



Travesty of justice

The Samjhauta blast case raises doubts about India's resolve to prosecute terror cases

The acquittal of Swami Aseemanand and three others brought to trial for the killing of 68 people on board the Delhi-Lahore Samjhauta Express near Panipat in February 2007 is bound to be seen as a travesty of justice. Any acquittal in a heinous crime will raise questions about the credibility of the investigation or the effectiveness of the prosecution; but there are some cases in which the outcome may also spark cynical responses ranging from attribution of political motive to suspicion of institutional bias. The train blast case, in which both Indian and Pakistani citizens died, may evoke all such responses. It casts a shadow on India's ability and resolve to probe and prosecute major acts of terrorism. It is the third case in which Aseemanand has been acquitted. He was earlier cleared of involvement in the Ajmer Dargah blast, which killed three persons in October 2007, and the Mecca Masjid blast that left nine dead in Hyderabad in May 2007. Aseemanand, a.k.a. Naba Kumar Sarkar, was a key figure, according to the prosecution, behind a Hindu right-wing group that wanted to avenge incidents such as the Akshardham temple massacre of 2002. The contours of 'saf-ron terror' were revealed by Aseemanand in 2010 when he gave a lengthy statement before a magistrate, detailing the planning and execution of some key terrorist attacks between 2006 and 2008. This confession failed to convince the trial courts, mainly because of his subsequent retraction. That he was in police custody at the time also cast a doubt whether it was voluntary.

There appears little doubt that the blast was aimed at destroying attempts to build friendly ties between India and Pakistan, and it is possible that extremists of any hue may have been behind it. However, the change of regime at the Centre in 2014 seemed to have weakened the National Investigation Agency's resolve. Details of the verdict are not yet available, but it is clear that the prosecution case collapsed after key witnesses turned hostile. The trial proceedings opened in February 2014, but by early 2015 witnesses began turning hostile. Among these were one who removed a mobile phone from the body of Sunil Joshi, a prime accused in the case who was murdered in December 2007, and another who bought mobile phones and electric detonators. On the flip side, the fact that some early suspects were Muslims and that the U.S. and the UN had linked Lashkar-e-Toiba operatives such as Arif Qasmani to the blasts could have been important factors. The larger concern for the criminal justice system is whether such acquittals indicate innocence, or the prosecution's lack of freedom and resolve to obtain a conviction.

Back on track

India and the Maldives must continue to build a shared strategic vision

India and the Maldives appeared to return to the old days of strategic bonhomie when External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj met her counterpart Abdulla Shahid in Male during a brief visit this week. It is the first full-fledged bilateral visit at the political level from India to the Maldives after the new government assumed office in the wake of the historic election last September. President Ibrahim Solih assumed charge after a multi-party, pro-democracy coalition led by his Maldivian Democratic Party was swept to power. Mr. Solih's inauguration, which was marked by the attendance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was assumed to be a potential inflection point in the trajectory of bilateral ties with India. The previous five years witnessed Male's disconcerting drift, under the aegis of the Abdulla Yameen government, into what many Maldivians felt was the stifling embrace of China. Chinese financing for infrastructure and construction projects poured in even as the functioning of the political Opposition and the judiciary was harshly curtailed. All of this flux appeared to have been washed away on September 23, 2018 when the Maldivian electorate voted resoundingly for the coalition that backed Mr. Solih for President.

Yet it would be unwise for New Delhi to take the Indian Ocean nation for granted. There is indeed an opportunity for reset on numerous policies, and some of that has already happened. In December, when Mr. Solih visited India, a \$1.4 billion financial assistance package for the Maldives was announced. While the proximity of the Indian general election may have precluded any major policy announcements from New Delhi, the two countries have agreed to exempt holders of diplomatic and official passports from visa requirements, inked an MoU on Indian grant-in-aid for "high-impact community development projects", and other agreements on energy efficiency and renewable energy, areas critical to the agenda of Mr. Solih. At a broader level, the archipelago and the larger Indian Ocean region could expect more collaborative approaches on regional maritime security issues, including counterterrorism and trans-national crimes. However, Male is still grappling with the legacy of the Yameen administration's headlong plunge into the orbit of Beijing. The massive debts the Maldives incurred, by some estimates to the tune of \$3 billion, linked to infrastructure investments need to be unwound. Second, the multiparty alliance must hold firm despite immense political pressures that arise from varying visions for governance. Some tensions already seem to be bubbling to the top: on February 25, Mohamed Nasheed, former President and important coalition-builder in the MDP, tweeted about the country's Supreme Court "meddling in elections - again". For genuine peace and bilateral harmony to take root in the region, building a shared vision for the future of the Maldives is the immediate task at hand.

