

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 9 MAY 2021



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**Rudy & Pappu Yadav in war of words over unused ambulances in Bihar**



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A view of West Bengal Legislative Assembly without Opposition MLAs during announcement of the name of the Assembly Speaker in Kolkata on Saturday. TMC's Biman Bandopadhyay was elected as the Speaker. — PTI

## Pro-independence heads to majority in Scotland polls

**London:** Scotland's governing Scottish National Party was on course Saturday to win its fourth straight parliamentary election and very close to securing a majority that would enable it to make a push for another referendum on independence from the UK With 60 constituencies counted, the SNP had won 51 of the 129 seats and was clearly on course to extend its dominance of Scottish politics. ■ **More on Page 6**

## 1 killed, 6 injured as TMC, BJP cadre clash

**Kolkata:** One person was killed and six others were injured in a clash between the TMC and the BJP in West Bengal's Birbhum district, the police said on Saturday. The incident occurred at Muktinagar village under Dubrajpur Assembly constituency. ■ **More on Page 4**

## Kabul school blast targets girls, 40 dead

**Kabul:** Multiple blasts at a school in the Afghan capital Kabul on Saturday killed at least 40 people and wounded dozens more, mostly female students, officials said, in an attack Afghan President Ashraf Ghani blamed on the insurgent Taliban group. ■ **More on Page 6**

## COUNTERPOINT



**2nd wave? I am more worried about my 2nd dose of vaccine!**

## WEATHER

**Max:** 37°C  
**Min:** 26°C  
**RH:** 28%  
**Rain:** 20%

**Forecast:** Partly cloudy

## ASTROGUIDE

**Plava:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Chaitra Bahula Trayodasi till 7.32 pm  
**Star:** Revathi till 5.29 pm  
**Variyam:** Sesha Variyam till 5.55 am (early hours)  
**Durmuhurtam:** 4.53 pm to 5.44 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 4.30 pm to 6 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 7.01 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.33 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 4.47 PM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 4.57 AM**

■ **Task Force will help govt go beyond ad-hoc solutions: SC**

# SC sets up 12-member Task Force to manage O2, Covid

**New Delhi, May 8:** The Supreme Court has constituted a 12-member National Task Force of top medical experts to formulate a methodology for allocation of oxygen to states and Union Territories for saving lives of Covid-19 patients and to facilitate a public health response to the pandemic.

The top court named a sub-group for carrying out the audit exercise for Delhi's health infrastructure and allocation of oxygen and said that it shall consists of Dr Randeep Guleria of AIIMS, Dr Sandeep Budhiraja of Max Healthcare and two IAS officers not below the rank of joint secretary —one each from the Centre and the Delhi government.

A bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said that the Union



Dr. Devi Prasad Shetty, Dr. Gagandeep Kang, Dr. Devender Singh Rana, Dr. Naresh Trehan

cabinet secretary will be the convener of the National Task Force and may nominate an officer not below the rank of additional secretary to depute for him, when necessary.

The top court said in its order passed on May 6 uploaded on Saturday that the secretary of the Union ministry of health and family welfare will be ex-officio member of the task force.

The bench said that other

members of the task force will include Bhabatosh Biswas, former vice-chancellor, West Bengal University of Health Sciences, Kolkata; Devender Singh Rana, chairperson of Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Delhi; Devi Prasad Shetty, chairperson and executive director, Narayana Healthcare, Bengaluru; Dr Gagandeep Kang, professor, Christian Medical College, Vellore, Tamil Nadu; and J.V.

▶ The establishment of the Task Force will provide the Union government with inputs and strategies for meeting the challenges of the pandemic on a transparent and professional basis, in the present and in future, says SC

Peter, director, Christian Medical College, Vellore, Tamil Nadu.

The remaining five members are Dr Naresh Trehan, chairperson and MD, Medanta Hospital and Heart Institute, Gurugram; Rahul Pandit, director, critical care medicine and ICU, Fortis Hospital, Mulund (Mumbai, Maharashtra) and Kalyan (Maharashtra); and Dr ■ **Turn to Page 4**

■ **India records 4 lakh fresh cases, 4,187 deaths in 24 hours**

## Black fungus blinds Gujarat Covid patients

**Ahmedabad, May 8:** Cases of Mucormycosis, a fungal infection, affecting some Covid-19 survivors are on the rise in Gujarat which has left many patients blind, doctors and officials claimed on Saturday.

Mathur Savani, chairman of Surat-based Kiran Super multi-speciality hospital, said that mucormycosis was detected in a patient who had recovered from Covid-19 disease around three weeks back.

"This number has gone up to around 50 now while 60 more such patients are awaiting treatment," Mr Savani said. The hospital, which is managed by a trust, has been receiving several patients diagnosed with Mucormycosis who are being referred from various areas in Surat and other parts of Gujarat, he said. "As of now, 50 mucormycosis patients are getting treated at Kiran Hospital and 60 others are awaiting (treatment). They all came to our hospital in the last three weeks.

All the patients who are suffering from mucormycosis had recovered from Covid-19 recently," said Mr Savani. — PTI

## Lancet lacerates Modi govt over muzzling flak

**SANJAY BASAK**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The latest edition of the medical journal Lancet has, in its editorial, come down heavily on the Indian government stating that "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government seemed more intent on removing criticism on Twitter than trying to control the pandemic." In the hard-hitting editorial, the journal added, "Mr Modi's action in attempting to stifle criticism and open discussion during the crisis is inexcusable."

It stated that the "impression from the government was that India had beaten Covid-19 after several months of low case counts despite the repeated warning of the dangers of a second wave and new strains."

■ **More on Page 3**

## +ve report not required for admission to Covid facility

**VINEETA PANDEY**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

In a significant move, the Union ministry of health and family welfare has revised the national policy for admission of Covid-19 patients to various categories of Covid facilities. Under the new policy, a positive test report for Covid-19 virus is now not mandatory for admission to a Covid health facility and the government has directed that no patient will be refused services in any hospital on any count. The directive to states and UTs comes following heavy criticism after serious patients were denied medical attention by hospitals owing to several reasons.

India on Saturday

recorded over four lakh fresh cases and 4,187 deaths in the last 24 hours. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with the chief ministers of Maharashtra, Himachal, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu on the Covid situation in their states.

The high rising cases have started showing some downward trend in Maharashtra and Delhi while 180 districts in the country have had no fresh cases in the last seven days. Yet, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh continue to report very high cases. Tamil

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## Only 5-6 days' vaccine left in Capital: Kejri

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said Saturday that Delhi has vaccines to last only another 5-6 days. Appealing to the Centre to give the city "adequate number" of vaccines, Mr Kejriwal said about 1 lakh vaccine doses are being administered in the city every day presently, and the daily figure needs to be increased to 3 lakh to vaccinate the entire population.

■ **More on Page 2**



Activists carry a 300-metre-long St. George ribbon, which has become a symbol of the pro-Russian insurgency in eastern Ukraine, during celebrations of the Victory Day at a World War II memorial in Saur-Mogila, about 60 km east of Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, on Saturday. — AP/PTI

■ **Violence erupts during Ramadan prayers, all injured Palestinians**

## Night clashes leave 200 hurt at Al Aqsa

**Jerusalem, May 8:** A night of heavy clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound and elsewhere in Jerusalem left more than 200 Palestinians wounded, medical corps officials said Saturday, as the city braced for even more violence after weeks of unrest.

Nightly protests broke out at the start of the holy month of Ramadan over police restrictions at a popular gathering place and have reignited in recent days over threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinians from their homes in east Jerusalem,



Stun grenades burst in the air amid clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem on Friday night. — AP

which is claimed by both sides in the decades-old conflict.

It was unclear what set off the violence at Al-Aqsa, which erupted when Israeli

## Another pandemic: Homeless, foodless



Homeless people stand in a queue to receive food during Covid-induced lockdown near Sacred Heart Cathedral in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

## BJP to decide on Assam CM today

**Sarma & Sonowal meet Shah, Nadda**

**MANOJ ANAND**  
**AND YOJANA GUSAI**  
GUWAHATI/NEW DELHI, MAY 8



Himanta Biswa Sarma, Sarbananda Sonowal

▶ The state unit of the party is abuzz that around 40 MLAs, including alliance partners, are backing Sarma, who was the first one to meet Nadda in New Delhi

that meeting." The state unit of the party is abuzz that around 40 MLAs, including alliance partners, are backing Mr Sarma, who was the first one to meet Mr Nadda. Later, the party top brass held a meeting with Mr Sonowal separately and then with both leaders. Later in the evening, Mr Shah and Mr Sonowal held another round of meeting with Mr Nadda at his residence.

While Mr Sonowal has a "clean image" and is given credit for "pro-incumbency" which helped the BJP to retain

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## DRDO Covid-19 drug cleared for emergency use

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has approved therapeutic application of the drug 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG) for the treatment of Covid patients. The drug has been developed by Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), a lab of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL), Hyderabad. "Clinical trial results

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# India, EU restart free trade talks after 8 years' gap

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

After a gap of eight years, India and the European Union (EU) on Saturday agreed to resume negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and a parallel investment protection agreement. Both sides also agreed on a Connectivity partnership "covering digital, energy, transport and people-to-people connectivity" that will also include "sustainable joint projects in third countries, most notably in the Africa, Central Asia and Indo-Pacific region".

These decisions were taken during a virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the heads of state or government of all the 27-member states of the bloc with a focus on expanding overall cooperation in areas of trade, investment and connectivity.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen hailed the decision to restart trade talks after an eight-year break as a "landmark moment". She also said that since 2013 "nothing happened" in the trade talks as the Modi government came to power and wanted to begin the talks afresh.

The connectivity pact will also "promote fast



Narendra Modi

and effective roll-out of 5G on the basis of global standards" and enhance cooperation through "submarine cables and satellite networks". In a veiled message to China, both sides also underlined their commitment to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region and discussed action to combat climate change.

