

# A fake medal devoid of any substance

Yossi Verter

The idea of giving the Medal of the Knesset to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was dreamed up in secret by Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana. He didn't inform the opposition (or the governing coalition). He doesn't care what Knesset plot together with the Knesset's events and ceremonies department, where he has a servant who does his bidding.

Why a plot? And why deceptive? Because there is no such thing as the Medal of the Knesset. It's fake, an Ohana bluff he hung around the Indian leader's neck. It was an empty gesture, devoid of content and context, by a good-for-nothing Knesset speaker devoid of substance and morality.

After all, a medal on behalf of the Knesset ought to in fact be from the Knesset. Something like the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor awarded by the U.S. Congress to people who made exceptional contributions to humanity, including foreigners such as Shimon Peres, Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa.

That medal is given after a thorough legislative process and requires the consent of at least two thirds of Congress' members. It represents a consensus reached by both sides of America's political divide, including the administration, of course. It honors its recipients rather than making a mockery of them.

The problem is that Ohana is incapable of doing anything in an honest manner. He will always choose

the crooked path. All he had to do was convene the presidium in advance, where every party in the Knesset is represented, and bring the matter to a vote. A huge majority would have supported the idea. That way, the medal would in fact have become a Medal of the Knesset. That might not be a bad idea, if it were done properly.

Incidentally, why did Ohana deny this great honor to U.S. President Donald Trump when he addressed the Knesset? Trump didn't deserve it? SAD!

**On the eve of Israel's most fateful election ever, an important oppositional media outlet may well fall into the hands of a right-wing figure.**

It's no wonder that the man who invited former MKs to the Knesset for Modi's speech (some unidentifiable, and some unfortunately all too identifiable) to fill the opposition's seats to "honor" the guest is the same man who arranged a nonexistent medal for Modi. Had I been Modi, I wouldn't even have taken this bluff onto the flight home, which left on Thursday. That's what those little garbage cans in hotel rooms are for.

But an expert on India who formerly served as ambassador there told me it's more likely that Modi's aides simply didn't bother

him with this nonsense. He is above such Israeli issues.

The opposition did right when it chose to demonstratively absent itself from the speeches by Ohana and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu but be present for the Indian prime minister's speech. There was no reason whatsoever to boycott Narendra Modi. He didn't do anything wrong.

But since Ohana insisted on boycotting Supreme Court President Isaac Amit, whom he doesn't like, the opposition could do nothing but protest this ongoing attack on democracy and statesmanlike behavior – aside from the limp-wristed MK Benny Gantz, who made do with skipping Ohana's speech but was present for Netanyahu's.

Is there no bottom to the depravity to which the Kahol Lavan party chairman will sink? After all, it's clear that had Netanyahu wanted to, he would have given an order to Ohana and Ohana would have sent an invitation to Amit.

But no. Netanyahu is continuing his double game. From one side of his mouth, he declared, as readers may recall, that "Isaac Amit is the Supreme Court president, and that's a fact." But from the other side, he allows Ohana to continue humiliating said president, and even more so to humiliate parliament. The Knesset is engaging in petty neighborhood politics – no offense meant to any specific neighborhood.

## A tangled spiderweb

The battered adage that what walks like a duck, talks like a duck and so forth would be an understatement for what is currently happening in the

talks to sell Channel 13 television.

The shock that decent people felt at the revelation of the despicable talks between Netanyahu and Yedioth Ahronoth publisher Arnon Mozes (one of the three cases in Netanyahu's criminal trial) and the alleged bribery deal between Netanyahu and Shaul Elovitch, then the owner of the Walla internet news site (another of those cases) is likely to recur sometime in the future. That's if and when what happened behind the scenes in the Channel 13 talks is revealed. For now, from what we can see at the very least stinks and raises tough questions.

