

The case of Shamima Begum

If the U.K. goes with the exclusionary instinct of an angry public, it will be dangerous for democracy



VIDYA RAM

In February 2015, three British schoolgirls from East London, aged between 15 and 16, took a flight to Istanbul and then Syria. They had told their parents they were going out for a day, but they didn't return. While their worried families went to Turkey in March to find out what happened to them, the disappearance of the girls sparked a national conversation on how young men and women in the U.K. were leaving for Syria and Iraq, often unbeknown to their families, to join the ranks of the Islamic State (IS) and other terrorist groups.

Giving evidence to a parliamentary committee shortly after the girls disappeared, the then Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Mark Rowley, spelt out what appeared to be Britain's approach: "If you have been innocently duped, you travelled to a war zone and you regretted it and you have come back, there is nothing criminal or terrorist in that. Clearly, if you have taken part in terrorism... then we are going to do everything we can to make sure you face the consequence of that through the criminal justice process." Britain has been contending with the issue of returnees for some time now. The government believes that of the 900 individuals who travelled to Syria and Iraq to join forces such as the IS, 40% have returned to the U.K., 20% have died, and 40% remain in the region.

Four years after the disappearance of the girls, *The Times* discovered one of them, Shamima Begum, in a Syrian refugee camp of 39,000 people. Heavily pregnant at 19 after having lost two children, Begum told the newspaper she had no regrets. She insisted that she was not the "silently" schoolgirl who ran away, but was still frightened. "Now all I want to do is come home to Britain," she said.

The question of citizenship

The story created an uproar in Britain; tabloids raged at her "unrepentant" attitude. The government swiftly ratcheted up its response. While



"The fact that Shamima Begum admitted to having no regrets leaving the U.K. is not surprising given that she lives in a refugee camp that is home to many Islamic State sympathisers." A picture of Begum. •REUTERS

the Security Minister initially insisted that no British lives would be put at risk to "go looking for terrorists or former terrorists in a failed state," it soon emerged that the authorities were determined to withdraw Begum's British citizenship. Under the British Nationality Act of 1981, the Secretary of State has the power to deprive a person of citizenship on the grounds that it is "conducive to the public good" and that the person would not be rendered stateless. The government believes that Begum either currently holds Bangladeshi citizenship or is eligible to apply for one. Begum and the Bangladesh government deny that she holds dual citizenship, and Bangladesh has even firmly said that there is "no question of her being allowed to enter into Bangladesh." This suggests that Home Secretary Sajid Javid's decision to strip Begum of her citizenship would render her stateless. Her family is considering legal options to challenge this decision. While deploring her conduct and comments to the media, her sister wrote in a letter to Mr. Javid that it is not possible for the family to abandon her either.

The issue has deeply divided Britain. On the one hand, the right-wing has sought to use the controversy to add to the narrative that it has often resorted to: of a supposedly magnanimous, set upon Britain, apt to be exploited by rogue individuals such as an impudent "jihadi bride". To this effect, many have attacked Begum's comments that revealed her

shock at the Home Office's decision. "Thank god, Sajid Javid grasped Shamima Begum is the one person uniting Britain - against her," declared a columnist in *The Telegraph*, accusing some of attempting to turn her in to the nation's "sweetheart". This is ludicrous, as everyone who opposes the Home Office's decision unanimously agrees that she must come back to face the judicial consequences, whatever they be.

Migration to Britain

To many others, this has highlighted the dangerous trajectory of British politics, where citizenship and the concept of belonging are under threat, and at the mercy of a capricious political system. Britain's attitude to migrants has already been under great scrutiny over its treatment of the Windrush generation (Commonwealth citizens who were invited to Britain between 1948 and 1971 to help rebuild the country after World War II, and were wrongly treated as illegal immigrants and some even deported). The Begum controversy highlights how only those with foreign roots are at the risk of losing citizenship. A white Brit without foreign ancestry would have no recourse to other countries and would therefore not be stripped of her citizenship. This makes the situation particularly discriminatory.

