

**BABRI DEMOLITION CASE**  
END OF MANDIR-MASJID POLITICS

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OCTOBER 11, 2020



**EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW**

# THIS VIRUS IS INDEED MAN-MADE

VIROLOGIST  
**DR LI-MENG YAN**

opens up on why  
she believes  
the novel  
coronavirus  
was created  
in a lab



**POLITICIANS & CRIME**  
MPs & MLAs  
DODGE PUNISHMENT

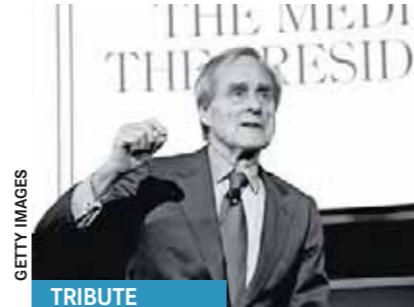
**HAROLD EVANS**  
A LIFE IN PURSUIT  
OF TRUTH

**HOME CHEFS**  
PLATEFUL OF MONEY

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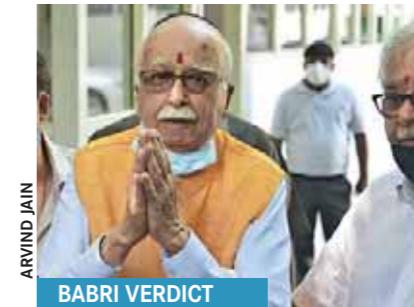
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### PLANNED PANDEMIC?

After she alleged that the novel coronavirus was made in a lab in China, virologist Dr Li-Meng Yan had to flee Hong Kong. In an exclusive interview with THE WEEK from New York, she reiterates her theory and challenges her detractors to prove otherwise. She even accuses the World Health Organization and the media of suppressing the truth

#### PLUS

- ◆ The allegations are questionable and inconclusive, says writer-researcher Milan Sime Martinic
- ◆ Claims in Dr Yan's paper, and counterclaims

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COVER DESIGN BINESH SREEDHARAN

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**Don't generalise**

It feels disgusting to know that many of our leading actors, producers and directors are promoting or using drugs ('Lost in the woods', September 27). This cannot be tolerated and strict action should be taken against such people.

Celebrities, particularly actors, influence young people. So, the onus is now on the Narcotics Control Bureau to find out every minute detail of the drug cartel and its supply chain. I find it difficult to believe that 80 per cent of Bollywood actors are on drugs. That could be an exaggeration.

It is not right to generalise everything. A few bad apples are not going to spoil an entire basket. India is the land of so many great actors, who have done great social service, which will never be forgotten.

**Vyom Prakash,**  
On email.

Too much focus and media attention is going into Bollywood's dalliance with drugs. There are many other issues that the country faces, and have to

be sorted out. Most film industries in the world face such problems, and this is nothing new. Bollywood films should always portray

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# ALL ABOUT KIDNEY STONES



**Dr Vivek Birla**

Urologist and andrologist  
Hi-Tech Urology Centre and  
Healthline Hospital, Thane

**What are kidney stones?**

A kidney stone, also known as a renal calculus, is a solid crystal build-up formed in the kidneys from dietary minerals in the urine. Stones can occur within the kidney itself as well as in the ureter (the tube draining urine from the kidney) or in the bladder.

**How do kidney stones form?**

Kidneys filter the blood by removing excess water and waste chemicals to produce urine. Urine passes from each kidney down a tube called the ureter into the bladder, then out of the body once the bladder becomes full. Many waste chemicals are dissolved in the urine and these chemicals sometimes form small crystals in the urine which clump together to form a stone.

**How common are kidney stones?**

Lifetime prevalence for kidney stones approaches 10 per cent, but it can vary according to geography. They can occur at any age but most commonly occur in people aged between 20 and 40. Roughly, half of all people who develop a kidney stone will have a recurrence again in the future.

**What are the symptoms of kidney stones?**

Flank Pain (discomfort in your upper abdomen), Haematuria (blood in Urine), Dysuria (painful urination), nausea, vomiting, fever and chills (if associated infection).

**Do all kidney stones cause pain?**

Kidney stones generally cause pain if they are blocking the ureter and trying to pass down towards the bladder. Stones that are not obstructing are thought to be non-

painful. This explains why some patients can have extremely large stones filling up their entire kidney with no or minimal pain.

**What are the possible complications from kidney stones?**

Although the pain of kidney stones can be severe, complications are uncommon. Sometimes a large stone can completely block the passage of urine down one ureter and this may lead to infection or damage to the kidney. This can usually be avoided, as blockages can be detected by X-rays or scans and large stones can be removed.

**How is Renal Calculi diagnosed?**

History and physical examination, Imaging Modalities Plain Radiography, IVP ,USG, CT Scans & Urine culture.

**How can kidney stones be treated?**

There are various treatment options for managing kidney stones. Some stones may be treated with medication. Other stone types may require surgical intervention. Surgical management may include non-invasive surgery [Extracorporeal shock wave lithotripsy (ESWL)], minimally invasive surgery [Percutaneous nephrolithotomy (PCNL) or ureteroscopy] or infrequently, open surgery.

**Do all stones require surgery?**

No. Some stones can pass spontaneously without medical or surgical intervention. The size and the location of the stone are factors that may affect whether a stone will pass spontaneously. Stones that are smaller than 4 mm have a 40-fold greater chance of passing spontaneously.

**How much fluid should a person drink to prevent kidney stone formation?**

People who have had a kidney stone should drink enough water and other fluids to produce at least 2 liters of urine a day. The amount of fluid each person needs to drink depends on the weather and the person's activity level, people who work or exercise in hot weather need more fluid to replace the fluid they lose through sweat.

**What can be done to help prevent a recurrence of a kidney stone?**

If one stone is detected, there is less chance to have a recurrence by drinking plenty of water throughout the day. By keeping urine diluted there is reduced chance of chemical build up.

- ◆ Increase fluid intake to maintain urine output of 2-3 l/day
- ◆ Decrease intake of animal protein (<52 g/day)
- ◆ Restrict salt intake (<50 mmol/day of sodium chloride)
- ◆ Normal calcium intake (>30 mmol/day)
- ◆ Decrease dietary oxalate
- ◆ Reduce the intake of foods rich in oxalate—spinach, rhubarb, chocolate, and nuts.

should be used more often during a military escalation with China.

**Rajesh Malik,**  
On email.

Tibet was an independent country since time immemorial. It was closed for all countries, including China, for certain reasons. But it always kept its doors open for India. Tibetans, who live in India, say Tibet is their motherland, but India is their fatherland. In the same manner we can say that Tibet is our brotherland. China should vacate Tibet immediately.

**Sudhansu S. Tunga,**  
Kolkata.

The Tibetan force should be encouraged to be at the forefront, at the Chinese border, along with the Indian Army. The Army should provide them the latest weapons and train them even harder.

We have already won the hearts of the Tibetans, and I want PM Narendra Modi to visit the Dalai Lama one of these days. That will add insult to injury as far as the Chinese are concerned.

**Devender Tokas,**  
On email.

**Stay away**  
BJP It should be understood well that Tamil Nadu—a state nurtured by Periyar E.V.R., C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi in Dravidian ideologies and culture—can never embrace a party like the BJP which has ideologies diagonally opposite to Dravidian teachings ('Saffron

onslaught', September 20). Having failed miserably to woo people of Tamil Nadu, the saffron party is now playing the religious card to divide and rule the state. People of Tamil Nadu are fed up with the Union government. They will not fall into the traps of its leaders.

**Tharcius S. Fernando,**  
On email.

The BJP is still nowhere in the picture in Tamil Nadu and its best bet continues to be Rajinikanth, though the matinee idol has been keeping them on tenterhooks.

M. Karunanidhi held on to the party post even when he was on his deathbed, and it was only after his demise that his son Stalin took over the DMK. Stalin, however, has not wasted much time in appointing his son Udayanidhi to the post that he had held. This has not gone down well with some of the senior leaders in the DMK.

**C.V. Aravind,**  
On email.

**What if it were you?**  
One expects a little better realisation and statement of facts from Anuja Chauhan ('Schizo-nation', September 20).

Kangana Ranaut is facing the declared and demonstrated might of the entire Maharashtra state, led by a certain political party. I would like to know how Anuja would have stood, sane and determined, if she was at the receiving end of such threats.

**C. Prakas,**  
Delhi.

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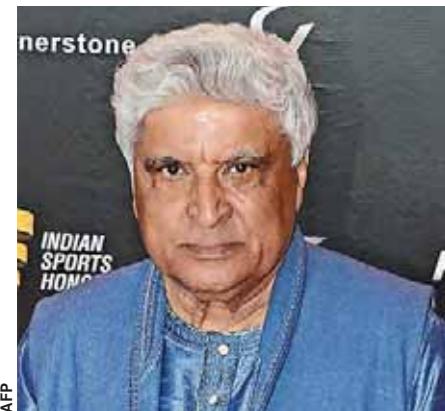
**— APERITIF —**  
**THE BIG PICTURE**

## **DEATH, PENALTY**

Many Indians are still reluctant to wear a mask, confounding even the 'god of death'. In a desperate attempt to make people wear masks, and in turn control the spread of Covid-19, authorities in Delhi are turning to Hindu mythology. A man in a Yama costume scolds the maskless at the India Gate.



PHOTO BY AAYUSH GOEL

**POINT BLANK**

These boys and girls are unlike the stars of yester-year who were not obsessed with their physical fitness. In fact, today's actors spend two to three hours in the gym. Do they look like drug addicts? They are extremely professional and responsible people.

**Javed Akhtar,**  
lyricist

The focus now is on six words: save farmers, save workers, save democracy. The government, with its many pliant media houses, will try hard to distract you. Young India, stay sharp. Stay vigilant.

**Derek O'Brien,**  
MP, Trinamool Congress leader

In these turbulent times, where we find ourselves confined in our living spaces, I have realised how important it is to fulfil the urge of travelling. In these times when going has got tough, I have often found myself reflecting on my previous travels.

**Aaditya Thackeray,**  
Shiv Sena leader

Shiv Sena should again join hands with BJP. If Shiv Sena doesn't come with us, I appeal to Sharad Pawar to join NDA for the development of the state. He may get a big post in the future. There is no advantage in staying with Shiv Sena.

**Ramdas Athawale,**  
Union minister, on the Nationalist  
Congress Party president



We're living in difficult times and I honestly think that a lot of people are frustrated. And somehow that is coming out on social media and you can see how much it has erupted. There's been a lot more hate in the last few months on social media than it was before.

**Sania Mirza,**  
tennis player

**WORD PLAY**

**Boreout** syndrome is an under-recognised psychological condition affecting workers across the world. Boreout is a state of extreme boredom and depression caused by there being no work or too little of it, over a long period of time. Bored-out workers tend to have lower job satisfaction and low self-esteem. And, it is as distressing as a burnout.

**MILESTONES****MAGICAL HANDS**

Australia's Alyssa Healy broke Mahendra Singh Dhoni's record for most dismissals (92 in 99 innings) by a wicketkeeper in T20Is. Healy achieved this feat in the second T20I against New Zealand at the Allan Border Field in Brisbane on September 27.

**MESSIAH OF MIGRANTS**

Actor Sonu Sood has been conferred with the SDG Special Humanitarian Action Award by the United Nations Development Programme for his philanthropy during the Covid-19 lockdown. The award was presented to Sood in a virtual ceremony on September 28.

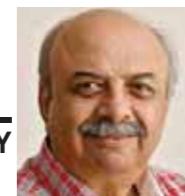
**EYEING SKY**

Hyderabad based space-technology startup Skyroot Aerospace unveiled

India's first privately developed cryogenic rocket engine, Dhawan 1, on September 25. The 3D-printed engine is named after renowned Indian scientist Satish Dhawan.

**POWER POINT**

**SACHIDANANDA MURTHY**

**Foodstuff for thought**

There was much amusement in 2012 when the Pakistan supreme court spent considerable time on whether the government has the right to fix the price of a *samosa* at ₹6. After lengthy arguments by bakers' association and the government, the lordships decided that *samosa* could not be subject to a fixed price, as the price of its ingredients, including meat, fluctuated widely.

If the Pakistan supreme court allowed cases to pile up while examining the stuffing of *samosas*, the Indian Supreme Court may now be asked to define the meaning of 'foodstuff'. This word, which is used in the Constitution, would be at the heart of the dispute between the Centre and states on agricultural marketing reforms.

These reform bills were declared passed amidst din in Parliament, without allowing for voting. The resentment has spilled into the streets even as the prime minister has described the reforms as historic benefit for the farmers.

There was discord in the ruling NDA, and one of its founders, Akali Dal, walked out of it, as violence erupted in Punjab and other states. The Congress said the reforms were a prelude to dismantling the minimum support price for foodgrains, and that the benefit would now go to big business groups, pushing farmers into debt.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi asked her party's chief ministers in Punjab, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Puducherry to pass their own state-specific bills to nullify the effect of the new Central law. The Centre's lawyers say that even if they pass the bills, these cannot become law without the assent of President Ram Nath Kovind, who has to act on the advice of the Central government. But, Sonia's move is to gain political mileage by saying that the protectionist proposals of states are blocked by an apathetic Central government.

At the heart of the dispute is Entry 33 in the Concurrent List of the Constitution. Unlike the Union

List and the State List, which give specific law-making powers to only the Union government or state governments, the Concurrent List gives equal riding rights, though there are provisions when a Central law will prevail over a state law on the same subject. Though agriculture is Entry 14 in the State List, the founding fathers brought confusion with Entry 33 of the Concurrent List, which says both governments control "trade and commerce in, and the production, supply and distribution of...., foodstuff, including edible oils and seeds."

Agriculture, broadly, includes food and non-food (for example, cotton) crops. States have assumed the right over it ever since the Constitution came into force in 1950. All states have enacted agricultural produce marketing laws.

Now, the Centre has asserted its own right to bring changes not only in trade but also in production, supply and distribution of 'foodstuff'. The dictionary defines 'foodstuff' as a substance suitable for consumption as food or to make food. Thus, 'foodstuff' could mean agricultural products, which are consumed, or are processed to be made into food.

Interestingly, neither the food minister (Ram Vilas Paswan) nor the food processing minister (Harsimrat Kaur, who resigned in protest) moved the new laws. They were moved by Narendra Singh Tomar, the agriculture minister.

While the battles would be fought in Parliament and in courts, the real test for the reforms would be in the marketplace. Narendra Modi is sure that the freeing of farmers from the control of the agricultural produce marketing committees would give them the freedom to sell 'foodstuff' anywhere in the country for advantageous prices.

In the government's eyes, it is an eternal rainbow for the farmers, while the opponents fear a dark age without guaranteed prices for farmers. The fickle economic weather of the country alone will determine what the skies hold for the farmers.

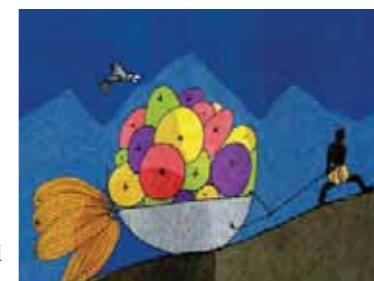
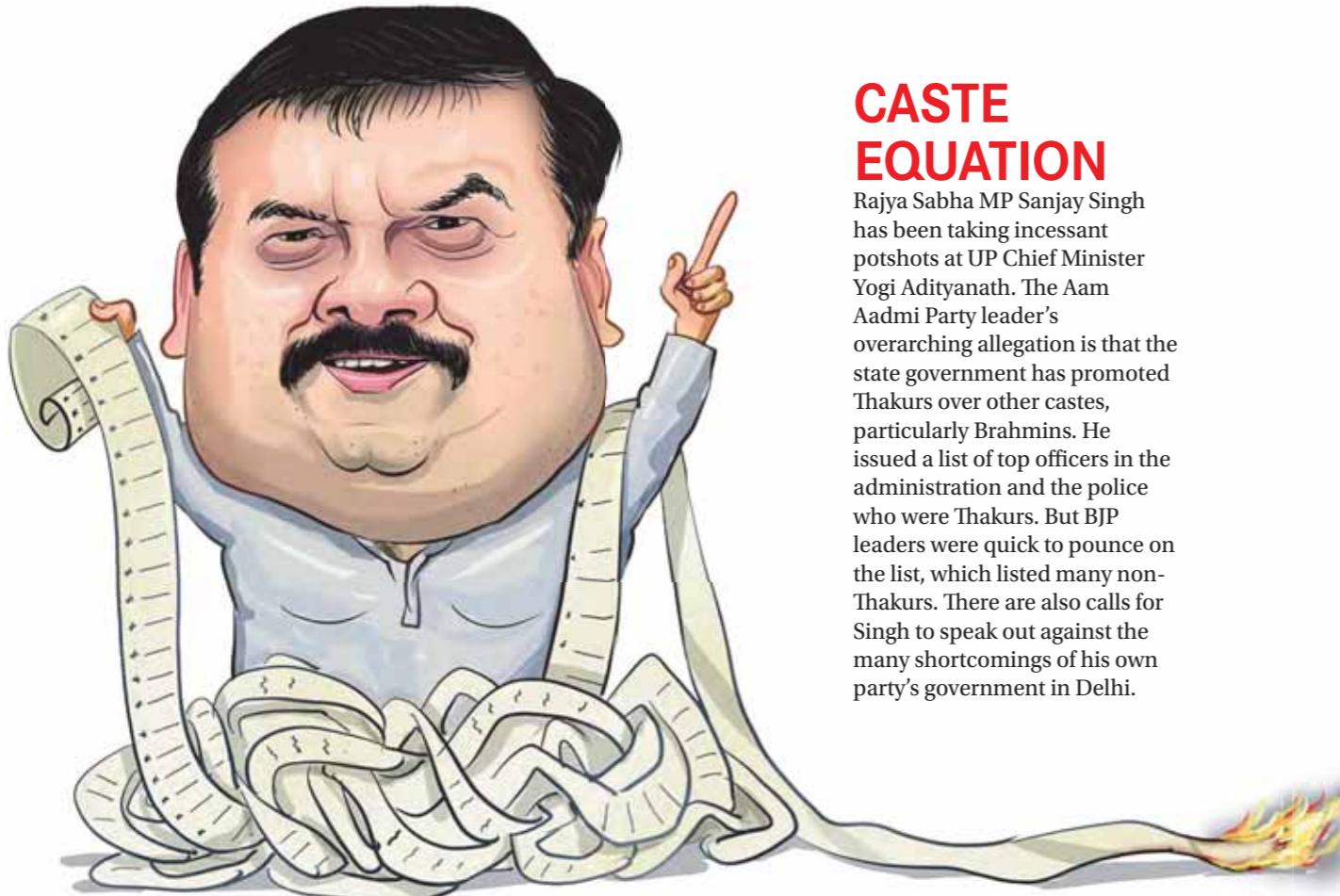


ILLUSTRATION BHASKARAN

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## CASTE EQUATION

Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh has been taking incessant potshots at UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The Aam Aadmi Party leader's overarching allegation is that the state government has promoted Thakurs over other castes, particularly Brahmins. He issued a list of top officers in the administration and the police who were Thakurs. But BJP leaders were quick to pounce on the list, which listed many non-Thakurs. There are also calls for Singh to speak out against the many shortcomings of his own party's government in Delhi.

## UNPOPULAR RECRUITS

It is rare for the two prominent factions of the BJP Kerala unit to agree on matters. But a single act by the national leadership seems to have elicited identical responses from both groups. The elevation of two recently recruited minority faces from the Congress—A.P. Abdulkutty and Tom Vadakkan—to plum posts in the state has upset leaders in both groups. While some have openly sulked over the move, others are seething in anger in private.



## FRIENDS TURNED FOES?

Poll strategist Prashant Kishor's recent visit to Chandigarh has set off intense speculation over him being roped in yet again to plan the Congress's campaign for the 2022 state elections. If Kishor does accept the Congress brief in Punjab, he would be taking on the Aam Aadmi Party, whose campaign he had designed in the Delhi elections earlier this year. After the AAP's resounding victory in Delhi, there were speculations on whether the association between Kishor and the party would carry over to Punjab, but that does not seem to be the case.

## POWER SNAG

Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra's fortunes seem to be nosediving. From being a chief ministerial candidate earlier this year, he is now facing severe backlash for his refusal to wear a mask in public. Also, despite hailing from Gwalior, he is not contributing to the campaign for the upcoming bypolls in the district. While it is known that he is not on best terms with Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the current reduction in Mishra's power is attributed to the relative inactivity of ailing Union Home Minister Amit Shah, considered Mishra's political guardian.



## MASK MADNESS

Covering one's nose and mouth with a mask seems to be a challenge for many politicians. Recently, Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri, speaker of the Karnataka assembly, had a tough time reminding members of the house to not lower their masks while speaking. First-time MLA Soumya Reddy protested their irresponsible behaviour and even threatened to walk out. On the last day of the session, members indulged in a shouting match, and the social distancing protocol went out the window. Since then, at least two MLAs have tested positive for Covid-19.

## DETECTIVE DREZE

There is more trouble in the fields. Economist Jean Dreze is plotting murder. Fictional, of course. Dreze, who was a member of the UPA government's National Advisory Council, has written a novel that begins as a murder mystery. Set in rural India, *Rumble in a Village* is based on his observations as a researcher travelling across the country. The book, however, is not a solo job. It was co-written with mathematician Luc Leruth, who has trained in astronomy and has a PhD in economics. Village life is certainly not quiet.

MANI-FESTO

MANI SHANKAR AIYAR



## Whither parliamentary democracy?

**A**fter 13 months of incarceration, Dr Farooq Abdullah, MP and several times chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, awaited his opportunity to speak in Parliament. The speaker had promised to give him time. In the event, he was allowed a minute at the start of the session and another minute at the end of it. This is what has happened to our parliamentary democracy.

Compelled, therefore, to tell Karan Thapar in an interview what he had wanted to tell the nation on the floor of the house, Farooq said the "trust" on which the "unity of the Muslim-majority state with India" was based has been broken, the "emotional bond" has "completely gone", and "they [Kashmiris] do not feel Indian" anymore because "they are sick of what they are having to put up with. Every street has a soldier with an AK-47, a policeman; every street, every village", their "dreams are gone, their children do not know their future" and "if I speak of India anywhere, they do not want to listen". Kashmir had joined "Gandhi's India, not Modi's India". "What is this? Is this democratic India? Is it Gandhi's India?"