Participating virtually as a "special invitee" in the two hour-long India-EU Leaders' Meeting that was attended by European Council President Charles Michel and leaders of the 27 EU member-nations at Porto, Portugal, hosted by its Indian-origin PM Antonio Costa, PM Modi "welcomed the growing convergences between India and the EU on regional and global developments" and thanked the EU's

■ **Turn to Page 4**



## SHORT TAKES

**₹860cr heroin seized, Afghan couple arrested**

**New Delhi:** The Delhi Police has arrested an Afghan couple from western part of the city and recovered over 100 kilograms of heroin worth Rs 860 crore in the international market, officials said on Saturday. The accused have been identified as Mohammad Shafi (48) and Tareena (36), both natives of Kandhar in Afghanistan, they said. According to police, they recovered 125.840 kilograms heroin worth '860 crore in international market. "On Friday, police got information that two persons would come from Wazirabad with heroin in their car and they will go towards Khyala. Later, a trap was laid and accused were apprehended around 4.35 pm from Ganda Nala Road, near Gas Agency, Khyala," Deputy Commissioner of Police (west) Urvija Goel said. A total of 125.840 kg heroin has been seized from the car which was kept in seven plastic bags, police said. During interrogation, Shafi disclosed that he was supplying heroin from Wazirabad to Khyala and thereafter to Punjab, they said. Tareena is his wife and he took her with him for help in supply of heroin and both were going to deliver the recovered drug, police said, adding that further investigation is underway.

**Plea for drive-in vaccination centres in Delhi**

**New Delhi:** A PIL was moved in the Delhi High Court on Saturday urging it to direct the Centre and the Delhi government to set up drive-in vaccination centres in open areas, including stadiums, as has been done in Mumbai. The plea by Delhi-based trader Amandeep Aggarwal seeks setting up of the drive-in vaccination centres, as done in Mumbai, to ensure citizens do not come into contact with each other and social distancing is maintained when people get vaccinated. The petition, filed through advocate Rushab Aggarwal, contends that the purpose of imposing a curfew or lockdown would be defeated if people are queuing or crowding at closed spaces like vaccination centres or hospitals to get vaccinated. The plea further contends that creating vaccination centres in open spaces would reduce the pressure on the medical staff and infrastructure at hospitals which are struggling to cater to the increasing number of Covid-19 patients in the national capital. — PTI

**Shiv Sena Mahila Morcha launches Covid help portal**

**New Delhi:** Shiv Sena Mahila Morcha Delhi unit in their continuous series of humanitarian steps, took another initiative last week and launched Shiv Sena Mahila Morcha Anti-Covid 19 Online Assistance Platform to provide an online help to all those who are seeking help on beds' online availability, plasma donors/seekers, oxygen availability, medicines, vaccine, Covid-19 tests etc., or who have an resources to provide any sort of help. "We are getting a huge response on this domain: <http://anti.covid19.online.helpdesk.shivsena.mahilamorchadelhi.packlineindia.com>," Sangita Gambhir of Shiv Sena Delhi unit said.

■ Inmates granted parole last year may walk free

**Decongest prisons across country 'at the earliest': SC**

**PARMOD KUMAR**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Concerned over rapid proliferation of Covid-19 amongst the inmates of congested prisons, the Supreme Court on Saturday ordered decongestion of prisons across the country by releasing "at the earliest" all those prisoners who were granted bail or parole in March last year and ordered authorities not to arrest mechanically in cases where the maximum sentence is up to seven years.

Noticing that India has more than four lakh prison inmates overburdening the jails with some having inmates beyond their optimal capacities, Chief Justice N.V. Ramana heading a bench also comprising Justo L. Nageswara

THE COURT ordered that those inmates who were granted parole, pursuant to top court's earlier orders, should be again granted a parole for 90 days in order to tide over the pandemic

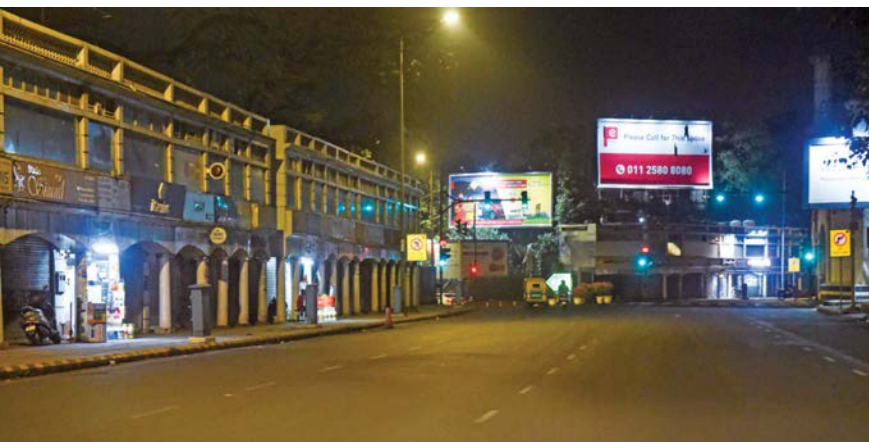
Rao and Justice Surya Kant directed that the high powered committees constituted by the states and union territories shall consider the release of prisoners by applying the guidelines laid down by the National Legal Service Authority (NALSA) last year. The court further ordered that those States which have not constituted high powered committees last year are directed to do so immediately.

The court ordered that those inmates who were

granted parole, pursuant to top court's earlier orders, should be again granted a parole for a period of 90 days in order to tide over the pandemic.

The court found merit in the suggestion by senior counsel Colin Gonsalves that the high powered committee, in addition to considering fresh release, should forthwith release all the inmates who had been released earlier pursuant to top court's March 23, 2020, order by imposing appropriate conditions.

"Such an exercise is mandated in order to save valuable time", the court said. The court further directed the authorities to strictly adhere to the guidelines issued by the top court by its earlier judgment in arresting accused in conflict with law.



Connaught Place wears a deserted look during the lockdown in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

**Supply daily 700 MT oxygen to Delhi, Sisodia urges Centre**

*Delhi got 488 MT oxygen on May 7, 30% less than required: Chadha*

**New Delhi, May 8:** Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Saturday urged the Centre to maintain the supply of 700 MT of oxygen to Delhi and suggested streamlining processes to ensure better distribution of the life-saving gas among all the states.

He claimed that the daily oxygen supply to Delhi has dipped in the past two days from 700 MT despite directions in this regard by the Supreme Court.

"Delhi has a current need of 700 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen. On May 5, Delhi received 730 MT of oxygen for the first time, thanks to the Centre," he said at an online briefing.

"However, the supply dipped to 577 MT on May 6

and further to 487 MT on May 7. It is very difficult for us to manage the needs of the hospitals at less than 700 MT supply," Mr Sisodia said. He said during court proceedings the Central government claimed that India has surplus oxygen and it also said that while there is a daily consumption of 7,000-8,000 MT of oxygen, there is an availability of 10,000 MT.

"There is a need for the Central government to streamline their processes, manage supply better, and ensure that all the states receive better quantities of oxygen and that they don't have to fight for it," he said.

"At present, Delhi requires a minimum of 700 MT of oxygen supply to cater to patients. An

increase in Covid beds and health infrastructure would necessitate oxygen allocation of 976 MT in the coming days," he said.

He hoped that the Centre will cooperate with the Delhi government and ensure daily 700 MT supply of oxygen in view of the Covid crisis.

Meanwhile, AAP leader Raghav Chadha said that it was due to the better distribution management of the Arvind Kejriwal government, its MLAs, and its officers that the administration is somehow able to make do with 488 MT of oxygen against its actual demand of 700 MT. The national capital had received 730 MT of oxygen on Wednesday, the highest so far.

**2.6cr vaccine jabs required in next 3 months for Delhi: Kejri**

*Number of vaccination centres will be increased to 250-300, says CM*

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said the number of Covid-19 vaccination centres will be increased three times in Delhi and demanded that the Centre supply around 2.6 crore vaccine doses for inoculation of all the people in the national capital in the next three months.

Currently, vaccination is going on at 100 centres in Delhi. The number of centres will be increased to 250-300 by the Delhi government, he said in an online briefing.

In order to vaccinate all the people in Delhi, over 3 crore doses will be required, out of which around 40 lakh have already been received, he said.

The chief minister urged the Centre to provide it with 85 lakh doses per month so that every Delhiite could be vaccinated in the next three months.

He said that due to good arrangements in Delhi, people from NCR towns like Noida and Ghaziabad are also coming here to get the vaccines. So, Delhi will require a little more than 3 crore doses, he said.

He said that Delhi currently has vaccine doses to vaccinate people for the next 5-6 days and urged the Centre to provide adequate doses.

**332 deaths, over 17K cases in Delhi, positivity below 25%**

**New Delhi, May 8:** Delhi recorded 332 more Covid-19 fatalities and 17,364 new infections on Saturday, while the positivity rate remained below 25 per cent for the third consecutive day, the Health Department said.

There are 87,907 active cases and over 12.03 lakh people have either recovered, migrated out or have been discharged, according to a health bulletin.

The infection tally rose to 13,10,231 after the national capital recorded 17,364 new cases in the last 24 hours.

The positivity rate stood at 23.34 per cent, lower

than 24.92 per cent a day ago.

The death toll rose to 19,071 after 332 more people succumbed to the pathogen.

Of the 22,289 hospital beds for coronavirus patients in the city, only 2,451 are vacant. As many as 49,865 patients are in home isolation and the number of containment zones have risen to 51,338, according to the bulletin.

A total of 79,800 beneficiaries were vaccinated on Friday, of which 67,753 were those who got their first dose, the bulletin stated.

PTI



**Delhi is not getting an adequate amount of vaccines. If it were to get the required amount of doses, the Delhi government would be able to vaccinate all within three months**

— Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi CM

urged the Centre and the experts for finding alternatives to vaccinate children below 18 years of age.

"We are particularly concerned about children under 18 years of age who cannot get vaccinated right now. I appeal to all experts and the Centre to arrange a vaccine for them too so that they can also get inoculated," the chief minister said.

Mr Kejriwal along with deputy CM Manish Sisodia also inspected a vaccination centre for the 18-44 age group which has been set up at Sarvodaya Girls Senior Secondary School in Chirag Delhi.