It raises other ethical questions. One Conservative MP asked in Parliament: "In removing British citizenship, the Home Secretary is essential-

ly saying, 'She's somebody else's problem', but... 'Which other country is supposed to look after her on our behalf? Can you imagine the fury here if we took a French or Italian citizen who joined Islamic State?'" Others wonder about leaving a young woman, who could potentially do harm or radicalise others, in Syria, a country without resources and vulnerable to terrorist activity.

Through all this Mr. Javid has insisted that his decision is all about "keeping the country safe". He has also questioned the ability of Britain's judicial system to hold Begum to account given that where she and others like her are is a "very lawless and dangerous place, so it is not always possible... to gather evidence of... activities that could be used to try to have a successful prosecution." However, many in the law enforcement agencies disagree with this perspective. The head of Mi6, Alex Younger, told *The Times* that while those who returned did pose risks, they had the right to come back. Others have pointed to the mechanisms that exist for returnees, such as through the use of temporary exclusion orders that place conditions on their return and enable them to be monitored at home. Still others have noted that depriving Begum of her citizenship could send out the dangerous signal that Britain is playing into the hands of terrorist recruiters, who are eager to make minority communities in the U.K. feel isolated. However, it's easy to see why Mr. Javid, widely seen as having prime ministerial ambitions, may disregard such considerations: A recent *Sky News* poll suggested that 76% of the public are in favour of Begum not being allowed to return.

What Begum did during her time with the 'Caliphate' and the extent to which she continues to sympathise with the IS is not known. The fact that she admitted to having no regrets is hardly a surprise given that she remains in a refugee camp that is home to many IS sympathisers. But if the starting point is to just go with the punitive instinct of an angry public and deprive a young woman, who was potentially brainwashed as a minor, of her fundamental rights, it is a dangerous time for democracy, due process and the rule of law.

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Re-imagining Delhi

The governance structure is in need of a drastic remake



RAGHU DAYAL

Notwithstanding the importance of the rural sector, it is the cities and towns, where citizens' daily travails in terms of *pani, bijli, sadak*, housing, schooling, healthcare and sanitation play out, that extensively impact the public's perception of a government's performance. While the annual inundation of cities, daily loss of lives on roads, and frequent infernos highlight dysfunctional civic and municipal governance, the failure to create zones, which results in thickets of illegal buildings and structures, as revealed in the 'sealing' overdrive in Delhi, shows how the rot runs deep.

Urban problems are not urban in isolation; they are national problems. Cities are in need of duly empowered municipalities and institutional systems and processes for closely coordinated and accountable agencies that can deliver in areas such as sanitation, health, education, mobility and housing.

Too many cooks

With a plethora of elected and other agencies, the governance structure for Delhi is in need of a drastic remake. In addition to 272 councillors in three municipalities, 70 MLAs, and seven MPs, there is the New Delhi Municipal Council for the cloistered Lutyens' zone, and the Cantonment Board, not to talk of the Union government controlling land and policing. Too many intervening institutions, often with overlapping jurisdictions and sometimes contradictory goals, make for suboptimal outcomes.

The mega-scale migration is Delhi's special challenge. Migration has steadily risen over the decades. With people pouring into the city and cars on to roads, the outlook for the environment looks grim. Delhi generates over 5,000 tonnes of refuse every day. In a way, Delhi is hailed as the country's pampered child. Its annual per capita income of ₹3.29 lakh (2017-18), which is almost thrice the national average. According to the 2011 Census, of a total of 3.34 million households in Delhi, 3.31 million had electricity, 2.62 million had safe drinking water, and 2.99 million had toilet facilities. Even so, the city has more than 200,000 homeless people and almost half of its population is in slums and unauthorised colonies.



High wages with little accountability for actual service delivery make public sector agencies an obvious target for patronage hiring. It also results in massive over-staffing. We need privatisation of civic delivery services like cleaning of roads and drains.