Channel 13's news department is critical and biting, as a news department should be, and Netanyahu has admitted in the past that he wanted to shut it down back when it was known as Channel 10. Now Channel 13 is up for sale. Two offers are on the table. One is from a group of high-tech people. The other is from Patrick Drahi, a tycoon who owns a

communications company (Hot) and other media outlets (the Srugim and Kikar Hashabbat websites and i24 television).

The first offer is the better one, and also easier to implement, from every possible angle – financial, regulatory and legal. The second is crooked, dubious and laden with pitfalls and problems from every possible angle – financial, regulatory and legal. But the high-tech bidders were opponents of the government's judicial overhaul, while Drahi is a rightist whose existing media outlets have a rightist orientation that verges on diehard pro-Netanyahu.

Drahi is mired in heavy debts. His financial capabilities are very limited. And of course, there's the question of cross-ownership of multiple media outlets. The high-tech group is completely free of all those ills.

Nevertheless, the owner of Channel 13, British-Jewish billionaire Len Blavatnik, chose Drahi's offer. So that's the one currently on

the table. According to reports in TheMarker, Blavatnik's decision was preceded by a message from on high: If you go with the high-tech guys, we'll place major hurdles before the deal. If you choose Drahi, "You'll get approval in five minutes."

You don't have to be a senior jurist well-versed in Netanyahu's existing cases to conclude that if even a shred of evidence confirming that this message was sent is found, this stinking deal needs to be investigated by the police's major crimes department, Lahav 433. It's a combination of the Mozes and Elovitch cases: On the eve of the most fateful election ever, an oppositional media outlet may well fall into the hands of a right-wing figure as part of a deal that includes regulatory benefits worth lots of money.

Do you remember Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi's broadcasting bill, currently being fast-tracked – questionably legally – in a Knesset committee headed by Galit Dis-

tel Atbaryan? Among other things, it deals with the issue of cross-ownership.

If it passes and enters the lawbooks, Drahi will be one of the big winners. Is it just a coincidence that the bill (which is supposed to be passed by the end of March, less than a month away) and the dubious deal are advancing in parallel, shoulder to shoulder?

The notable difference between the previous decade and today is that now, everything, or almost everything, is in the open. There's no shame and no fear.

There's greater audacity; a trial being dragged and conducted with horrifying sluggishness, making it a mockery; and a corrupt prime minister with no restraints who was and remains obsessed with the media. And facing him are weaker, deterred, persecuted gatekeepers together with lousy, ignorant ministers with the democratic consciousness of a gnaw.

If we have learned anything from the past, it's

that Netanyahu knows how to prepare for an election. He's a master at laying the groundwork in every possible field, including the media (we haven't forgotten the plan to close Army Radio).

There are two agencies responsible for preventing the development of another corruption case against him that could affect the election – the Second Authority for Television and Radio and the Competition Authority. Their heads, Mordechai Mordechai and Michal Cohen, respectively, are viewed as honest people who don't kowtow to the government.

Consequently, Mordechai is on the way out in favor of Yifat Ben Hai Segev, who was good to Netanyahu all the way to the end of her changing testimony in the Elovitch case in her former capacity as chairwoman of the Cable and Satellite Broadcasting Council. As for Cohen, she has survived two and a half years of attempts to fire her by failed Economy Minister Nir Barkat.

Incidentally, as these lines were being written on Thursday, Haaretz's Nati Tucker reported that the Second Authority for Television and Radio refused to discuss Channel 13's request to approve Drahi's offer because it's only the first step in a broader deal, so there's no point in discussing it in stages.

And speaking of Netanyahu's poison machine, until a week or two ago, it ignored this issue. It had Israeli Arab journalist Lucy Aharish, opposition politician Yair Golan, the Brothers and Sisters in Arms organization and Supreme Court President Isaac Amit. Its hands were full.

But the moment the economic argument in favor of the Drahi option collapsed, the machine's operators swung into action. Suddenly, they began posting on X and smearing journalists working for Channel 13's news department. That, too, is doubtless a coincidence.



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