A family member of a Covid-19 patient carries an oxygen cylinder at a filling centre in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

**O2 hoarding case transferred to crime branch**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The Delhi Police has transferred the case of alleged black-marketing and hoarding of oxygen concentrators in which over 500 machines were recovered to the Crime Branch, officials said on Saturday. On Friday, police recovered 105 oxygen concentrators during raids at two upscale restaurants in the Khan Market area and arrested one person. Police on Thursday recovered 419 oxygen concentrators during raids at a restaurant and a farmhouse in south Delhi and arrested four men.

A senior police officer said that the case of alleged hoarding of 524 oxygen concentrators has been transferred to the Delhi Police Crime Branch. "With further seizure of 105 #Oxygen Concentrator from Khan Chacha & Town Hall, 2 upscale restaurants in Khan Mkt, total 524 seized from #blackmarketers Owner Navneet Kalra, also owns Dayal Optical, is on run. Manager, 3 staffers arrested by #DelhiPolice SouthDist. Further raids on," the Delhi Police had tweeted.

A Delhi Court on Saturday set aside an order directing the distribution of oxygen concentrators seized by the Delhi Police among various courts and police personnel, saying that a judge has to act like a "selfless and dispassionate saint". Principal District and Sessions Judge Narottam Kaushal passed the order on a petition filed by the Delhi government seeking

**Top cop calls for strict action against hoarders**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

Delhi police commissioner S.N. Shrivastava on Saturday reviewed the action against hoarding and black marketing of medicines, injections and oxygen cylinders in the National Capital. The CP also reviewed the cases of frauds taking place on pre-text of providing Covid help, besides the effective enforcement of the lockdown in a virtual meeting. The CP appreciated police actions on black-marketing, hoarding and Covid help cheating. He told the district's Deputy Commissioners of Police (DCPs) to obtain orders from courts as early as possible for release of seized medicine, concentrators and oxygen cylinders for use by needy patients.

revision of an order passed by a magisterial court. On May 5, Metropolitan Magistrate Anuj Bahal had issued the directions for release of the seized oxygen concentrators which could be used for saving the lives of police personnel.

The judge had directed the allocation of two oxygen concentrators to DCP Dwarka, two to the Delhi Judicial Academy in Dwarka and the rest to the principal district and session judges of Dwarka, Tis Hazari and Saket.

**SC protects Army major from arrest in dowry case**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

The Supreme court has protected from arrest an Army major accused of alleged dowry harassment, inflicting cruelty, and committing unnatural offences on his wife, Granting interim protection from arrest to Major Amit Patha, a bench comprising Justice Vineet Saran and Justice Dinesh Maheshwari ordered.

"In the meantime, the petitioner (Amit Pathak) shall not be arrested in connection with FIR No. 38 of 2021 registered with Women Police Station, Paday, Gwalior". The court directed the posting of the matter in the second week of July when courts will assemble after summer vacation. The top court will meet in the first week of July after summer break that starts from May 11.

Major Pathak approached the top court challenging the rejection of his anticipatory bail under Section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure that provides "When any person has reason to believe that he may be arrested on an accusation of having committed a non-bailable offence, he may apply to the High Court or the Court of Session for a direction under this section; and that Court may, if it thinks fit, direct that in the event of such arrest, he shall be released ..."

**Oxygen refilling facility for Noida villages from today**

**Noida, May 8:** The Noida Authority will begin from Sunday a facility to refill oxygen cylinders of Covid-19 patients who are in home isolation in villages here, according to an official statement. The decision comes within days of a similar facility being launched for residents of urban areas through their Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and Apartment Owners' Associations (AOAs) which have set up isolation centres.

The Noida Authority said that so far, it has refilled 420 oxygen cylinders and got them distributed to 41 isolation centres through RWAs and AOAs from its facility in Sector-93.

"Now we are extending the facility for people in home

isolation in villages of Noida. The service would begin from May 9 at the Community Centre in Sector-135 and people can go the facility for refilling oxygen in case of requirement," the authority said.

People will have to give an empty cylinder and they will be given back a refilled one within 24 to 36 hours, according to officials.

The time for distribution is 8 am to 11 am, while for submitting empty cylinders, people can go to the facility between 3 pm and 6 pm, they said.

The authority appealed to people to maintain Covid-19 protocols like social distancing and wearing face covers, and said that for availing the facility, one must produce a photocopy

of the patient's Aadhaar card, a doctor's prescription, oxygen saturation level report along with the Covid report.

"Transportation charges for the cylinders have been fixed at ₹500 (D-type big cylinder) and ₹200 (D-type small cylinder)," it said.

The authority's decision to introduce the service comes amid several people facing a harrowing time to get oxygen cylinders refilled due to increased demand in wake of an surge in Covid-19 cases. The move by the authority has been hailed by village residents and groups.

Noida Village Residents Association (NOVRA) president Ranjan Tomar said the decision by the Noida Authority, which has 81 vil-

lages under its jurisdiction of management, will bring respite to people in home isolation in rural areas here.

"It's a laudable step. A regularised system of access to oxygen for patients in home isolation who have been prescribed the same by the doctor would also bring down the demand for beds in hospitals," he said.

Tomar added that his association had put up a demand for a regularised system last month itself.

Noida in Gautam Buddha Nagar district of western Uttar Pradesh has been badly hit by the pandemic. The district has officially recorded around 300 deaths so far and has over 8,000 active cases of the deadly infection. — PTI



Health workers check a Covid-19 patient inside a banquet hall converted into a Covid-19 isolation centre in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Assam launches flood reporting system

**Guwahati:** An online flood reporting and information management system was launched on Saturday in Assam, which faces severe deluge every year, an official said. The online system developed jointly by Assam State Disaster Management Agency and UNICEF will replace the existing manual flood control mechanism. Launching the digital system, chief secretary Jishnu Barua said managing floods is a critical administrative function as it involves multiple departments and stakeholders. The current practice of flood reporting passes through a time-consuming manual verification and quality control system, he said. The new system for flood reporting will be operational from May 15. The administration is very conversant in dealing with flood, relief and recovery efforts, which depend on situational awareness and availability of data, the chief secretary said.

## AMU prof dies of coronavirus

**Aligarh:** Dean of Faculty of Law at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Prof Shakil Ahmed Samdani, died on Saturday at Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital where he was undergoing treatment for coronavirus, an official said. AMU spokesperson Rahat Abrar said 59-year-old Samdani was admitted to the hospital in the varsity 10 days ago after he tested positive for Covid. He initially seemed to have recovered but his condition suddenly deteriorated a few days back, the official said. The teaching staff at the AMU has lost 17 members during the past 18 days. All of them were either suffering from Covid or displaying Covid like symptoms, the spokesperson said. Professor Rafiqul Zaman Khan (55), till recently the chairman of the Department Computer Science, passed away on Friday at the medical college hospital due to Covid. — PTI

## Odisha registers 21 new corona deaths

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha on Saturday registered 21 Covid-19 deaths and registered 11807 new coronavirus positive cases. "Odisha has registered a record 21 deaths and 11807 new cases of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours," informed the state information and public relations department. With this, the coronavirus death toll in the state surged to 2161 while the total caseload jumped to 5, 24,207. The death of 21 more persons in the last 24 hours due to the virus took the total death toll to 2161. Kalahandi witnessed maximum four deaths followed by Sundergarh, Cuttack, Bhadrak, Angul which saw two casualties each.

## PAWAR SEEKS RELIEF TO BARS, HOTELS, EATERIES

**Mumbai:** NCP president Sharad Pawar has urged CM Uddhav Thackeray to grant relief to the hospitality sector, which have been hit hard by the coronavirus, by providing concessions in electricity bills and waiver in property tax. In a letter to the CM, Pawar said hotels and bars having FL-3 licence – a liquor licence needed to serve alcohol in hotels and restaurants – should be allowed to pay excise duty in four weeks. The Centre had announced an Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS), whose scope was extended till June 30 to cover the hospitality, leisure and sports sectors. The Maharashtra government must announce a similar scheme for the tourism and hospitality sectors, both of which have been hit by the curbs. "Maharashtra is facing a difficult situation due to the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. To break the chain of the coronavirus, the government has been forced to impose strict restrictions. However, this has led to shut down of trade and businesses and this sector is facing economic problems," said Mr Pawar in his letter. Meanwhile, the Maha govt has announced the criteria on which taxes and charges will be levied at industrial rates on non-classified hotels in the special hospitality category. In order to bolster the hospitality sector, the state government had given it industry status last year.

## Docs warns against deadly fungal infection

'Black fungus' cases rising in 2nd wave ■ 8 Covid survivors die in Maha, 7 patients lose eyesight in Guj

**Ahmedabad/Mumbai, May 8:** Cases of mucormycosis, a serious but rare fungal infection, are on the rise among Covid survivors, causing blindness or other serious issues, health officials in Maharashtra and Gujarat said on Saturday. Mathur Savani, chairman of Surat-based Kiran Super Multi-speciality Hospital, said mucormycosis patients are coming to his hospital from many parts of Gujarat.

"Fifty mucormycosis patients are being treated and 60 more are awaiting treatment," Mr Savani told PTI.

Seven such patients lost their eyesight, he said.

The civil hospital in Surat has set up a facility for such patients, said in-charge Resident Medical Officer Dr Ketan Naik.

In Ahmedabad, at least five mucormycosis patients are being operated upon every day at the Asarva civil hospital, a senior doctor said.

"We get five to 10 such cases daily, especially since the second wave of Covid started," said Dr Devang Gupta, ENT specialist at the hospital. "At least one in five cases is related to eyes. Many are suffering from blindness," he said.

In Maharashtra, at least eight Covid survivors have lost vision in an eye due to mucormycosis and 200 others are being treated, said Dr Tatyarao Lahane, who heads the state government's Directorate of Medical Education and Research.



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

## Shivraj initiates move to tackle third wave of coronavirus

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
BHOPAL, MAY 8

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, on Saturday, initiated a move to tackle the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic, which is feared to hit the country within 4-5 months.

Mr Chouhan ordered that an expert committee be constituted to suggest measures to gear up the state to combat a possible third wave by improving the health infrastructure in the state besides removing the shortcomings faced by the state during the first and second wave of the pandemic, sources said.