Use of technology

Conservancy services deserve a senior-level exclusive administration. Waste management demands professionalism and technology. The use of biotechnology should help in the treatment and disposal of waste; information technology in city planning and service delivery options; energy saving and cleaner technologies in urban transport; and high-tech, low-cost materials in building and housing. Technology can be used to implement user-based charges for access to roads, electricity and water. Economies of scale can be achieved by sharing service areas such as billing and tariff collections, cable laying and maintenance.

China envisions three big urban clusters – along the Pearl River, the Yangtze River, and the Beijing-Tianjin corridor – each with 50 million people or more. The National Capital Region, aiming to relieve pressure on Delhi, needs to be similarly treated as a Common Economic Zone, with a rationalised inter-State tax structure, uniform financial/banking services, telecom facilities and power supply, an integrated education and health policy, rail and road transport network, water supply and drainage system.

It is not a case of a lack of funds, but of governance and delivery. In most cities, municipalities are viewed as dens of corruption and inaction. Inspectors do not inspect, they only extort. A structured, mandatory inspection system is necessary for effective delivery. Councillors and commissioners don't regularly move around their wards; they remain inaccessible to people.

Owing to its great importance for national reconstruction and countrywide impact, especially for India's large cities – Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru – the real catalyst for reimagining the NCR needs to be the Union government. A compact, less diffused and pruned structure will hopefully usher in a promising paradigm of urban management that is worthy of being replicated across the country. The primary need is for the delivery apparatus to be transformed. The city needs to first address its basic problems before it dreams of striding towards the goal of being really *swachh* and 'smart'.

The writer is former Managing Director, Container Corporation of India

SINGLE FILE

More mixed events, please

If the Hopman Cup gets the axe, it will be a loss for the sport

PREETHI RAMAMOORTHY



It was one of tennis' most striking images: Roger Federer and Serena Williams, arguably the greatest players of the sport, playing against each other for the first time. This moment was possible thanks to the Hopman Cup, a mixed team competition that has been held in Perth, Australia, for the past three decades. "Fed/Serena and Hopman Cup is dominating sports news today," *Sports Illustrated's* Jon Wertheim tweeted. "Even 14 time zones removed, there is more talk of this than college bowls. If I'm Tennis Australia, I'm thinking long and hard before I mess with this event."

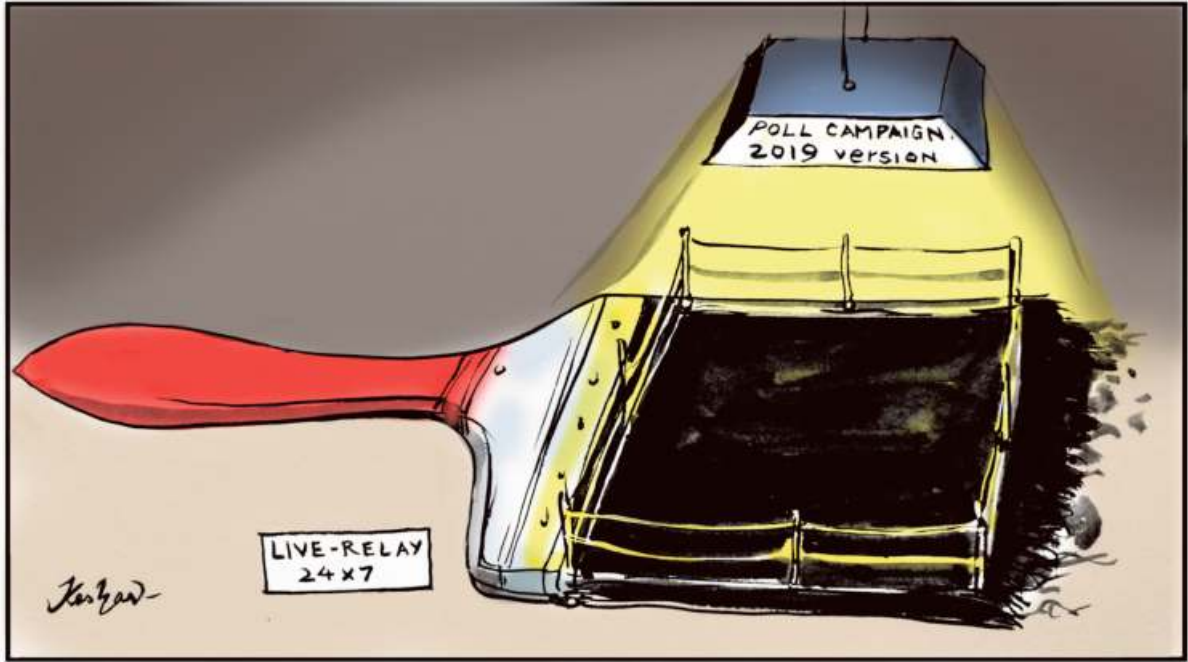
Despite making headlines worldwide, it is unlikely that the world will see a repeat of this. The future of the Hopman Cup is uncertain because the Association of Tennis Players (ATP) is planning to relaunch its World Team Cup, the ATP Cup, around the same time. This all-men's event will serve as another springboard before the Australian Open, carry a hefty \$15 million in prize money and, most importantly, contribute to player ranking points. On the other hand, despite its star performances, the Hopman Cup does not count towards rankings.

