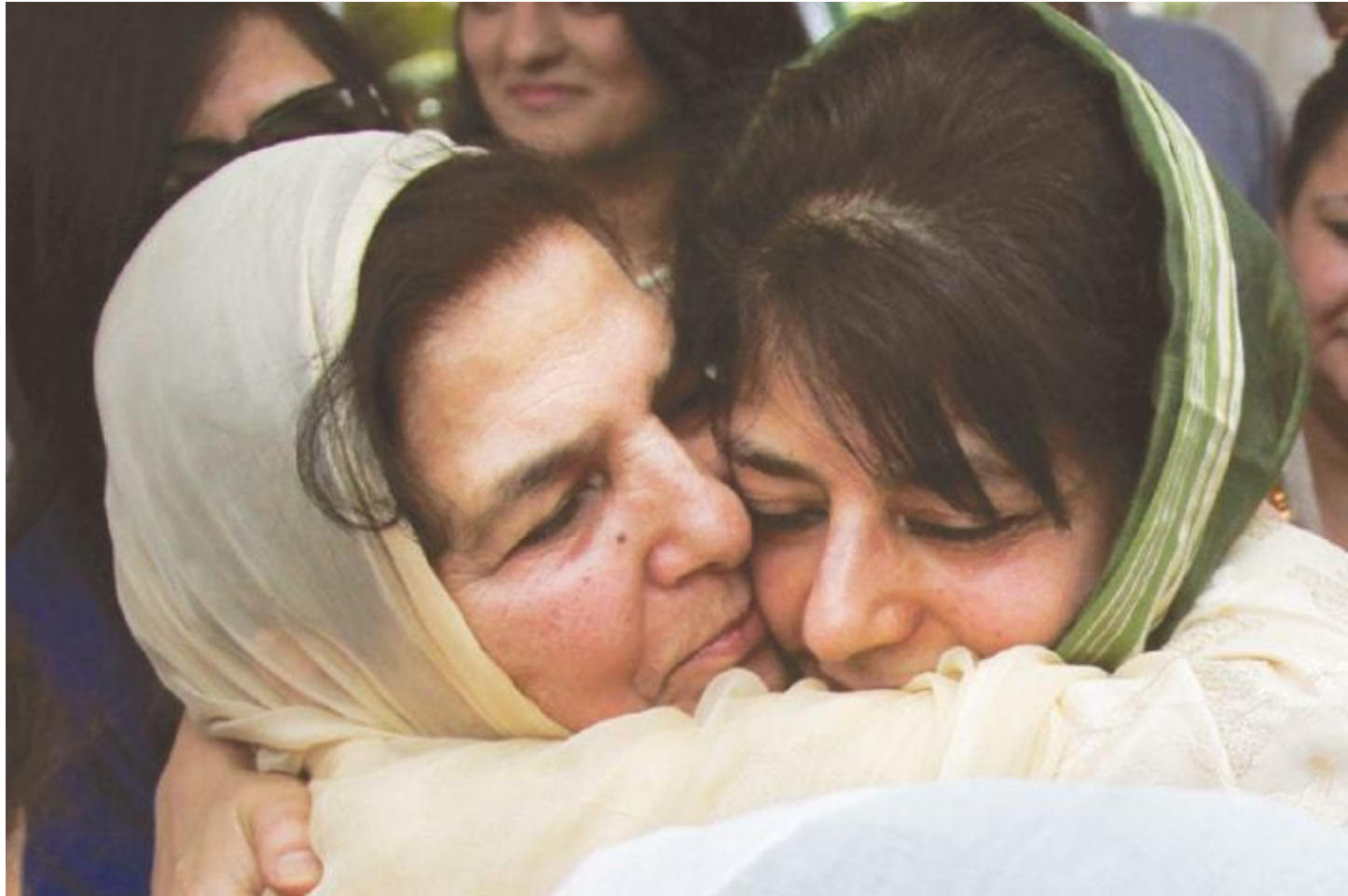


Mehbooba becomes first woman CM of occupied Kashmir



SRINAGAR: The leader of a pro-India party on Monday became the first woman to become the chief minister of Indian-occupied Kashmir following the death of her father, the region's top elected leader.

Mehbooba Mufti took the oath of office after her Peoples' Democratic Party and India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party ended a nearly three-month deadlock over forming the state government.

The chief minister's post had fallen vacant after Mufti's father and PDP founder Mufti Mohammed Sayeed died in January.

Since then, Mufti was reluctant to continue her party's coalition with the Hindu nationalist BJP without an assurance from its leaders that they would take "confidence building" steps to improve the restive Himalayan region.

Mufti held a meeting with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month but details of her agreement with the BJP remain unclear.

The Peoples' Democratic Party's coalition government with the BJP came about after prolonged negotiations, as no single party won a majority needed to form a government in the state during elections in 2014.

The PDP emerged as the single-largest party with 28 seats in the region's 87-strong state legislature, while the BJP won 25 seats — all in Hindu-dominated districts.

The two parties hold diametrically opposite views on several issues, such as a law that protects Indian military personnel from criminal prosecution in the violence-wracked Himalayan region.

The PDP wants the law scrapped, which the BJP opposes.

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