Meanwhile, the number of active coronavirus cases in Madhya Pradesh, on Saturday, crossed the 1 lakh mark for the first time since the pandemic hit the state in February, 2020.

The number of active cases in the state has reached 1,02,486. Mr Chouhan held a video conference with the district collectors to review the pandemic situation in their areas. He directed them to enforce the lockdown in their areas strictly to break the chain of the virus.

In another development, the state, for the first time during the second wave of the pandemic that hit the state two months ago, witnessed a declining trend in the positive rate.

Madhya Pradesh, on Saturday, reported 11,598 fresh cases taking the tally to 6,60,712. The state has recorded 90 deaths in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 6,334.

► **MADHYA PRADESH, on Saturday, reported 11,598 fresh cases taking the tally to 6,60,712. The state has recorded 90 deaths in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 6,334.**

► **IN MAHARASHTRA,** at least eight Covid survivors have lost vision in an eye due to mucormycosis and 200 others are being treated, said Dr Tatyarao Lahane, who heads the state government's Directorate of Medical Education and Research.

"They survived Covid but the fungal infection attacked their weakened immune system," he said.

Dr Lahane earlier said the eight Covid survivors had died but later clarified that he said so inadvertently.

This disease is not new but is on the rise among Covid patients because the use of steroids elevates sugar level and some medicines suppress the patients' immunity, he said.

"In such a situation, the fungus infects the patient easily. In one such case, one of the eyes of a patient had to be removed permanently to save his life," Dr Lahane said.

Also called the black fungus, it is present in the environment, and those with suppressed immunity or co-morbidities are more vulnerable to infection, he said.

Symptoms of mucormycosis include headache, fever, pain under the eyes, nasal or sinus congestion and partial loss of vision, Dr Lahane said.

The treatment involves injections for 21 days. The basic cost of the injections is around ₹9,000 per day, he said.

Dr Hetal Marfatia, pro-

fessor and head of the ENT department at the government-run KEM hospital in Mumbai, said a surge in mucormycosis cases is being witnessed in the last two weeks. "On average, two or three such patients are visiting the hospital every day," he said.

Many of these patients come from outside Mumbai and cannot afford the treatment cost, he said.

This fungal infection came to light during the first 'wave' of the pandemic, typically a couple of weeks after the patient was discharged, Dr Marfatia said.

"But now some patients are contracting this infection even while undergoing Covid treatment," he said.

Niti Aayog Member (Health) V.K. Paul on Friday had said that mucormycosis cases were being found in patients with Covid.

"It is caused by a fungus named mucor, which is found on wet surfaces. It, to a large extent, is happening to people who have diabetes. It is very uncommon in those who are not diabetic. There is no big outbreak and we are monitoring it," he had said. "When a patient is on oxygen support, it should be ensured that water does not leak from the humidifier (to prevent the growth of the fungus)," he said, while also calling for "a rational usage" of steroids and medicines such as Tocilizumab to treat Covid patients.



A resident doctor wearing PPE kit does a check-up of a new born baby in an isolation ward at the Nowrosjee Wadia Maternity Hospital in Mumbai. — PTI

## Pappu Yadav targets BJP for idle ambulance fleet

**NAVYAR AZAD**  
with agency inputs  
PATNA, MAY 8

Jan Adhikar Party (JAP) chief Pappu Yadav, on Saturday, raised the political pitch in Bihar by targeting BJP MP Rajiv Pratap Rudy after a fleet of unused ambulances was found parked on the campus of the Amnour Community Centre in Saran district.

Mr Yadav demanded an explanation as to why around 30 ambulances with Rajiv Pratap Rudy's name, and reportedly purchased using MPLADS funds, were parked unused on the campus of the community centre.

"When the state is battling a huge crisis due to lack of medical resources, why are so many unused ambulances with BJP MP Rajiv Pratap Rudy's name parked here? There are more than 30 ambulances here and I have information that there were more than 100 ambulances parked here earlier, but were moved," the JAP chief said in a statement.

Mr Yadav also released a video on social media that



Jan Adhikar Party President Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav addresses a press conference in Patna on Saturday. — PTI

showed him removing the cover from the ambulances and pointing at Mr Rudy's name and the word "MPLADS" mentioned on it. However, Mr Rudy, who represents the Saran Lok Sabha constituency, accused Mr Yadav of indulging in politics. He said that unused ambulances were parked due to the unavailability of drivers. He also said that the district magistrate of Saran was informed about the situation and advertisements were also put up for drivers, but nothing transpired.

"Pappu Yadav is trying to indulge in politics by rais-

ing baseless allegations. He doesn't know that out of the 80 ambulances, 56 are operational and serving the people. Pappu Yadav can take these ambulances, but he should promise that he will provide drivers and serve the people of Saran during this pandemic.

"I would urge Pappu Yadav to keep his politics for Madhepura because people of Saran know the truth and they will not get influenced by him," Mr Rudy said.

Mr Yadav raided also a place where over two dozen Ambulances purchased from the fund of Saran Lok Sabha member Rajiv Pratap Rudy were parked triggering a controversy.

The ambulances had Rudy's name and were bought using fund from the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS).

Accompanied with his supporters, Yadav visited the place Friday where the ambulances were standing and after a tiff with the security men went inside and removed tarpaulin cover from the stationary ambulances.

## Sena blames Modi for Covid situation

**BHAGWAN PARAB**  
MUMBAI, MAY 8

Holding the Narendra Modi government responsible for the prevailing Covid situation in the country, Maharashtra's ruling party Shiv Sena has said the country is running because of the institutions created by the Nehru-Gandhi family. It has also slammed the Union government for continuing with the work of the Central Vista project amidst the Covid.

"The corona crisis has badly affected India's economy. Despite this, the country has survived because of the system created in the past 70 years by previous Prime Ministers like

Pandit Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Manmohan Singh," said the Uddhav Thackeray-led party in a hard-hitting editorial in the party mouthpiece 'Saamana' on Saturday.

"Many poor countries are offering help to India to tackle Covid. Earlier, countries like Pakistan, Rwanda and Congo used to get help from others. But due to the wrong policies of today's rulers, India that prides itself as Aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) is going through that situation now," said the party.

According to the editorial, India has reported the highest number of Covid deaths in the last 10 days. Globally, one out of the five active patients is in India.

► **THE PARTY** has also slammed the Union government for continuing with the work of the Central Vista project amidst the Covid

In the last ten days, 36,110 deaths have occurred. Every hour, there are 150 Covid deaths in the country. We have left the USA and Brazil behind in terms of deaths due to the virus. The world fears India now. Several countries have stopped their citizens from doing business with India, due to which the country's economy has been hit hard.

BJP MP Subramanian Swamy has demanded that Union minister Nitin Gadkari be given charge of

## Uddhav wants own app for vaccination

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday demanded from the central government to allow Maharashtra to develop its own app (application) for registration of citizens for vaccination drive as the CoWIN app has been facing technical glitches. Mr Thackeray has written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in this connection. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister spoke to Mr Thackeray over the phone and praised Maharashtra's handling of the second wave properly, informed Mr Thackeray's office.

## Covid +ve Asaram shifted to hospital

**Jodhpur:** Self-styled godman Asaram, who was being treated for Covid for the past two days at a hospital here, has been shifted to the AIIMS in Jodhpur due to security reasons, a police official said on Saturday. The condition of Asaram, jailed for sexually assaulting a teenage girl, is stable, doctors at the M.G. Hospital here said. He was moved to the AIIMS here on Friday night and police have cited security reasons behind his shifting. "There were consistent attempts by devotees of Asaram to sneak into the hospital to get a glimpse of him or get close to him since his admission in the M.G. Hospital. — PTI

## Barrymore urges India to 'stay strong'

**Mumbai:** Hollywood star Drew Barrymore has requested people across the globe to help India in its fight against the Covid and urged her fans in the country to "stay strong". The actor said her heart goes out to the people of India who are trying hard to "hold it together" amid the surge in cases in the country. "Today, as we cope with the worldwide situation, my heart goes out to the people of India who are trying hard to hold it together," Ms Barrymore said. — PTI

## Lancet editorial blames PM Modi for mismanaging India's Covid pandemic 'Modi's attempts to stifle criticism inexcusable'

**SANJAY BASAK**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 8

With India recording over four lakhs Covid cases and over 4000 deaths during the last 24 hours, the medical journal, The Lancet in its editorial came down heavily on the Indian government stating that "Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's government seemed more intent on removing criticism on Twitter than trying to control the pandemic."

In a hard-hitting, editorial the journal stated that "Modi's action in attempting to stifle criticism and open discussion during the crisis is inexcusable."

It stated that the "impression from the government was that India had beaten Covid-19 after several months of low case counts despite the repeated warning of the dangers of a second wave and the emergence of new strains." It also accused the authorities of "falsely

suggesting" that "India had reached herd immunity, encouraging complacency and insufficient preparation" while on the other hand, a "serosurvey by the Indian Council of Medical Research in January suggested that only 21 per cent of the population had antibodies against SARS-CoV-2."

The Lancet further claimed that The Institute of Metrics and Evaluation estimated that India would witness a "staggering One million deaths from Covid-19 by August 1." However, the health minister, Dr Harsh Vardhan on Saturday claimed that "not a single new case of Covid-19 was reported in 180 districts in the country in past seven days and no fresh infections were recorded in 18 districts in the last two weeks." The journal claimed that till April 2021, the "government Covid-19 task force has not met in months."

The Lancet stated that the "message that Covid-19



Relatives mourn over the death of a Covid patient at Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital in Prayagraj on Saturday. — PTI

was essentially over also slowed the start of India's Covid-19 vaccination campaign, which has vaccinated less than two per cent of the population..." On the government's announcement of expanding the scope of vaccination, the journal maintained that "the government abruptly shifted course without discussing the change in poli-

cy with states, expanding vaccination to everyone older than 18 years, draining supplies and creating mass confusion and a market for vaccine doses in which states and hospital systems competed."

