



Closed road

The ban on civilian traffic on the Udhampur-Baramulla highway must be rescinded

The ban on civilian traffic for two days a week on the 271-km stretch of National Highway 44 between Udhampur in Jammu and Baramulla in Kashmir, which came into force on April 7, is an ill-advised move. The ban, which is to last till May 31, is supposedly to enable the orderly conduct of the Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir, in the light of the tragic February 14 suicide attack on a CRPF convoy on NH 44 at Pulwama, that killed 40 personnel. On Sundays and Wednesdays, between 4 a.m. and 5 p.m., only pre-determined categories of civilian traffic will be allowed on the highway with clearance from the authorities. For the rest of the time, the highway will be given over to the movement of troops. As a measure to prevent another Pulwama-type attack, this is draconian. NH 44 is the lifeline of the State – it is vital to move goods (including perishable agricultural produce), and along it lie many educational and medical institutions. In many cases, avoiding the stretch would greatly multiply the time and distance between two points. The government is at pains to emphasise that exceptions are in place for those in medical emergencies, lawyers, doctors, tourists, government employees, students, and so on. But such a system of permits and bans militates against the freedom of movement at the heart of a democratic society. To be sure, even before the ban, civilian traffic has not moved on the highway unfettered by checks. Such is the security challenge in J&K. But to officially segregate civilian traffic is to put people's lives at the mercy of a calendar, and to invite confusion about the organising principles of Indian troop deployment.

The Pulwama attack was a wake-up call about the security drills in place to prevent terrorist strikes. It demanded an appraisal, so that the lives of soldiers and civilians alike can be secured. To throw civilians out of gear – as they were on the first day of the highway ban, on April 7 – defies logic. It also positions the administration against the people, as has become clear from the political and legal challenges to the traffic restrictions. In a State that is already under President's Rule, it has pushed the political class and the administration farther apart. The State's parties such as the National Conference and the Peoples Democratic Party have led the voices of protest. Petitions have been filed in the J&K High Court arguing that the restrictions violate Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution. The effect of any response to the Pulwama attack ought not to be an increased alienation that places troops and local people in an us-versus-them timetable. It must, instead, be a doubling up of the security protocol to make life more secure and hassle-free for civilians and soldiers alike.

Netanyahu's Israel

As he tries to clinch a fifth term as PM, hopes for peace in Palestine dim further

The April 9 parliamentary elections in Israel have underscored the structural shift in the country's democracy – the right wing reigns supreme. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had faced serious challenges during the campaign. He faces corruption allegations that could lead to his indictment. The Blue and White party, formed a few weeks ahead of the election, had quickly risen to become the principal opposition force, giving Mr. Netanyahu a scare. He had lost some allies even before the elections. In the event, Mr. Netanyahu has emerged victorious. While both Mr. Netanyahu's Likud party and the Blue and White got 35 seats each (after 98% of the votes were counted), he could become Prime Minister for a fifth time with support from rightwing parties. Likud has markedly improved its performance from 2015, when it had won 30 seats and still formed the government. The orthodox Jewish parties Shas and United Torah Judaism, which won seven and six seats respectively in 2015, secured eight each this time. The Union of Rightwing Parties and the right-nationalist Yisrael Beytenu have won five seats each, while the centrist Kulanu has got four. With the support of these potential allies, Mr. Netanyahu would have the backing of 65 MPs, well past the halfway mark in the 120-member Knesset.

Mr. Netanyahu ran a contentious, ultra-nationalist campaign to drum up support for Likud and its allies. He had publicly aligned with Jewish Power, a fringe party known for its racist, anti-Arab views. If Mr. Netanyahu had said there wouldn't be any Palestinian state under his watch during the 2015 election campaign, this time, a few days ahead of the poll, he said he would annex parts of the West Bank to bring Jewish settlements under Israeli sovereignty. He also exploited the security concerns of Israeli voters by presenting himself as the only leader capable of keeping them safe from "Palestinian terrorists" as well as Iran. Mr. Netanyahu is credited with stabilising the Israeli economy and, more controversially, clinching major diplomatic coups such as the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the occupied Syrian Golan as Israeli territory, thanks to American President Donald Trump. Mr. Netanyahu is now set to become the longest-serving Prime Minister, overtaking David Ben-Gurion, the country's founder. But the Israel he leads today is totally different from what even Ben-Gurion and the early socialist Zionists had imagined. With Mr. Netanyahu showing no interest in the peace process and the occupation of Palestine being deepened both militarily and through Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Israel, which is described by a Basic Law passed last year as "the nation state of the Jewish people", is a *de facto* apartheid state. Given his record, there is little reason to hope that Mr. Netanyahu will break the *status quo* during his next term.