When free speech is truly free

Its true power is its capacity to make those in power accountable to those who don't have power



SUNDAR SARUKKAI

Freedom is a theme which is going to come up again and again through this election. It is a term, like truth, that has globally become extremely important today. But it is not an easy concept to understand, especially in a public political discourse. First of all, there are many kinds of freedom: freedom to speak, to write, to think, to imagine, to live our lives, to eat what we want, and so on. Since this term is invoked so quickly and so easily - witness little children saying they want their freedom to have ice cream! - it is important that we understand its diverse meanings in our everyday use of this term. Here I want to understand what one of the most important expressions of freedom, free speech, could mean.

Freedom to hold forth?

We often tend to think that among the main elements of democracy are the holding of elections and a free media. Both elections and free media are important because they stand, among other things, for the notions of free speech and free expression. Casting a vote anonymously, of one's own free will, is an example of free expression and is broader than just 'free speech'. Similarly, when the media has the freedom to air all kinds of views, it is seen to be an example of free speech. But is free

speech really the essence of democracy? Is it really so important for an effective democracy?

Paradoxically, there is an inherent tension between free speech and democracy. If free speech is understood merely as the freedom to say what one wants, then that is obviously not conducive to meaningful social behaviour. For example, one can spread falsehood about another in the name of free speech. One can insult, lie, create harm and hatred through free speech. In these cases, free speech should rightfully be called rumour and gossip. Rumour, gossip, fake news and deliberate lying can be hidden under the guise of free speech. It is speech with an ulterior motive. To call these as free speech is a mistake.

The answer to the problem of defining what really constitutes free speech lies in understanding the meaning of 'free' in free speech. What is really free in free speech? The freedom to say what one wants? We can't really say what we want all the time since all speech is constrained. We are constrained by language, words, concepts and grammar, and even by the physical contours of our mouth. We are constrained by the biological and cognitive structures related to thought and its expression through language. Socially, we are not fully free to say what we want. We cannot make certain utterances in certain places. A commentator, commenting on a game of cricket, cannot suddenly give a lecture on philosophy saying that he is protected by free speech!

In addition to constraints, all speech also has a cost. When we



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utter something, good or bad, there is a price to pay. Even in personal relations with family and friends, we cannot say what we want. If we do so - that is, if we are honest and outspoken - there is a price to pay. Relationships get broken, wars are declared between people because somebody spoke 'freely'.

Thus, the essence of free speech is not really about the freedom to say what we want. It is more about speech which is free, which comes with no cost. Free speech is actual speech for which you don't pay a price. But paying a price is not in the hands of the speaker. When I say or write something, I do not know who will take offence at it. People get upset and take offence very easily these days! Free speech is nothing but the conditions under which the hearer is not allowed to take offence and intimidate the speaker.

The real freedom in 'free speech' lies not in the freedom of the speaker to say what she wants but in the constraint on hearers to allow the speaker to say what she

Beyond the 'us-them' binary

By calling the Christchurch attacker a terrorist, the New Zealand Prime Minister sent a powerful message



TABISH KHAIR

Though some media outlets gave it needless coverage, anyone could have expected that the Islamic State (IS) would call for "revenge" following the Christchurch, New Zealand mosque shootings on March 15, in which 50 people lost their lives. At its peak in 2015, the IS had 30,000 fighters and the estimated support of (at the most) half a million Muslims - out of a total world population of an estimated 1.8 billion Muslims in 2015. It also has the reputation of being the organisation that has killed the maximum number of Muslims in recent years, a fact obscured by its gory executions of 'non-Muslims'.

For the IS to urge 'revenge' on the behalf of all Muslims was exactly the same as the act of terrorism perpetrated by the Australia-born, white supremacist, alt-right terrorist on men, women and children who had gone to two Christchurch mosques for peaceful Friday congregational prayers on March 15. As his 'manifesto' indicates, this young white alt-right male terrorist was also seeking "revenge" for various acts of real

or imagined violence by 'Muslims'. In short, the perpetrator of the Christchurch massacres and the IS are caught in a distorting binary worldview of 'us versus them', and inevitably this is the world they will create if the rest of us do not call their bluff.