The editorial suggested that India must now pursue a two-pronged strategy. First, the "botched vaccination campaign" must

► **THE LANCET** in its editorial came down heavily on the Indian government stating that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government seemed more intent on removing criticism on Twitter than trying to control the pandemic.

be rationalised and implemented with all due speed. To carry this out, the government would have to overcome "two bottlenecks", which include increasing the supply of vaccine and setting up a distribution campaign to cover "not only urban but also rural and poorer citizens, who constitute more than 65 per cent of the population." It also suggested that the government "must work" with local and primary health care centres that "know their communities and create an equitable distribution system."

According to the Lancet, India must "reduce SARS-

CoV-2 transmission as much as possible while the vaccine is rolled out." It wanted the government to "publish accurate data in a timely manner" and also every fortnight, "explain" to the people "what is happening and what is needed to bend the endemic curve including the possibility of a new federal lockdown."

The Lancet also stated that "Genome sequencing" needed to be expanded "to a better track," "understanding and control emerging and more transmissible SARS-CoV-2 variants."

The Lancet added that the "success of the efforts" would actually "depend on the government owning up to its mistakes." And then, came the final sting. The medical journal observed that the success in tackling Covid would come by "providing responsible leadership and transparency and implementing a public health that has science at its heart."



## SHORT TAKES

## Public transport suspended in HP

**Shimla:** The Himachal Pradesh government has decided to suspend public transport from Monday to check the spread of Covid-19, an official spokesperson said. The decision was taken during a high-level meeting chaired by chief minister Jai Ram Thakur on Saturday, he said. It was also decided that the daily needs and essential commodity shops will remain open only for three hours in a day and timing of the same will be fixed by the deputy commissioners concerned. Coronavirus curfew is already in force in the state from May 7-17. These strict restrictions of suspending public transport and opening essential commodities shops only for three hours a day will come into force on May 10 from 6 am. All public transport will remain suspended till further orders and private vehicles will only be allowed in case of emergency services. — *PTI*

## 1.48cr Ridley's born on Odisha's beach

**Kendrapara, Odisha:** A total of 1.48 crore baby turtles of the endangered Olive Ridley species have emerged out of the eggshells at Gahirmatha beach in Odisha's Kendrapara district, officials said on Saturday. The uninhabited Gahirmatha island is witnessing the unique natural phenomenon — the birth of baby turtles sans mothers. "A total of 1.48 crore of baby turtles have broken out of eggshells to mingle in the Gahirmatha seawaters till Thursday, marking the grand culmination of the annual sojourn of Olive Ridley sea turtles to this unmanned Gahirmatha Island," said Bikash Ranjan Dash, the DFO of Bhitarkanika Mangrove (wildlife). The birth of the turtles began on April 25 and the annual event has now reached its fag-end. The babies have emerged from 2.98 lakh nests. — *PTI*

## DRDO Covid-19 drug cleared

■ **Continued from Page 1** have shown that this molecule helps in faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces supplemental oxygen dependence. Higher proportion of patients treated with 2-DG showed RT-PCR negative conversion in Covid patients. The drug will be of immense benefit to the people suffering from Covid-19," government officials said. The drug was on May 1 granted permission for Emergency Use as adjunct therapy in moderate to severe Covid-19 patients. During the Phase-III clinical trial conducted on 220 patients between December 2020 to March 2021 at 27 Covid hospitals in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, a significantly higher proportion of patients improved symptomatically and became free from supplemental oxygen dependence by day-three, indicating an early relief from oxygen therapy/dependence, the DRDO statement added. The drug comes in powder form in a sachet which is taken orally by dissolving it in water. It accumulates in the virus infected cells and prevents virus growth by stopping viral synthesis and energy production. Its selective accumulation in virally infected cells makes this drug unique. Being a generic molecule and analogue of glucose, it can be easily produced and made available in plenty in the country, officials added.

## Ex-mantri on notice, 6 cadre suspended

■ **Continued from Page 1** Lodhi, in the April 17 by-polls to Damoh Assembly constituency. Mr Lodhi has blamed Mr Malaiya and his family for his defeat in the by-elections. "A show-cause notice has been served to Mr Malaiya seeking clarification to anti-party activities during the Damoh by-poll. The party also suspended primary membership of Sidharth Malaiya and five mandal presidents," BJP media in-charge Lokendra Parashar said. Union minister Patel, who represented Damoh parliamentary constituency, had earlier attributed the party's loss in Damoh by-poll to "internal sabotage".

## Bengal gov summons chief secy

Expresses displeasure at not being updated on law and order situation

**Kolkata, May 8:** West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar Saturday expressed displeasure at not being updated on the law and order situation in the state with regard to post poll violence by the chief secretary and director-general of police (DGP).

State chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay and DGP Virendra called on the governor at Raj Bhavan on Saturday evening being asked by him over the law and order situation in West Bengal.

"Unfortunately both came without any paper or reports sought. Directed them to send the same without delay. In a sense disgusted with such stance," Mr Dhankhar tweeted after the officers met him.

Maintaining that the home secretary has failed to apprise him on the law and order situation vis a vis the post-poll violence, Mr Dhankhar had asked the chief secretary to see him.

Mr Dhankhar had tweeted earlier in the day that the home secretary did not forward reports of the DGP and commissioner of Kolkata police in this regard.

"Chief secretary @MamataOfficial has been called upon to see me today before 7 pm as ACS Home @HomeBengal failed to impart status report on law and order regarding post poll violence," the governor tweeted.

"Such drifting of governance @MamataOfficial from constitutional prescriptions is unfortunate and cannot be overlooked. While the State passes through most severe post poll violence, there is just NO input to the constitutional head. This is least expected," Mr Dhankhar wrote.

The West Bengal has been rocked by large scale violence after the bitterly fought state elections. — *PTI*



Three newly-elected TMC MLAs — Aditi Munshi, Lovely Moitra and June Maliah — at the West Bengal Legislative Assembly premises in Kolkata on Saturday. — *PTI*

## ■ Biman Bandyopadhyay elected as Speaker 'Covid crisis result of Centre doing no work in last 6 mths'

**Kolkata, May 8:** West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday hit out at the centre for pushing the country to "threshold of Covid destruction" as the union ministers didn't do any work in the last six months except for visiting Bengal daily to capture power.

She reiterated that BJP was unable to accept the mandate of the people and inciting violence after completion of elections in Bengal. Attacking Election Commission, the TMC supreme alleged that had the poll panel not "directly" helped the saffron party, they could not have won even 30 seats in the just-concluded assembly elections.

Ms Banerjee was speaking in the Assembly after TMC MLA Biman Bandyopadhyay was elected Speaker for the third time.

BJP which has emerged as the main Opposition with 77 MLAs in the 294-member Bengal house boycotted the election of the speaker blaming the state government for post-poll violence in the state.

"To set up a double engine government, they have pushed India to the threshold of Covid-19 destruction. In the last six months, the central ministers have not done any work other than coming to Bengal everyday to capture power," Ms Banerjee said.

Incidentally, West Bengal has been witnessing a surge in the Covid-19 cases since early-April when the state was in mid of the eight-phase assembly elections with back-to-back rallies by several leaders and central ministers.

Union home ministry on Saturday visited several violence-ravaged places of the state.

The team, led by an additional secretary of the ministry, flew to Birbhum district in the morning and from there they proceeded to several places, including Nanoor, which have been witnessing post-poll violence following the announcement of assembly poll results on May 2.

Members of the team then went to Nandigram in Purba Medinipur district and visited places like Kendamari Jalpai and

spoke to locals.

The team, tasked with looking into reasons for the post-poll violence in West Bengal, had met governor Jagdeep Dhankhar at the Raj Bhavan on Friday.

The ministry has sought a report from Dhankhar on the law and order situation in Bengal, in view of the violence that erupted in the state following the announcement of assembly election results. The team had visited Budge Buda and Satgachia in South 24 Parganas district on Friday. — *PTI*

## BJP to decide on CM today

■ **Continued from Page 1** power in the state, Mr Sarma is considered an "influential leader" and the BJP's "trouble shooter" in the North-East.

Both Mr Sonowal and Mr Sarma have considerable clout in the state organisation and their supporters had been lobbying for them.

It is significant that the party had not announced any chief ministerial candidate ahead of the March-April polls. The BJP had said that it would settle the issue after the elections were over. In 2016, the BJP had projected Mr Sonowal as its leader and won, forming its

## +ve report not required

■ **Continued from Page 1** Nadu has also imposed complete lockdown in the state to check the spike in cases.

As per the Union government directive to all states and UTs, hospitals under the Central government, state governments and Union Territory administration, including private hospitals managing Covid patients, shall ensure that they admit suspect cases to the "suspect wards" and start treatment immediately instead of insisting on a positive Covid-19 test for admission. The order further said no patient

will be refused services on any count. This includes medications such as oxygen or essential drugs even if the patient belongs to a different city.

"No patient shall be refused admission on the ground that he/she is not able to produce a valid identity card that does not belong to the city where the hospital is located. Admissions to hospital must be based on need. It should be ensured that beds are not occupied by persons who do not need hospitalisation. Further, the discharge should be strictly in accordance

with the revised discharge policy," the order said. Meanwhile, the NHAI has announced that tankers and containers carrying liquid medical oxygen (LMO) will be exempted from user fee at toll plazas on national highways across the country. In view of the current unprecedented demand for the medical oxygen due to the Covid-19 surge, containers carrying LMO will be considered at par with other emergency vehicles like ambulances for a period of two months or till further orders, NHAI said in a statement.

ship would be to strike a balance between the two power centres. If Mr Sonowal is popular among people for his low-key profile and handling issues smoothly, Mr Sarma has been aiming for the post post not only for his performance and executing the party policies aggressively but also for having the support of the majority of newly elected MLAs.

Both the contenders have remained tight-lipped about their day-long parleys and were expected to return to Guwahati by Saturday evening to attend the legislative party meeting on Sunday.

Within 15 days, the Covid-19 contagion in West Bengal shoot up by several thousand.

Ms Banerjee slammed Narendra Modi government for spending a lot of money in building new Lok Sabha building, PM's residence and other luxuries when the country is battling pandemic but not providing free vaccination to all the citizens of the country that would have cost them not more than ₹30,000 crore.

"If they give vaccine to the people, they will need ₹30,000 crore which is nothing for the central government. They are spending around ₹50,000 cr to build Lok Sabha building, Prime Minister's residence, his plane and statue...but their priority should have been universal vaccination which they did not do," she said.