Of all major sports, tennis celebrates men and women competing as equals in the same major tournaments, for the same prize money, and in front of the same crowds. Apart from mixed doubles at the Grand Slams and the Olympics, the Hopman Cup is the only tournament where tennis fans can witness the best men and women players compete on the same court. It is one of those rare events that features mixed doubles as the main crowd draw. Some stellar examples from the past include Boris Becker and Steffi Graf, who played together in 1992, and Federer and Martina Hingis, who played together in 2001. This year, Federer and Belinda Bencic won. A record 1,10,364 people were in attendance and several days were sold out.

This is perhaps why it is surprising that the sport has decided to let it go, rather than embrace it as a huge selling point. It also points to what the sport thinks of mixed doubles. Even at Grand Slams, these matches are given little fanfare and often relegated to smaller courts. The prize for winning at Wimbledon is \$1.45 million compared to \$3 million for the singles winner.

But for fans of tennis, some of the most entertaining matches feature both men and women. They are a mixture of power and finesse, joy and unpredictability. Tennis is a gender-balanced sport. But in the last two years, three new all-men events have been introduced: the ATP Cup, the revamped Davis Cup and the Laver Cup. There is no reason why these tournaments cannot include a female or mixed doubles version. When you get your best men and women together, it is ultimately the sport that wins.

The writer writes on tennis for *The Hindu*



NOTEBOOK

When India-Pakistan animosity was pushed to the back burner

Not long ago, the two public service broadcasters promised to share treasures

ANURADHA RAMAN

Since the time of its inception in 1930, All India Radio (AIR) has broadcast interviews, public addresses, conversations, and music. Senior officials often speak about the invaluable treasures in AIR's archives and narrate the most fascinating stories. One that has stayed with me is about Saadat Hasan Manto. Manto apparently scribbled stories on paper napkins, which are in AIR's possession. I dream of seeing those paper napkins some day.

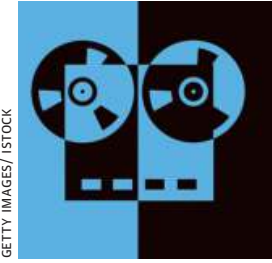
Almost every single artist has sung in AIR studios. I heard that veteran singer Gangubai Hangal was made to wait at the gates of AIR before being allowed to enter its studios for a recording. Much as I wish she had not been made to wait, I have also heard about how, much before television, when AIR ruled the roost, its studios played host with generosity. A newly inde-

pendent country wished to preserve its cultural diversity, and AIR was the patron saint for one and all.