The 'T' word

And this time, for a change, a world leader called their bluff right at the start. The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, not only referred to the attacks as "one of New Zealand's darkest days" but, more courageously, did not hesitate to call their perpetrator a "terrorist". By using the 'T' word - which is easily applied to terrorising violence by Muslim criminals but tardily applied to similar violence by white supremacist or (in India) Hindutva criminals - Ms. Ardern sent a powerful message. In this, she was supported by her counterpart in Australia, Scott Morrison, who also did not hesitate to describe the perpetrator as a terrorist.

The hesitation in the media to describe white extremism or Hindutva violence as terror is a reflection, however diffuse, of exactly that binary division of the world into 'us versus them' that I have highlighted. It has its counterpart in the Muslim world too, and I will come to that a bit later. Evidently, Ms. Ardern's honest description of what happened in Christchurch



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sent a message not only to the world media but also to Muslims: what she effectively said was that Muslims are not 'them' in New Zealand. She highlighted this in many ways, by thoughtful acts of condolence as well as a clear statement in which she embraced the victims (mostly immigrants and refugees) as "one of us".

The good effect of such admirable statesmanship was evident in the responsible way in which the New Zealand media largely covered the tragedy. Those of us in India who are used to our hyper-ventilating evening shows should have marked this difference. Not that the 'us-them' binary disappeared. The tabloid press - not least in England, a country whose inability to face up to its own subterranean prejudices has landed it in the on-going mess of Brexit - still continued, much of the time, to think along those binaries. This was admirably exposed by The Feed, which, among other things, compared the initial front page

wants. Thus, when we demand the right to free speech, we are essentially demanding the right to stop others from not letting us speak. The most important consequence of the idea of free speech is that it shifts the responsibility of free speech from the speaker to the hearer. But does this mean that anybody can say what they want? Can they slander a person through falsehood in the name of free speech? Is slandering a person the same as criticising the government or the nation? After all, our governments, independent of which party is in power, have effectively used the charge of sedition to stop certain utterances in public.

Criticism as a duty

It is not free speech to purposefully slander a person. But criticising the government or nation is not the same as slandering an individual. Such criticism is not just a right, it is more a duty of democratic societies. In a true democracy, there is nothing that can be considered as slandering the government, even if a criticism may be wrong and unjustified. That is because free speech is a tool to make democracy workable and it is not really about the individual freedom to say what one wants.

Democracy is about governance for others and on behalf of others. It is a social and public system of responsibility of governance. The very foundation of democracy is collective action and the real freedom in a democracy is the freedom of choosing who will govern on our behalf. The ideal of democracy is that we are all potential rulers - any one of us can be the

Prime Minister of our country. When we elect somebody, we are only putting a group of people to govern on behalf of us. Free speech is the mechanism to make sure that they govern correctly and on our behalf. It is only free speech, defined in this manner, that makes democracy workable.

The true power of free speech lies in its capacity to make those in power accountable to those who do not have power. It is a means to control those in power and is not really about freedom of individuals. The price we demand for making somebody govern on our behalf (the elected leaders) is to allow us to say what we want about them, not as individuals but as political leaders.

The power equation

Thus, true free speech covers only those acts of speech which speak against power, and keep those in power accountable. It thus safeguards the most cherished democratic principle. Free speech by itself is not the essence of democracy but is the means by which any democracy can be sustained. Anybody who doesn't like to hear criticism of government or government representatives is being undemocratic. We dilute the importance of free speech when we use it to derive personal benefit or cause harm or do so in situations which are not about power. Speech, in the task of keeping check on power, has to be subsidised and made free by those in power.

Sundar Sarukkai is a philosopher based in Bengaluru

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

No bail

But for a British reporter accusing the fugitive Indian diamond businessman Nirav Modi and later a bank employee alerting the police about his presence, it is doubtful whether the diamantaire would have been arrested in the manner he was (Page 1, "Nirav Modi's free run ends, held without bail in London", March 21).

While the developments have come as a face-saver for the government, there are still several unanswered questions about his having fled India despite complaints about his alleged banking misdeeds. One can be sure that Nirav Modi is not going to be flown back any time soon given the protracted extradition processes in the United Kingdom. One has to remember that Vijay Mallya has yet to be brought back to face trial for alleged banking frauds. Is all this a part of election time compulsions?