Within 15 days, the Covid-19 contagion in West Bengal shoot up by several thousand.

## 10 killed in limestone mine blast in Andhra

Cause of blast not known; CM Jagan, Naidu express shock

**Amaravati, May 8:** A powerful explosion that rocked a limestone mine in a Kadapa village in Andhra Pradesh left 10 people dead, with the blast so severe that four of the victims' identities could not be established yet.

The mangled remains of the vehicle that carried the gelatin sticks and the mutilated bodies of blast victims gave ample indications of the impact of the explosion.

Kadapa superintendent of police K. Anburajan told PTI over phone that the blast occurred when a consignment of gelatin sticks was being unloaded at the limestone mine on the outskirts of Mamillapalli village in the district.

Of the 10 victims, only six could be identified as the remaining were fully dismembered, according to Porumamilla inspector of police K. Mohan Reddy. The deceased belonged to Pulivendula Assembly segment, the native of chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

"It is a licensed limestone mine and certified operators had brought the consignment. The blast occurred when the sticks were being unloaded," Anburajan said from the accident site.

The cause of the mishap could not be established immediately as the work-



Smoke billows from a blast at a limestone quarry at Kadapa district's Kalasapadu Mandal Saturday. — *PTI*

ers at the site were killed in the explosion.

Chief minister Reddy spoke to Kadapa district officials and enquired about the incident.

He expressed grief over the death of the workers and extended sympathies to the bereaved families, a CMO release here said.

Leader of the

N. Chandrababu Naidu too expressed shock over the mishap and demanded that the victims' families be paid an ex-gratia of ₹1 crore each, on par with what was given to the victims of styrene vapour leak in the LG Polymers unit in Visakhapatnam last year. — *PTI*

## Fire on board aircraft carrier; none injured

**Mumbai, May 8:** There was a minor fire on board India's aircraft carrier *INS Vikramaditya* on Saturday morning, a Navy spokesperson said. The fire was doused and all personnel on board are safe, the spokesperson said in a statement here.

"The duty staff observed smoke emanating from the part of the warship having accommodation for sailors.

"The ship's duty personnel acted promptly to fight the fire. All personnel on board have been accounted for and no major damage has been reported," the statement said. An inquiry into the incident is being ordered, he said, adding the aircraft carrier is in Karnataka's Karwar harbour.

The warship is a modified Kiev-class aircraft carrier purchased by India from Russia in 2013 and was renamed in honour of Vikramaditya, the legendary emperor. — *PTI*

It said that the sub-groups will do audit to determine whether the supplies allocated by the Centre reach the concerned state/UT, the efficacy of the distribution networks in distributing supplies meant for hospitals, health care institutions and others and whether the available stocks are being distributed on the basis of an effective, transparent and professional mechanism.

The top court said that the Task Force will constitute sub-groups/committees of each state/UT for auditing and it will comprise of an officer of the State/UT Government not below the rank of secretary to the state government, an officer of the Centre not below the rank of additional/joint secretary and two medical doctors in the state/UT concerned including at least one with administrative

experience of managing the medical facilities of a hospital and a representative from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO).

The bench clarified that the purpose of the audit is not to scrutinise the decisions made in good faith by doctors while treating their patients but to ensure accountability in respect of the supplies of oxygen provided to every state/UT.

The purpose is to ensure that the supplies which have been allocated are reaching their destination; that they are being made available through the distribution network to the hospitals or, as the case may be, the end users efficiently and on a transparent basis; and to identify bottlenecks or issues in regard to the utilisation of oxygen, the bench said on audit by sub-groups.

commitments." A separate document on the partnership added, "The Partnership will support sustainable digital, transport and energy networks, and the flow of people, goods, services, data and capital centred on equity and inclusivity..."

Both sides also welcomed the resumption of the India-EU Human Rights Dialogue earlier this month as per a decision reached last year.

## SC sets up 12-member Task Force

■ **Continued from Page 1** Saumitra Rawat, chairman & head, department of surgical gastroenterology and liver transplant, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Delhi; Shiv Kumar Sarin of Institute of Liver and Biliary Science (ILBS), Delhi; and Zarir F Udhwadia of Hinduja Hospital, Breach Candy Hospital Mumbai.

The top court said, "We expect that the leading experts in the country shall associate with the work of the Task Force both as members and resource persons as this will facilitate a meeting of minds and the formulation of scientific strategies to deal with an unprecedented human crisis."

"The establishment of this Task Force will enable the decision makers to have inputs which go beyond finding ad-hoc solutions to the present problems. The likely future course of the

drugs worth an estimated \$120 million to India as part of international efforts to help it fight Covid-19. MEA's secretary (West) Vikas Swarup said, "Negotiations on both the Trade and Investment Agreements will be pursued on parallel tracks with an intention to achieve early conclusion of both of them. As you know, the negotiations were suspended in 2013 after several rounds of talks spanning

six years. Both sides have worked intensively over the last few months to arrive at a common understanding." On the connectivity pact, the joint statement said, "We launched today a sustainable and comprehensive Connectivity Partnership that upholds international law, conforms with international norms and affirms the shared values of democracy, freedom, rule of law and respect for international

commitments." A separate document on the partnership added, "The Partnership will support sustainable digital, transport and energy networks, and the flow of people, goods, services, data and capital centred on equity and inclusivity..."

Both sides also welcomed the resumption of the India-EU Human Rights Dialogue earlier this month as per a decision reached last year.

PM Modi seeks EU's help on patent



## THE ASIAN AGE

9 MAY 2021

Sanjeev Ahluwalia  
Off the beaten trackThe social media djinn:  
Excluding and unsocial

Social media — the use of online platforms, as substitutes for old style, high-touch, physical contact formats like newspapers and one-on-one meetings — is now near ubiquitous, boosted greatly by the pandemic.

The ebb and flow of advertising revenues best illustrates the media preferences of customers. Digital marketing accounted for more than half the \$530 billion global advertising spend in 2020, up from just under two per cent in 2000, growing faster than television ever did (*Financial Times*).

One driver for the dramatic switch in audience preferences could be that mainstream media — newspapers, radio and TV — tend to patronise the recipient, being top down and unidirectional. Social media, however, empowers the user by making them essential participants in media creation, in a manner, unmatched by the tamer mainstream options of writing letters to the editor or being in the audience of TV shows.

It is not very empowering to be a couch-potato, a passive recipient of TV or radio news and entertainment, with no room for “self-expression”, except to change channels, much like dissatisfied voters do quinquennially.

Social media, in contrast, encourages you to create content and share it publicly, to be listened to, read, seen and appreciated. You can do your stuff on Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter or Koo — comedy, fashion, disseminate gyan, list your professional achievements, cook, sing, make music, teach and mentor like Khan, sir of Bihar, coach, share your art, your writings, your magic, comment on anything under the sun or support #Hashtagged global causes, followed by the expectant, anxious wait to get your efforts acknowledged and the rush of joy, when inundated by “likes”.

Nearly 4 billion out of the 7.7 billion global population is hooked onto the net and 54 per cent of the traffic is via mobile phones. This number can only grow. Only infants and the 900 million poor — who earn less than the World Bank’s PPP \$1.9 per person per day poverty line and whose numbers have increased during the pandemic, are likely to remain excluded.

Digital connectivity is the next “life-line”, after electricity, as digital interface becomes the norm, the opportunities for physical contact dwindle and digital lockers become the only safe storage for Aadhar, BPL cards, bank details, medical insurance — proof of the new-age identities, necessary for accessing social services.

A story best illustrates the point. A nanny from three decades ago, recently turned up where we used to live. Her son was covid positive and needed medical assistance. She had a medical insurance cover. But the hospital wanted a deposit of ₹30,000 which she did not have. So, she went looking for help to her previous employers. We had moved long ago. But the new occupants were good enough to call and tell us. Another family, for whom she had worked, told us they helped her with some ready cash. But she had left no contact number. All we could do was to wait for her to call. But she never did. Maybe, with her son incapacitated, she lost her only digital connect with the world — her son’s pre-paid phone. When every minute mattered, her only option was to walk about begging for money, oblivious of all the available crowd-sourced initiatives for help and the many charities providing covid relief.

Compare the frustratingly, isolated life of this mother, a poor, senior citizen, with the socially replete life of those with 24x7 connectivity even as the pandemic rages — sharing updates on the next available oxygen bed or oxygen concentrator, videos on the benefits of prone breathing, learned discourses on covid dos and don’ts, venting frustration by fingering hate objects or dispensing gyan via webinars, catching up on the prospects for peace in Myanmar or the impact of Presidents Biden’s next public-spend splurge on the Indian stock market. The disconnect between the well-off and the poor is near complete.

And yet it is not just the poor who are left behind. Only half as many Indian women use the Internet as men. The gap is worse in the rural areas. Only 33 percent of Indian women use social media, versus 67 per cent of men. Women are 26 per cent less likely to access mobile Internet due to misogyny, harassment and revenge porn (ORF, May 2021).

Add to that, the use of social media for narrow political ends without regard for social harmony. The disproportionate market power digital commerce endows, on a few companies. The billions of tax dollars avoided by multinational e-commerce, whilst feeding off the commercial data generated by their customers, often without explicit permission and without compensation and we have a fishbowl of growing global inequity.

This was not where the Internet was headed, way back in 1974, when the first Internet Protocol Suite was written. Nor was a world splintered by digital privilege, the intention in 1997, when the first social media platform — Six degrees — launched. Back then, the idea was to shrink the world, lift people and institutions to their fullest potential. Like Alice, we stepped through the looking glass. It is time to look back.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Subhani



## The architecture of hubris



Manish Tewari

## State of the Union

Fascism has a strange fascination with architecture. The moment the Nazis rode to power in 1933 Herr Hitler started unveiling his plans for building a new capital for his thousand-year Reich.

To be named Germania it envisaged the grand redevelopment of Berlin.

From the mid-1920s itself much before power ever loomed over the horizon Hitler fantasised about his blueprint for Germania. It finds a prominent mention in his book called the *Mein Kampf*. Hitler had even prepared the drafts of the grandiose monuments that he proposed to erect. In his mind’s eye Adolf Hitler in addition to being The Great Helmsman was also the immortal designer.