Asked why then there have been no protests, Farooq replied, "How can you have protests when every street is full of soldiers?" And, he then added ominously, "The minute you remove those soldiers, lakhs will be on the streets... You can keep the entire Indian Army there, but one day the volcano will blow." India, he said, still holds "the land, with force, but they have lost the people." The fight would not end until the abrogated articles, decreed "permanent" by the Supreme Court, are reinstated; the division of the state rescinded; the "honour" and "dignity" of the people restored.

Thapar reminded Farooq that when all this happened in August last year, Kashmiris had taunted



Farooq with cries of "Ab bolo 'Bharat Mata ki Jai'". Farooq admitted this was true "because we stood with India", adding, "many of them felt, 'Well good! They deserve it'". But now, the Gupkar Declarations of August 2019 and 2020 have "brought all the parties together". They realise, "divided we cannot win our battle.... Every party is putting their personal differences aside for the greater cause of the dignity of the people." While no one wants to be a Pakistani, the present thrall is driving all the regions—Jammu, the Kashmir valley and Ladakh—into the embrace of the Chinese, notwithstanding their treatment of Chinese Uighur Muslims.

There could have been a reasoned rebuttal because Parliament is all about the cut and thrust of argument. I remember my first visit to Parliament in 1960 as an 18-year old college student to watch Comrade S.A. Dange light into Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru for over an hour for dismissing one of the first democratically elected communist governments in world history—the E.M.S. Namboodiripad government in Kerala—while an impassive Nehru sat alert throughout the denunciation and there was no interruption from the Congress benches. Then, in the middle of the Chinese invasion of October-November 1962, Nehru arranged for both houses to reconvene to debate and denounce the failures of his foreign policy. That was democracy then.

Now, we have a prime minister running scared of listening to the truth about what he and his home minister have wreaked in Jammu and Kashmir. Instead, he ducks Parliament and treats himself to unchallenged monologues on our state media. That might have worked in Zia-ul-Haq's Pakistan but is incompatible with the norms and practices of our 70-year old democracy.

ILLUSTRATION BHASKARAN

Aiyar is a former Union minister and social commentator.

## MAHATMA'S UNFINISHED WORK

"ELIMINATING LEPROSY IS THE ONLY WORK I HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO COMPLETE IN MY LIFETIME- M. K. GANDHI"

**M**ahatma Gandhi's vision was not only to treat people affected by leprosy but to bring them into the mainstream. The Leprosy Mission Trust India (TLMTI) has been pivotal in bringing holistic healing, social inclusion, and a life of dignity to tens of thousands of people affected by leprosy and disability since 1874. TLMTI's 14 hospitals at Ayodhya, Prayagraj, Barabanki, Delhi, Kolkata, Purulia, Janjgir-Champa, Mungeli, Amravati, Sangli, Villupuram, Manamadurai, Salur and Muzaffarpur across 10 states of India provide free specialised leprosy care and rehabilitation.

TLMTI's award-winning vocational training centres provide formal skill trainings in trades like Diesel Mechanics, Welding, Motor mechanic, Computers, Sewing technologies to young adults affected by leprosy and disability and provide them placements through employers' network.



TLMTI is winner of International Gandhi Award 2019

Leprosy is still haunting the world. According to the World Health Organization's latest data, India has 57% of the global caseload with 1,14,451 new cases detected in 2019. The sad part is that children are getting affected by leprosy. We, at TLMTI are committed to the cause of leprosy and would like to see India free of this disease by 2035.



Mahatma Gandhi always said that we need to work together to eliminate this disease from our country. Let us pledge to eliminate leprosy in our lifetime.

### We seek CSR support for:

- Sponsorship of students at our skill centres
- New hospital buildings
- Medical equipment
- Sponsorship of patients with surgical needs
- Livelihood support for the people in community
- Support for care homes
- Support on advocacy campaigns
- Support for research laboratory

We need everyone's support in our fight against leprosy. To donate, please visit [www.leprosymission.in/donate](http://www.leprosymission.in/donate)



All donations are tax-exempted under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.  
[www.leprosymission.in](http://www.leprosymission.in)

The Leprosy Mission Trust India  
healing, uniting, dignifying

For more details Contact

E-mail: amit.kumar@leprosymission.in | WhatsApp: +91-8860071874

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Leprosy, if not diagnosed in time, results in severe deformities and disabilities. Children as young as 10-year-old are being admitted to TLMTI's hospitals with Grade II disabilities (visible damage), severe reactions and other leprosy associated damage. While TLMTI's doctors work hard to correct these deformities and save these children from developing permanent disabilities, we also work towards de-stigmatisation and creating awareness. We need your support to give these children a second chance at life and to ensure that no child suffers from the destabilising impact of leprosy.

### IN THE LAST 5 YEARS TLMTI

- Benefitted more than 3 million patients
- Equipped 7000 people with livelihood skills
- Benefitted more than 4 lakh people through community development interventions





## **Candragupt Institute of Management, Patna**

### **A SELF-RELIANT INSTITUTE OF GLOBAL STANDARDS**



Chief Minister Shri Nitish Kumar lighting the ceremonial lamp during the first Convocation of CIMP in the year 2010.

Candragupt Institute of Management Patna (CIMP); inaugurated in 2008 by the then Vice President of India Md. Hamid Ansari; has emerged as a leading institute of higher education, research, consulting and training in management winning laurels across the globe for its innovative thinking, best practices and societal transformation. The vision nurtured by Bihar's Chief Minister Shri Nitish Kumar, who is also Chairman, Board of Governer of CIMP, led to setting the institute in 2008, modelled on the lines of the IIM's, that would resurrect the lost educational glory of the state as a centre of advance learning has paid off well. Accolades and honours are being showered on its faculty who have a prime role in harnessing and nurturing the untapped intellectual potential of the youth of Bihar at par with the best in the world of organizational management skills.

Recently, the premier B-school witnessed a historic moment when a research paper titled "Changing Health-related Behaviour Leveraging Data Analytics" by Rajeev Ranjan, Senior Management Professional and the Head of

Administration at CIMP, was accepted for presentation at the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Multi-disciplinary Studies held at University of Cambridge (UK) on 30-31 July, 2020. This is for the first time that anyone from CIMP had the Cambridge privilege. The paper explores the potential of Data Analytics in Changing Health-related Behaviour (CHB) of the people citing the "3-4-50 Concept" which says that 3 behaviours (poor diet, little to no physical activity and smoking) alone lead to 4 types of diseases (heart disease/stroke, diabetes, cancer, pulmonary disease) accounting for 50% mortality the world over. It calls for focusing on "changing behaviours" or early interventions so that the health risks due to poor lifestyle & habits get minimized.

This autonomous body has the privilege of being the only state-funded management institute in the country having impeccable standards in faculty, resources and infrastructure. Since its inception, CIMP is channelizing and leveraging the talented young minds linking it to developmental aspirations of

Bihar and the larger global picture.

Adding another feather in its cap has been the best paper award to Prof. Sudeep Rohit, Professor of Marketing at CIMP, at the 2020 American Marketing Association Conference. Prof. Sudeep's research paper titled "Value Co-Creation at the BOP: Beneficiary Roles in Policy Based healthcare Service Delivery" amongst the few research papers that were selected for presentation at the conference this year was adjudged the "best paper" submitted and presented at the conference. His paper proposes a new theoretical lens for the design and delivery of health service programs to poor consumers. This year research papers were presented by scholars from American, UK, Canadian and Chinese universities, amongst others. From India, scholars from Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, Lucknow and Kozhikode also presented their papers.

CIMP offers two-years' full-time Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM) which is approved by AICTE, accredited by NBA and recognized by AIU and is as equivalent to MBA of an Indian University. It also offers four-years' full-time AICTE recognized Fellow (Doctoral) Programme in Management (FPM) and Eleven Months' Executive Programme in Management (EXPM) for officers of Govt. of Bihar. As part of its Executive Education, CIMP has provided short-term management training through over 170 Management Development Programs (MDPs) to 10,000 plus senior government officers and corporate executives drawn from Bihar Administrative Service, Bihar Police Service, LIC, Indian Oil, India Post, and the like. It has also to its credit about 130 national and international research/consulting assignments for clients like The World Bank, UNICEF, DFID (UK), Election Commission of

India, POWERGRID, Government of India, Government of Bihar, Government of Kerala, etc. CIMP faculty have presented more than 100 papers (majority of them in the international conferences) while research papers by them have been well received in national and international journals. About 200 plus workshops and seminars on various relevant issues, like Stress Management, Crisis Management and Effective Managerial Leadership have also been conducted in the institute.

To keep it's pedagogy at par with the global standards, visiting professors from world-famed institutes from across the globe are regularly invited to lend international exposure to its students. The course curriculum, pedagogy and study material of the courses taught here is at par with IIMs and is sourced from Harvard Business Review. The CIMP campus is imbued with the synergy of highly qualified faculty members drawn

The institute has an impeccable record 100% campus placements right from the first batch onwards. Even this year, much before the advent of the global pandemic, the 11<sup>th</sup> batch of PGDM had 100 percent campus placement; wherein more than 30 companies from different sectors selected students of this B-school for various positions across major cities of the country. Interestingly, more than 50 percent of the students of this batch got placed even six months ahead of the completion of the campus placements. These achievements are a testimony to the quality of the intellectual cultivation of students at CIMP and the confidence of the industry in "Brand CIMP" and also recognized by ITC Ltd as a "preferred campus."

On the wishes of the *Hon'ble* Chief Minister Shri Nitish Kumar, CIMP prepared *Vision Document 2025* for the state. Under Startup Policy 2017, CIMP, as a notified host institution by

association with IBM, provides training to the students, faculty, corporate executives and government officers in various areas of data and decision sciences. Several CIMP students are also pursuing Fellow Programme in Management (FPM) in various IIMs across the country. This B-School is also poised to start an Executive Programme in Management and a Weekend Programme in Management for working professionals.

Even many students of CIMP have presented papers in several international conferences held worldwide. To mention a few; "Influencing employee engagement: The role of human resource practices in public sector context", in Malaysia; "An analysis of mortgage loan approval with customer segmentation" in Sri Lanka; "An exploratory study to understand sugar price fluctuations in Bihar, India" in Thailand and "Impact of Microeconomic and loan specific determinants on non-performing loans in India: An Empirical Evidence" was presented in Las Vegas, USA, which was awarded as the best entry from among 150 selected research papers.

CIMP has been the recipient of a number of coveted recognitions and some of the noteworthy ones are International Star for Leadership Award in Quality - Platinum Category at BID Convention Paris, France on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2015 Socrates Award for "Best Institute/ University" organized by Europe Business Assembly (EBA), The Club of the Rectors of Europe (CRE), Oxford, Great Britain, and EBA Conferences, UK on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2013 European Award for Best Practices 2013 organized by European Society of Quality Research (ESQR) in Vienna, Austria on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2013, awarded "The Majestic Five Continents Award for Quality & Excellence", by Association of Otherways Management and Consulting, France for quality and excellence in Geneva, Switzerland on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2013, conferred the International Arch of Europe (IAE) Award in the Gold Category for overall quality and



CIMP Director Dr. V Mukunda Das handing over the contribution of CIMP employees by Cheque to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund in the year 2017.

from leading national institutes like IIMs, IITs and international institutes of repute like Old Dominion University (USA), Lehigh University (USA), Lancashire Business School (UK) and Stockholm School of Business (Sweden). The institute also gets mentoring support from an eminent Advisory Council, comprising of Professors from IIMs and other leading international B-schools.

Government of Bihar, has provision for state-of-the-art Startup Incubation Centre on its campus to support business incubation activities. A Centre for Public Policy similar to the one in IIM Bangalore and Centre for Research in Emerging Markets was also started on the campus with support from researchers of Stockholm University, Sweden. The Business Analytics Lab at CIMP, setup in

excellence at Frankfurt, Germany on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2013 and conferred the “EQ Leadership Award” by Tata Institute of

(Developing Library Network New Delhi). Students have 24 hours online access to more than 10,000 plus full text



A view of the Academic Block of CIMP

Social Sciences (TISS) in recognition of significant contribution to leadership development in Bihar at Mumbai on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2013. CIMP was also ranked above a prominent IIM by the University of Connecticut in 2010 in research in Economics and figures high in the IIRF ranking along with several top-notch B-Schools of the country.

The benchmark of excellence is set very high at CIMP. The institute moved to its new state-of-the-art academic-cum-residential green campus spread over 10 acres, which was inaugurated on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2015 by the its Chairman and Hon'ble Chief Minister of Bihar Shri Nitish Kumar. An academic block, an MDC block, an auditorium, two separate hostels for boys and girls, extra-curricular activity block along with the institute director's residence are its key features. The Wi-Fi enabled campus is equipped with all essential modern facilities that includes air-conditioned smart classrooms and conference rooms with LCD screens and projectors to stimulate learning and interaction. The CIMP Library Resource Centre (LRC) is a major facilitator for teaching, learning, training, and research activities. The well-stocked LRC enables access to e-resources as part of its resource collaboration with Harvard Business School Publishing (HBSP) and DELNET

journal and e-books through EBSCO, J-Gate and National Digital Library (NDL). An in-house Badminton Court, Table Tennis and Gym facilities also ensures a healthy mind and body. Besides CIMP has several research hubs focusing on topics of contemporary relevance.

In its endeavor to provide global education and exposure to its students, CIMP has collaborated with a number of international organizations and development partners namely Lancashire Business School in the UK for research on Corporate Social Responsibility, with Stockholm Business School in Sweden for research on microfinance institutions and their working in India, and with EGADE Business School in Mexico. Students from the Department of Global Development at Queen's University in Canada and Non-Resident Bihari (NRB) students from Mauritius and Fiji have visited the institute.

Conscious of its social responsibilities, CIMP has initiated a silent revolution aimed at completely transforming the economically and socially weaker sections in Bihar. In a historic initiative, CIMP started the Student Guidance Centre (SGC) to provide free coaching to SC/ST students, especially girls,

assisting them in the preparation of CAT exam. Also, under the Chief Minister's SC/ST Entrepreneurship Development Scheme, 2018-19, more than 500 unemployed youth were trained. CIMP is the only management institute in the country where 50 per cent students from the SC/ST and backward communities, study, with 100% placements! Almost 40-50% of the students are girls! The Return on Investment (ROI) at CIMP is probably the highest in the country for lower and middle-class students.

‘A Beautiful Mind,’ is yet another social initiative of CIMP wherein 40 slum children (5-15 years of age) get educated and groomed leveraging their self-esteem and at the same time instilling social values in its students. Also, meritorious students are given incentives and if a girl student comes within the first 3 ranks in any semester, she gets a waiver of her term fees. Students desirous of getting education loans from leading nationalized banks are also assisted.

C-Proms (Colloquium of Professional Managers of Bihar) is yet another noteworthy programme of CIMP, intended to bring together a motley of professionals for free exchange of ideas and sharing of concrete action plan for the development of rural Bihar. A 20-year Village Development Project is being developed that aims at zero poverty and zero unemployment. It is the first of its kind plan envisaged in India. Village Thumma in Sitamarhi district and Bardaha in Madhepura district have been identified as pilot projects. Technologies such as use of Wi-Max and cloud computing have already been pioneered in the village on CIMP initiatives.

Brand CIMP, built on uncompromising standards in quality, discipline, value systems and traditional moorings that its students imbibe, envisions itself as a truly international institute shall soon have off-shore campuses at Mauritius, Surinam and Fiji, having large diaspora of Bihari community.

## PMO BEAT

R. PRASANNAN



# A minister and a gentleman

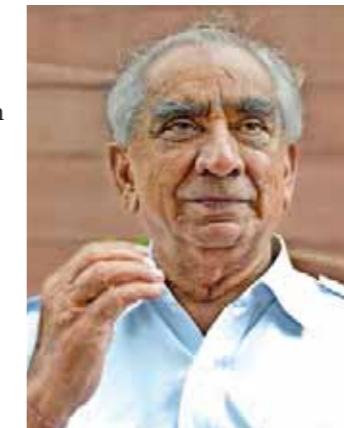
**T**he president swears in all Union ministers to oaths of office and secrecy. But in 1998, the PM House witnessed a strange swearing-in, where the prime minister administered the oath of secrecy (not of office) to two men. One was Pramod Mahajan; the other was Jaswant Singh who passed away on Sunday.

Jaswant had lost the 1998 polls. The RSS, which had many grousing against the anglicised aristocrat (including his temerity to walk into their sanctified premises with his shoes on), insisted that no poll-losers be taken into the cabinet. So Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who wanted to confide in Jaswant and Mahajan matters of governance and atom bomb tests, swore them to secrecy on the PM House lawns.

When the world came down on bomb-maker India like a tonne of yellow cakes, Vajpayee sent Jaswant to Washington to ‘interlocute’ with deputy secretary Strobe Talbott. Soon, Vajpayee got Jaswant into the Rajya Sabha and made him de jure foreign minister. Talbott, who met Jaswant at 10 locations in seven countries, was so overwhelmed by Jaswant’s deft diplomacy as well as Victorian English, British manners, booming voice and military demeanour that he showed this specimen from the pre-World War era to his wife. She cooked a dinner for Jaswant.

Jaswant had also sent Vajpayee on a bus to Lahore, apparently to tell Talbott and the world that the atom-armed neighbours could also make peace. Sadly, the bus mission got hijacked to Kargil heights by Pakistan’s commando-general Pervez Musharraf.

That was the problem with Jaswant. He could not fathom diplomatic deception. He took everyone to be a gentleman like him who honoured a word given. So it was at Agra where he organised a Vajpayee-Musharraf summit with no agenda. The



general came, and carpet-bombed the summit with Kashmir talk. Cabinet colleague Yashwant Sinha records in his memoirs that Jaswant had trusted the Pakistanis again and agreed to a draft joint statement that made no mention of the Shimla pact or cross-border terrorism. The summit crashed as L.K. Advani and Yashwant put their foot down, and the general took a midnight flight back home.

Vajpayee still trusted him, investing even the defence job with Jaswant when George Fernandes had to briefly stay out of the cabinet following the Coffingate. “I wish I had these two departments,” a jealous US secretary of state Colin Powell quipped.

Jaswant believed that Indians and India ought to carry their heads high. As finance minister later, he let every Indian carry up to \$25,000 when flying abroad and spend in style, marking the beginning of capital account convertibility.

He held his head high always. Though he left the Army as a major, its cavalry culture stayed with him. He wore shirts with shoulder flaps that looked like epaulettes. He chose his words carefully—whether in diplomacy, in Parliament or a private chat—to achieve what the Victorian virtuoso of literature Matthew

Arnold would have conceded was a ‘grand style.’ Rarely would he mention a fellow-MP by name, but by the constituency he or she represented. In the house he was particularly fond of “the honourable member from Bolpur,” the communist barrister Somnath Chatterjee.

Once he used the style to put down Congress’s South Bombay MP Murli Deora, known for his ties with tycoons. He called Deora “the honourable member from Nariman Point,” much to the mirth of Deora himself.

**Tailpiece:** Jaswant met his match in a backbencher. As he ended a long-winded speech in his clipped English, someone quipped aloud: “Can we have an English translation of the speech, please?”

PHOTO SANJAY AHLAWAT

prasannan@theweek.in

# Utter chaos

Despite a high number of tests, Uttar Pradesh struggles to contain Covid-19 because of other challenges

BY PUJA AWASTHI

**ON AUGUST 16**—the seventh day of running a high fever—Ragini Asthana's breath became wheezy. The 56-year-old teacher was rushed to the Pandit Uma Shankar Dixit hospital in her hometown Unnao. She did an antigen test for Covid-19, which came back negative. But her oxygen and blood pressure fell rapidly. She was then referred to the Ursula Horniman Memorial Hospital, Kanpur, and was admitted to the ICU on the first floor. By then, Asthana could barely move. Yet, in the absence of a catheter, she had to drag herself to the only toilet available on the ground floor, from where the hospital's Covid-19 wing operated. Her oxygen levels improved slightly before plummeting again. Family members said that the same nurses and doctors moved between the ICU and the Covid-19 ward. When they asked an attendant to wear gloves, they were asked to provide the same.

Around 4:30am on August 19, after receiving four injections over two days to stabilise her blood pressure, Asthana was declared dead. The family was given, what they call, a temporary death certificate without the hospital's stamp. It listed cardiorespiratory arrest as the cause of immediate death. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease was the antecedent cause. The family said that she had never experienced breathing distress earlier. Her body came in a bag with injunctions to not open it.

"Her symptoms pointed to Covid-19, but we could not get an RT-PCR test despite a chief medical officer (CMO) from another district calling the hospital for it," said Asthana's nephew Ankur Khare. "Losing her is difficult. Not knowing what we lost her to is more difficult." The family then got prescriptions from a doctor in Kolkata for tests at private labs. One member tested positive and has since died.

Asthana's case illustrates multiple strands in Uttar Pradesh's Covid-19 struggle. There is testing, but not necessarily of the right kind. The situation magnifies staff shortages in hospitals and how non-Covid patients bear its brunt. It highlights the helplessness of health care workers, many without the basic protection of gloves. With more than three lakh cases, Uttar Pradesh is one of the five states that contribute to almost 60 per cent of the country's caseload.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has been relentless. Every morning at 10, he huddles with Team 11—a bureaucratic steering committee for the pandemic. He travels constantly to monitor the districts, and has pushed for the highest number of single-day tests. He is ably helped by a health minister (see interview) known to keep his head down and work without making big statements.

Yet all is not well.

The state's public health care system is crippled by corruption—



PAWAN KUMAR

TEST POINT

People queue up for a Covid-19 test outside a hospital counter in Lucknow

there is an ongoing inquiry into the procurement of pulse oximeters and thermometers by panchayats above the mandated prices. The state ranks sixth from last on the country's list of doctors to population ratio. One in five posts of laboratory technicians is vacant. Most government hospitals do not follow the protocol of having at least 20 per cent beds in the ICU, needed for the increasing number of critical patients.