S.K. CHOUDHURY,
Bengaluru

The Opposition is bound to accuse the government of having let Nirav Modi escape in the first place, but those parties should remember that there has been some movement as far as Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi are concerned. It was under the Congress that Bhopal gas tragedy accused Warren Anderson and Bofors scam accused Ottavio Quattrocchi were facilitated free passage.

CHANDER ARUNA,
Chennai

One cannot fail to notice the pertinent observation of the judge - that there are substantial grounds to believe that Nirav Modi would fail to surrender if granted bail. Such high-profile defaulters have to be brought to justice to restore our faith in law and justice. If there is some positive development in the cases of Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi, one will also be reassured that the U.K. is not a haven for law violators, as it is assumed to be now.

M.S. VAIDYANATHAN,
Chennai

It is necessary to revisit the clauses of extradition treaties in force so that offenders do not take advantage of the loopholes and get the better of legal systems in the home country. Inordinate delays tire out a system in pursuit of such cases and often reach a dead end after the initial burst. The case of Lalit Modi has been going on for nearly a decade and he is almost forgotten after the cases of more prominent offenders have come under the spotlight. Unlike a few decades ago, the image of India as a global economic power has grown manifold. Hence the country deserves better in terms of extradition processes.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

'Chowkidar' campaign

A Hollywood movie with four Academy awards, Spartacus (1960), has an interesting and emotional portrayal of a scene where the rebellion slaves, who were caught by the Roman army, refused to identify their leader, Spartacus, though lured with

freedom. This they did with all of them saying, "I am Spartacus." As the result, they were all subjected to crucifixion as the identification failed. Such is the expression of unchallenged loyalty to the leader. Does the BJP's "Main bhi chowkidar" (I too am watchman) plan resonate with such a movie scene? Movies have entertainment value and so do the tall promises that our political parties make. To this one can add the 'tit-for-tat' dramatics ("I turn abuse into ornaments: PM", March 21).

VICTOR FRANK A.,
Chennai

If the ruling party is relying on a catch-phrase to score a home run and if it also thinks that the mere addition of a word as a prefix to Twitter handles is all that it takes to win an election, then all is not right with that democracy. The tag may not resonate with the country's impoverished multitudes. The BJP could have made a greater claim to being a chowkidar had it

convincingly established that the Rafale deal was not dubious. It is not yet clear whether the BJP's exertions to make the tag a 'people's movement' will gain enough momentum to enable its re-election.

G. DAVID MILTON,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

Sparrows at Manapad

On a recent visit to Manapad at Thoothukudi (Tuticorin), Tamil Nadu, we were pleasantly surprised to find scores of sparrows in the 500-year-old Holy Cross church which stands on a hillock and is surrounded by the sea on three sides and an imposing light house.

Food is no problem as there are many pilgrims who visit this landmark church every day. The birds seemed to be

at home in the church despite the strong sea breeze. We were also able to find sparrows in and around the three large churches in the village, houses and even in the cemetery. Their numbers have declined from what I remember them to be in childhood, but these 'light-winged Dryads' still continue to survive. Though some houses were found to have nests for the birds, the scholars mentioned in the report ('Life' page, "Where the house sparrows nest: preference shifts to packed places", March 21) can guide the villagers on how to set up artificial nests and also food and water requirements.

THARCUS S. FERNANDO,
Chennai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

Qatar hosted Asian Games in 2006 and not Commonwealth Games as mentioned in a report, "The Indian angle to Qatar WC" (Sport, March 21, 2019)

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What can India do to influence China on Masood Azhar?

PARLEY

India-China dialogue has expanded but the two countries are not on the same page on terror

Last week, China placed a hold on the listing request for Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM)'s leader Masood Azhar at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The Ministry of External Affairs said that it was "disappointed" by the outcome. Alka Acharya and Jabin Jacob talk of the Azhar problem, the Wuhan summit, and the strategic view of India's relationship with China, in a discussion moderated by Suhasini Haidar. Edited excerpts:

While we say that China is not supporting us on this aspect, we also have our annual counter-terrorism exercise with China. I think that sort of mixed messaging doesn't work.