A crisis that resists hasty solutions

As the EU extends the Brexit deadline, it is still anybody's guess if London will finally get its act together



VIDYA RAM

On Wednesday, 12 days after the U.K. had initially been due to leave the European Union (EU), Prime Minister Theresa May headed to Brussels to persuade leaders of the remaining 27 member states to grant Britain an extension that would enable Brexit to happen by June 30 at the latest. With the ultimate decision on this lying with Brussels (and the member states, each of which has the ability to veto an extension outright), it felt a far cry from the picture of a Britain "taking back control" that the government and Leave supporters had propounded in the wake of the 2016 referendum. In the end Britain's suggested date was brushed aside as EU leaders – following an epic five-hour meeting – opted for October 31, with Britain able to leave earlier if a deal is reached.

Amid accusations

After it became clear that the original March 29 Brexit deadline was no longer tenable, accusations over who was responsible have come thick and fast. Ms. May herself faced a backlash from MPs when she appeared to blame them for the chaos, accusing them of "political games" and "arcane political rows" that she and the public had tired of. Ironically for Ms. May, her comments were also seen as bolstering the determination of MPs to continue to block her withdrawal deal within Parliament, which has now thrice been rejected by MPs.

As with the results of the 2016

referendum, the causes of the current political crisis in Britain are manifold, though the starting point surely has to be the open-ended nature of the question put to the public: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?" The question, which itself was open to generous interpretation, was used as a launch pad for all sorts of arguments by the Leave campaign, ranging from the need to end free movement from the EU and immigration more widely, to having the opportunity to strike trade deals independently, to ending payments to the EU, to challenging the establishment. All these and other reasons played into the result: a Nuffield study published last year noted that immigration was the main reason that people voted to leave, followed by sovereignty, though the economy and the desire to teach politicians a lesson also played in.

The ambiguity of the question has meant that politicians across the political spectrum have been able to interpret the results to pursue pretty much any vision of Brexit. There's Ms. May, who has put immigration controls at the heart of her vision of Brexit. This position on free movement is also adopted to a certain extent by the Labour party, to the fury of many of its supporters. However, while Ms. May has insisted on ending membership of the EU customs union to enable Britain to forge independent trade deals on goods, Labour believes remaining in part of these arrangements is the only way to enable businesses to get the tariff and hassle-free relationship with Europe they require to continue thriving, while ensuring that no hard border develops on the island of Ireland between the Repu-



blic of Ireland (the EU nation) and Northern Ireland (part of the U.K.).

Across party lines

These visions have not held across party lines, with some MPs choosing to leave their parties over their differences. While some Conservative MPs believe Ms. May's plan to transform the relationship is excessive, there are others who have condemned it as tantamount to a betrayal, relegating Britain to "vassal" status to the EU, particularly because of the backstop arrangements for Ireland that would put the U.K. into a customs union with the EU that couldn't be ended unilaterally were future talks to break down. Labour, on the other hand, has faced critics who believe it should be doing more to represent the 48% who voted to remain in the EU, as well as from others who have warned that fighting Brexit would amount to abandoning some of the most deprived communities in northern England which voted overwhelmingly to leave. These tensions – which have pervaded the party membership, discussion between MPs and even the cabinet and shadow cabinet – have made achieving political consensus on all sides particu-

'Deep regret' is simply not good enough

Britain's refusal to squarely apologise for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre is expected but disappointing



NAVTEJ SARNA

Though no one was holding their breath, there was some expectation of a British apology on the occasion of the centenary of the horrific Jallianwala Bagh massacre, more so since the demand came this time not from Indians alone but also from a strong contingent of British MPs across political parties. British Prime Minister Theresa May finally came out with: "We deeply regret what happened and the suffering caused."

Words are important, especially in the heavily-nuanced English language, and those who invented that language certainly know how to use them. One can imagine the careful drafting in Whitehall that would have gone into formulating the Prime Minister's statement. For comparison, in a press conference in Brussels the next day, Ms. May said that she "sincerely regretted" her failure in delivering a Brexit deal so far. "Deeply" is admittedly stronger than "sincerely", but the nature of contrition expressed is identical.

The second aspect of the statement that stands out is its passiveness – "what happened", "the suffering caused". There is no hint of agency here; this could well be the

statement of any observer and not of inheritors of the empire that committed the atrocity. The blandness too is disturbing: one would have expected some sympathy for the victims or their descendants and some reference to the brutality of the massacre.