In the spring of 1936, Adolf Hitler commissioned his pet architect Albert Speer who later became his minister of armaments to execute his vision and construct “the” megapolis that would be the epicentre of his Reich.

Hitler was resolute that the centerpiece of his Nazi dystopia christened Welthauptstadt-World Capital Germania should be completed by 1950.

Speer had been the de-facto Nazi architectural director since 1934. He had created a distinct impression on Hitler with his exotic metamorphosis of classical architecture into mammoth but manifestly ascetic Nazi architecture that was designed both to intimidate and overwhelm.

This transfiguration was personified in one of Speer’s initial but key undertakings, the Nuremberg parade grounds laid out for the 1934 Nazi Party Congress. The impact of the classicist architecture of that stadia is intimately captured in an array of propaganda films curated by the Nazi information czar Joseph Goebbels.

It was designed to provide a backdrop to the stunning imagery of militarised discipline of Nazi cadres forming

a geometrical aligned corporate congregation united in their allegiance to the Fuhrer. The political ontology portrayed by the overpowering impact of this architectonic setting is of Being-as-One. One people, One nation and One Reich, which Hitler emphasized in his oration in that arena. He preached both “complete unity” and asked for blind the obedience of the German nation. Isn’t it eerily similar to the one leader one nation election rhetoric that we hear these days with elections of course being dispensable even in the medium term?

Hitler’s visualisation was to transform Berlin into Welthauptstadt Germania — the greatest city of them all. However stripped of sophistry it was at best plagiarism on a malevolent scale. The only originality being cloning and super sizing of the landmark monuments that Europe had on offer then.

These monoliths were to be erected along a seven-kilometre (4.3 miles) Boulevard of Splendours to create an overarching persona of Nazi preeminence on citizens and travellers alike. At the south end of this avenue was to be located the Triumphal Arch six times more humongous than the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. At its north end the concourse was supposed to pan out into a parade ground containing a gigantic Palace for the Fuhrer, the Reich Chancellery, and a gargantuan Grand Hall. Mark the Palace for the Fuhrer.

Hitler perceived monumental architecture as a means of creating a beguiling sense of shock and awe. He was fervent in his conviction that colossal constructions were powerful weapons of projecting political supremacy. For him architecture was not simply the means of giving form to space. It was the virtuosity of creating power through prodigious spatial imagery.

The budget for this vanity project was an estimated 46 million Reich Marks about 50 billion US Dollars at today’s cost. Hitler dismissed all concerns with regard to the both timing and cost notwithstanding an on going war. For in his megalomaniac existence it was about perpetuating his legacy. The only way of leaving your indelible footprint on the sands of time was by erecting grandiose edifices.

Moreover the Nazi party was a pioneer in the use of propaganda both during its relentless quest and perpetuation of power. As the Reich minister of propaganda it was Joseph Goebbels’ conviction that “propaganda becomes ineffective the moment we are aware of it”. Inspired by this credo the Nazi Party consciously created a myth about opposing the status quo and presenting its Supreme leader as both, an outsider to the incestuous alchemy of the decadent elite and a radical messiah, ironically while being in bed with the very same set. Does it not contextualise the constant railing against Lutyens’ Delhi and the fabled Khan Market Gang?

The Nazis were not alone in this endeavour. The Fascist Dictator of Italy Benito Mussolini also launched an ambitious building drive. However, it was the creation of the Casa del Fascio (House of the Fascist Party) that most caught Italian fancy. Primarily it was the headquarters of the Fascist Party. Archetypes of this new building got constructed across the Italian peninsula. Stereotypically situated in the town centrum these structures were built to typically dwarf the church’s dominant role in Italian social life. They metaphysically underscored the eternal presence of Il Duce — as Mussolini was called. Antiquity was equally important weapon in the Fascist arsenal. Isolamento as it was known as, involved the valorisation and refurbishment of rhetorically momentous structures.

Monuments as statements, as manifestations of a civilisation and its values and accomplishments, is an impulse that began to fade with the invention of the

printing press. The mass market book, carrying the soul and complexity of a civilisation, became the representative artifact.

The ideas, concepts, aspirations of a people did not need large and expensive agglomerations of masonry to articulate and announce themselves. The written word, the book, cheap and universally available, could do it to perfection.

It is the reason the exemplary founding fathers of modern India did not first, in 1947, move to raze building and raise buildings to announce the dawn of a new freedom and a new covenant of equality and fraternity and justice for all Indians; they chose to sit down, almost three hundred of the very best of them, for almost three long years, to debate and dissect and carve the most important book of contemporary India, the Constitution.

Democrats create festivals of ideas, crusades of justice and equity, carnivals of creativity, in which all may participate, on some kind of equal footing. It is only autocrats and fascists, monarchs and megalomaniacs, who seek statues and monuments to awe their subjects, to bring them to their knees.

Modernity with all its commitment to freedoms and reason is sought to be subordinated by monumental architecture to the will of the fascist state. This is precisely what we are witnessing with the relentless and profoundly vulgar redevelopment of the central vista in New Delhi (in the middle of a crippling pandemic at an enormous financial cost).

All this bombast of masonry and unbridled arrogance, is one more eternal blunder by a government and a leader who have unleashed untold misery across the country for the last seven years with their terrible decisions. In the final count, in the story of our ancient civilisation, all the grandiloquence of the central vista project will not be worth a single page of the Indian Constitution.

The author is a lawyer, MP and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari.

LETTERS  
SOLUTION TEMPLATE

Amidst this raging pandemic, with vaccine requirements running into hundreds of crores and when we globally have less than a score of vaccine manufacturers, it is too much to expect any paradigm shift immediately in the opening up of pharma patents. But we can hope that with the current initiative, nations come together on the entire architecture of research, development and funding of vaccines and major lifesaving drugs. Serious diseases, epidemics and pandemics of the future will then have a ready template for guidance and scale-up of production.

R. Narayanan  
Navi Mumbai

## DOOR TO DOOR

THE DELHI CM has claimed that Delhi will get vaccinated in three months. It is a good and welcome statement since NCR had witnessed the ferocity of the virus with many deaths. A lockdown is in force now. It is likely to be extended further in order to break the chain of virus spread. During lockdown days, people will be staying indoors. Taking this opportunity, the government can vaccinate the people by taking the shots to the doorstep of the residents. Summoning the services of the local hospitals’ mobile medical units and medical staff, this can be done in a hassle-free manner. It will help people avoid rush and disappointment.

Sravana Ramachandran  
Chennai

## LOCKDOWN TO HELP

WITH THE CORONAVIRUS situation in India spiralling out of control, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government must impose a strict nationwide lockdown. In the last 24 hours, the country, for the first time, witnessed more than 4,000 deaths. Several medical experts, Opposition leaders and Supreme Court judges have asked the government to implement lockdown without bothering about the big corporate bosses as it seems to be the only option. The Modi government should not be concerned about the economic impact of the lockdown as the human cost of the spread of the virus would have greater consequences.

Bhagwan Thadani  
Mumbai

## CHILDREN WORST-HIT

THE SECOND WAVE of the Covid-19 pandemic sweeping through India has been particularly brutal on children. A worrying number of children have tested positive for Covid-19. Additionally, with the coronavirus infecting entire families, many children have been left to fend for themselves. In some cases, one or both parents are down with Covid-19. Several cases have come to light of children having lost both parents to the disease. These children need immediate support. The government must work with NGOs and activists who have experience in dealing with children.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy  
Bengaluru

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Jay  
BhattacharyaHow the West  
can help India  
fight Covid war

Hospitals in Delhi are openly pleading for supplies of medical oxygen, a commodity so scarce that it is now being sold on the black market for almost ten times the normal cost. Makeshift crematoria are being set up around the city to cope with the surge in the number of deaths. Richer countries are asking why India, with 20 million Covid cases, is so reluctant to lock down again. It’s a good question. The answer lies in the disastrous effects of lockdown for so much of India’s population.

Closing any society has serious consequences, but the results were always going to be worse in the developing world. I have been watching the pandemic unfold in India from Stanford University, where I’m a professor of medicine. But for me, it is not just an abstract problem in a faraway country. I was born in Kolkata and still have many family members in India. Some have contracted Covid, while others have suffered from the terrible effects of lockdown.

As soon as the pandemic started, India followed the familiar litany of Covid lockdown policy: masks, a test-and-trace system, school closures and border closures. India was one of the

first emerging economies to announce a lockdown and adopted one of the world’s most stringent approaches.

Stay-at-home advice is easier to follow if you have a proper home. But in India’s slums, where millions live, quarantine is almost impossible — as is the concept of “working from home” or home-schooling.

Then there are migrant labourers, ten million of whom were living in India’s cities before the pandemic. Lockdown meant many of them immediately lost their jobs, livelihoods and homes. Millions started on the long journey back to their villages on foot, not knowing whether they would ever make it home.

Lockdown meant precipitating India’s largest human displacement since Partition in 1947. The forced resettlement of massive numbers of Bengalis, including my grandparents, is within the ancestral memory of my older family members, who recall the story with horror.

One way to understand the trajectory of cases in India is to see that the lockdowns at first protected the professional Zoom class from infection, while exposing the poor. But it was never a guarantee that more affluent popula-

tions would not end up affected by the disease as well. India’s experience is consistent with the track record of lockdowns around the world. Official Indian government estimates suggest that between 37,000 and 80,000 lives were saved by lockdown. Even if this is correct, the numbers are surpassed by the death and suffering lockdowns also caused.

What could have been done differently? A better strategy of vaccination, for a start. When the jab first became available in India, I argued for focused protection of the elderly population. There is a thousand-fold difference in the risk of mortality from Covid between the young and old, so protecting elderly Indians from infection would yield substantially lower Covid mortality and hospitalisation, as well as reduce pressure on healthcare systems.