On the one hand, if you seem too conciliatory with China, then it may see that as a sign of weakness and therefore not change its position. Is this actually a larger challenge for India when it comes to China?

A.A.: I don't agree that because China has chosen to block Azhar's listing, it amounts to its contradictory stand on other issues with us. China has tried to take a consistent position as to why it has to blacklist an individual, whereas it is taking a slightly different position with regard to the organisation (JeM).

The fact is that the India-China dialogue has expanded. It has now brought terror on board, but we need to be discussing this more because I don't think we are on the same page as far as terror is concerned. It is a part of the strategic dialogue and that's a start. We are together on many multilateral platforms, so we could start communicating our position to the Chinese much more clearly, but at the same time not permit this issue to derail what is a much larger process.

In India there is no stomach for any kind of dialogue with Pakistan. And yet with China, every time there is a pushback from China, this is pretty much in your face when China refuses to list Masood Azhar despite the kind of push India has made diplomatically after the Pulwama attack. How do you explain this dichotomy?

A.A.: In the last five years, the whole situation with Pakistan has become more rigid. So, if in the past we did see an attempt to balance no terror or no dialogue till the terror attack stopped, but at the same time you are opening up other channels. Increasingly, you are seeing that the Chinese are becoming more and more significant players in this region, so you are in a bit of a dilemma. Because you need to ensure



MASOOD AZHAR - AP

that your relationship with China doesn't get derailed. There is a lot of suspicion about how the Chinese are preparing to support Pakistan. You can't shut that door because then you are really only dependent on the Americans. It's not just about China, India and Pakistan. It's about the Americans wanting to disengage; the Russians wanting to get into Afghanistan via Pakistan. Do you think the Americans are going to play our game with the Pakistanis for us? I'm not too sure.

Why does China continue to stand firm on the Azhar issue in particular?

J.J.: This is clearly tactical as far as the Chinese are concerned. The BRICS forum in Goa refused to allow any mention of terror in the joint declaration. But the next year, in China, they were willing to go along. So, it's up and down. And I suppose the Chinese are not completely at home in Pakistan, so they also need to put pressure on the Pakistanis and tell them to behave vis-a-vis Chinese influence.

The larger issue is about communication. What is the communication that India has with China on this particular issue? At the end of January, we had the 8th India-China Joint Working Group Meeting on Counter-Terrorism. And if you look at the MEA website... it doesn't really inform you about what is going on. The Chinese can get away with that. But in India the government needs to communicate to the strategic community and to the public. You can't deal with the Chinese us-

It's not the anti-India sentiment in China that really drives matters. We have failed to reassess our relationship with Pakistan. The more you disengage from Pakistan, the more of a free hand you give China.

ing Chinese methods and ignore how the system works at your end.

Do you think the diplomatic capital that India is using when it comes to the Azhar issue is worth it?

J.J.: There are two parts to this. The first is, of course, this is an overkill, because we don't have the capacity to follow up. The kind of effort that we have to put into this is only worthwhile if we can follow up with other global capitals, even the small players, through the year. But on the other hand, there is a certain value that the people in the Ministry dealing with China understand — that China is not comfortable being named and shamed and sticking out as the only objector in this.

Don't you think that's the old China? I think the new China doesn't have a problem sticking out.

J.J.: True, but we don't know if we have come to that realisation.

A.A.: I would say it's the reverse. I think today China is far more wary of its international image and therefore the need not to stand out like a sore thumb, especially when there

is a global consensus on certain issues. Now, does the Azhar issue actually dent that image, or does it really show China as a power which has double standards?

How much of an impact did the U.S.'s open statements challenging China have on China's own decision? Or do you think China's mind was made up?

J.J.: Yes, the Chinese do take the Americans seriously and that's again a question of capacity because the Americans can follow up. They can put others under pressure to follow what the Americans think is in their interest. In the case of terrorism or the Nuclear Suppliers Group, these are important for India perhaps, but they are not important to other states. And it is possible to keep the other states interested if we have the capacity to consistently put pressure. As long as that's not the case, the Chinese will not be moved.

On the question of political wrangling... on the one hand, you have the government accusing the Congress party leader of meeting the Chinese Ambassador. You have criticism from the Opposition that, despite the Wuhan summit, the Prime Minister has been unable to get any concessions from China. How much is this political issue over China playing out in Beijing as well?