Also, the lockdown was not wholly utilised. Ambulance drivers in many districts struck work over delayed salaries. Existing manpower was not readied. In Lucknow, for instance, the faculty of many super specialty hospitals, instead of training for

the pandemic, went on summer break. Multiple doctors said that key management positions in hospitals were filled by political push and there was a crippling communication gap.

"The crisis was not understood," said a doctor serving in a Covid-19 ICU. "Its management is unevenly distributed. The same doctors and nurses keep working instead of having a pool to draw from. The way we are forced to work is unethical and inhuman." At the same hospital, resident doctors on duty for seven straight days begged to resign.

Private hospitals have faltered. At Lucknow's TSM Medical

**It is easy to judge negatively. Right up to the CM's office people are working 24x7 to manage this situation.**

Nuzhat Husain, officiating director, Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences (RMLIMS)—one of the three government institutions providing Covid-19 care in Lucknow—said,

"It is easy to judge negatively. Right up to the CM's office people

College and Hospital, 38 patients requiring Level 3 (L3) care died as it was only equipped with L2 facilities. The management refused to comment, but THE WEEK accessed a review report that read, "Patients with co-morbidities are not assessed.... The control room is not functional... Most deaths occur between 10pm and 8am as doctors do not take rounds."

Nuzhat Husain, officiating director of the Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences (RMLIMS)—one of the three government institutions providing Covid-19 care in Lucknow—said,

## INTERVIEW



**Jai Pratap Singh,**  
health minister, Uttar Pradesh



PAWAN KUMAR

**STITCH IN TIME**  
A tailor makes  
masks by the  
roadside in  
Lucknow

are working 24x7 to manage this situation. We have done well on the testing front in terms of numbers and reach. We are conducting molecular tests in places like Azamgarh and Banda—unimaginable six months ago. The situation is evolving. We are keeping pace."

Director General of Health Devendra Singh Negi said that the state was doing well. He said paediatricians, physicians and chest specialists were being trained to manage BiPAP machines and high-flow nasal cannulas (both systems to pump oxygen). Nurses, ward boys and sanitation workers were trained for infection control and biomedical waste management.

However, video training or quick courses do not translate into the ability to offer critical care. As Pravin Kumar Das, the anaesthesiologist in-charge for RMLIMS's Covid-19 hospital, said, "A nurse with years of ICU experience has instincts that cannot be developed overnight."

Negi said that the state was geared to meet the need for increased oxygen supply. "Though we have not faced shortages, we are giving licences to new suppliers in the shortest possible time," he said. "We will reduce production of industrial gases and divert capacity to oxygen production, if needed. A big oxygen plant is coming up in Modinagar."

Doctors, besides battling their own

fears, are also harassed. On September 4, the district magistrate of Raebareli allegedly called the CMO a donkey and threatened to skin him. Sachin Vaish, chairperson of the Provincial Medical Services Association, said that such complaints were common. "We do not want rose petals or the beating of thalis. We demand respect," he said. "Everyone is under pressure, but that is no excuse for foul words and mistreatment." The burden on doctors is also attributed to the undue influence of bureaucrats in the Covid-19 management. Negi, an anaesthetist, though discounted this view.

Dr Kafeel Khan, the paediatrician at the centre of the 2017 Gorakhpur tragedy (wherein 70 children at the Baba Raghav Das Medical College died owing to stoppage of oxygen supply), said, "The state's health system is a white elephant. When doctors and health workers do good, they are penalised. Who will dare speak about shortcomings?"

Deficiencies in Lucknow offer a window into how critical the state's challenges are. On August 2, Sudeep Sarkar, 44, the owner of a printing press, tried to get a Covid-19 test done at a government health centre. He had high fever, body pain and laboured breathing. Sarkar lives alone and drove himself for a test after popping a pill. He stood in line for two

hours only to be told that he could not be tested despite his temperature being high. He went to another government centre but the designated testing time was over. The next day, at a third centre he was told there were no test kits. A desperate Sarkar took to social media. "I was distraught," he said. "For hours, I retweeted every Covid-related tweet with a comment to draw attention to myself." There was no response from the state machinery. On day five, as he stood for hours in another line, the kits ran out again. "I threatened to call the media. It was only then that I was tested," said Sarkar, who tested negative.

The state's media is walking a blurry line, often running blind items with racy headlines. One report was titled, 'Doctors gobble food worth lakhs'—this, for news about money spent on transporting and quarantining doctors who came off Covid-19 duty in hotels.

Husain said that while the media is eager to criticise, society should be asked to be responsible, too. The High Court has stepped in to ensure some public accountability by pronouncing that those without masks be penalised.

Uttar Pradesh's Covid-19 trials have just started. When it shall look back to list what was lost and gained, the dead like Asthana will need answers like the living. **•**

# Given our population size, we have fared much better

BY PUJA AWASTHI

**Q/How has Uttar Pradesh responded to the pandemic so far?**

**A/**We have more than 1.55 lakh beds at different levels of care. We started with just 7,200 tests [per day] but have now touched 1.5 lakh plus tests a day. We started with antigen and pool testing. TrueNAT machines were installed in one go in all districts. CBNAAT machine—used to test for tuberculosis—were also put to use for Covid-19.

If we compare ourselves to other states, then given our population of 23 crore, we have fared much better. Our strategy is testing, intensive surveillance, contact tracing and home isolation or hospitalisation if need be.... Multiple levels of surveillance are in place such as the chief minister's helpline, the chief medical officers and the local health centres. Health workers from my local community health centre came to check on me when I was sick [Singh was tested positive for Covid-19 in July] without knowing who I was.

**Q/How have you tackled the shortage of medical manpower?**

**A/**UP has been short of medical and paramedical manpower even otherwise. For [the current] situation we have permitted open tenders from the market. The response has been 50-50. The most acute need is of pharmacists and lab technicians, but if doctors are willing to come, we shall welcome them. We have been asking the private sector and the Indian Medical Association to help us. Existing AYUSH doctors have been trained to work in Covid-19 care.

**Q/Do you think the government places extra emphasis on test numbers at the cost of quality?**

Our teams have been strictly instructed to do quality testing and not just test randomly for the sake of numbers. The kind of test and the result determine the number of tests. For example, an antigen test can give a reliable result when a person is Covid-positive. If it yields a negative, it is sent for RT-PCR testing [for further confirmation].

**Q/Why have private laboratories been hesitant to test?**

**A/**We had reduced the rate of RT-PCR tests from ₹2,000 to ₹1,600 as the cost of reagents came down. Many states had introduced similar rate cuts, but in a meeting with private laboratories we understood the cost they had to bear. Now the rates have been readjusted, and they are testing.

**Q/Has the government relied too much on bureaucracy, instead of the medical experts, to manage the pandemic?**

**A/**The bureaucracy is important as the challenges of the pandemic have to be met on multiple fronts by multiple departments such as the industry, police, panchayati raj, animal husbandry, revenue, agriculture and health. The Team-11 approach (at the state capital and the districts) is very good as it provides for coordinated Covid-19 management and also ensures that other essential activities do not suffer. **•**

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JOURNALISM WITH A HUMAN TOUCH

# Spreading terror

The arrest of nine suspected Al Qaeda operatives throws up possible links between terror outfits in Bengal and Kashmir

BY RABI BANERJEE

**IN 2014**, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the successor of Osama bin Laden, released a video saying he had set up an organisation called Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). In India, he said, the modules were active in West Bengal and Assam.

Six years later, on September 19 this year, the National Investigation Agency arrested nine suspected Al Qaeda operatives from Bengal and Kerala. All nine were from Murshidabad, which borders Bangladesh and is one of the more backward districts in the country. Intelligence agencies have found AQIS modules in Murshidabad, and have traced several others to Malda and Uttar Dinajpur.

Sources told THE WEEK that, in August, the NIA came to know about several meetings between groups operating in Murshidabad and Ernakulam, Kerala. Acting on a tipoff, the agency started snooping; it used its IT cell to trace phone calls and WhatsApp video calls between suspects. The NIA also used the Border Security Force's South Bengal Frontier to collect details about the nine. While six of them lived in Murshidabad, three were labourers in Kerala. The group is headed by Murshid Hasan, who was working as a cook in Ernakulam.

According to the NIA, the accused

were plotting a "major bloodletting" in Delhi and other parts of India. The agency had recovered country-made firearms and a few conventional explosives (no IEDs) from the men. An NIA source said that the AQIS planned to attack some BJP leaders, including Dilip Ghosh in Bengal.

The NIA apparently got to the nine men after it arrested Tania Parveen, a college student, from Baduria in the North 24 Parganas district of Bengal in March. According to the agency, Parveen had links with Lashkar-e-Taiba.

After interrogating the nine accused on September 25, the NIA made another arrest—Shamim Ansari from Jalangi in Murshidabad. He reportedly used to make trips to Kerala as a labourer.

The investigation has revealed that the accused are linked with Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, which is the AQIS cell in Jammu and Kashmir. Notably, the Director General of the Jammu and Kashmir Police had said that Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, which reportedly also operates from Pakistan, had been wiped out from Kashmir after its head, Zakir Musa, was killed in 2019.

It is surprising that Bengal-based outfits, which usually look to Bangladesh for inspiration, have allegedly developed links with

Pakistan-based groups. NIA sources said that some of the accused had visited Srinagar and other areas in Kashmir as labourers. Interestingly, after the removal of Article 370 last year, Kashmir-based Pakistan militants had killed five labourers from Murshidabad. This raises the question—why would labourers from Murshidabad have been in contact with the militants who killed their own people? Could there be a quid-pro-quo arrangement?

If the Bengal-Kashmir link is proven, it would mean that Pakistan has widened its network of terror beyond Kashmir and Mumbai.

But does that rule out a Bangladesh connection? "We are investigating it. So far, the NIA has not touched the issue," said a Kolkata Police Special Branch officer. Both the special branch and the West Bengal CID have interrogated the men.

If needed, said NIA sources, they would question the accused on possible links to the 2014 Burdwan blast, which the agency is still investigating. The NIA would check if the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen of Bangladesh modules in Bengal—which were uncovered after the Burdwan blast—had built up AQIS modules, too.

Another worrying fact for investigators is the link to Kerala. The men from Murshidabad are not part of



PHOTOS PTI



## IN THE DOCK

The nine men the NIA arrested on September 19

before the arrests, Dhankhar said, "The director general is burying his head in the sand like an ostrich. The state is a safe haven for terror, crime and illegal bomb-making competitions, which results in atrocities and violation of human rights."

Partha Chatterjee, state education minister and Trinamool Congress secretary general, said: "The matter is under investigation, no one should play politics."

During the interrogation, the NIA also found that some madrassa authorities were in touch with six of the men. This had apparently happened during the Burdwan blast case, too. "I would ask NIA officers to stay a few days in madrassas here," Md Yahiya, chairman of Bengal Imams' Association, told THE WEEK. "They would see what nationalism is all about. We create good humans in madrassas, not rapists or crime lords."

Bandi Mukti Committee, a human rights organisation that had given legal aid to the Burdwan blast accused, said it would send a fact-finding team to the villages from where the men were arrested. "In the past 123 terror cases in India, the accused walked free in 99 cases," said BMC state secretary Choton Das. "In many cases, the Supreme Court threw out the charge-sheet." 

**The investigation has revealed that the accused are linked with Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, which is the AQIS cell in Jammu and Kashmir.**

The arrests have predictably become a political issue. "Bengal and Kerala have become dens for terrorists as governments in both states have no eagerness to crush the menace," said Dilip Ghosh.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar lashed out at the police. After Bengal Director General of Police Virendra wrote to the NIA, asking why the state police were not kept in the loop

# The Editor of all Times

BY JACOB MATHEW

**T**he book *Good Times, Bad Times* was becoming a big seller when I attended a media workshop in 1983. The course director at the workshop narrated fascinating anecdotes about the author of the book, the legendary newspaper editor Harold Evans. I never thought I would one day get to know him well enough to call him Harry.

Harry had good times most of his life, and the best of times as editor of *The Northern Echo* and *The Sunday Times*, two British papers where he excelled in investigative journalism in the sixties and seventies.

He became editor of *The Times*, London, in 1981. The media baron Rupert Murdoch had bought it, as well as *The Sunday Times* and *The Scotsman*, from the Thomson family. The owner and the editor shared only one thing in

common, a passion for newspapers. As narrated in the book, they fought over editorial independence, and Harry resigned the same year. The book dripped with emotion, but 25 years later, Harry wrote: "I am often asked my feelings about Murdoch today. My concerns are professional rather than personal."

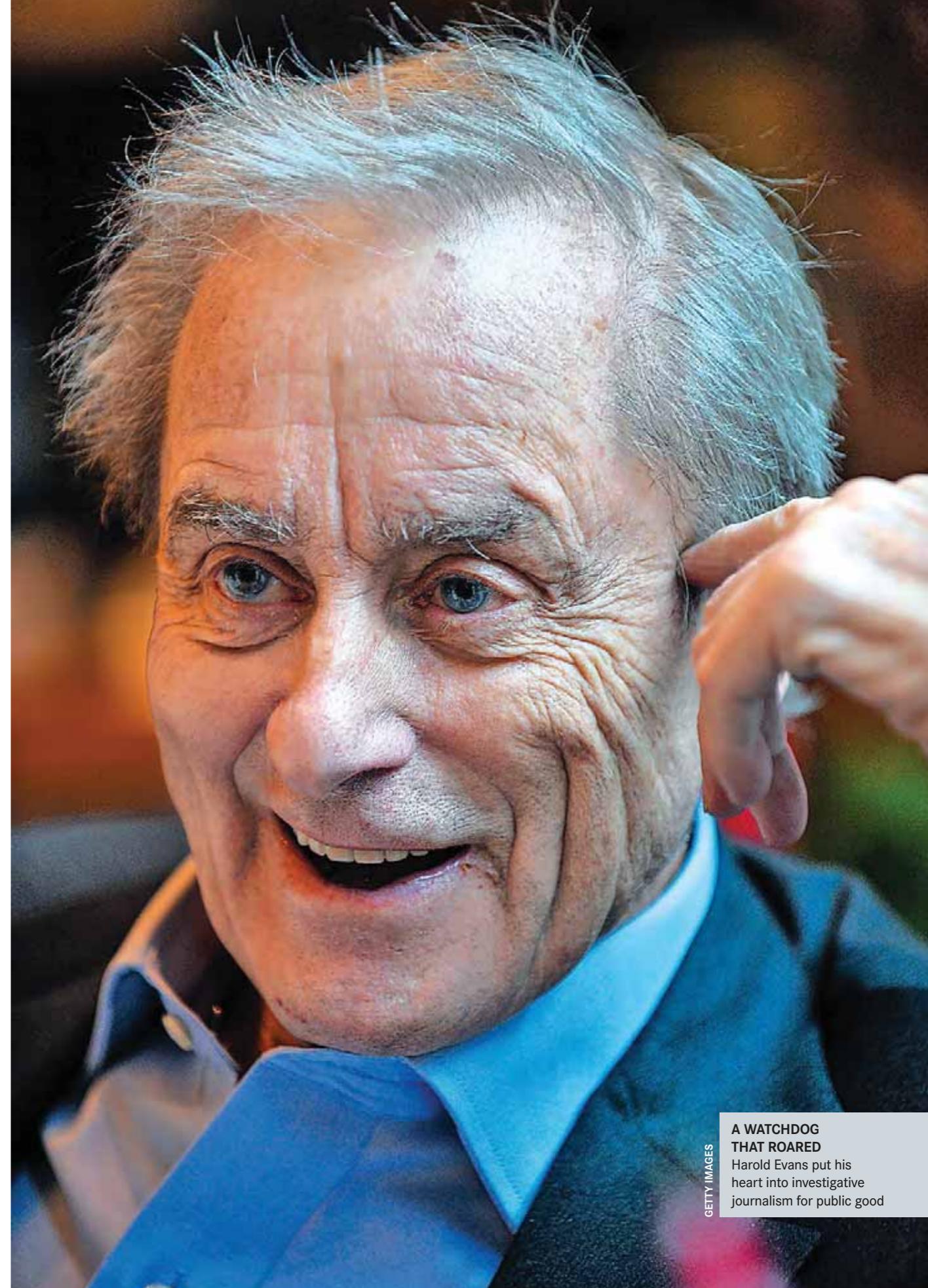
As a newspaperman, Harry had fire in his belly like the steam engines that his father drove in Manchester. He was only 16 when he began writing for a weekly newspaper in Lancashire. After customary military service and a college degree, he returned to journalism demob-happy at *Manchester Evening News*, perfecting the art of writing, editing and design.

At *The Northern Echo*, he demonstrated the power of investigative journalism and became an ardent campaigner for public good. In 1963, he ran a series of articles on the need to make cervical cancer test compulsory for all women. Then he wrote letters to the MPs, forcing the government to introduce compulsory testing.

Another series he ran in 1965 led to the posthumous pardon of the young Timothy John Evans (no relation) who was hanged in 1950 on a wrong charge of murdering his baby daughter, Geraldine. This strange judgment stated that Timothy Evans probably had not murdered his baby, for which he was hanged, but he probably had murdered his wife, for which he was not even tried. After the pardon, his coffin was dug up from prison and handed over to the family for the last rites in a consecrated cemetery. Within months, the House of Commons voted to stall executions in the UK for a period of five years and, in 1969, the death penalty was abolished.

This story became a movie, *10 Rillington Place*, in 1971 with John Hurt as the hanged man and Richard Attenborough (of *Gandhi* fame) as the serial killer John Christie, who had murdered Timothy Evans's wife and baby and six others including his own wife. Narrating the story, Harry told me that Attenborough had mentioned to him that it was "the most disturbing role" he had played.

Harry's best-known campaign was in *The Sunday Times* for compensation for thalidomiders—children born with severe defects due to the German drug thalidomide that their mothers had taken for morning sickness. The drug harmed 10,000 children worldwide during 1958-61. Chasing the story for years, Harry and his team obtained documentary evidence and, in 1972, exposed the drugmaker in the UK—the biggest advertiser in the paper. The UK drugmaker eventually paid the victims £28 million [value today: £341 million].



**A WATCHDOG THAT ROARED**  
Harold Evans put his heart into investigative journalism for public good

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## — TRIBUTE —

SIR HAROLD EVANS [1928 - 2020]



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The campaign furthered press freedom. A top court in the UK stopped *The Sunday Times* from publishing an article on the thalidomide tragedy during the drugmaker's negotiations with the victims. It upheld the attorney general's plea that its publication would amount to contempt of court as the matter was sub judice. The European Court of Human Rights, however, ruled that the UK court's order infringed the newspaper's freedom of expression. Consequently, the UK government was forced to change its law that prevented civil case reporting. In 2014, a UK documentary, *Attacking the Devil: Harold Evans and the Last Nazi War Crime*, chronicled Harry's relentless pursuit of the thalidomide story.

*The Sunday Times* famously exposed the duplicity of Kim Philby, an India-born English diplomat who settled in Moscow in 1963 after the British intelligence had declared him a Soviet double agent. Another expose followed the crash in 1974 of a Turkish DC-10 jet near Paris killing 346 passengers; the door of its cargo hold had flown off. Harry's reporters discovered that the aircraft manufacturer had lied that it had repaired the faulty door. In 1975, Harry risked prosecution under the Official Secrets Act by publishing former Labour party minister Richard Crossman's diary entries on prime minister Harold Wilson's cabinet meetings.

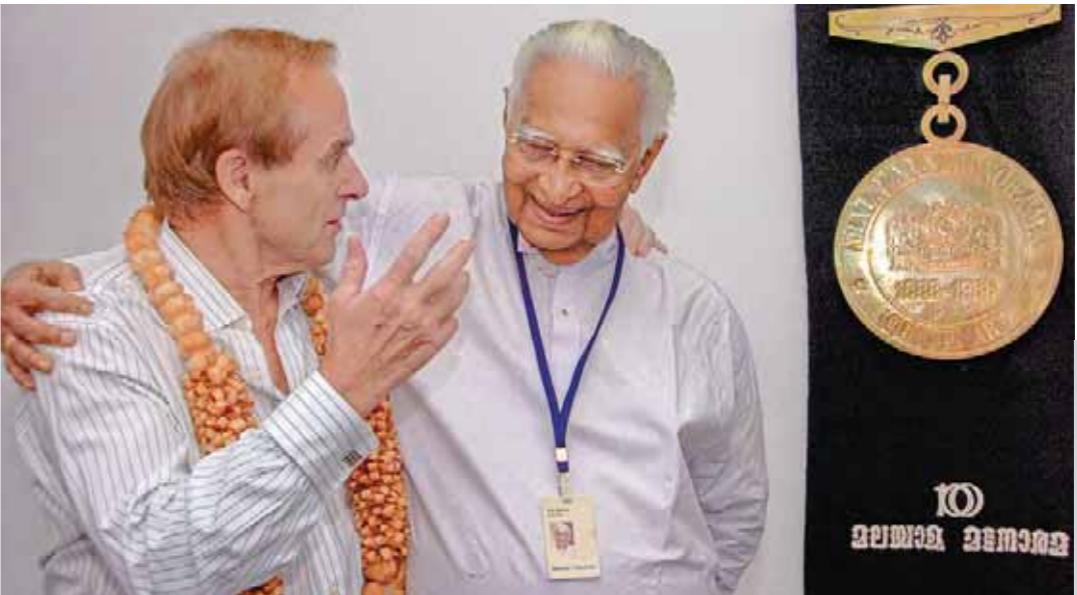
Harry moved to America in 1984 to join the *US News & World Report*. Later he became editor in chief of *Atlantic Monthly Press* and the New York *Daily News*. He taught at Duke University for a while and in 1986 regained glory as the founding editor of *Condé Nast Traveler*. Soon he was the all-powerful publisher and president of Random House, offering fabulous advances for the biographies of Marlon Brando, Colin

Powell, Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon and the young lawyer Barack Obama. He also served as editor at large of the American magazine *The Week* (founded in 2001) and *Thomson Reuters*. He was associated with *Reuters* till the very end.

He devoted more time to writing books after his book *The American Century*, published in 1998, achieved iconic status. And there followed such fine books as *My Paper Chase: True Stories of Vanished Times* and *Do I Make Myself Clear: Why Writing Well Matters*.

