

# In a league of his own

**ISLAMIC CULTURE**, to Ahamed, is tall like the Qutub, strong like Red Fort, beautiful like Taj



**Power drive**

*Kumkum  
Chadha*

Volatile Muslims called it the great betrayal. After the Babri Masjid demolition, when Muslims were baying for Hindu blood, E. Ahamed, currently Mamata Banerjee's deputy in the Indian Railways, was brokering peace.

Politically, his party, the Indian Union Muslim League, split on the issue. The hardliners wanted no truck with the Congress while the moderates thought it wiser to keep the alliance intact. Ahamed did not "disconnect" with the Congress. Critics called it opportunism.

Politics apart, Ahamed carries his religion on his sleeve. He is among the few Indian leaders to have prayed at the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, perhaps the only one invited by the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to do so. The al-Aqsa mosque is the third in the holy hierarchy — the first two being Mecca and Madina in Saudi Arabia.

He has been vocal about showing solidarity with the Palestinians, calling Israel a "dagger thrust into the heart of Muslim nations". This was when India was warming up to Israel, its ally during the BJP regime. Even when the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance wrested power in 2004, the collaboration continued — a tough situation for Ahamed and his party, given the anti-Israel sentiment among Muslims, particularly in his home state Kerala.

Like it was when the ice-cream parlour sex scandal in Kerala hit the headlines, Ahamed vociferously defended one of his colleagues who had to resign as state minister. "He was," Ahamed conceded,



■ Ahamed holds the late Indira Gandhi in high regard. His take on her: "A great lady. No one like her... never was... never will be."

ARVIND YADAV / HT PHOTO

## FACT-O-METER

**Edappakath Ahamed (71),  
Minister of State for Railways**

**Downside:** Losing his wife  
Zuhara in an accident

**Fear factor:** Communal  
violence

**Our take:** Somewhat boring  
and academic

"a friend and a party man. I had to defend him."

Ahamed studied in a *madrasa* (religious school) in Kannur. He did his law and fought a few murder cases. Politics happened as his father was in the Muslim League and he in its student wing.

His take on Islamic culture: "As tall as the Qutub Minar, as strong as the Red Fort and as beautiful as the Taj." Like a true Muslim, he offers *namaaz* five times a day and however important his political engagements, never misses Friday prayers.

His pecking order — the Prophet, Muslim League founder Mohammed Ismail and Indira Gandhi. "Oh, a great lady. No one like her... never was... never will be," he said of Gandhi.

One day, he asked her about the fate of minorities after her death. Seeing how aghast she was at the question, he was nervous about his future. She packed him off to then Union home minister Giani Zail Singh, who welcomed him with open arms. That afternoon, Ahamed got several concessions for riot-ravaged Muslims.

In Kerala, Ahamed is seen as the party's hotline to 10, Janpath. "Muslim League's Delhi connection," says to party MP E.T. Mohammed Bashir.

A six-term MP and five-term MLA, Ahamed has spent 37 of his 71 years in the state assembly or Parliament. He is irked at not been given a cabinet rank but, for the record, is "happy in what I get".