A.A.: There are three dimensions here. One, over a period of time the Chinese have seen that there is a fairly consistent position in India. Whichever government has been in power has more or less taken the same framework, which is one of engaging and moving the relationship forward. Therefore, I am sure many people in China do not take this internal wrangling very seriously. I think on the whole these charges are of necessity, purely political. So, you will have to say, 'Wuhan is in tatters'. I don't agree with that. Wuhan was about something else.

The second point is that we have not yet grasped that the China-Pakistan relationship is undergoing a major transformation, and we continue to take this anti-India perspective as the dominant one, which it is

not. China is far too invested in Pakistan. Anti-India is lower down, it's not the top priority.

And the final point is that China-India relations are also not static. And the best way to beat this is to get the India-China game up.

J.J.: I agree that the China-Pakistan relationship is something that has transformed over time and I also agree with Alka that it's not the anti-India sentiment in China that really drives matters. I think where we have failed is in reassessing our relationship with Pakistan. The more you disengage from Pakistan, the more of a free hand you give the Chinese. Trade is the only way we can fix things in many ways.

Alka, you said Wuhan is not in tatters. Yet we see no movement from China on India's NSG membership and on Azhar. On the other hand, India has torn down some of the irritants vis-a-vis China, whether it is sidelining the Tibetan leadership or not speaking about the Chinese building infrastructure in Doklam. Why do you say the Wuhan summit still carries some weight?

A.A.: The answer to that would depend on your understanding of what Wuhan was all about. It was an informal meeting between the two leaders to address what had become a dangerous impasse in the relationship. Two sides were eyeball to eyeball for 72 days. This was a means to defuse that situation and evolve a modus operandi for ensuring that this relationship does not get derailed. More importantly, what is the framework within which this relationship has to develop? It was not issue-based. As to whether we have got what we want from China... I think we need to figure out where this relationship is going, particularly how we are managing the economic aspect. That ultimately is going to provide the ballast.

J.J.: Wuhan was tactical. My problem with Wuhan is that you are moving away from process-based interactions between governments. Instead we have an individual-based approach. This might work in China because President Xi Jinping is the all-powerful. But not here.



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SINGLE FILE

Testing Israel's character

The April election will determine whether Israel belongs to all its citizens or to the Jewish people alone

MOHAMMED AYOUB



Does Israel belong to all its citizens or to the Jewish people alone? The Israeli election scheduled for April 9 will have an important bearing on this issue. Israel has struggled with this question from its birth. The dilemma has been exacerbated by the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967 that has led to projections that soon there will be as many Arabs as Jews in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

As the prospect of a two-state solution has receded, the spectre of a bi-national state with equal rights for all citizens, Jews and Arabs alike, has begun to haunt the Zionist right. The Nationality Law passed by the Knesset in July 2018 by a vote of 62 to 55, which declares Israel the nation state of the Jewish people, was a pre-emptive measure to rule out this option for all time to come. More than 65 discriminatory laws have been passed since Israel's establishment restricting the rights of Palestinian citizens. However, this is the most blatant attempt to legally define the Palestinian inhabitants of Israel as second-class citizens.

While the opposition denounced the law as racist, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described its passage as "a pivotal moment in the annals of Zionism and the State of Israel. We enshrined in law the basic principle of our existence." The controversy around this law has heated up following the decision of Israel's elections committee, now under appeal in the Supreme Court, to bar the joint Arab party Raam-Balad from participating in the coming election. Signalling his support to the election committee's decision Mr. Netanyahu tweeted, "Those who support terrorism will not be in the Israeli Knesset!"

Mr. Netanyahu re-emphasised his commitment to the Nationality Law when in response to criticism of it he wrote on Instagram, "Israel is not a state of all its citizens. According to the Nation-State Law that we passed, Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish People — and them alone." In the same post he argued that a government led by his opponents Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid will be dependent on the support of Arab parties and will, therefore, "undermine the security of the state and citizens". Mr. Netanyahu clearly implied that the loyalty of Israel's Arab citizens was suspect and that they should never be a part of a coalition governing Israel.

Considering the small margin by which the Nationality Law was passed, the election is likely to become a referendum on the basic character of the Israeli state. The electorate will be passing judgment not only on Mr. Netanyahu's fitness to govern considering the corruption charges levelled against him, but more importantly on whether Israel is a state for all its citizens or for the Jewish people alone.