Two decades ago, I met Harry for the first time in Edinburgh, Scotland, at the annual assembly of the International Press Institute (IPI). My brother Philip Mathew was IPI vice chairman and Harry was there on a panel discussion. Later, while I was visiting the US, he invited me to his New York home to meet his wife, the renowned journalist Tina Brown, and their children, George and Isabel. Tina had edited *Tattler*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*. Her book *The Diana Chronicles* had done exceedingly well in 12 languages. She later became chief editor of *Newsweek*, which went only digital in 2013. When the former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, Tina wrote a cover story for *THE WEEK*. They had known each other since their Oxford days.

In 2007, Harry accepted my request to deliver the K.C. Mammen Mappillai Memorial Lecture, held in honour of my grandfather who was editor of *Malayala Manorama*. Later that year in New Delhi, he addressed a packed hall on 'Freedom of the press in an age of violence'. During that visit to India, Harry and Tina spent a week in Kerala. His meeting with my father, K.M. Mathew, was emotional. They had known each other for long, having first met at a media workshop Harry conducted and my father attended in the early 1960s. My father practised what he



ROCKIE GEORGE

learnt from Harry and benefited a lot from it. To my surprise, my father gave me his notes from that nearly 50-year-old workshop! I treasure them still. When I shared these notes with Harry, he wrote back, "I wept reading them."

"It is fair to say that the IPI workshops... encouraged a revolution in Indian newspapers, broadening their appeal, reinforcing their vitality and their capacity to monitor government and business," wrote Harry in *My Pa-*

*per Chase*. "But by no means was this renaissance all inspired only by British and American missionaries, and certainly not carried out by them, but by editors like K.M. Mathew of the *Malayala Manorama* in Kerala, who put everything he learned into practice and doubled his circulation."

Harry wrote a moving tribute when my father passed away in 2010. Later that year, addressing the 60th year celebrations of IPI, he said, "Today we honour those men and women who created and sustained our institution in the aftermath of the greatest war the planet has endured." Amongst the few, my father was mentioned.

My eldest brother Mammen Mathew worked in Harry's editorial team in *The Sunday Times* in London in 1968. Harry was, in fact, his editorial mentor. Mammen recollects Harry's obsessive passion for checking facts and designing the final front page.

*THE WEEK* magazine has an umbilical link with Harry. He wrote a column, titled *Slumpflation*, in its inaugural issue in December 1982. He coined the word *slumpflation* (slump + inflation) expressly for this article, to describe a state of economic slump and rising inflation. *THE WEEK* has the honour to call him 'the first columnist'.

British journalists honoured him at the turn of the millennium by voting him 'All Time Greatest British Newspaper Editor'. He was knighted in 2004. To many, Sir Harold Evans will remain a hero forever. The gold standard he set with his crusading style in journalism will always inspire truth seekers in the media world.

—Jacob Mathew is managing editor, *Malayala Manorama*.



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— COVER STORY —

EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW

Dr Li-Meng Yan

MADE IN  
CHINA

Virologist Dr Li-Meng Yan says the Covid-19 virus was developed in a Chinese lab and blames the WHO for suppressing the truth

BY POOJA BIRAIJA JAISWAL

Dr

Li-Meng Yan's world turned upside down the moment she alleged that the Covid-19 virus originated

in a lab in China. Fearing for her life, the young virologist had to flee Hong Kong where she had been working since 2012. She is now in New York, but her family back home is being "monitored closely" by the Chinese Communist Party and she has been forced to cut off all contact with them.

But Yan is in no mood to give up. In an exclusive video interview with THE WEEK, she reiterated the lab origin theory of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, and challenged her detractors—including the Chinese government and some of her own peers—to prove that she was wrong. She did not even spare the World Health Organization, where her husband is currently employed. Yan said she could be killed any moment by the Chinese government, but she appeared unperturbed. "The truth is important, not me," she said.

Excerpts from the interview:



**SEEKING REFUGE**  
Yan at the Keystone Symposia in Austin, Texas, in 2018. Fearing for her life, Yan fled from Hong Kong and is now in New York

EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW

**Our government has many, many ways to withhold truth. It made sure that everyone bought the theory that the seafood market in Wuhan was the problem, but it was a big lie.**

**Q/Can you describe your present state of mind?**

**A/I** have been trying to fight the lies and bring out the truth since January. But the CCP, the WHO, the scientific world and the media are trying their best to suppress me. Many people ignored the possibility that the Covid-19 virus came from a lab and was not a natural disaster. People have now started realising the truth. They can find more facts to support their investigation, can discuss it and can share their ideas. This way, the CCP's suppression can be broken down. Also, I am working on my second scientific report to show the world scientific evidence. But I am shocked that the people with whom I have worked in the past are lying to the public about the origins of the Covid-19 virus, ignoring the safety of the world. Even after I have put out my scientific report, top experts continue to lie. And, people believe them because they are the experts.

From January 19, Lude's broadcast channel (a YouTube channel run by an activist called Lude, who is close to controversial Chinese businessman Guo Wengui) has been helping me deliver the message that the Covid-19 virus is man-made. When authorities watched the broadcast, they knew that some insider had revealed the truth and that was the reason they admitted that there was indeed human-to-human transmission and that cases had tripled and were reported from all over China. Just a few hours after the broadcast, President Xi Jinping declared that Covid-19 was a very serious infectious disease on the same level as SARS 1. But the government still allowed people to travel worldwide. The WHO said there was no need to be afraid and that it was not yet time to announce a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). It also discouraged the use of hydroxychloroquine, which I felt was an irresponsible move.

Right now, I am getting help from the US, from people who are opposed to the CCP and also from leading scientists all over the world who believe that the

Covid-19 virus was indeed man-made. But I am a victim of attacks by the Chinese government and its supporters.

**Q/You said you came to know of human-to-human transmission in China by December 31. But China and the WHO confirmed such transmission only on January 20.**

**A/**On December 31, I was assigned to the WHO H5 reference lab at the University of Hong Kong's Centre of Influenza Research by my supervisor, Leo Poon, to track the new, unknown pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan—because of the lack of information through official channels. I got confirmed information that the genomic sequence of the suspected virus had already been isolated in Wuhan.

Over 40 cases had happened by then, but they announced only 27. A paper in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, too, confirmed the presence of the virus in December. But the Chinese government came out with a white paper to give its own version and silence people. From local doctors to experts at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, no one was allowed to know or say anything without the government's permission. Nobody knew what was happening. Our government has many, many ways to withhold truth. It made sure that everyone bought the theory that the seafood market in Wuhan was the problem, but it was a big lie.

**Q/Why did Malik Peiris (a re-**

**nowned virologist who was with the University of Hong Kong) keep quiet about the alleged cover-up?**

**A/I** had known Prof Peiris even before I joined the department. I came to the University of Hong Kong in July 2012. I met my husband there. He was an expert working for the WHO on the emerging diseases sphere and was a member of Peiris's team. They both were from Sri Lanka. We had known Peiris for more than 10 years. My PhD supervisor, too, had worked with Peiris. So Peiris knew everything I had discussed with my supervisor and my husband. But he did not act. WHO chief Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and the organisation's Covid-19 technical lead, Maria Van Kerkhove, have very strong connections with Peiris, but nobody acted. Peiris, by the

way, has strong connections with the Chinese government. So the Chinese government and the WHO swept everything under the carpet.

**Q/Many scientists dispute your claim that the Covid-19 virus is man-made.**

**A/**Scientists who reject the lab origin theory of Covid-19 are lying. I take full responsibility for my claims and those who challenge me can sue me. I chose to put my name on my paper. My first report was read by many well-known people in the US government before it was published.

There are two theories about the Covid-19 virus: the nature theory and the theory of lab origins. Those who support the natural origin theory rely heavily on a previously discovered



GETTY IMAGES

**SHUTTERS DOWN**

A photo taken in January shows a man ride past the closed Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, which has been linked to initial Covid-19 cases, in Wuhan, China

EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW

**Statements against me from the University of Hong Kong came out when I stepped into the Fox News studio in July. The Chinese Communist Party continues to threaten and monitor my family. My house was ransacked.**

REUTERS



**MASKED COMMUNICATION**  
Chinese President Xi Jinping inspecting the Covid-19 prevention and control work at Anhuali Community in Beijing in February. Yan says that Xi declared that Covid-19 was a very serious infectious disease only after her views—that the virus was man-made—were aired anonymously on a YouTube channel

bat coronavirus called RaTG13, which shares a 96 per cent nucleotide sequence identity with the Covid-19 virus. I challenge the existence of RaTG13 in nature.

Moreover, viral genomes can be engineered and manipulated to create novel coronaviruses. There has been a highly probable pathway for the laboratory creation of the Covid-19 virus and the evidence is present in the viral genome. There may be a chance that the virus attacks animals through an intermediate host and then jumps into humans, but that takes a very, very long time and also requires big coincidences such as bats meeting suitable intermediate hosts and the bat virus adapting to the new host.

Nature origins can be mimicked in laboratories. The genomic sequence of the Covid-19 virus is suspiciously similar

to that of a bat coronavirus, SARS-CoV, discovered in 2003 by Chinese military laboratories. The receptor binding motif (RBM: a fragment from a virus that binds to a specific receptor sequence to gain entry into host cells) of the Covid-19 virus which determines its host specificity is suspiciously similar to that of the RBM of the 2003 virus. Genomic evidence suggests that the RBM has been genetically manipulated.

Also, the Covid-19 virus contains a unique furin-cleavage site, which is absent in coronaviruses found in nature. It is likely that this has been inserted artificially. So all that was needed to create a new virus was a backbone or a template, and, for Covid-19, bat coronaviruses ZC45

and ZXC21 have been the closest. These two have been with Chinese authorities since 2015. Although Covid-19 was created using ZC45 or ZXC21, changes must have been introduced to obscure the genetic connection.

**Q/The article titled “The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2” published in *Nature Medicine* says the virus is natural.**

**A/**My second report, which is currently under progress, deals with this issue. The CCP has influenced not just Chinese scientists, but also people overseas. Dr K.G. Andersen (lead author of the *Nature Medicine* paper) attacked my report and myself, saying that my paper was nonsense and

that the analysis by his team showed that the Covid-19 virus was neither a laboratory construct nor a purposefully manipulated virus. But they are misleading people.

To engineer and create a human targeting novel coronavirus, one needs to pick a bat coronavirus as the template. Research labs have been collecting samples of bat coronaviruses over the past two decades. The actual template could be ZC45 or ZXC21 or a close relative. To convert this template into a coronavirus that can bind with the human ACE2 receptor, it needs to perform molecular cloning as well as reverse genetics, resulting in the creation of live and infectious viruses with the desired artificial genome. These are

consistent with the hypothesis that the Covid-19 genome has an origin based on the use of ZC45 or ZXC21 as a template. Besides, the article you referred to is full of problems. Basically, it admitted to some of the unusual characters in the Covid-19 genome, but intentionally ignored the possibility of the man-made origin of the virus.

**Q/Did you try to report your findings to authorities in Hong Kong and China?**

**A/I**did not report on the virus being man-made because I knew I would be killed immediately. I reported the cover-up, the human-to-human transmission and the fact that there was no intermediate host from mid-December to January 17. I kept reporting this, but there was no response. My investigations, intelligence and all the scientific evidence showed me that it came from the military. But I could not trust the CCP and I saw what happened in Hong Kong during the protests. So I had to give this out to the world by myself.

**Q/When did China know about the human-to-human transmission?**

**A/The** human-to-human transmission happened first in December. Wuhan, by then, had already isolated the live sequence of the virus using a patient's sample. This is against their claims of all these happening in the middle of January. By the end of December, doctors in Wuhan, including Li Wenliang who first told us that there was a novel coronavirus, were asked to keep quiet. Everyone was scared. Doctors were scared. Nobody was allowed to talk.

**Q/Is China trying to influence studies across the world on the Covid-19 virus?**

**A/Absolutely.** They control the clinical samples. Even in Hong Kong, you cannot get clinical samples.

**The World Health Organization gave out wrong and misplaced advisories, even asking people not to wear masks. Its officials came to China several times, yet they never visited the right hospitals and centres which could have helped them get information.**

For example, if I want to do antibody screening for an area next to Wuhan, the government will not allow it. When we tried to do an asymptomatic study in China, the CCP secretary of Guangzhou and the head of the Guangzhou CDC took the samples away. The government collected 33 environmental samples in Wuhan, but no outside experts were allowed.

**Q/The University of Hong Kong says you never conducted any research on human-to-human transmission.**

**A/**After my PhD from mainland China, Peiris wanted me to go to the School of Public Health at the University of Hong Kong and work there with Leo Poon. I thought it was a challenge because it was the topmost lab in coronaviruses. I worked in virology, immunology and vaccine development. My universal influenza vaccine is patented. I have presented papers in major global conferences. Before I left the university, I had initiated several important projects including one on Covid-19. My work on hamsters in Covid-19 was certified to be excellent by scientists across the community. My research paper on infectious diseases published in *The Lancet* was cited more than 300 times in just a month. Statements against me from the University of Hong Kong came out when I stepped into the Fox News studio in July. The CCP continues to threaten and monitor my family. My house was ransacked. The vice chancellor of the University of Hong Kong recruited people to dig out information about me and to contact my friends. They even tried slapping a criminal case on me. I have cut off all contact with my family since July. They do not know anything about what I am doing.

Nobody stood up for me. Peiris left the job immediately after I escaped from Hong Kong. The university deleted my credentials from its website and said my words were without scientific evidence. But Leo Poon never responded to me in public because he knew I had the evidence to back up my claims.

**Q/When did you realise that you were in danger?**

**A/I**was in danger right from the moment I decided to reveal it all. Lude helped me keep everything secret by volunteering to give out the message himself. It takes time for the Chinese government to actually zero in on a target. Lude had intelligence that I was in danger and that the government wanted to make me disappear. After that, people from the Rule of Law Foundation helped me escape from Hong Kong to the US.

**Q/You are associated with controversial businessman Guo Wengui and through him with former White House strategist Steve Bannon.**

**A/**From the time I decided to leave Hong Kong, I was in touch only with Lude. He was the one who contacted the Rule of Law Foundation set up by Guo. The foundation targets the CCP's wrongdoings. They helped me come out with the truth and I will never discredit the support they have extended.

**Q/You are a postdoctoral researcher, but you chose to publish your controversial paper on an open access site before having it peer reviewed.**

**A/The** requirement of peer review does not mean that something needs fixing. It is also not an indication of a good standard. So many peer-reviewed journals including *Nature* and *The New England Journal of Medicine* have had some controversial history of faking data or giving out misinformation. Also, those journals have a small group of experts for peer review. But I knew the urgency. The pandemic was upon us and we needed to act fast. Moreover, I did not need the credibility of a journal. And, the Chinese government was breathing down my neck. So I chose not to approach any peer-reviewed journals.

GETTY IMAGES



#### NEEDLE OF SUSPICION

Tedros Adhanom, director general of WHO, met with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing in January. Yan says that the Chinese government and the WHO swept everything under the carpet

wait to disprove the lies surrounding the natural origin theory of the novel coronavirus.

**Q/Why did you refuse to engage with critics including prominent virologists?**

**A/I**did engage with them whenever I got an opportunity. But most media do not want to engage objectively with me. Also, I am busy with my next scientific report. When it comes out, many lies from those prominent scientists will be revealed.

**Q/Virologist David Robertson of the University of Glasgow has shown that the Covid-19 virus and its closest known ancestor, the RaTG13 virus, have been in circulation among bat populations for decades.**

**A/**In my second paper I will tell you that the RaTG13 is fabricated. My mind says this virus never existed. While suggesting a natural origin for the Covid-19 virus, reports on the RaTG13 virus have diverted the attention of the scientific community and the public away from ZC45/ZXC21.

**Q/What is the way forward from here?**

**A/I**am in the US now, working on my second research paper. I cannot

and we had a lot of happy moments.

**Q/Are you living in fear right now?**

**A/**No. I know the CCP and the Chinese government are targeting me. They are following me everywhere. They even knew about the apartment in New York where I stayed after coming here. I had to change my apartment immediately. But, as of now, I have protection. Also, I do not think the CCP will win against me.

**Q/Do you feel targeted by the global scientific community?**

**A/**Yes, they are targeting me. I can be killed any moment by my government. But I still want more and more people to talk about the origins of this virus and know the truth. This is not about me. It is about the truth. 



To watch the interview  
Visit [www.theweek.in](http://www.theweek.in)

# CLAIMS AND COUNTERCLAIMS

SARS-CoV-2 is similar to bat coronaviruses discovered by Chinese military laboratories. One of these or a closely related bat coronavirus "should be the backbone used for the creation of SARS-CoV-2"

Bat coronaviruses circulate in wild bats and could have been discovered by anyone. David Robertson, viral genomics researcher at University of Glasgow, said the fact that these strains were identified at Chinese military labs is "just circumstantial"

The **receptor-binding motif** (RBM) of SARS-CoV-2 spike protein resembles that of SARS-CoV from the 2003 epidemic. The SARS-CoV-2 RBM "cannot be born from nature and should have been created through genetic engineering"

The paper mentions **restriction sites** at either end of the RBM and asserts that their presence is indicative of an engineered virus. But, scientists reportedly pointed out that these sites occur naturally in all types of genomes, from bacteria to humans

SARS-CoV-2 contains a unique **furin-cleavage site** in its spike protein; this is known to enhance viral infectivity and **cell tropism**. This site is absent in this class of coronaviruses found in nature. Also, rare **codons** suggest that the site is not natural

The paper's claim that the furin-cleavage site is found on no other coronavirus of this class reportedly contradicts findings about similar cleavage sites on bat coronaviruses in wild populations

## JARGONBREAKER

**Spike protein:** Protein on the surface of the virus which binds with host cell receptors, leading to infection

**Receptor-binding motif:** A segment of around 70 amino acids in the front half of the spike protein which makes direct contact with host cell receptors

**Restriction sites:** Specific sequences of DNA to which restriction enzymes—DNA-cutting enzymes—bind

**Furin-cleavage site:** A site which can be recognised and cleaved by furin, an enzyme. Inactive proteins can be activated by such cleaving

**Tropism:** The turning of all or part of an organism in a particular direction in response to an external stimulus

**Codons:** A sequence of three **nucleotides** which form a unit of genetic code in a DNA or RNA molecule

**Nucleotides:** Compounds which form the basic structural unit of nucleic acids such as DNA

SOURCES NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AND PAPER LED BY LI-MENG YAN

GRAPHICS SREEMANI KANDAN S.\RESEARCH KARTHIK RAVINDRANATH



## RENAMING THE VIRUS

United States President Donald Trump at a rally in Jacksonville, Florida. Trump has often called the novel coronavirus 'China virus', claiming that he has evidence it was manufactured in China. Yan's report fits well with Trump's 'China virus' narrative

# True lies, false truths

**Li-Meng Yan's allegation that the Covid-19 virus originated in a lab in China is questionable and inconclusive**

BY MILAN SIME MARTINIC

**T**he China virus." The words reach a crescendo as they roll out of President Donald Trump's mouth, clearly showing his irritation. He is rebranding Covid-19 as the 'China virus' and has claimed, without any proof, that he has seen evidence that it was manufactured in China.

Out of the darkness about how the virus left the city of Wuhan and spread across the world, a report from a Chinese virologist who fled to the US has gone viral among the conservative media in the United States. It fits well with Trump's China

virus mantra, which has become one of the mainstays of his reelection campaign.

Is it all too convenient? Does the report stand up to scrutiny?

The report titled "Unusual features of the SARS-CoV-2 genome suggesting sophisticated laboratory modification rather than natural evolution and delineation of its probable synthetic route" is authored by Dr Li-Meng Yan, a virologist who claims to be one of the world's first scientists to have

studied the new coronavirus and to have discovered that it originated in a People's Liberation Army lab,

though the report only alludes to it as a possibility.

Yan fled Hong Kong saying she feared that she would disappear along with her evidence. "I have to hide because I know how they treat whistleblowers. As a whistleblower here I want to tell the truth of Covid-19 and the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus," she told Fox News.

The Yan report is presented in conjunction with Shu Kang, Jie Guan, and Shanchang Hu, all listed as PhDs with the Steve Bannon-run Rule of Law Society and Rule of Law Foundation, a group with no previous experience working on infectious

diseases. Bannon was Trump's chief strategist and was arrested recently on a fraud indictment. He was picked up from a yacht owned by renegade Chinese billionaire Guo Wengui.

Putting aside questionable political motivation, and there is certainly plenty to look at there, the report, though not technically inaccurate in many of its individual statements, spins a tale of possibilities about the origin of the Covid-19 virus based on unsupported claims, beliefs and unexplored anecdotes. It projects a sensational circumstance favourable to Trump's political line.

Couched in confusing scientific jargon, the report moves quickly to set up possibility as evidence. It leaves interpretations in the air and concludes by innuendo, basically sowing doubt about the likelihood of current explanations and thus inferring that the virus is man-made. But the report fails on several levels to show that its findings are legitimate.

"The evidence shows that SARS-CoV-2 should be a laboratory product created by using bat coronaviruses," says the report. Beyond that, the authors claim that a "synthetic route" to create the virus makes its laboratory creation "convenient," and that they will demonstrate that it can be done in approximately six months.

The writing shows that the authors derived their hypothesis by questioning the veracity of the theories about the origin of the virus. But it ignores evidence to the contrary. "Even if we ignore the above evidence that no proper host exists for the recombination to take place and instead assume that such a host does exist, it is still highly unlikely that such a recombination event could occur in nature," says the report.

Kristian Andersen, professor of immunology and microbiology at the Scripps Research Institute in San Diego, California, disagrees. His research uses infectious disease genomics to investigate how

## Putting aside questionable political motivation, and there is certainly plenty to look at there, the report, though not technically inaccurate in many of its individual statements, spins a tale of possibilities about the origin of the Covid-19 virus based on unsupported claims, beliefs, and unexplored anecdotes.

pathogenic viruses emerge and cause large-scale outbreaks. Summarising a peer-reviewed study he co-published in the journal *Nature Medicine* in March, Andersen says, "By comparing the available genome sequence data for known coronavirus strains, we can firmly determine that SARS-CoV-2 originated through natural processes."

