

Victoria, the obfuscation state

Editorial, 12:00AM November 20, 2018

Transparency and accountability are fundamental in a healthy democracy, and for politicians the ultimate form of accountability is an election. But in the final week of the Victorian campaign there is growing disquiet about the level of transparency from the Andrews Labor government over law and order issues. This is deeply worrying given the extent to which these issues are central in the election. Victorian voters deserve to cast their votes in the full knowledge of all the relevant facts. With pre-poll voting at record levels, no matter how much is revealed in coming days a large proportion will have cast their votes while denied some of the relevant facts.

For instance, Attorney-General Martin Pakula told the public last Friday that when they had previously bailed Bourke Street terrorist Hassan Khalif Shire Ali, Victoria Police had not been informed that his passport had been cancelled by federal security agencies (over fears he would try to join Islamic State in the Middle East). Then yesterday, after the Department of Home Affairs and ASIO said they would have passed on that information, Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton admitted Victoria Police had been told.

Mr Ashton also revealed he held back the fact Shire Ali was on bail when asked on the night of the attack but that he informed Premier Daniel Andrews the next day. Yet the public was not informed until a journalist broke the news almost a week later. Despite the caretaker provisions applying during the campaign, the opposition was not informed by the Premier or the Chief Commissioner. This is an alarming lack of transparency around a crucial issue of terrorism, law enforcement, justice and public safety.

The revelations occur as we discover the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has been considering “for a couple of weeks” whether to lay charges over the so-called Red Shirts affair, which implicates more than 20 Labor MPs, including six ministers, in possibly fraudulent misuse of public funds at the previous election. Given the lack of co-operation and duck-shoving over this investigation, it is worrying that voters don’t have such a ruling openly available to them already.

Editorials