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NOTEBOOK

The phenomenon of ghost newspapers

As India goes into poll mode, news must not be up for sale

ANURADHA RAMAN

In 2015, a senior government official approached this newspaper with a story. He was sure that it would not be published. The story had to do with the media itself, and referred to the phenomenon of 'ghost newspapers'.

The documents in his possession exposed the murky operations of these newspapers. These were newspapers that disappeared as mysteriously as they appeared, and dealt with little news. On paper, they were called 'small newspapers' and were in the business of making a quick buck. Officials were privy to this business but they could do little to stop these papers from thriving. On paper, there are rules that govern the registration of newspapers. It is the Registrar of Newspapers for

India (RNI)'s preserve to register titles, check their authenticity, and keep a watch on claimed circulation figures. In practice, the phenomenon of 'ghost newspapers' mocked these rules. Officials in the government hinted at a collusion between those who handed out government advertisements and those who were in the newspaper business.

The list of newspapers to which advertisements were given was maintained in the records of an organisation called the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), which has been renamed as the Bureau of Outreach and Communication and comes under the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. The Bureau empowers newspapers according to their circulation. Advertisements are doled out

accordingly.

Officials in one of the ministries had meticulously checked out the credentials of the newspapers. In the process of collecting information, there were a few surprises in store for them. There were more than 190 newspapers bearing the same content and yet appearing under different names. There were also newspapers that were being published in the same press. How they had passed the scrutiny of officials was a mystery.

Quite predictably, officials at the DAVP and RNI clammed up when I reached out to them. I sent emails, but got no response. A few people in the small newspapers industry admitted to the existence of ghost newspapers, but that was all. Going through these documents was a revelation for me, as there

was no connection between the newspapers that had received government advertisements and those that were empanelled by the DAVP.

India has among the highest number of newspapers in the world. This is a highly regulated business. From 99,660 in 2014, the number of newspapers has soared to above a lakh since. The phenomenon of ghost newspapers will continue to be a challenge in the coming election, just as paid news and fake news was in 2009, when advertisements appeared as news, and in 2014. These problems have only got exacerbated since then. As India goes into poll mode, news on TV, print and online will be consumed with interest. It will be in the interest of democracy to ensure that news is not up for sale.

FROM *The Hindu*. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 22, 1969

P.M. willing for dialogue on Centre-State ties

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, to-day [March 21] expressed her willingness to have a national dialogue on Centre-State relations, while addressing the Standing Committee of the National Integration Council here [New Delhi]. Mrs. Gandhi said it was necessary to discuss the issue. It would be helpful if a working paper was first prepared setting out the guidelines. She added that the Home Minister, Mr. Y.B. Chavan, was asking the Administrative Reforms Commission to expedite its report on Centre-State relations. The issue could be discussed "at a suitable time." She stressed that the question should be carefully examined. The consequences of a Centre with less powers, at a time when the States were pulling in different directions, should be gone into.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 22, 1919.

Mussalmans in Burma.

Replying to an address presented by the Mahomedans of Akyab the Lieutenant-Governor said [in Rangoon] that special preference to Mussalman candidates for Government service in Arakan could be considered if it was shown that qualified candidates were unable to obtain a reasonable share of the appointments because of racial or religious discrimination against them. The appointment of a Mahomedan deputy inspector of schools to the divisional educational board would be considered. The demand for a Mahomedan representative from Arakan on the legislative council had to be considered with the general scheme of reforms now engaging the consideration of the Government. The demand was opposed to the body of Mahomedan opinion in Rangoon which had expressed itself against the necessity of communal representation of Indians in Burma. The fourth request for the last day of Mohorrum to be gazetted as a holiday required examination.

CONCEPTUAL

Indelible ink

This refers to the violet-coloured ink in India that is applied on a voter's forefinger after she exercises her vote. In 1962, the Election Commission in collaboration with the Law Ministry, the National Physical Laboratory of India and the National Research Development Corporation made an agreement with Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd. to manufacture ink that couldn't be wiped off easily. Mysore Paints was founded in 1937 by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV. The company is the sole supplier of indelible ink for civic body, Assembly and Parliamentary polls. It also supplies ink to about 25 countries. Indelible ink remains bright for about 10 days, after which it starts fading. It is known to contain silver nitrate and is manufactured in secrecy.

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