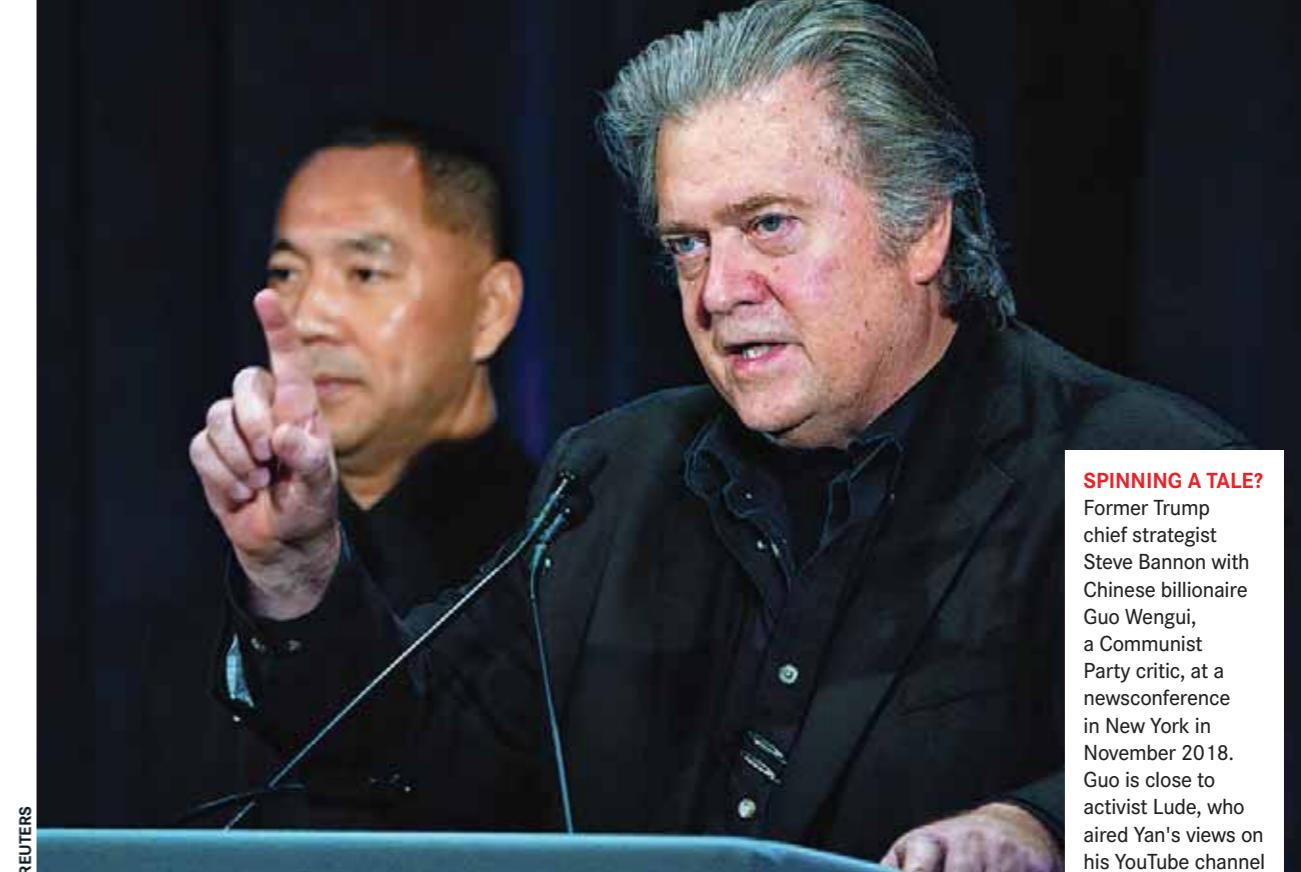
Andersen and his co-authors say the new virus likely emerged because of natural selection, a process by which organisms adapt to their environment to survive. Yan, however, chose to ignore Andersen's study. "The receptor-binding motif (RBM) within the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2, which determines the host specificity of the virus, resembles that of SARS-CoV from the 2003 epidemic in a suspicious manner. Genomic evidence suggests that the RBM has been genetically manipulated," says the Yan report.

Andersen's team, however, looked specifically at the spike proteins and their gene sequences and found that "the spike proteins were the result of natural selection and not genetic engineering". Yan's case for in-vitro manipulation of the virus ignored such contradictory findings.

Andersen says Yan's report lacks scientific merits. "It is non-scientific and false—cherry-picking data and ignoring data disproving their hypotheses. It is using technical language that is impossible to decode for non-experts—poppycock dressed up as 'science,'" he tweeted.

Columbia University virologist Angela Rasmussen thinks the analysis by Yan and her team did not adequately support their claims. "These claims are, to use some virology jargon, total horseshit," tweeted Rasmussen. She told *The Daily Beast* that Yan's claims were all circumstantial and that some of them were entirely fictional. She debunked Yan's sensational claim that "the coronavirus' genes are suspiciously similar to that of a bat coronavirus discovered by military

REUTERS



### SPINNING A TALE?

Former Trump chief strategist Steve Bannon with Chinese billionaire Guo Wengui, a Communist Party critic, at a newsconference in New York in November 2018. Guo is close to activist Lude, who aired Yan's views on his YouTube channel

laboratories," asserting that the similarity was natural. Meanwhile, Carl T. Bergstrom, professor of biology at the University of Washington, says the Yan Report is a "bizarre and unfounded preprint".

In the end, Yan's data does not support her conclusions. It reaches its goal of linking the message through a series of beliefs and suppositions. It does not demonstrate that it could be done, rather shows that it could possibly be done. Mere possibility, while sensational, is not probability, as it implies resources and motives not necessarily available.

But the motives behind the report are raising eyebrows. *The Daily Beast* pointed out that "the Rule of Law Society and Rule of Law Foundation websites indicate that the organisations have not previously published scientific or medical research."

Machiavellian moves by Bannon no longer elicit surprise, but his involvement in the production and release of the Yan report suggests that it is part of a larger, coordinated political effort to advance the "China created the coronavirus" story.

Twitter suspended Yan's account

for making false claims, while Facebook and Instagram flagged retweets of her Tucker Carlson interview. But the conservative media in the US has been repeating the report, despite the global scientific community questioning and rejecting her claims.

"This preprint report cannot be given any credibility in its current form," says Andrew Preston, an expert in microbial pathogenesis at the University of Bath in the UK. He told the BBC that Yan's claims were unsubstantiated. Dr Michael Head of the University of Southampton says Yan did not offer any data that overrode previous research.

It is unquestionable that Yan is now in the Bannon orbit, in that interconnected and interdependent world of politics and power, of information and allusion, of order and disorder, good and bad, truth and fiction. Unfortunately, Yan and her co-authors have put forth their hypothesis as a fact, a conclusion they reached by straying into confusion and assumptions, ignoring more likely paths. ①

# Safety check

As trials of vaccine candidates are expedited, worries abound about the consequences of haste

BY NAMITA KOHLI

**ON SEPTEMBER 26**, a group of public health experts wrote an open letter to Dr Albert Bourla, CEO of US pharma giant Pfizer, which is developing a Covid-19 vaccine candidate with German firm BioNTech. The company's mRNA vaccine is one of the world's leading candidates, and Bourla's claims of a "clinical answer" to its phase 3 trials by October end has triggered safety concerns among a section of global experts. In the letter, they urge the company to wait until the end of November before seeking emergency authorisation for the vaccine to ensure that rigorous safety standards are followed and public trust and confidence in the vaccine is guaranteed.

According to the WHO, 40 vaccine candidates are being clinically evaluated, of which 10 have entered phase 3 trials, which involve testing the vaccine on thousands of people. In that context, the next couple of months will be crucial for regulators, vaccine manufacturers and distributors across the world, and put the world's best delivery systems to test. With emerging possibilities of emergency use authorisation (EUA) for multiple candidates, safety and immunogenicity data is also being

closely evaluated.

Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan has said that India is considering EUA, too. An EUA allows the vaccine to be used before it is fully licenced, after conducting a risk-benefit analysis based on available data. Normally, the third trial [phase 3] takes about six to nine months. But if the government decides, this period can be cut short through an EUA, Vardhan said. "Any emergency authorisation is always done by adopting reinforced safeguards so that people do not worry about safety," he said. "A high-level group has been formed to monitor the pace of the vaccine development under the direct guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. There will be no shortcut on safety. EUA will be given only if it meets the standards."

Multiple candidates are undergoing phase 3 trials in India. After the Oxford-AstraZeneca candidate—currently being tested by Serum Institute of India—the Russian sovereign wealth fund, RDIF, which is backing the vaccine Sputnik V, also announced a tie-up with Hyderabad-based Dr Reddy's for conducting phase 3 trials and distributing the vaccine. Bharat Biotech's candidate,

Covaxin, too, will begin phase 3 trials in Lucknow and Gorakhpur in October, according to UP Health Secretary Amit Mohan Prasad.

With these candidates being fast-tracked, granting EUA to a vaccine and rolling it out initially to the vulnerable population, and then to the general population, will involve challenges on several fronts including regulation and logistics, experts say.

"With any vaccine, monitoring safety and performance pre- and

post-licensure is important," said Dr Gagandeep Kang, professor, Christian Medical College, Vellore. "A vaccine should be used widely in the appropriate population at a point where regulators are convinced (even under an EUA) that the vaccine has a high likelihood of being safe and effective. The best safeguard is a strong safety monitoring system and an impact monitoring system."

According to her, India's vaccine safety monitoring has improved

significantly in the past decade. "But the focus, so far, has been routine immunisation in children. Building safety monitoring in other age groups will be challenging," said Kang.

She added that impact monitoring would most likely require phase 4 studies, or post-marketing surveillance, since there is no other way to monitor vaccine effectiveness.

According to a draft note on regulatory guidelines for vaccine development, released recently by the central

drugs standard control organisation, a Covid-19 vaccine should have 50 per cent efficacy. "To ensure that a widely deployed Covid-19 vaccine is effective, the primary efficacy endpoint estimate for a placebo-controlled efficacy trial should be at least 50 per cent," it read. Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said the note was not final and that comments and feedback were invited.

The overall efficacy endpoint is not a matter of concern. "These are

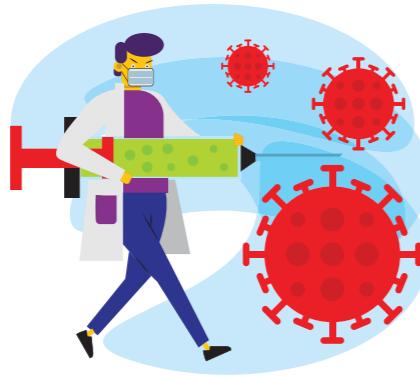


first-generation vaccines, and this is a mucosal infection," said Kang. "First-generation vaccines essentially should protect against disease and then we can think of improving performance through a range of approaches. Mucosal vaccines are unlikely to give perfect protection in any situation, so a 50 per cent requirement is acceptable at this time." She added that the draft policy is aligned with WHO and FDA guidelines. "But it would be good to know what essential data is to be generated and what is recommended, but not essential," she said.

The draft policy note states that given the "urgent need" to provide a Covid-19 vaccine, clinical development programmes for Covid-19 vaccines might be "expedited". Vaccine trials proceed in stages, where permission for each phase is preceded by evaluation of data. For an emergency situation such as Covid-19, the regulator proposes adaptive and/or seamless clinical trial designs that allow for selection between vaccine candidates and dosing regimens, and for more rapid progression through the usual phases of clinical development.

But it is unclear as to what this seamless approach is in terms of clinical endpoints at the end of each trial phase, said a public health expert who did not wish to be named. For vaccine trials, endpoints would include side-effects, neutralising antibody titres and disease prevention. In the case of drug trials, the endpoints—preventing disease progression and death—are more clearly defined, the expert said.

"The policy note also does not define what would happen if there were multiple vaccines with same levels of protection for authorisation," said the expert. "Aspects such as the liability of a company or other stakeholders in case of a side-effect after vaccine has been administered have not been defined. It is a good



### IN THE PIPELINE

#### Covishield

Developer: Oxford-AstraZeneca

Type: Non-replicating viral vector vaccine

Serum Institute conducting trials on 1,600 healthy adults across 17 sites in India

#### Covaxin

Developer: Bharat Biotech-ICMR

Type: Inactivated virus vaccine

Phase 3 trials will begin in October in Lucknow and Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh

#### Sputnik V

Developer: Gamaleya Research Institute, Moscow

Type: Non-replicating viral vector

Phase 3 trials to be conducted in India by Dr Reddy's, subject to regulatory approval

#### Emergency use authorisation (EUA):

Allows the vaccine to be used before it is fully licenced based on available data and a risk-benefit analysis. India does not have a EUA mechanism. A draft regulatory framework for vaccines, especially a Covid-19 vaccine, was released by the drug regulator on September 21

start, though."

Vaccines take years to develop. With Covid-19, that time frame is being crunched to months. In a first-of-its-kind plan on vaccine regulation and shortening trials, top experts propose a plan where each phase incorporates parallel processes. For instance, phase 1 of human trials would not mean halting animal studies, rather those studies would continue even after the vaccine candidate has moved on to human trials.

"To optimise time in a public

health emergency such as the current one, several or all of the clinical evaluation, production planning, distribution strategy and safety evaluation steps of the vaccine development continuum could be conducted in parallel, rather than in a sequential manner," wrote Dr Amit Kumar Dinda, department of pathology, AIIMS, Dr Santanu Kumar Tripathi, Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine and public health expert Dr Bobby John in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, the peer-reviewed journal of the ICMR. "This telescoped design will enable an earlier submission of safety and efficacy data, allowing for potential regulatory approval for an EUA for the candidate vaccine," they wrote.

Parallel processes also imply that manufacturing and distribution logistics be taken care of, even as several vaccine candidates are being tested. "In other countries such as the US, the UK, Japan and Australia, the level of preparedness is much higher, from pre-booking vaccines to ordering syringes," said Pavan Mocherla, managing director (south Asia), BD India. "The understanding is that the vaccination would proceed in phases, where vulnerable sections would be administered in phase 1. For that, the requirement for syringes would be an estimated 150 million, and until now, the government has not formally reached out to us for any orders. Though the government must be working on a blueprint, private stakeholders have not been involved yet. Timely involvement of relevant firms would help expedite vaccine delivery."

With the world's largest manufacturing capacity, India is set to make the Covid-19 vaccine for the world. Its own challenges though remain to be addressed—including making available ₹80,000 crore for mass vaccination in the next year, as estimated by Serum Institute chief Adar Poonawalla.<sup>1</sup>

## THE WEEK

### DEAR DOCTOR

Dr Chandan Chaudhari  
Nephrologist, Wockhardt hospital, Mumbai

## Renal code

Monitor blood pressure and creatinine levels regularly to keep your kidneys healthy

**A**ny infection occurring anywhere in the human body can put pressure on the kidneys. The precautions to be taken by a patient suffering from kidney disease will be the same as in the case of any other Covid-19 patient except for two things: patients with chronic kidney disease (CKD) must regularly check their blood pressure at home and monitor their creatinine levels at least once every month. A high-protein diet is not recommended for CKD patients who are not on dialysis and for transplant patients.

**CKD patients who are not on dialysis**  
Get a renal function test done every month. Also, do not consume too many Vitamin C tablets, which is otherwise used as prophylaxis for Covid-19, as it might increase potassium levels.

**Kidney transplant patients**  
The immunity levels of a patient who has undergone a kidney transplant

**Chronic kidney disease patients, not on dialysis, should not consume too many Vitamin C tablets as it might increase potassium levels.**

**A Covid-positive patient might have to undergo dialysis three to four times a week, up from two to three times a week, to remove excess water from the lungs.**

is already suppressed to a large extent—such patients are prescribed immunosuppressants so that their body does not reject a transplanted kidney. It is, therefore, easier for them to catch Covid-19. If found to be Covid-positive, they can have severe manifestations of the disease—prolonged pneumonia and low oxygen saturation levels. So, striking a balance between reducing their dosage of immunosuppressants and ensuring that the body does not reject the transplant is challenging. Also, those who have recently undergone a kidney transplant, say, in the last five years, must monitor their creatinine levels at least once in two months.

—As told to  
Pooja Biraia Jaiswal



**The immunity levels of a patient who has undergone a kidney transplant is already suppressed to a large extent. It is, therefore, easier for them to catch Covid-19.**

**Patients who underwent a kidney transplant recently must monitor their creatinine levels at least once in two months.**

# Ripples of the ruling

The CBI special court judgment that acquitted all 32 accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case will have far-reaching implications

BY PUJA AWASTHI

**JUSTICE IS A LONELY BEING,** often condemned to trudging long distances in search of an elusive truth which not only seems true but can also be demonstrated to be so.

On September 30, it completed a journey of 10,160 days to conclude that none of the 32 accused of having a role in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya were guilty. The initial charges were filed against 49 people.

To the tunnel vision of justice, the prosecutors had failed to bring such conclusive evidence that proved beyond a shred of doubt the role of those accused—a list which included India's former deputy prime minister Lal Krishna Advani and former Union minister for human resources development Murli Manohar Joshi. The judgment did not say that the demolition was not a criminal act, or that the accused were not present when it happened. It concluded simply that the evidence did not prove guilt on any of the multiple charges under the Indian Penal Code. These charges included wrongful assembly; causing voluntarily hurt to a public servant in the discharge of his duty; action

with intent to incite any class or community of persons to commit any offence against any other class or community; and criminal conspiracy.

Krishna Kumar Mishra, one of the defence lawyers, said: "The reasons given by the court for the judgment are sterling. None of the evidence presented could be conclusively proven to be valid. The videos of the demolition, for instance, should have been seized, seizure memos prepared and the evidence sent for forensic testing. Instead the agency [Central Bureau of Investigation] randomly picked up evidence available from the market. It was not a failure of the investigating agency, but the circumstances were such that it was impossible to collect evidence in the midst of lakhs of people."

The videos Mishra referred to were those available in the immediate aftermath of the demolition. They had contained grainy images of the domes being hammered by *kar sevaks* and brought down amid lusty cries of *Ek dhakka aur do, Babri Masjid tod do* (Give one more push and bring the Babri Masjid down). They remain available in public

PAWAN KUMAR



domain till date under titles such as 'Shri Ram Janmabhoomi ka Raktranjit Ithihas' (The blood-soaked history of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi). Also, in evidence were scores of photographs provided by media persons. These were rendered useless by the non-availability of negatives.

The judgment throws into question the methods involved in the investigation. At one point it quotes a member of the investigation team as saying that the cassettes with the alleged inflammatory speeches were not sent for forensic examination as it was clear that the incident had happened. At another place it quotes an investigator's contention that many papers were seized from the house of Shiv Sena leader Moreshwar Save, but a number of these were found not related to the case upon examination later.

The judgment dismisses all evidence provided through the media.

For instance, in the case of then UP chief minister Kalyan Singh, the judgment says, "...the giving of a statement to a newspaper cannot be treated as acceptance or admission of a crime till strong evidence proves it".

This is not a novel observation. In many cases, courts have held that newspaper reporting, whether correct or not, is hearsay secondary evidence and not admissible unless the reporter is examined or any person before whom the incident has occurred is examined, and facts proven.

Though a detailed reading of the judgment would require some time, Syed Mohammed Haider Rizvi, a Lucknow-based lawyer said: "On the face of it, the verdict acquitting all the accused and considering Babri Masjid demolition as a spontaneous incident and not a conspiracy comes in the teeth of the Supreme

Court order dated November 9, 2019, which clearly stated that the destruction of the mosque and the obliteration of the Islamic structure was an egregious violation of the rule of law."

The accused on many occasions, and with pride, claimed their role in bringing the Ram Mandir Movement to its conclusion.

In his book *Ayodhya 6 December 1992*, P.V. Narasimha Rao, the prime minister of India when the demolition happened, wrote: "The BJP took 'moral responsibility' for the day's developments in a statement issued by the party's vice president S.S. Bhandari. L.K. Advani and M.M. Joshi were among the prominent BJP leaders present in Ayodhya at the time of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. As the *kar sevaks* chipped away at the structure, BJP-VHP-RSS leaders had pleaded in vain with them to stop."

But as the scales of justice are not tipped by morality, it remained unconvinced.

Mahant Raju Das of the Ayodhya's famous Hanuman Garhi Temple said: "Ram Mandir is only the start. We will adopt constitutional means to free Mathura, Kashi and the Tejo Mahalaya." The first is a reference to the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple at Mathura, the second to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi and the third to the Taj Mahal in Agra (which some consider to originally be a Shiv temple).

Sharad Sharma, the Vishva Hindu Parishad spokesperson in Ayodhya, however, said: "There is no dialogue on Kashi or Mathura. We are only celebrating. The Lord is truly free today."

On the same day, however, in Mathura—which is supposed to be the birthplace of Lord Shri Krishna—a petition made its way

**STORM GATHERS**  
A file photo of the crowd at Ayodhya, hours before the mosque was demolished on December 6, 1992

**DEC 5, 1992**

Kar sevaks swell to about two lakh. A group of them are seen looping a rope over a large rock on a mound, trying to pull it down, tugging from different directions. This was later alleged to be a rehearsal

Vishva Hindu Parishad general secretary Ashok Singhal states: "There will be no violation of court orders."

**DEC 6**

By 11am, the motorcade with L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi reaches the site, followed by a frenzied mob. A large crowd breaks in with the leaders

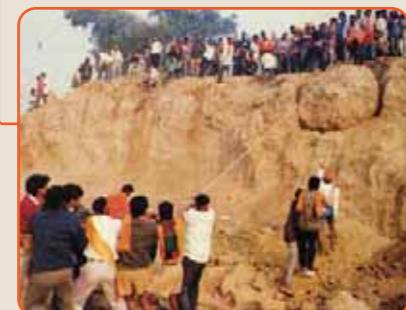
Hundreds climb the terraces of buildings adjoining the site.

Assault party scales mosque wall after overpowering the lone policeman who stood in their way

SOURCE THE WEEK ARCHIVES

## DEMOLITION DIARY

A look back at how the assault on the Babri Masjid unfolded



At 4:45pm, the central dome falls. The crowd dances. The shrine's collection box is open and bare, having been looted

Amid concerns about the safety of the assaulters who had climbed the domes, Advani exhorts them to come down. Four of them are buried under the second dome which falls at 4:30pm

By 4pm, a good part of the mob starts leaving the site with the mosque's bricks as souvenirs. Two domes yet to fall

Soon, there are people on all three domes. Mob advances with pickaxes, knocks down walls; but, it takes more than two hours to bring down the first dome

and... [provides] for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th day of August, 1947". The Ram Janmabhoomi at Ayodhya was the only exception, expressly granted by the Act.

