. When contacted, Anil Kumar, enforcement RTO, Agra, said, "The Mercedes owner would be issued a challan of Rs 2,000. If found guilty again, his licence may be suspended." The car was found to be registered in the name of Ashwani Kumar Bhatia, MD, ARS Steel and Alloy, Pudukcherry. **TNN**

9 U'khand kids killed as vehicle falls into gorge

Dehradun: At least 15 people, including nine schoolchildren, were killed and about 18 others were injured in two accidents in Uttarakhand's Tehri and Chamoli districts on Tuesday.

In the first incident, nine school students died while 10 others suffered injuries after the vehicle they were travelling in fell into a 200-metre-deep gorge near Kangsali in Tehri district. In the second incident, at least six people were killed after a big boulder fell on the bus they were travelling in on Badrinath NH. **TNN**

ED looks for Nath's kin after court nixes pre-arrest bail plea

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New Delhi: Soon after his anticipatory bail plea was rejected by a Delhi court on Tuesday, the Enforcement Directorate launched a search for Ratul Puri, nephew of Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath, who failed to appear before the agency for questioning in the Rs 423 crore Augusta Westland bribery case.

Puri, who is wanted in the chopper scam investigation and has been questioned by the ED multiple times, will be arrested soon as he has been evading the probe. Puri was untraceable till late on Tuesday evening.

Puri had evaded ED's questioning and approached the court for anticipatory bail. The agency has already issued a look out notice against Puri, imposing restrictions on his travel out abroad. He was questioned earlier by the ED and the income tax department with the latter attaching his "benami assets"



worth Rs 254 crore.

Earlier in the day, Puri failed to get relief from the Delhi high court and the trial court, clearing the way for the ED to arrest him. In the morning, Delhi high court dismissed "as withdrawn" Puri's petition seeking a direction to the trial court not to pronounce order on his anticipatory bail plea without hearing his other pending applications.

The trial court dismissed his anticipatory bail plea and said the probe was at a crucial stage.

"Keeping in view the fact that the investigation, in matter in hand, is at a crucial stage especially as regard role played by

accused/applicant Ratul Puri coupled with evidence collected so far by the ED and considering serious nature of allegations, gravity of offence and alleged conduct of accused, I do not consider it to be fit case for grant of anticipatory bail," special judge Arvind Kumar said.

His counsel said they would move the HC again to seek protection from arrest.

Bill that seeks to boost consumers' rights gets RS nod

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Rajya Sabha on Tuesday passed a new bill to revamp the consumer protection regime in the country. The Consumer Protection Bill, which was earlier cleared by Lok Sabha, lays down the process for fast redressal of consumer disputes and strict penalties including jail term for adulteration and misleading advertisements by firms.

Celebrities endorsing misleading advertisements will face the risk of paying fine of up to Rs 10 lakh for first offence and they can be banned for one year from endorsing any product or service. Subsequent offences will attract fine up to Rs 50 lakh and ban up to three years.

Responding to SP member Jaya Bachchan, who raised the issue of celebrity endorsements, Union consumer affairs minister Ram Vilas Paswan said earlier the parliamentary standing committee had recommended jail term. However, after an assessment of the best practices across the

RS clears bill to evict squatters

With Rajya Sabha giving its approval, the Parliament on Tuesday paved the way for speedy evictions of unauthorised occupants of government residential accommodations. Under the current rules, the eviction proceedings take unusually long time.