Israel’s Oppressive Law

What is the issue?

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- Israel’s new “Nationality Law” has institutionalised its oppressive vision.
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- It seeks to legalise discriminatory practices against Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, which is alarm bell for all progressive forces worldwide.
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What are the main features of Israel’s new Nationality Law?

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- The law, which is named “Israel, the nation state of the Jewish people” states that Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people.
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- Further, it emphasises that only the Jews have the right to self-determination in Israel and that Hebrew is the only official language.
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- Notably, Arabic (which was also an official language till now) has been demoted to a special status, which is undefined under the text of the law.
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- The law seeks to further Jewish settlements on the occupied West-bank and has declared the settlement policy as a supreme national goal.
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- It also grants religious and ethnic communities the right to maintain segregated habitats (implying, exclusive villages for Jews).
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How does the law read against the historical perspective?

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- Although Israel's nationality law is a continuation of its oppressive politics since 1948, it is indeed a major leap in that direction.
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- The law is menacing for the Palestinians as it explicitly seeks to deny the existence of two national aspirations within Israel.
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- This denial of the Palestinian's right to self determination has to be seen in the wider historical context in which Israel was born in 1948.
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- **History -** "Zionist Movement" was started in 1890s, with a vision to colonise a territory as homeland for Jews worldwide, who were spread across Europe.
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- After the "Balfore Declaration of 1917", British policy of facilitating Jewish settlers in its erstwhile colony of Palestine commenced.
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- Notably, Palestine was the preferred destination for the Jews due their historical and religious connection to that land.
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- **Influx -** The number of settlers spiked in the after the 2^{nd} world war and thus began a power struggle between the native Arabs and settler Jews.
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- With international backing, the Jews managed to establish Israel as a Jewish nation (on Palestinian territory), thereby making it a colonised settler state.
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- In fact, the Jewish colonisation and the oppression of the Palestinians are very similar to that of the European destruction of the Native Americans.
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- The only difference is in the historical timing: Importantly, the Zionist project is unfinished as yet, as is the Palestinian resistance to it.
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How did such colonialism proceed in contemporary times?

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- **Early years -** The colonial project has been proceeding quite successfully since oppressive ways were commenced in 1948 with the birth of Israel.
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- In the early years, Israeli ethnically cleansed (forcing people out) half of Palestine's population and took over 78% of the land.

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- The Palestinian minority which got left under Israeli control was put under a harsh military rule on the basis of British colonialist practices.
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- The remaining 22% of erstwhile-Palestine (before Israel was formed) is what constitutes West Bank and Gaza strip, where most Palestinian nationals lived
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- **Post 1967 -** Israel occupied strategic areas and roads in West Bank and Gaza after the 1967 Arab-Israel war and continues to control them till date.
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- While Israeli control has now stretched over the whole of historical Palestine, millions of Palestinians still continue to cling on their native land.
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- Notably, this is despite the fact that millions have fled elsewhere as refugees over the years due to lack of opportunities and severe political oppression.
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- In this context, Israel's peace outreach has been clearly about finding the best way control as much as territory with as few Palestinians in it as possible.
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- **Diplomacy -** For achieving its objectives, Israel has to get oppressive and openly violent at times, like the colonisers of the middle ages.
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- But this is not an easy task in our times as it had been then - partly because of international pressures and partly due to Palestinian persistence.
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- Hence, Israel resorts to peace détentes time to time, as a diplomatic tool to merely ease pressures, but it isn't ready to offer anything substantial for peace.
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- Considering this attitude, even the most forthcoming Palestinian leaders are unable to accept the solutions that Israel has to offer.
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How does Israel's current expansionist policy look?

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- **Unilateralism -** Currently, the strategy of unilateralism proposed by previous hardliner Israeli PM Ariel Sharon (2001-2006) is being adhered to.
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- This concept decries the "two national theory" that was long forwarded by the Israeli governments and favoured a more aggressive oppressive approach.
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- Its stresses that there is no need to negotiate with the Palestinians over the future, and that Israel needs to proceed unilaterally to extract its ends.
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- The call that Israel has to make is to decide which parts of historical Palestine should be annexed under direct rule and which need to be ruled form outside.
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- **Current Vision -** Most of Israel's current policymakers subscribe to the "unilateralist thinking" and the nationalism law is their making.
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- The Palestinian Authority that was recognized under the Oslo Accords of 1993 now officials controls West-Bank and Gaza Strip.
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- In this context, the unionists currently don't seek to control Gaza and the densely populated areas of West bank (40% of west bank).
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- But the nationality law now gives the legal mandates for full annexation of sparsely populated regions of West bank through establishment of settlements.
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- Notably, this is already being done with and multiple Jewish colonies have come up in the region despite strong international opposition to it.
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What does the law mean for Palestinians under Israeli Occupation?

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- The nationality law defines clearly how Israel will deal with the millions of Palestinians under its direct rule.
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- They will be citizens who will be tolerated only if they suppress their national identity and the historical narrative.
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- Even then, they will only be second-rate citizens under an apartheid system that will not allow them to live in exclusive Jewish communities.
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- Further, they will also not have the same state benefits, access to land, and freedom of movement and association as the Jewish citizens.
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- The new law seeks to guide future government on the attitude they need to adopt towards Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.
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- Notably, as Israel continues to expand its territorial clout, the number of Palestinians within their occupation will also go up.
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What are the larger implications?

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- Racism continues to exists in many countries even today, but institutionalised racism has been erased from almost everywhere in the world.
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- With the fall of apartheid South Africa, the last bastion for openly oppressive laws was thought to have fallen, but Israel seems to be recreating them again.
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- In fact, if any national law elsewhere seeks to discriminate Jewish people on similar lines, Israeli would’ve cried foul that anti-Semitism has returned.
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- India is a nation that has stood strong against oppressive regimes in the past, and its increasing friendship with oppressive Israel doesn’t speak well.
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- The world has fought hard for humanistic values over the years to evolve what is at least a notionally equal society if not practically equal.
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- Israel is undoing even that level of progress that has been achieved, which is a sham that shouldn’t go unchecked.
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Source: The Hindu

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