Incidentally, the local court dismissed the Krishna Janmabhoomi petition, and the petitioners are now planning next steps. Ranjana Agnihotri, a Lucknow based lawyer who is among the eight plaintiffs to the suit describes herself (and five other co-plaintiffs) in it as "followers of vedic *sanatan dharam*, worshippers and devotees of Lord Shri Krishna... (who) profess, propagate and perform puja and other rituals of Lord Shri Krishna according to custom, traditions and practices of vedic *sanatan dharam* from the time of their ancestors". It

Agnihotri said: "We are only seeking to correct a long standing wrong. The birthplace of Shri Krishna has special significance and we are within our rights to protect it and demand recovery of lost property".

The implications of the 2,300-page judgment on the Babri Masjid demolition, delivered by CBI judge, Justice Surendra Kumar Yadav, thus lie beyond his court.

In justice's lonely journey, this then could be a temporary halt, not its final destination. ▶



ARVIND JAIN

**THE WAIT ENDS**  
L.K. Advani with daughter Pratibha at his house in Delhi on September 30

# Patched legacy

With veteran leaders having been pronounced innocent in the Babri Masjid demolition case, the BJP has fulfilled much of all it had set out to do

BY PRATUL SHARMA

**A FEW MONTHS** after the BJP's loss in the 2004 general elections, L.K. Advani became party president for the third time and explained the reasons behind the defeat in his address. "We assumed a direct correlation between good governance and the electoral outcome. We were not entirely correct," said the 77-year-old leader, referring to the Atal Bihari

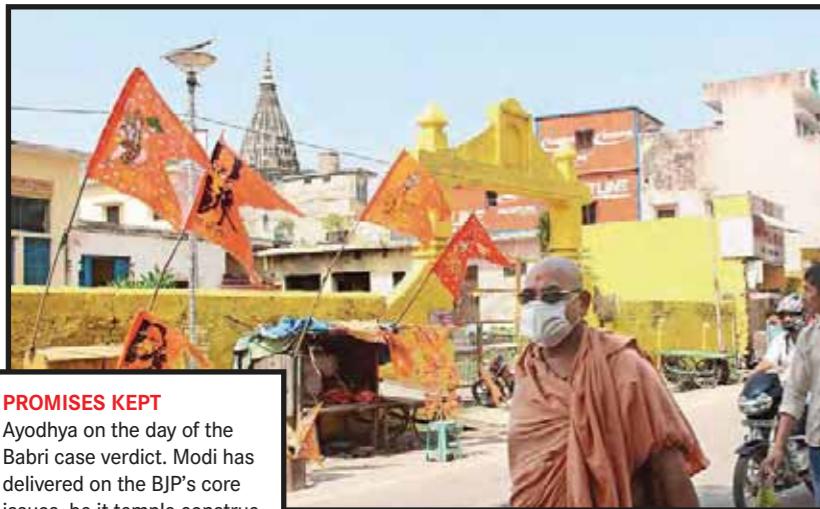
Vajpayee government's India Shining campaign. "Unfortunately, good governance in a country as large and diverse as India does not generate a uniform effect." He then came to the missing ingredient from the BJP's messaging. "In BJP's voyage from the fringe to the centre of the political stage, we aroused many expectations, some extremely emotive," he

said. "We were unable to fulfil some of these. The construction of a grand temple in Ayodhya was one such issue."

That was Advani's call for a return to hindutva as an emotive issue, but it was something that even he did not push hard for. In an apparent bid for an image makeover, a few months later, he termed the demolition of Babri Masjid as the saddest day of his life. This left the BJP cadre confused till Narendra Modi rose to the top in 2014. Modi gave hope to the Hindu voters that he could fulfil their wish for a temple. As the prime minister laid the foundation of the Ram temple on August 5, Advani was missing from the ceremony.

On September 30, 56 days after the ceremony, a special CBI court acquitted all accused in the conspiracy to demolish the mosque. The CBI charge sheet of October 1993 named 48 persons including Advani, M.M. Joshi, Uma Bharti, Kalyan Singh and Vinay Katiyar; only 32 of them are alive today.

"The judgement vindicates my personal and the BJP's belief and



**PROMISES KEPT**

Ayodhya on the day of the Babri case verdict. Modi has delivered on the BJP's core issues, be it temple construction or removal of Article 370

commitment towards the Ram Janmabhoomi movement," said Advani, 92, after the acquittal. The BJP leaders were accused by many eye-witnesses of encouraging *kar sevaks* to bring down the mosque. But the court said the evidence produced by the investigating agency was not conclusive.

Advani was the prime mover of the Ram temple movement as he brought the issue to the fore with his Rath Yatra. That was 30 years ago, on September 30, 1990, during his first term as party president. The original charioteer of the *yatra* may have faded from the political scene, but the impact of his initiative has had a lasting impact on the country's polity and national consciousness.

During the BJP rule under Vajpayee, the cause of hindutva was overtaken by the issue of nuclear tests and the Kargil war. The national security issues injected nationalism in large swathes of the population. The 10 years of the UPA government shifted the focus to development and rights-based policy. With Modi's arrival as an unabashed champion of muscular nationalism, hindutva was back in currency, but with a stronger focus on national security, which was pushed as necessary to save cultural values. It made Modi the

biggest beneficiary of the hindutva movement. And, he has delivered on the BJP's core issues, be it the temple construction or the abrogation of Article 370.

The November 2019 Supreme Court verdict to hand over the land in Ayodhya to the Hindu community and the recent CBI court verdict will bring into focus the aspirations of the Hindu majority. All parties, even those opposed to the BJP, have become conscious of the sentiments of the community. Even during the 28 years the court took to decide the matter, no political party pushed for a resolution, given how emotive the issue was.

"The conspiracy theory was the handiwork of the then government on the insistence of left-leaning historians," said BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Rakesh Sinha. "[The demolition] was not premeditated. The other objective of the episode was to revitalise and legitimise the appeasement theory. There was an attempt to compare the temple movement with violent agitations across the world that were anti-minority. Moreover, it was an attempt to put in the dock the main icons of the hindutva movement by presenting them as majoritarian. The [Ram temple movement] was

liberating for the Hindu from the yoke imposed colonially and the Nehruvian definition of secularism."

The Vishva Hindu Parishad, one of the main drivers of the temple agitation, reacted favourably to the judgment. "The Supreme Court judgment of November 2019 unanimously settled that the subject land in Ayodhya does belong to Ram Lalla," said VHP working president Alok Kumar. "[The latest] judgment has busted the conspiracy theory. It is time to eschew politics, shed prejudices and instead of looking into the past, look forward to work together for the unity and progress of our country."

Within the hindutva ecosystem, the matter had reached happy fruition. There have been many hardline Hindu groups who demand that focus now shift to "liberation of temples in Kashi and Mathura, which were demolished to build mosques". But even the BJP would not want strife on its hand when the most contentious issue has been resolved, and these temples do not hold same weight as the Ram temple.

The BJP is sticking to welcoming the court verdict for now. "The assembly was never declared unlawful by any authority, by any mode as prescribed in law," said BJP general secretary Bhupender Yadav. "The organisers wanted to stop them (*kar sevaks*). But they were not allowed to go there. The court said the demolition happened in the spur of the moment. The truth has finally prevailed."

The judgments and the start of the temple construction will certainly be trumpeted by the BJP during upcoming election campaigns. The party hopes that the completion of the temple before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections will help create a cultural renaissance.

This judgment frees BJP veterans of all charges. Party patriarchs Advani, Joshi and others who have been sidelined in recent times will hope that history books will be kinder to them from now on. **T**

**BITTER CHOCOLATE**

**SWARA BHASKER**



## Caste deniers, crime deniers

**A** column on Mahatma Gandhi, I thought as I opened my laptop to write this column, calculating that it would be apt since October 2nd is approaching. Just then, while trying to google something, my eyes caught a news update. The survivor of the Hathras gang rape had succumbed to her gruesome injuries in Delhi, 15 days after the horrific incident. I began reading the on-the-ground reportage of the incident and my head began to swim.

A 19-year-old dalit girl who had begun her day as she did every day—cutting grass in the fields. A mother who noticed her daughter missing and exasperatedly thought she would give her "two slaps". The daughter's pair of slippers and a mud trail in the adjacent field belonging to upper caste Thakurs. The mother discovering her daughter's brutalised body—eyes bulging, tongue cut off, spine damaged and vagina bleeding. But this would be only the beginning of the horror.

The apathy, criminal negligence and then wilful attempt to deny the gruesome crime by the Hathras administration and Uttar Pradesh Police are a sinister example of the privileged closing ranks behind the privileged—no matter what the crime is.

The Hathras gang-rape survivor ought to have died—or that is what the rapists and the rape deniers in the UP administration had calculated. She could not speak, no one would find out. Everyone would be safe. But the girl fought and lived for 15 days. And, despite her cut tongue, she spoke! She named the men who brutalised her. (They were her upper caste Thakur neighbours, who had previously also attacked the dalit family violently.)

The girl's voice reached some persistent journalists. And, when they spoke—in an act almost metaphoric in its symbolism—Akanksha Kumar, Nidhi Suresh, Tanushree Pandey and Rohini Singh became the voice of that brutalised tongueless girl. Their relentless reporting and tweeting amplified the case on social media; and, mounting pressure ensured that the accused rapists were arrested. However, once the girl died, the UP Police and Hathras administration were back to their cal-

lous cruelty. The family of the girl was not allowed to have her body; her father and brother were detained; and the girl's body was forcibly burnt against the family's wishes and religious beliefs.

This case reads like a terrible film from the 1980s—the ones that fetishised sexual violence upon women for thoughtless consumption by male audience. It is nauseating that this is the reality of India in 2020. But, perhaps, what was more nauseating was the initial denial by the state administration that the brutal gang-rape had even taken place.

Once that was undeniable, some on social media and TV began to actually debate on whether the girl's tongue had been chopped by the rapists or had she bitten it herself in trauma; had her spine been broken or was it an injury induced by the choking? This is the horrifying reality of our mindset that is reflected in this debate, that we as the "dominant mentality" do not even acknowledge the brutalised dalit female body—its reality, its existence, its narrative—and the fact that her body was tortured and disfigured by men drunk on the monstrous unaccountability of caste privilege.

How does it matter, the technicality of how the girl lost her tongue or spinal function? Should not the basic fact that a dalit was gang-raped, by her privileged Thakur neighbours (who have a history of caste violence), so brutally that she became paralysed, lost her tongue and eyesight, shake us out of our caste denial?

The denial, by the privileged, of the sufferings of the oppressed is perhaps one of the most invisible, but violent actions—in every age, in every geographical context. We would rather not face the "inconvenient truth", and so we deny!

We choose to believe a lie rather than face inconvenience. And so, for any real change to take place—perhaps before we demand death for the rapists and justice for the girl—we would do well to start with changing ourselves and stop being caste deniers. After all, as Mahatma Gandhi said: "Our greatest ability as humans is not to change the world, but to change ourselves."

The writer is an award-winning Bollywood actor and sometime writer and social commentator.



# Address change

Despite the growing unease over the use of archaic titles in Indian courts, breaking away from them will not be easy

BY SONI MISHRA

**EMINENT JURIST FALI** S. Nariman, in his memoirs *Before Memory Fades*, recalled his appearance before a judge who had just been promoted from the city civil court to the High Court. Nariman's opponent kept calling him "Your Honour". The judge grimaced at what he perceived as an indignity—the practice in India is to refer to judges in High Courts and the Supreme Court as "My Lord" or "Your Lordship". "My opponent had a good case. But he lost! Judges are human," wrote Nariman.

Nariman advised aspiring lawyers to always address a court correctly and said judges in the upper courts must always be addressed as "Your Lordship". He wrote in brackets: "Believe me, the judges simply love it."

Despite the growing unease with the titles, seen as colonial and carrying feudal overtones (some even say they are against the constitutional principle of equality), Nariman appeared to have been proven correct when Chief Justice of India S.A.

Bobde objected to a lawyer addressing him "Your Honour", during a hearing on August 13. The CJI said it was an American usage. The lawyer said there was nothing prescribed by law as to how a judge should be addressed, but Bobde said it was a matter of practice of the court.

It is, however, ironic that Bobde should have objected to being called "Your Honour". In 2014, he was on a two-judge bench with the then chief justice H.L. Dattu which observed that the only expectation the judges had was that they be addressed in a dignified manner. The bench had disposed of a PIL filed by veteran lawyer Shiv Sagar Tiwari seeking to end the use of the titles, the apex court said it was up to the bar council to resolve the issue.

While the Supreme Court has chosen not to specify the correct way to address judges, the Rajasthan High Court, in 2019, issued a notice requesting lawyers and others appearing before the judges not to address them as "My Lord" or "Your Lord-

"Your Honour" has been accepted in Indian legal practice as an appropriately modern substitute for "My Lord" and "Your Lordship". The Bar Council of India on May 6, 2006, had passed a resolution stating that the form of address to be adopted in the Supreme Court and High Courts was "Your Honour" or "Honourable Court" and, in the subordinate courts and tribunals, it was "Sir" or the equivalent in regional languages.

The resolution came after the Supreme Court, in February 2006, refused to ban the use of the titles. Disposing the Progressive and Vigilant Lawyers' Forum's petition seeking to end the use of the titles, the apex court said it was up to the bar council to resolve the issue.

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## TITLES AROUND THE WORLD

	My Lord/Lady or Your Lordship/Ladyship	Your Honour	Mr President of the Court	Mister Chairman/Madam Chairwoman	Qazi or Sir/Madam	Your Worship
US	●	●				
England	●	●				
France	●	●				
Italy	●	●				
Spain	●	●				
Germany	●	●	●		●	
Saudi Arabia	●	●	●	●	●	●

Note: In the US "My Lord/Lady"/"Your Lordship/Ladyship" is used to address judges of the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, and "Your Honour" for Justices of the Peace. In England "My Lord/Lady"/"Your Lordship/Ladyship" is used for High Court judges; "Your Worship" or "Sir/Madam" for magistrates and "Your Honour" for circuit court judges.

RESEARCH SONI MISHRA

ship". It asked lawyers and litigants to call them "Sir" or "Shrimanji". A resolution passed by a full bench of the High Court said the move was meant to honour the mandate of equality enshrined in the Constitution.

Judges in their individual capacity have also been asking lawyers to desist from using "My Lord" or "Your Lordship" to address them. The most recent instance of this is Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court Thottathil B. Radhakrishnan, who in July, said to officers of the district judiciary and the registry that they should address him as "Sir".

Interestingly, "My Lady" or "Your Ladyship" is not used often in Indian courts. Lawyers are not comfortable using the terms, while female judges are also known to have objected to the usage. A few years ago, in the Punjab and Haryana High Court, Justice Daya Chaudhary strongly objected to being called "Your Ladyship" by Advocate General Atul

Nanda. Nanda tried to reason with her by referring to the history of the usage of the term. However, Chaudhary was adamant, and Nanda said that he would avoid the usage.

While the bar council's resolution is clear on how the judges have to be addressed, it largely remains on paper. Even in Rajasthan, despite the High Court's notice, at least 70 per cent of the lawyers still address judges "My Lord" or "Your Lordship", said Syed Shahid Hasan, senior advocate and chairman of the Bar Council of Rajasthan. "Judges also like to be called that," he said. "It is high time these titles are done away with. Judges have to be given respect, but they are not God."

Former Supreme Court judge Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan rejected the idea that judges like to be addressed in a certain manner. "I don't think any judge would insist on being called in a certain manner," he said. "All that is expected is that the chair

is shown respect. 'Your Honour' is fine. Even 'Sir' is fine."

Lawyers feel the use of the titles has a lot to do with habit and training. The joke that goes around in legal circles is that if the two titles are done away with, majority of the lawyers will not be able to argue since they are so used to starting their argument with "My Lord" or "Your Lordship". Supreme Court lawyer Sneha Kalita said most litigants use "Sir" to address judges. "They are not used to referring to judges as 'My Lord' or 'Your Lordship,'" she said. "It is a habit we lawyers inculcate from the time we are in law college. A certain level of dignity and respect has to be maintained in the relationship between the bar and the bench."

Lawyers also talk about peer pressure as a factor determining the use of the titles—if they opt for "Your Honour" when the opposing lawyer is going for "My Lord" or "Your Lordship", the judge may think they are trying to act smart.

However, Lokenath Chatterjee, advocate, Calcutta High Court, said a majority of the lawyers do not mind using the archaic titles. "It is linked to the majesty of the court and reflects respect towards the institution, and lawyers are a part of that," he said.

Breaking away from this practice will not be easy for Indian courts. ▀

[ **Judges in their individual capacity have also been asking lawyers to desist from using "My Lord" or "Your Lordship" to address them.** ]

# Unsettled, unsettling

The huge pendency of criminal cases involving lawmakers is corrupting politics. The Supreme Court and Parliament need to act swiftly

BY SONI MISHRA



**VIRSA SINGH VALTOHA** is a polarising figure in Punjab politics. A two-time MLA, Valtoha, 57, is known as much for his alleged role in Sikh militancy in the heyday of the separatist movement as for the provocative statements he has made after entering the political mainstream. A leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal, he now holds the dubious distinction of being an accused in the oldest pending criminal case against a lawmaker.

Valtoha's claim to notoriety was discovered during the hearing of a public interest petition in the Supreme Court on September 9. A bench headed by Justice N.V. Ramana

wanted to know the oldest pending criminal case against a lawmaker. The amicus curiae in the case, lawyer Vijay Hansaria, said it was a 1983 murder case in Punjab in which Valtoha was an accused. The judges were shocked; the proceedings in the case had been hanging fire for nearly four decades.

The case relates to the murder of a doctor in Tarn Taran district. The first information report was filed in September 1983, and trespass and murder charges were framed this January 17. In the meantime, Valtoha got bail in 1991 and was twice elected MLA—in 2007 and 2012.

The court has asked the state government's counsel to apprise it of the status of the matter, even as Valtoha says he had been discharged in the case. "I was falsely implicated," he said. "I was in jail from 1984 to 1991 in connection with other cases, so the question of my not participating in the trial in this case does not arise. The co-accused in the case got acquitted. Some months later, I got bail and was discharged from the case."

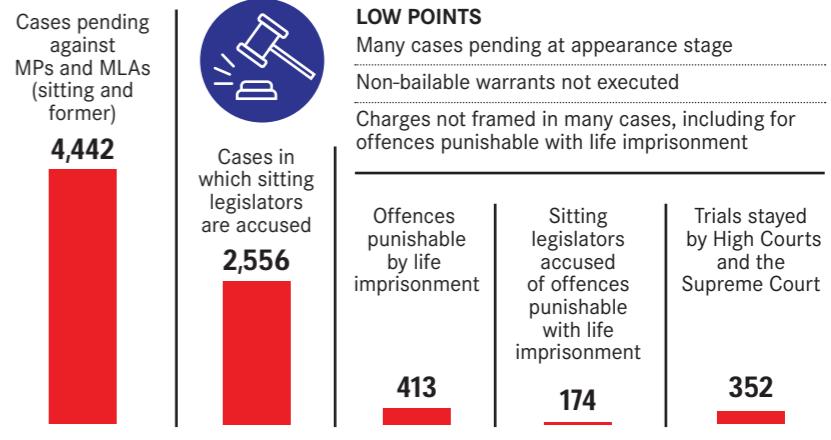
Valtoha was arrested in Operation Blue Star in 1984. He alleged that the murder case was being revived for political reasons. "My opponents are targeting me," he said. "There are

many people who cannot bear to see me in mainstream politics."

Valtoha may or may not be guilty, but his case is a prime example of the huge pendency of criminal cases involving incumbent and former legislators. They continue to contest elections and enter legislative bodies, even as cases involving them are stuck in courts.

According to a report submitted by Hansaria to the Supreme Court, 4,442 cases are pending against sitting and former MPs and MLAs. In 2,556 of these, incumbent legislators are accused. In as many as 413 cases, the offences are punishable

## LAWMAKERS. LAWBREAKERS?



GRAPHICS SREEMANIKANDAN S.\RESEARCH SONI MISHRA

by life imprisonment; 174 of these cases are against sitting MPs and MLAs. In a large number of cases, charges have not yet been framed, and many are still at the appearance stage. In many of the cases, the matter is stuck at the "execution required of arrest warrant" stage. During the hearing in which the Supreme Court bench learnt of Valtoha's case, a case from West Bengal was also mentioned. It involved charges far less serious, but it predated the Punjab case by two years. The charges against veteran Trinamool Congress leader Sisir Adhikari included rioting, being armed with a deadly weapon, unlawful assembly and endangering life or personal safety of others, and the FIR was filed in 1981. The case was disposed of a few months ago.

"Of course, I would have liked the case to get over earlier," said Adhikari, 79, a former Union minister who has been a Lok Sabha member since 2009.

"I mentioned the case in my election affidavits. We know how overburdened our courts are. So I do not want to blame anyone for the time it took for the case to be disposed of. It was only after the court gave an order for the cases to be tried by special courts that the trial gathered pace."

A conviction in the case would not have resulted in Adhikari's disqualification, since the punishment would

have been less than two years in jail. But the case does serve as an example of criminal proceedings against lawmakers moving at a snail's pace. According to the amicus curiae, the reasons for prolonged pendency include the accused trying to influence witnesses by using money and muscle power. He said the court should direct the authorities to strictly implement witness protection measures.

In many cases, non-bailable warrants issued by the trial court for securing the presence of the accused were not executed. "There are serious issues involved in establishing evidence in these cases," said advocate Sneha Kalita, who helped Hansaria prepare the report. "The accused do not appear before the court. Witnesses either do not turn up or turn hostile. So the case goes into a standstill at the evidence stage."

She also pointed out that there were not enough special courts to hear the cases. There are now 12 such courts, but the Supreme Court wants the Centre to consider increasing this number based on the district-wise breakup of pending cases. "There is also the issue of the investigating officer and the witnesses having to travel long distances to attend trial in the special courts. If more such



SAJIL BERA

courts are set up, this problem can be resolved," she said.

