

In arresting G Bala for a cartoon lampooning the CM, Tamil Nadu joins the list of those who can't take any criticism

The central government, its critics allege, is so thin-skinned, it can't take even the slightest criticism of its policies. While that may or may not be true, it would appear it isn't the only one. And the latest to join this august group is the Tamil Nadu government which has just arrested freelance cartoonist G Bala for mocking chief minister E Palaniswami as well as the Tirunelveli district collector and the police commissioner. While the government may well be right in feeling the CM and other officials were unfairly targeted since they could not have prevented last month's self-immolation by a family being harassed by a moneylender, curbing freedom of speech is hardly the way to go about this.

In the past, other state governments have also arrested people when they found the criticism unbearable. A professor was arrested in West Bengal for "defaming" chief minister [Mamata Banerjee](#) by circulating a cartoon making fun of her in 2012. Cartoonist Aseem Trivedi was arrested for his work supporting the Anna Hazare movement and charged with, if you please, sedition in 2012. Two girls were arrested in Mumbai for questioning, on Facebook, why Mumbai was shut down after Balasaheb Thackeray's death in 2012. A Puducherry businessman was arrested for posting a tweet about Karti Chidambaram the same year. Poet Kanwal Bharti was arrested in 2013 for posting a message on Facebook that criticised the Uttar Pradesh government for suspending IAS officer Durga Shakti Nagpal, who had cracked down on the sand mafia ... While the courts have done their bit by striking down Section 66-A of the Information Technology Act which was used to make arrests earlier, the sedition law is proving a tougher nut to crack with all politicians supporting it.