Along with the archival material, which is accessible to journalists, came the problem of storing the spools of recordings in a temperature-controlled environment. Some rare recordings were erased to make way for new public speakers, and these made news.

But what I was looking for six years ago were the rare Muhammad Ali Jinnah tapes – two public speeches made on August 11 and 14, 1947. As with AIR recordings, there was a back story to Jinnah's original tapes on spools (the speeches are now available on YouTube). I was told that the original spool recordings were buried in the vaults of AIR. I was also aware that Pakistan wanted the original tapes of their Quaid-e-Azam's address.

The story goes that two



south Indian engineers (most of the engineering staff then were recruited from south India for their technical skills) were dispatched to Pakistan to record Jinnah's address as there were no recording facilities in Lahore and Peshawar then. Here is where things get a little muddled. Apparently, the engineers came back with the recordings, but the recordings got misplaced in the chaos that followed Partition. While Pakistan insisted that India had the tapes, India countered this saying that it didn't have the August 11 recording. This had Jinnah's speech about how all faiths

would enjoy equal treatment in the new country.

After I chased officials at AIR for eight long months, they made available the August 14 recording, which was later returned to Pakistan amidst much fanfare. A public-spirited individual had also filed a request under the Right to Information Act to make public the Jinnah recordings. What AIR also had was another recording of June 3, 1947, a brief talk by Jinnah in Delhi. This was not the 'multi-faith' address.

There was much bonhomie on display as India too made a request for some rare recordings of its filmstars, Prithviraj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar, from Pakistan to be returned to its archives. On display was a common legacy where two public service broadcasters promised to share treasures from the past. And for a brief moment in time, animosity was pushed to the back burner.

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 26, 1969

Indus Valley inscriptions deciphered

A team of Finnish scientists yesterday [February 25] announced that they had succeeded in deciphering – by logic, intuition and computer – the language of India's ancient Indus Valley civilisation that vanished about 4,000 years ago and left a mysterious legacy of thousands of inscriptions on beautifully carved seals. The team, sponsored by the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies here [Copenhagen], said the break through came only three weeks ago, and provided a key that threw open the doors to a new understanding of the Indus people. "Our key already gave the answer to the mystery of the origin of the Hindu caste system," said Dr. Asko Parpola one of the four Finnish researchers on the team. "It also approved for certain that the bearers of the Indus culture were Dravidians." The deciphered Indus inscriptions showed that the caste system existed long before the Aryans swarmed into India.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 26, 1919

A Daring Robbery.

A daring robbery is reported to have been committed [in Bangalore] at 2nd Q.V.O. Sappers and Miners. It is stated that at about seven o'clock in the evening a domestic servant, who subsequently turned out to be unemployed, appeared at the guard room with a chit asking for the family allotment cash box to be handed over to Captain Joyce. Believing the chit to be genuine the Havildar of the guard, with the permission of the officer of the day, gave the cash box to the servant. In company of a Sapper, it is stated that these men say that they went to the R.E. officers' mess where they say a European officer to whom they handed the cash box told the Sapper to return at 10 P.M. for the box, which he did. The man, it is said, alleges that when he went back the same officer said the cash box was locked up in a big Safe and he was to come for it in the morning. In the morning, however, the cash box was found broken open and empty with the exception of two or three cheques, on Coles Road, about a furlong away.

CONCEPTUAL

Hysterical strength

BIOLOGY

This refers to the abnormal levels of strength exhibited by certain individuals during times of extreme stress. For instance, people have been reported as lifting heavy objects like cars and huge rocks when their lives were under imminent threat. Such superhuman strength is attributed to the production of a variety of hormones like cortisol and adrenaline by the human body when exposed to extreme stress, which in turn increases the overall energy level of an individual.

MORE ON THE WEB

Oscar fashion in Pictures: Tuxedo gowns, much pink, and jewel tones

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