Let us recall "what happened". On April 13, 1919, Baisakhi day, following unrest in Amritsar after protests against the Rowlatt Act, Brigadier General (temporary rank) Reginald Dyer took a strike force of 50 rifles and 40 khukri-wielding Gurkhas into an enclosed ground, Jallianwala Bagh, where a peaceful public meeting of 15,000-20,000 was being held. Immediately and without warning, he ordered fire to be opened on the crowd. The firing of 1,650 rounds was deliberate and targeted, using powerful rifles at virtually point-blank range. The "suffering caused" included several hundred dead and many times more wounded. The officially accepted figure of 379 dead is a gross underestimate. Eyewitness accounts and information collected by Sewa Samiti, a charity organisation point to much higher numbers. Non-Indian writers place the number killed at anything between 500 to 600, with three times that number wounded.

More was to follow after the proclamation, two days after the massacre, of Martial Law in Punjab: the infamous crawling order, the salaam order, public floggings, arbitrary arrests, torture and bombing of civilians by airplanes –



all under a veil of strictly enforced censorship.

A history of evasion

Let us look next at what was done. After calls for an investigation, including by liberals in Britain, a Disorders Inquiry Committee, soon to be known by the name of its Chairman, Lord Hunter, was set up. In his testimony, Dyer asserted that his intention had been to punish the crowd, to make a "wide impression" and to strike terror not only in Amritsar but throughout Punjab. The committee split along racial lines and submitted a majority and minority report. The majority report of the Hunter Committee, using tactically selective criticism, established Dyer's culpability but let off the Lieutenant Governor, Michael O'Dwyer. The minority report written by the three Indian members was more scathing in its criticism. By then Dyer had become a liability and he was asked to resign his command, after which he left for England. This decision for a quiet discharge was approved by the British Secre-

larly difficult.

But what has been particularly striking is the government's refusal to compromise. It had become increasingly clear that the government's vision of Brexit wasn't one that would pass through Parliament – indeed, 230 MPs voted against it in January in the biggest defeat for a U.K. government in parliamentary history. Ms. May has plodded on regardless, even as some pointed out the double standards: she insisted that she should be able to bring her vote to MPs over and over again; but at the same time she robotically insisted on respecting the referendum result, despite the fact that so much had changed and so much more had become known in the past two years.

However, Ms. May is not the only one to refuse to compromise. Some Brexiters and the Conservative party's parliamentary ally, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) of Northern Ireland, have dug in. The DUP's intransigence will be particularly painful for Ms. May, whose impetuous decision to call a snap general election in 2017 gave them the crucial powerful hand over Brexit decisions. Indeed, had that election not been called, it is quite possible that the government would not have struggled with the numbers in getting its deal through, and Brexit could have happened on the scheduled date.

Muddle along

Advocates of a public vote too have not covered themselves in glory. The Independent Group of MPs who left the Conservative and Labour parties earlier this year courted criticism when they failed to help push the customs union and other softer options over the line in a series of indicative votes

tary of State, Edwin Montagu, and, after an acrimonious debate, also by the House of Commons. The conservative Lords however took a different tack and rebuked the government for being unjust to the officer. Similar sentiments in Dyer's favour came from the right-wing press – the *Morning Post* started a fund for him which collected £26,000 – as well as from conservative sections of the public who believed he had saved India for the empire. Rudyard Kipling, who had contributed £10 to the fund put an ambivalent comment on the wreath he sent to Dyer's funeral in 1927: "He did his duty as he saw it."

Now what has already been said: The speech that carried the day in the House of Commons in 1920 was that of Winston Churchill, no fan of Gandhi and his satyagraha. He called Dyer's deed "an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in sinister isolation"; privately he wrote that the "offence amounted to murder, or alternatively manslaughter". Significantly, Churchill, likening the event to "Prussian" tactics of terrorism, said that this was "not the British way of doing things". In other words, he was resorting to British exceptionalism: he was hanging out Dyer to dry as a rogue officer, while saving the larger colonial enterprise as benign.

Dyer was certainly rogue, but he was not alone. He was one of a line of several such – John Nicholson, Frederick Cooper, J.L. Cowan

recently. Had they done so, MPs could have got the majority they needed for a road ahead to show that there was an alternative road to Ms. May's, but instead they have continued to cling to the hope of either revocation or a public confirmatory vote.

It has been particularly unfortunate for the U.K. that given the fundamental issues that were apparent from the start of the Brexit process that Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union was triggered in March 2017 well before the type of Brexit they wanted to pursue had been agreed upon. This has forced the debate to happen against the backdrop of a deadline and cliff-edge that has made it possible for the government to threaten, "it's our deal or no deal", or "it's our deal or a long delay", making it more into a game of chicken than a country trying to forge the right road ahead. For this Parliament itself bears much responsibility, voting overwhelmingly to trigger the exit process back in 2017 with pretty much nothing to go on.