The amicus curiae has suggested setting up special courts in every district, giving priority to cases depending on the severity of the crime and punishment involved, reviewing the stay on a large number of cases, providing protection to witnesses, and asking the High Courts to monitor the progress in the cases. A larger issue arising out of this is the criminalisation of politics. What began as a criminal-politician nexus, say experts, has led to the criminal coming to the fore and fighting elections, with dons-turned-politicians like Mukhtar Ansari and Ateeq Ahmed completing the mainstreaming of crime in politics. Nearly half of the winners of the Lok Sabha elections in 2019 had criminal cases against them, according to a study conducted by the Association for Democratic Reforms. Of the 539 MPs elected in May 2019, 233 or 43 per cent were named in criminal cases. As many as 112 MPs (21 per cent) were accused of serious crimes. Maj Gen (retd) Anil Verma, head of ADR, said the Supreme Court should not

leave it to Parliament to enact laws to clean up politics. "They (parliamentarians) will be the last people to do something about it, considering the large number of lawmakers who face criminal charges, and the prevalence of money and muscle power in elections," he said.

The oft-stated defence of politicians is that most such cases are politically motivated and that they should not be deprived of the 'innocent till proved guilty' principle. "Getting named in cases is an occupational hazard," said Adhikari. "You take part in an agitation, and you risk being named in a case."

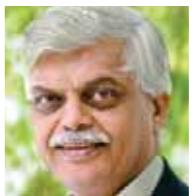
In February this year, the Supreme Court directed political parties to publish the criminal history of their poll candidates along with the reason for giving tickets to the accused. The order will be implemented for the first time in the assembly elections in Bihar, due later this month. The Supreme Court has, meanwhile, refused to pass an order to debar politicians facing criminal charges from contesting polls. It had ruled in 2013 that a legislator convicted of a crime and given a minimum punishment of

two years in jail would lose his or her membership of the house immediately. Lalu Prasad of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and Rasheed Masood of the Congress lost their seats in Parliament because of the order. The existing law states that convicted politicians cannot contest elections for six years after completing their sentence. There have been demands for barring politicians facing criminal charges from contesting polls, and banning convicted politicians from fighting elections.

According to former chief election commissioner S.Y. Quraishi, such a ban would be unduly harsh. He said the current minimum ban of eight years—two years of minimum imprisonment, followed by a six-year ban—is enough to kill a political career. A way out, according to him, has three options. "One, political parties should themselves refuse tickets to the tainted," he said. "Two, the Representation of the People Act should be amended to debar persons against whom cases of heinous nature are pending. Three, fast-track courts should decide the cases of tainted legislators quickly." **T**

**RELIEF, AT LAST**  
Trinamool Congress leader Sisir Adhikari (left) with fellow MP Abhishek Banerjee. Adhikari was named in a case of rioting and unlawful assembly. The FIR was filed in 1981, and the case was disposed of a few months ago

IVORY TOWER  
SANJAYA BARU



## News weak, time out

**T**he media love lists, and Indian media obsess about western lists. How is India doing on this index and that, by how many places has it moved up or down. Rarely does such reporting educate the reader or viewer about what goes into the making of a list—the criteria used, the data digested, the assumptions made and the biases inherent to definitions. So, it was not surprising that when the newsmagazine *Time* included Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a global list of "100 Most Influential People", Indian media was quick to report but without spelling out why he had made it.

Remember that the criterion for making it to even *Time's* "Person of the Year" is the person should have "most affected the news and our lives, for good or ill". It was left to one of Modi's irrepressible critics to point out that *Time* picked the prime minister for this list more for "doing ill than good", so to speak.

*Time* explained its choice stating: "First elected on a populist promise of empowerment, his Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party rejected not only elitism but also pluralism, specifically targeting India's Muslims. The crucible of the pandemic became a pretence for stifling dissent. And the world's most vibrant democracy fell deeper into shadow."

Despite the fact that the west is today largely on India's side, and Prime Minister Modi has established good relations and rapport with most major western leaders, western media is turning increasingly critical of him. However, nothing that has appeared in western media is more critical of Modi than what appears in Indian print media. It is only Indian television that has become excessively adulterous.

Modi is not the first Indian prime minister to be criticised by western media. From Jawaharlal Nehru to Manmohan Singh, every Indian prime minister has been conferred both bouquets



and brickbats. In 2008, *Newsweek*, under Fareed Zakaria's editorship, wrote off Singh and echoed the view of Rahul Gandhi cronies who, in the run up to 2009 election, wanted an "ageing" Singh to make way for "young" Rahul. Singh surprised everyone later that year leading his coalition back to power with more MPs in tow.

In 2002, *Time* declared that prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was "asleep at the wheel" and that many in his party wanted him replaced. Nothing of the sort happened. Despite getting Indian politics wrong on many occasions and underestimating the survival instincts of Indian prime ministers, western media manage to make a splash in India, often with half-baked stories.

This is more a reflection of Indian obsession with what the west thinks of us than a comment on western media's political prescience or ability to tell the truth.

It is one of the ironies of Indian media that it invests so little in covering the world and reporting from foreign stations but pays so much attention to what world media says about India and its

leaders. Among all the major powers, India has the fewest number of foreign correspondents. World news comes to Indian media from foreign sources, rarely their own correspondents. Worse still, Indian media's sourcing of news of non-western societies and many of India's neighbours also comes from western media sources. It is an odd love-hate relationship: excessive dependence on western media for news, combined with condescension when the news is not complimentary.

It has been reported that Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar has instructed Indian diplomats overseas to build better relations with local media. While this is necessary and diplomats can help improve India's image overseas, there are limits to how much carefully built images can blur a reality staring in one's face.

Baru is an economist and a writer. He was adviser to former prime minister Manmohan Singh.

ILLUSTRATION BHASKARAN

# Tough stake

The SP Group's debts will be cleared if it sells its stake in Tata Sons. But the sale itself is no cakewalk

BY NACHIKET KELKAR

**DECEMBER 18, 2019**, was a day of celebration for Cyrus Mistry, who had been sacked unceremoniously as the chairman of Tata Sons in October 2016. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) had ruled that day that the sacking was illegal, and he would have to be reinstated as the chairman of Tata Sons. The NCLAT verdict sent shockwaves through Bombay House; the Tatas did manage to get a Supreme Court stay on the order a few days later.

The Shapoorji Pallonji Group (SP Group) owned by the Mistris had invested in Tata Sons in the 1960s. Reports suggest that J.R.D. Tata was not quite happy with having an outsider in Tata Sons. But the two sides shared a cordial bond over the decades. The relations soured after Cyrus was fired overnight. And it got worse when the Tatas blocked SP Group's move to raise funds by pledging their shares in Tata Sons.

The Mistris, who have an 18.4 per cent stake in Tata Sons, needed the funds to tide over the crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Supreme Court has barred the group from selling or pledging any Tata Sons shares until October 28, when it is likely to start hearing the final arguments in the case. This judgment might have been the final nail in the coffin, which prompted the Mistris to finally decide that the time had

come to separate from the Tatas. The Tata Trusts—which are into various philanthropic activities—hold 66 per cent shares of Tata Sons, which in turn exerts control over a 100-odd companies manufacturing salt to software. The SP Group pegs its stake in Tata Sons at around ₹1.8 lakh crore. This is based on the value of the operating companies as well as the brand value of the Tatas. The Tatas may not agree to the valuation, and they do have a right of first refusal, according to the articles of

Association of Tata Sons. While the SP Group has reportedly lined up institutional investors for the stake sale, the Tatas may not want the shares falling into the hands of a third investor. The Tatas have told the apex court that they are open to buying the SP Group's stake. However, it is easier said than done.

The Tata Group is also saddled with huge debt, notably in its power, automobile and steel companies. The SP Group in its statement alleged that debt in major Tata Group companies had increased by ₹1 lakh crore in the last three years. So, buying out the Mistris may not be so easy for the Tatas.

"It may not be easy for both parties to agree on valuations. It is also not clear how the Tatas are going to raise the funding required to buy the shares," said Shriram Subramanian,

founder and managing director, InGovern Research Services, a corporate governance advisory firm.

Nirmalya Kumar, Lee Kong Chian professor of marketing at Singapore Management University and distinguished fellow at INSEAD Emerging Markets Institute, says Tatas may have to get an outside investor. But who will invest \$20 billion with restraints on liquidity and transferability of those shares, he asks.

If the Tatas want to buy out the stakes of the SP Group, there are four major options. "One option is to sell stakes in some companies like TCS; or divest some businesses completely; or raise some private equity funding; or raise some financing over a period of time," said Subramanian.

Proxy advisory firm Institutional Investor Advisory Services (Iias) estimates that Tata Sons may have to

sell a 16 per cent stake in TCS, which will bring down its shareholding to 56 per cent from 72 per cent. For the past several years, Tata Sons' ability to infuse equity and provide liquidity support to its businesses has been driven by TCS dividends and buyback. According to Iias, the sale of 16 per cent of TCS will restrict the financial flexibility of Tata Sons and somewhat weaken its ability to hold the group together.

"The easiest way for this separation, if you want to do it, is to give them (SP Group) equivalent value of TCS shares, and tell them that they would be free to do what they want with those shares," said Kumar. "This will resolve around two-thirds of the valuation issue, and Tatas will continue to hold a 51 per cent-plus stake in TCS."

Alternatively, experts suggest that



HAPPIER DAYS

File photo of Ratan Tata and Cyrus Mistry

**The easiest way for this separation is to give them (SP Group) equivalent value of TCS shares, and tell them they are free to do what they want with those shares.**

—Nirmalya Kumar, Lee Kong Chian professor of marketing at Singapore Management University

Tata Sons could sell non-core assets and pledge the equity of its listed companies to raise funds. But that would mean that the group will be deeper in debt. The Tatas may also look at roping in institutional investors to buy out the SP Group stake. Sovereign wealth funds have also been reportedly sounded out.

Exiting Tata Sons by offloading its stake will address the SP Group's debt woes completely (According to CARE Ratings total reported debt of Shapoorji Pallonji & Company Private Ltd on standalone basis stood at ₹11,745 crore as on March 31, 2019). The decision to separate from the Tata Group has lifted the shares of the two listed companies of the SP Group—Sterling & Wilson, and Forbes & Co—over the past week.

But are these celebrations premature? Time will tell. ■

# Old trade, new tools

Agritech companies are disrupting the agriculture sector and giving hope to farmers in distress

BY PRATUL SHARMA

**TWO YEARS AGO**, a late evening meeting changed Kishan Rathor's perspective on agriculture. After the meeting, with agriculture startup Gramophone, he decided to divide his 10-acre farm in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh into two. He used traditional methods of sowing *moong* (green gram) in one half and in the other he followed the advice of Gramophone's app.

"The production cost decreased, while output increased from 22 quintals to 27 quintals," said Rathor. "It was the first time I realised agriculture can be profitable." He is classified as a medium farmer; 13 per cent of the farmers in the country fall into this category, which is under threat of being pushed into poverty if the farmers do not use resources well. Luckily for them, increased penetration of cheap smartphones in rural areas has opened up access to information like never before. And the younger farmers are willing to try new things on their farms.

Over 1,000km from Dewas, in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, litchi farmer Sunil Kumar, too, harnessed the power of technology. As lockdown disrupted supply chains, he got himself listed on Kisan E-mart, powered by Pune-based startup Agri10x. The

listing caught the attention of a London-based buyer. After a deal was negotiated, the purchaser's kin checked the produce prior to shipping.

There are over 500 such agritech firms and many of them were founded in the last five years mostly by IIT and IIM alumni. They are bringing innovation into agriculture, primarily digitising the farm-to-factory and farm-to-fork processes, and focusing on minimising wastage across the supply chain and empowering farmers to make informed decisions.

Though the market penetration of these firms is only around 1 per cent, the entry of a new wave of entrepreneurs is starting to transform the way food is produced, marketed and consumed. Covid-19, the bane of millions worldwide, became a boon for agritech companies. These companies also stand to benefit from the Centre's agricultural reform laws, which diluted the Essential Commodities Act, gave legal framework for contract farming, and allowed farmers to sell to anyone, anywhere. As a result, they are now poised to scale-up operations. As per a recent Ernst & Young report, agritech in India has a market potential of \$24 billion by 2025.

"We help farmers increase their productivity and reduce production



**GROWING TOGETHER**  
Karthik Jayaraman, CEO and co-founder, WayCool, with a farmer in Sadali village, Madhya Pradesh

costs by 20 per cent by giving right advice, and managing their farms through a technological platform, right from sowing to harvesting," said Tauseef Khan, co-founder, Gramophone. "This is something which is in the control of the farmers, unlike prices and output which are dictated by market dynamics. We help them reduce uncertainty in decision making." He added that they also educate farmers about scientific agricultural practices and provide better quality seeds, and better crop protection and crop nutrition products than what is available in the market.

Gramophone's Krishi Mitra app allows farmers to engage with experts and even send them pictures of their crop on WhatsApp. The platform also uses advanced image recognition technology to process farmer queries and return relevant information.

Karthik Jayaraman, CEO and co-founder, WayCool, a Chennai-based company, said that the improvement of road networks in the last 20 years has made movement of goods easier and is one of the enabling factors for the agritech space. "Second is the transformation in the cost of communication and the digitisation of money, which enables faster movement. These are important components of the supply chain and we thought now was the time," he said.

He added that with the government reforms, the focus had shifted from ramping up production to ramping up the supply. Jayaraman said that the focus should now be on improving the supply chain by building infrastructure to improve cold storage, even in villages.

In another critical area of the agricultural value chain comes companies like Agribazaar, which replicates the mandi using an online aggregation model. A farmer lists his produce and buyers like merchants, traders and corporates can place orders. Once the transaction is complete,



FARMER'S CHOICE

Kishan Rathor said an agritech firm's app helped him decrease production cost and increase yield

Agribazaar picks up the produce and the payment is credited to the farmer's bank account.

"Our app is helping local farmers go [pan India]," said Amith Agarwal, CEO and co-founder, Agribazaar. He said that in April 2020, the app facilitated the transport of over 8,000 trucks worth of produce, even from far-off places like Ladakh, Sikkim and Lakshadweep. "The response during this lockdown was encouraging," he said. Founded in 2016, the startup has connected around 10,000 traders and processors, and over 100 farmer producer organisations with its network of over three lakh farmers across 36 states and Union territories. The app has facilitated sales of ₹14,000 crore since its inception, said Agarwal.

Agri10x partnered with the government to help farmers access their marketplace to sell their produce, like the litchi farmer in Muzaffarpur did. "We now have access to the government's common service centres (CSCs), access points that deliver e-services to rural and remote areas in the country," said Pankaj Ghode, founder and CEO, Agri10x. "We charge a trading fee of 6 to 10 per cent, which is equally divided among

farmers and traders. The two players save a lot of cash, which would otherwise be spent on middlemen. The size of the operation itself is enormous as volumes start from 200 tonnes and go up to 1,000 tonnes."

AgNext, a Mohali-based company set up by Taranjeet Singh, measures the quality of agricultural produce. Using its in-house Qualix platform, it helps food-processing businesses analyse the trading and safety parameters of commodities. It provides test reports over the phone within 30 seconds.

The pandemic has brought about a visible change in consumer behaviour. Safety concerns have come to the fore and consumers are reading the labels more closely. Ninjacart, a Bengaluru-headquartered fresh food supply chain company, introduced "end-to-end food footprint traceability" for fruits and vegetables. "Footprint is Ninjacart's first but significant step towards ensuring food safety," said Thirukumaran Nagarajan, co-founder and CEO, Ninjacart. "It allows the consumer to trace the complete footprint of the products purchased from Ninjacart. For every product one buys from Ninjacart, it will tell you the farmer details, ware-

houses that handled the produce, the truck that carried the item to stores and more."

Before the government's recent reforms, each state had a different set of rules and it was hard for agritech companies to understand. "We could not expand our base outside south India as we did not know the rules," said Jayaraman. "At some places, we had to pay extra for every kilo bought from farmers. Grains could only be sourced through APMCs (agriculture produce market committees)."

The dilution of the Essential Commodities Act is also a boost. Jayaraman explained: "There is demand for onions in the Middle East," he said. "But we were not reliable suppliers as we could not store under the Essential Commodities Act. Now, with reforms, storage has been made possible."

A report by Maple Capital Advisors pegged that venture capital investments in agritech startups are expected to exceed \$500 million in the next two years. Pankaj Karna, managing director, Maple Capital Advisors, said: "The golden age of Indian agriculture may well have just begun, backed by unparalleled digital access to farmers, overarching reforms and government support." ▶

**A homely touch**

In the pandemic, home chefs have become a force to reckon with

BY RAHUL DEVULAPALLI, MANDIRA NAYAR, REKHA DIXIT AND POOJA BIRAIJA JAISWAL

**LADY AND THE LADLE**

Roshni Nathan started 'Kitchen Table' in Hyderabad in July. She does not serve regular Telugu food, and instead takes inspiration from her trips to Mumbai and Goa



Almost 90, Krishna Sekhri, aka Krishna aunty, is easily the most popular resident of her leafy, green colony in Delhi. With a shock of white hair, a ready smile and free advice on anything from children to food, she is often spotted in the colony walking her Labrador. "Half my life has been spent sitting on the park bench opposite my house," she says with a smile. There, Krishna aunty often used to sing to a smitten audience. The lockdown brought her life to a halt, until her family realised it was time for an intervention. It came in the form of her other passion—food. At 'Aunty K's Kitchen', Punjabi recipes are brought alive with a dollop of warmth. The kitchen opens every weekend and sells out within minutes of the menu being put up on the colony's WhatsApp group. "I do simple, slow cooking," she says. "It is wonderful that people like it."

Cooking is part of her DNA. Hailing from a large family, her mother would cook for everyone, including the seven dogs. Her food was the stuff of legend. "Even the tinda (Indian round gourd) tasted like mutton," Krishna aunty reminisces fondly. "My father's friends who stayed at the best hotels in Lahore always ate dinner at our house." Krishna aunty herself, however, only learnt to cook after her marriage to an IFS officer. In the lockdown, she has brushed up her old skills. She spends her time reading cook books and planning the menu for the weekend. Now her palak chicken, parathas, chola, butter chicken and pickles have become as legendary as her mother's dishes.

It is not just Krishna aunty. In the pandemic, the home chef business is booming like never before. Whether it is the Mumbai-based quartet sell-



AYUSH GOEL



PHOTOS P. PRASAD



**CHEFS' SPECIALS**  
(Clockwise from left)  
Namratha Mongam, a home chef from Vizag; Monica Kansal Gupta, a Delhi-based home baker; and Monika Khandelwal, a Rajasthani home chef living in Hyderabad

ing burgers through 'The Accidental Burger House', or the chef behind 'Mehfil Delhi' who is introducing Delhites to Kashmiri cuisine, or the 'Curly Sue' pork being sold by a couple in Bengaluru, home chefs have mushroomed across the country, quickly filling the gap left by people's reluctance to dine out. It is generally perceived that food prepared by home chefs in small, curated batches is healthier and safer.

Some of these home chefs are infusing novelty and freshness into their offering. In July, Roshni and Errol Nathan started 'Kitchen Table' in Hyderabad. The couple does not serve the usual Telugu and Hyderabadi fare, though. Roshni takes inspiration from her travels in Goa and Mumbai, coming up with popular dishes like Goan prawn curry and green masala chicken. "We have

lived in Hyderabad for the last 16 or so years," she says. "Though people want to try new food, it is difficult to get it in the city. The number of people going to Goa from Hyderabad has increased. They cannot go there all the time so we thought of coming up with niche Goan food." Her cooking has also been influenced by her Anglo-Indian in-laws in Mumbai. The Anglo-Indian East India Bottle Masala, for example, which includes 30 to 35 spices, is used in several of her dishes.

The specialty of Namratha Mongam, a home chef from Vizag, is heritage recipes and rare techniques. Namratha is inspired by her family's grand history, which includes a letter of appreciation from Queen Elizabeth II. Her husband's Malayali Christian family, too, is equally interesting, having preserved centu-

ries-old recipes passed down through the generations. "There are fantastic cooks on both sides. I asked our families to share important recipes," says Namratha, who started 'Ma Vantillu' (My Kitchen), specialising in coastal Andhra and Kerala food. She only realised how popular the venture had gotten during the Kerala festival of Onam, when they prepared *sadyas* (traditional Onam feasts) with 26 curries. "I was surprised to get 100 orders that day," she says. There is great demand for her crab masala, Kerala chicken curry and appam and stew. To complement her recipes, she uses fresh vetted ales, mostly sourced from her farm on the outskirts of the city. Aside from the financial aspect, merely being able to serve good food is reason enough to continue as a home chef, she says.

In the pandemic, anything perceived to be healthy is an instant best-seller.

Like the gond laddoos of Monika Khandelwal, a Rajasthani home chef living in Hyderabad, which are believed to be highly nutritious with healing powers. Although she makes only one kilo every day, the demand for them is much higher. "I made the laddoos for a person in my complex after seeing a request in the community group," she says. "After that, I started getting a lot of requests." According to her, the laddoos are made in an authentic style with jaggery, unlike the ones you get in shops made with sugar.

Many of these home chefs publicise their food through Instagram or WhatsApp. Mumbai-based Sonal Garga and her son, Vimanyu, for example, started out by offering fresh, cheesy pizzas through their housing society's WhatsApp group. Sonal says she figured pizza would

be one item that those who chose not to dine out would miss the most. "Today, we deliver customised food as per choice and taste," she says. This includes sizzlers, cakes and a variety of starters. All she requests is a 24-hour notice to get the ingredients. She says she makes around ₹40,000 a month.

The home chef business has become so successful that many ancillary enterprises have come up around it. Like the platforms which connect home chefs with customers. These include Zingg and Assorted in Delhi and Trice in Hyderabad. "There are a couple of reasons why home chefs are much in demand," says Priyanka Raghuraman, co-founder of Trice, which has enlisted home chefs from 55 communities. "First, they offer authentic dishes that are rarely available in restaurants and cloud kitchens. Second, they make the dishes in their own kitchens with the same ingredients they use to cook for their families. In a way, they are inviting you into their homes."