If the Brexit process was Britain's first opportunity to flout its prowess as a rational, independent trading nation, capable of holding its own on the global stage, it is a chance that has so far been missed by miles and the sense of frustration among EU leaders has been palpable. The October 31 deadline has given Britain time to find the "best possible solution." Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, said, urging Britain to "not waste this time". Whether Britain manages to do so and finally comes up with a solution acceptable to Parliament and the EU remains to be seen.

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– who resorted to severe disproportionate violence in 1857 and after the 1872 Kuka rebellion; he was also part of the despotic administration led by O'Dwyer (later assassinated by Udham Singh in 1940) which emboldened and then exonerated him. In 2013, then Prime Minister David Cameron quoted the same Churchill epithet of "monstrous", adding that this was a "deeply shameful event in British history" and "we must never forget what happened here." The Queen had earlier termed it as a "distressing example" of past history. Again, general homilies with hands nicely off and no admission of a larger culpability of racialised colonial violence that underpinned imperialism.

Healing a wound

Deep regret is all we may get instead of the unequivocal apology that is mandated. The expectation could be that time will add more distance to the massacre, making these calls for apology increasingly an academic exercise. We will no doubt also be advised to forgive and move on. The fact remains that there are many ways to heal a festering wound between nations, as Canada's apology for the Komagata Maru shows; clever drafting is not one of them.

Navtej Sarna is a writer and former High Commissioner to the U.K. and Ambassador to the U.S. He is a member of the Jallianwala Bagh Centenary Commemoration Committee. The views expressed are personal

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.

Court on Rafale papers

The report, "SC rejects Centre's plea to keep Rafale documents secret" (Page 1, April 11), on the Supreme Court's ruling establishes that no government is above the law and that investigative journalism cannot be stifled. The government's stance so far on documents that pertain to the deal indicates that it has something to conceal and is perhaps an attempt to buy time till the elections are over. The verdict is also an opportunity to allay aspersions voiced on the integrity of the supreme institution in the aftermath of its December order.

DEEPAK SINGHAL,
Noida

■ It is a matter of pride that *The Hindu's* efforts, through investigative journalism, to

probe the Rafale deal have finally yielded results to the extent that the Supreme Court took note of it. The top court has once again struck a blow for the freedom of speech, thereby strengthening our democracy. I hope this moment will also enlighten citizens on the need to not give up the fight of safeguarding their constitutional rights.

RANJIT KUMAR PAUL,
New Delhi

Talking peace

The Prime Minister is leaving no stone unturned in order to somehow or the other win the general election. His repeated references to the armed forces and also the Pulwama incident in order to garner votes gloss over the point that the latter was on account of a failure of

intelligence, for which his government is responsible. The second point is about what the government has done in order to restore normalcy with Pakistan. Dialogue with Pakistan is imperative.

N.G.R. PRASAD,
K.K. RAM SIDDHARTHA,
Chennai

For the young voter

I am 80-plus and the results of this election are not going to be of very great consequence to me. But I wish the vast majority of the Indian electorate, especially the young and vibrant, cares. And so I write this note. When I was a class VI student in a village in Kerala, I spent election day on the road near the polling booth shouting, "Every vote in the bullock-cart box." Since then, I have not missed a single election

as a responsible voter. I began my adult life in Cherrapunji and had no problem mixing with people from across India. Being Khasi, Lushai, Naga or Assamese made no difference. When I moved to Shillong, there too it was a life of acceptance. It never occurred to me to even bother to find out what religion/caste or region one belonged to. To me, all were and are the citizens of this great country. All the elections I experienced were based more or less on facts. Now, things have changed. Many of us are being told that our religion is in danger; our culture is in danger; why, even our gods are in danger. Our nationalism was not a talking point at all because it was as dear to every Indian as the air he or she breathed. We cherished our freedom,

both intellectual and physical, and our democratic values. We do not want these to be taken away. Therefore, I request the young people of this land to think for themselves. Facts and truth, and not enthralling theatrics, should guide them. Before they exercise their franchise, they should make sure that they are serving this great land and not any particular politician.

Dr. C.P. DAMODARAN,
Thrissur, Kerala

One-sided

Armchair critics can never offer anything constructive to the government but derive immense pleasure by criticising people who do things honestly. What is the use of publishing articles such as "Notes on the BJP's manifesto" (OpEd page, April 11)? Incidentally, the writer

says he is associated with an organisation "in pursuit of alternative ideas and imagination". Of what use is this?

K. SIVASUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

Expressing 'regret'

There is a huge difference between the words "regret" and "apology". What India needs is an outright apology for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and Britain should shed its ego. Had such a brutality been unleashed on the British, Europe, America and Israel would have shamed the oppressors every year. There seem to be different standards because it happened to "others".

T. ANAND RAJ,
Chennai

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