Home chefs who established themselves much before the pandemic are adjusting their modus operandi to cater to the new reality. Like Monica Kansal Gupta, a Delhi-based home baker with her own brand, 'It's Sinful', who lost many big orders from her corporate clientele after events got cancelled in the lockdown. However, as the unlock phases began, she started getting queries for small parties. "Earlier, I used to make 18kg to 25kg cakes. Now the parties are in smaller groups, so the orders are for 1kg to 2kg cakes," she says. The nature of her catering, too, has changed, with orders for artisan breads and baked savouries like tortillas, quiches, burgers, puffs and pizzas increasing. These were items people would earlier source from fast food joints, but are now wary. Over the last three months, she has catered for around 18 parties. Business is different now, she says, but it continues to go strong.



AAYUSH GOEL

## Cheers to better days!

**{ India's best bartender is ready to serve and sling post-quarantine drinks }**

BY SNEHA BHURA

**H**ow would Yangdu Lama describe his bartending style? "Classic!" he says. He is observant, friendly and loves a great conversation. He is a benevolent barkeep in Delhi, which sounds almost fictional. It is like he wants to revive a culture where bartenders not only mix the perfect drink but are also part-therapists, part-philosophers.

As most of his conversations have revolved around life in quarantine since Delhi bars reopened on September 9, Lama would much rather look ahead. So, he shares with THE WEEK three invigorating post-quarantine cocktails he devised:

**SAGE AND THE SPIRITS**  
Yangdu Lama is regarded as the Yoda of India's alcohol and beverage industry

International's annual Bar World 100 list, a definitive list of the world's top bars. This came four months after his south Delhi bar, Sidecar, was featured in Asia's 50 Best Bars 2020.

For Lama, born in Gayabari village in Kurseong, this validation can only be a sign of a brewing renaissance. "It comes at a time when you need it most," says Lama. "From here on, more Indian bars will start featuring on the world's best list. The shift is really tilting towards Asia." He adds that a whiskey from Goa, Mithuna by Paul John, was ranked the third-best whiskey in Jim Murray's Whiskey Bible 2021, and one of the world's best bartenders right now is a South Korean woman—Bannie Kang, based in Singapore.

The history of cocktails and drinks has been shaped by wars and historical epochs in the last 200 years. A churning awaits the Indian drinking world, too. For Lama, Sidecar already represents what bars in post-pandemic India need to be. "It is purely about service culture," he says. "Sidecar has no DJs, no dance floor, no Friday or Saturday night mayhem and no rock'n'roll bands. You can read a book or catch up with a friend. The idea of a bar is not about making a lot of noise, getting drunk or being squished in crowds. We play a specific kind of music at a certain volume. Patrons are encouraged to interact with bartenders and owners."

With more than two decades of experience, the 48-year-old Darjeeling native is regarded as the Yoda of India's alcohol and beverage industry. The Delhi-based mixologist recently became the first Indian to enter Drinks



### MARIGOLD G&T

*Gin: 60ml  
Homemade marigold cordial: 20ml  
Classic Indian tonic to top  
Method: Pour the gin and the homemade marigold cordial into a stem goblet, filled with ice. Top with tonic, garnish with a dehydrated orange slice and serve.*



### CARROTA CUP

*Vodka: 60ml  
Carrot juice: 90ml  
Fresh lime juice: 15ml  
Cherry brine: 20ml  
Method: In a cocktail shaker filled with ice, pour all the ingredients and shake well. Strain into a chilled coupe and serve.*



### MULBERRY MANHATTAN

*Bourbon whiskey: 40ml  
Campari: 20ml  
Fig and apple glaze: 20ml  
Aromatic bitters: 3 drops  
Method: In a mixing glass filled with ice, pour all the ingredients and stir well. Strain into a cocktail glass, garnish with a dehydrated apple slice and serve.*



THE PLAYBOOK:  
A COACH'S RULES  
FOR LIFE

Available on Netflix

Rating



## Method to the madness

BY REUBEN JOE JOSEPH

Picking the brain of a successful sports coach can be an insightful exercise. More than teaching game-specific tactics or skills, it is the life lessons that a coach imparts that transforms players. And it is these principles that *The Playbook* seeks to uncover from the lives of five top coaches—Doc Rivers and Dawn Staley (basketball), Jill Ellis and Jose Mourinho (football) and Patrick Mouratoglou (tennis).

Take, for example, Rivers' discovery of the African philosophy of ubuntu when he was desperate to inspire his star-studded Boston Celtics team. The players accepted the ubuntu maxim of "I am because we are" and began to put the team above self. It resulted in the Celtic's first NBA championship in 22 years.

Each 30-minute episode is divided into each coach's rules, weaving in their stories of overcoming challenges, silencing haters and fighting issues like racism and sexism in sport. Of these, Ellis and Staley stand out as tall pioneers in two male-dominated sports. Ellis coached the US women's national football team to two World Cup triumphs, but more importantly at a time when she backed her players' demand for equal pay. Staley, meanwhile, did the impossible task of filling stadiums for women's basketball college games in South Carolina.

There is a lack of variety though, not only of the sports featured but also in the fact that four of the five have excelled in the US. The only outsider is Mourinho, whose episode is probably the least informative. It shows the grit of a man to outthink his counterparts, but it does not really seem like Mourinho lives by any inspiring rules.

The best of the lot is the episode on Mouratoglou, best known for coaching Serena Williams. Methodical, lucid and respectful of his players, the Frenchman's tale of using his biggest fears to his advantage to become one of the best readers of tennis players and the game is one that would require a whole series in itself.

*The Playbook* is a well-shot and well-documented series that, for once, gives a peek into the inspiring lives of coaches, rather than players. A second season with more diversity would be welcome for us non-Americans. ☺

# ENOLA ALONE

BY MATHEW T. GEORGE

**S**he sprang out of Nancy Springer's *The Case of the Missing Marquess* in 2006. A Holmes who is missing from Arthur Conan Doyle's canon. The 16-year-old sister of Sherlock and Mycroft. Home-schooled in everything from martial arts to cipher games, archery and painting.

In *Enola Holmes*, Miss Harrison (Fiona Shaw), the strict headmistress of a finishing school, admonishes Enola and says: "The name Holmes is coming to mean something in England...." She is referring to the achievements of Mycroft, the well-paid bureaucrat. In the literary world, too, the name Holmes has come to mean something;



screenplay writer Jack Thorne and director Harry Bradbeer seem to have forgotten this. Over time the surname has become a peg to hang various hats from; director Bill Condon hung a top hat on it in *Mr Holmes* (2015). Springer, Bradbeer & Co have hung a bonnet on it this time.

Just into the movie, Enola (Millie Bobby Brown) hints that her name spelt backwards reflects her situation—alone. She has not seen her brothers for years and her father is no more. It is just her and her unconventional mother, Eudoria (Helena Bonham Carter), who vanishes on her 16th birthday. Enola is alone. So, watch the movie for her alone and you will not be disappointed.

Though set in Victorian England, it is a production for our times. With rights being taken for granted today, Enola Holmes highlights the struggle that got us thus far. Voting rights for women, for example. Saudi women got the right to drive only as recent as September 2017, still you feel the rising anger when Mycroft rubs it in that the fatherless Enola is his ward, under his thumb and not even qualified to keep the money left to her by her mother.

The movie also adds 'colour' to Doyle's whitewashed canvas. Detective Lestrade (Adeel Akhtar) is swarthy with impressive whiskers. Eudoria's confidante, Edith (Susan Wokoma), is a woke black woman. And, Watson is nowhere to be found.

Enola runs away from home to find her mother and meets another runaway—Viscount Tewkesbury, the young marquess of Basilwether. And an uncommon marquess he is. In a landscape where Enola could not find anything to eat, the keen botanist cooks up a feast with foraged greens and mushrooms. But then, a short while ago, she had saved him from an assassin. As mentioned earlier, a movie for our times. Especially the part where Enola tells the peer of the realm, "You're a man when I tell you you're a man." Is there romance? Yes, just a hint.

While Bradbeer has tried to justify her surname by casting her in Sherlock's (Henry Cavill) mould, her skills are nowhere close and the holes are too many. For example, in a park a dead branch is cut halfway through and left to fall on Tewkesbury when he is gathering mushrooms under it. Too obvious, too much of a coincidence for a murder attempt and so unlike Doyle.

In the end, Enola stands on her own, forces Mycroft (Sam Claflin) to accept her terms, and makes Sherlock and Eudoria proud of her choices.

In this movie, Holmes has come to mean something else. Accept her. **•**

Rating



Available on Netflix

## PLOT GLOT



**TROUBLED BLOOD**  
By  
**Robert Galbraith**  
Published by  
**Hachette India**  
Price ₹899  
Pages 929

BY MANDIRA NAYAR

**A**t nearly 1,000 pages, *Troubled Blood* is a wrist-breaker. And the longest you get to spend with the author's famous characters—private detective Cormoran Strike and his assistant, Robin Ellacott. Still, one wonders, is it a tad too long? J.K. Rowling, writing as Robert Galbraith, loves stories with diverse characters and side-plots. Her latest is cluttered with them. Each character, even the minor ones, are etched out in great detail with elaborate back stories, even if red herrings.

It all starts with a cold case. At a pub in Cornwall, a woman asks Strike to find out what happened to her mother, Margot Bamborough, a doctor and former Playboy Bunny who disappeared 40 years ago. Bill Talbot, the first investigator in the case, was attacked by the serial killer Dennis Creed, who tortured and murdered several women. Margot's daughter, Anna, was only a year old

when her mother disappeared. Now, she wants closure. Anna's partner Kim—this is the first time Rowling is introducing a lesbian couple, after facing flak for her comments on the transgender community—is not too keen. Strike, too, is hesitant, what with the cold trail, dead witnesses and an imprisoned Creed.

You do not turn to Rowling for fast-paced thrillers. Her stories are for those who love wonderfully eccentric characters and rambling plots, but even for the most enthusiastic Rowling fan, this book is tedious. The messy lives of the characters and the different threads in the story are too much to keep up with. The thrill of the first two books in the series, including the delicious chemistry between Strike and Ellacott, fizzles out in *Troubled Blood*. They spend most of their time bickering or being grumpy. Consequently, instead of a sinfully-satisfying experience, Strike's fifth outing is a let-down—not fun, frothy or eminently sinkable. **•**

## ...FIGHT LIKE A GIRL

INFOCUS



**Dr Varun Rajan**  
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his year has been a **T** rollercoaster ride for everyone around the globe. The pandemic, as scary as it is, also taught us that our choices and actions have the power to protect the vulnerable among us in a big way. The same holds true when it comes to breast cancer.

As an oncologist, I prescribe screening and lifestyle modifications for my patients along with the

medication needed. But here I pen down the most important but ignored need of a cancer patient: emotional and psychological support from both family and society.

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer seen in women being diagnosed with it. Breast cancer is a highly curable disease and the cure rate is more than percent if detected early. But what is more important is getting the patients ready for the battle and helping them triumph over cancer.

We should first understand the psyche of women. The incidence of breast cancer in young women is increasing in India. Most of these young women are in the prime of their life, with

booming careers, or are newly wed, or have children. Even at that moment they are worried about their families and kids more than themselves. The woman shuttles between her role as a wife, mother, daughter, a career woman and what not, cares very less of herself, forget being cared for. This comes from an eye-opening moment from my professional life. One fine morning I received a call from one of my patients, Mrs X, who was diagnosed with breast cancer and undergoing chemotherapy. Her usually pleasant tone was missing. I was surprised as during her previous visit to the hospital I had informed her family that her illness was completely curable and her chemotherapy will come to an end in a few weeks time. I did not realise I was dampening my patient's happiness. She feared all the love and care she received from her family during her treatment would end once the treatment is over and she will go back to the one who takes care of everyone. She told me over that call how she wished to cling to her illness for that little extra care her family gave her.

We recognize the month of October as breast cancer awareness month, which is a worldwide annual campaign involving thousands of organisations to educate people about breast awareness, importance of early detection, treatment options and more.

In this 'Pink Month', let's promise to stand by any woman in need and support her through the crisis. Respect her, value her opinion, listen to her wishes. Be with her. NO ONE FIGHTS ALONE. Success is ours.

# GAME OF THRONES

BY MANDIRA NAYAR

**I**t is not a story of true love, but there are lovers aplenty. *The House of Jaipur: The Inside Story of India's Most Glamorous Royal Family* is a tale of romance, opulent palaces, infidelity, scandal and princes who lived large—all wrapped up in an irresistible fairy-tale with no happy endings.

Author John Zubrzycki traces the history of the family that truly put Indian royalty on the international map. The book is the delicious tale of the most glamorous couple in India, who dined with the Kennedys and counted the Windsors as their friends—Gayatri Devi, or Ayesha as she is referred to in the book, and her husband Sawai Man Singh II, or Jai.

Zubrzycki has written about opulence before; *The Last Nizam* was a fascinating glimpse into the intrigue around the world's richest man. Here, too, he is wonderful at blending fact, gossip and history into a heady cocktail. He vividly recreates an almost

impossible-sounding world—of champagne, cocktails, *shikars* and parties—that existed at the cusp of Independence. It is also an ode to Gayatri Devi. Zubrzycki makes no bones about where his sympathies lie. She is the heroine of the story, but he also peppers it with the delightfully eccentric characters who surround her.



**THE HOUSE OF JAIPUR:  
THE INSIDE STORY  
OF INDIA'S MOST  
GLAMOROUS  
ROYAL FAMILY**

By  
**John Zubrzycki**  
Published by  
**Juggernaut**  
Price **₹599**  
Pages **358**

was his alleged interest in boys and her propensity to drink. During his last year at the Mayo College for Indian Chiefs, however, he was allowed conjugal visits once a fortnight.

Peppered with fascinating stories and characters, the book is a compulsive read. Jai's second wife, Maharani Kishore Kanwar, or Jo, was lively and struck a firm friendship with Virginia Cherrill, her husband's lover. Jo and Virginia wrote to each other regularly. While Jai was busy writing love letters to Virginia, he was also wooing Ayesha, who later became his third wife. Then there was the powerful Roop Rai, or "the female Rasputin", Madho Singh's favourite concubine, who, according to British intelligence, had "hypnotic power" over the Maharaja and had convinced him that she could speak with his dead wife.

But perhaps the most fascinating character he writes about is Indira Devi—Ayesha's mother, who spurned the Baroda Maharaja to instead marry Jitendra Narayan, who later became the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. She brought chiffon into fashion, had several affairs and was close to Jai. One of her paramours was Khusrub Jung, the dashing Hyderabad nobleman who was private secretary to the crown prince of Kashmir, Hari Singh, and with whom she had a daughter. Thrilling, deeply satisfying and engaging, the book is a must-read. **T**

# THE WEEK

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## Role change

L. Adimoolam and K. Madhavan (below) have become the new presidents of the Indian Newspaper Society and the Indian Broadcasting Federation. Adimoolam has 36 years of experience in newspaper management, both on the technical and marketing front, and is the representative in the INS for the magazine, *Health & The Antiseptic*. Madhavan is the Star and Disney India country head and has been active in the IBF since 2012.



## Melody of hope

Sonakshi Sinha came together with dad Shatrughan Sinha to feature in a new song, 'Zaroorat', which conveys a message of hope during the pandemic. "We are tackling big problems right now—economic slowdown, internal conflicts and tension at our borders," said Sonakshi. "Now, more than ever before, it has become pertinent to lend a helping hand, say a kind word or even smile." The music video features people from diverse backgrounds, like acid attack survivor Tasmi Agarwal and politician Kiran Bedi.



ESHNA KUTTY, hoop dancer

## Hoop, hoop, hurray!

Delhi-based Eshna Kutty—the 24-year-old hoop dancer whose 'Genda Phool' video in a sari and sneakers was the brightest thing on the internet last week—talks about how she plans to turn hooping into a professional art-form in India.

### Q/ How and when did you discover hooping?

A/ I discovered hooping some 10 years ago and got fully into it around six years ago. What I like about hooping is how anybody can pick it up. I have never danced in my life. I am into sports and hooping looked very elegant yet sporty. Initially, it was like a side hobby—a pocket-money profession. It is only after my studies last year that I decided to do it full-time.

### Q/ You have also been teaching hooping.

I have taken hooping workshops across the country. I would get invited to teach in studios across cities, in batches of 20 to 30. It slowly picked up in the last year. I saw a shift in the number of students I had. There are hundreds of hoopers now. Hooping comes under a broader term called Flow Arts, which includes juggling, poi spinners, slacklining and acro yoga, the same way how dancing has different styles

like jazz, contemporary and hip-hop.

### Q/ How did the sari come into the picture?

Every Indian hooper might have hula-hooped in a sari. I like to keep my practice interesting and mix different art-forms. And I love wearing saris. It was all spontaneous. I was meant to post some #sareeflow videos over a period of time. The 'Genda Phool' video that went viral was the third #sareeflow video on my Instagram handle. But it was not even something I was supposed to post. It was just a practice video, with me warming up to, you know, the actual insane #sareeflow content. My Instagram following has always been more non-Indians—mostly international professional hoopers. The goal of #sareeflow was to show that a distinctive community of Indian hoopers also exists.

### Q/ What are your plans with hooping?

I am currently branding. It is coincidental that I was working on my company, Hoop Flow, when this video went viral. The company just got registered. I am going to be launching it in the coming weeks. Hoop Flow will be a one-stop destination where people can buy hula hoops and learn how to dance using them. I would like to host hoop festivals and build the community. Throughout my journey with hooping, I have often shied away from telling people I hula hoop because they just don't understand. There is a lot of stigma attached to it. So I wanted to be so popular that you don't have to explain yourself.

—Sneha Bhura



JANAK BHAT

## In the line of fire

In an Instagram post, Karan Johar termed the allegation that drugs were used at one of his house parties as "baseless and false". "I would like to unequivocally once again state that I do not consume narcotics and I do not promote or encourage consumption of any such substance," he stated, adding that such a malicious attack subjected him, his family and colleagues to hatred, contempt and ridicule. The controversy broke after an old video of a few Bollywood celebs partying at his home last year resurfaced on social media.

## President's choice

According to a new book by Rick Gates—a former campaign aide of President Donald Trump—the US president had seriously considered fielding daughter Ivanka Trump as his vice-presidential candidate in the 2016 elections, before ultimately settling for Mike Pence. In *Wicked Game: An Insider's Story on How Trump Won, Mueller Failed and America Lost*, Gates writes about Trump suggesting Ivanka's name during a VP discussion. Ivanka herself looked surprised and "we all knew Trump well enough to keep our mouths shut and not laugh", he writes.



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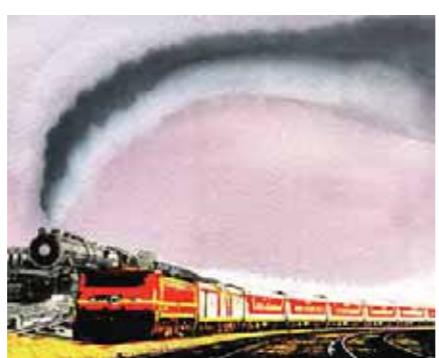
## Cooling all classes

**M**ahatma Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* was originally written in Gujarati in 1908. This book/monograph was a dialogue between Reader (the general Indian) and Editor (Gandhiji). In this, Gandhiji was against railways, one reason being the differentiation between third-class carriages (for Indians) and coaches for Englishmen, reminiscent of his experience in South Africa.

In 1917, Gandhiji wrote a vivid description (*Third Class in Indian Railways*) of travel by third class. He also consciously opted to travel only by third class. With aviation and road transport thriving (pre-Covid-19), young people from a certain socioeconomic class are more familiar with air travel than railways. For railways, they may know of Rajdhani, Shatabdi, AC-1, AC-2 and AC-3 tier, and CC (chair car).

There will be a figure that the Indian Railways runs 13,000 passenger trains and 9,000 goods trains every day. Such figures (on passenger trains) include suburban and specials. "Regular" passenger trains are just over 6,000 and most (around 4,000) are not mail/express. As much as 95 per cent of passengers travel on those 4,000 trains. They travel sleeper class or third class. They travel without AC and they travel unreserved. I should be more careful about nomenclature. The old third class formally became second class in 1977, without necessarily changing anything.

In British India, there was fourth class and inter class. Memories of train travel depend on age. I remember travelling first class, second class (old inter class) and third class. These were non-AC and non-corridor trains. I remember trains with steam engines, stopping for coal and water every 100km. You could get off and stretch your legs on a platform, and have a cup of tea. You could roll up the window and savour the scenery and soot. I remember third-class coaches without fans and lights.



With 75,000 passenger coaches (today's figure), change on all coaches cannot happen overnight. Third-class coaches started to have fans and lights only in 1959. So yes, I have travelled (short distances) on coaches without fans and lights. When there was a fan, it would often not work and there was a trick to get it going. You inserted a comb or a ball-point pen through the grille and nudged it. Prodded, the fan would start to rotate. Bars on windows started in the 1970s. So yes, I have travelled on trains where passengers clambered in through the window. I have travelled on third-class coaches with wooden seats, without cushions.

We had the first AC train in 1956, between Howrah and Delhi (with some limited attempts in 1952/53). At that time, it was called Air-conditioned Vestibuled Express. Neither AC nor vestibule needs explanation.

(But non-AC third-class coaches were also attached.) Today, we know this as Poorva Express. Before someone corrects me, I should say the first AC train was Frontier Mail in 1934, cooled with blocks of ice. But that was different. There are engineering issues for AC, easier to handle in LHB (Linke-Hofmann-Busch) than ICF (Integral Coach Factory) coaches. As we move towards LHB (or train sets) for all of Indian Railways and 100 per cent electrification, why should sleeper also not become AC? It has been tried for Tejas and Humsafar.

Amid Covid-19, some decisions taken by the Indian Railways have not been noticed that much. One such is to make all trains fully air-conditioned post-Covid-19, initially on some routes. Old third-class will become AC-3 tier. In the absence of proper commercial accounting, it is difficult to estimate proper revenue/costs for the Indian Railways and fares are also administratively decided. Subject to that, among various classes, AC-3 is the most profitable. This is a good commercial decision, too. One day, everyone will travel reserved.

ILLUSTRATION BHASKARAN

Bibek Debroy is the chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the prime minister.

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