So far, vaccines have been delivered to roughly 10 per cent of India’s population — which would have been more effective if jabs had been targeted at those most at risk. Instead, perhaps half these jabs have gone to those who had the virus and will therefore have natural immunity. Worse, nearly 60 per cent of these doses have gone to people under 60, leaving a vast number of the

older population vulnerable during the recent surge in cases. Rather than focus on those most at risk of dying, India has made the vaccine available to anyone over 18, which has diverted even more doses from the poor high-risk elderly to the more affluent low-risk young.

But before we in the West shake our heads at India’s misplaced priorities, we ought to ask: is Britain not also guilty? The UK’s vaccination success has now covered the at-risk groups who constitute 99 per cent of Covid deaths. The plan is to keep vaccinating the British population right the way down to teenagers and children. Why not donate these vaccines to India instead?

If Britain and America are sitting on millions of doses of vaccine that could save the lives of India’s elderly, what should we do? Share the vaccine? Or give it to those for whom it would make little or (in the case of those who have recovered from the disease) almost no difference? It is hard to find a moral justification for not doing more to help.

India makes lots of vaccines. Yet Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, has complained that India is not exporting enough of its supplies to Europe. Discussion should instead focus on how to save as many lives as

possible — and how it is more important to vaccinate older, high-risk Indians than young Americans and Europeans with minimal mortality risk. President Joe Biden is sending raw materials to help make AstraZeneca vaccines in India: no great hardship, as the Astra jab hasn’t yet been authorised in the United States.

I was one of the signatories of the Great Barrington Declaration, which advocated shielding those most at risk, and fewer restrictions for those at low risk. When vaccine programmes have followed this general principle and been targeted at those most in need, the results have been extraordinary. We should ask: why not apply this principle worldwide? When our own at-risk groups have been protected, might we then start to help countries still in mortal peril?

Britain and America both have proud records of helping friends in need. There can be no better example, right now, of a country needing aid than India.

By arrangement with the *Spectator*

The writer is a professor of medicine at Stanford University



## SHORT TAKES

TWO ARRESTED  
IN MALDIVES  
BOMB ATTACK

**Mal, Maldives:** Maldives police have arrested two people over an assassination attempt on former president Mohamed Nasheed who has been taken off life support, officials and relatives said on Saturday.

The Indian Ocean island has called in international help to investigate Thursday's bomb attack that left the democracy pioneer and climate activist needing 16 hours of surgery to remove shrapnel from his lungs, liver, chest, abdomen and limbs.

Police said two people had been arrested but did not give details.

They were looking for four suspects seen in the vicinity of the attack on Thursday night just as Nasheed was about to get in his car.

Australian Federal Police officers and two experts from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime were expected to join the investigation on Saturday.

LIBYAN MILITIAS  
TAKE OVER TRIPOLI  
GOV'T HEAD OFFICE

**Cairo:** In a show of force, armed militiamen briefly took over a hotel in the Libyan capital of Tripoli that serves as headquarters for the interim government, officials said on Saturday.

Friday's development came after the three-member presidential council earlier this week appointed a new chief of the intelligence agency, Libya's version of the CIA. The militias, which control Tripoli, were apparently unhappy with the choice of Hussein Khalifa as the new spy chief. Presidential council spokeswoman Najwa Wheba said no one was hurt in the takeover of Hotel Corinthia, in the heart of Tripoli.

The hotel was mostly empty on Friday, the Muslim weekend. After a while, the militias left the hotel, according to an official at the Interior Ministry who spoke on condition of anonymity under regulations. Khalifa and the militia leaders were not immediately available for comment on Saturday.

ROYAL SCANDAL:  
NEW ZULU KING'S  
CLAIM DISPUTED

**Cape Town:** A new Zulu king in South Africa was named amid scenes of chaos on Friday night as other members of the royal family questioned Prince Misuzulu Zulu's claim to the title and bodyguards suddenly whisked him away from the public announcement at a palace.

The controversy over the next king, a largely ceremonial role but one with great significance for South Africa and its 12 million Zulu people, has arisen after the death in March of King Goodwill Zwelithini, who had reigned since 1968. Zwelithini apparently named one of his six wives, Queen Mantfombi Shiyiwe Dlamini Zulu, as the "regent of the Zulu kingdom" in his will, but her death just over a week ago after holding the title for only a month has thrown the royal succession into turmoil. The commotion broke out at the reading of Queen Mantfombi's will and hours after a memorial service for her.

NASA'S NEW CHIEF  
HEDGES ON 2024  
MOON LANDING

**Cape Canaveral:** NASA's new administrator is big on tackling climate and diversifying the agency's workforce, but hedging on whether the US can put astronauts on the moon by 2024. In his first interview since becoming NASA's top official this week, former Sen. Bill Nelson said on Friday that tracking climate change is a top issue. He also wants to diversify the space agency's workforce so it reflects America.

As for landing astronauts on the moon, Nelson said the goal remains 2024, a deadline set by the Trump administration. But he cautions space is hard and he needs more time to review the matter, especially with a contract protest over the lunar lander for astronauts.

"We all know that space is hard," he said, noting there are often delays developing new technologies. "But the goal is 2024." His underlying vision for NASA "to explore the heavens with humans and machines", Nelson said he did not seek the NASA administrator job and had recommended three women to lead the space agency.



Masked Palestinian followers of the Hamas movement near Beit Lahia in the Gaza Strip, prepare to fly incendiary balloons across the northern border toward Israel, on Saturday. —AFP

Israel braces for  
Jerusalem riots,  
over 160 injured

**Jerusalem, May 8:** More than 160 people were wounded after Israeli riot police clashed with Palestinians at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound late Friday, capping a week of violence in the Holy City and the occupied West Bank. Stones, bottles and fireworks were hurled at officers who fired rubber bullets and stun grenades at the crowds at Islam's third-holiest site, also revered by Jews as the location of two biblical-era temples.

At least 163 Palestinians and six Israeli officers were reported wounded at Al-Aqsa and elsewhere in east Jerusalem, as the Palestinian Red Crescent said it had opened a field hospital because emergency rooms were full.

Police said officers had restored order because of the "rioting of thousands of worshippers" after evening prayers.

Tensions in Jerusalem have soared in recent weeks as Palestinians have protested against Israel's restrictions on access to parts of the Old City during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, and after authorities

ordered several Palestinian families to leave their homes to make way for Israeli settlers.

The United States called for "de-escalation" and said the threatened evictions could worsen the situation in east Jerusalem, as the United Nations warned the forced evictions could amount to "war crimes".

Friday's unrest came on Al-Quds (the Arabic name for Jerusalem) Day, an annual day of pro-Palestinian rallies held by Iran, the arch-enemy of Israel, which also saw many thousands march in majority-Muslim countries across the region and as far as Pakistan.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said that he held the Israeli government "responsible" for the unrest and voiced "full support for our heroes in Aqsa".

International observers urged calm, with UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland tweeted his concern, and urged all parties to "respect the status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem's Old City in the interest of peace & stability." —AFP

Boris Johnson  
welcomes wins  
in local elections

**London, May 8:** UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson was enjoying an election bounce on Saturday as many of the local and by-election results went in favour of his ruling Conservative Party.

In what is seen as a result in support of the government's coronavirus vaccination programme as well as the handling of Brexit, the Opposition Labour Party faced a crushing by-election defeat in a traditional stronghold of Hartlepool in north-east England, which the party had held for many decades.

The Johnson-led Conservatives secured key victories over Labour as they took control of a number of councils in the West Midlands. The Tories have hailed it as a continuation of the crushing Labour defeats in the 2019 general election.

"What happened in 2019 was that people mandated us to get Brexit done and to begin the process of uniting and levelling up. I think what's happened now is they can see we did get Brexit done and to a certain extent they can

see we delivered on that," said Johnson, on a visit to Hartlepool to congratulate the new Conservative parliamentarian Jill Mortimer.

"I think what people want us to do now is get on with delivering on everything else. And so, number one is continuing the vaccine rollout — making sure we go from jabs, jabs, jabs to jobs, jobs, jobs. Make sure we have a strong economic recovery. But then get on with a massive project for this country — and it is a very ambitious thing," he said.

"Every government has tried it to some extent but I don't think any government has tried it as wholeheartedly as this government is trying. And that is uniting and levelling up," he added. The Hartlepool vote and this week's local elections, for which the results are continuing to be counted, were Labour leader Keir Starmer's first major electoral test after just over a year as Labour leader. The general picture has been dismal, focussing scrutiny on his performance over the last 12 months. —AP

## SPACE | ALERT

Chances of debris landing on an inhabited zone are tiny, probably 1 in a million

## Chinese rocket set to re-enter atmosphere

**Beijing, May 8:** A large segment of a Chinese rocket is expected to make an uncontrolled re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere on the weekend, but Beijing has downplayed fears and said there is a very low risk of any damage.

A Long March-5B rocket launched the first module of China's new space station into Earth's orbit on April 29. Its 18-tonne main segment is now in freefall and experts have said it is difficult to say precisely

where and when it will re-enter the atmosphere. Re-entry is expected to be around 2300 GMT on Saturday, according to the Pentagon, with a window of nine hours either side.

Chinese authorities have said most of the rocket components would likely be destroyed on re-entry. "The probability of causing harm... on the ground is extremely low," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters on Friday. Although there has been

EU seals deal for up to 1.8 bn  
extra BioNTech/Pfizer doses

27-nation bloc is on track to have 70% of adults vaccinated by late July

**Poro Portugal, May 8:** The EU has concluded a deal with BioNTech/Pfizer for up to 1.8 billion extra doses of their Covid-19 vaccine, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Saturday.

"Happy to announce that the EU Commission has just approved a contract for guaranteed 900 million doses (+900 million options) with BioNTech/Pfizer for 2021-2023," she tweeted from an EU summit in Portugal. "Other contracts and other vaccine technologies will follow," she promised.

The contract, on top of the 600 million BioNTech/Pfizer doses the commission has already secured, aims to supply the bloc — population 450 million — with enough jabs for booster shots, the EU said.

They could also expand vaccination to minors and for exports to lower-income countries outside the EU, it added.

Von der Leyen has said that the mRNA technology used by BioNTech/Pfizer and other vaccine-makers has proven safe and effective.

BioNTech of Germany and Pfizer of the United States have stepped up supply Europe with their jointly produced doses, and their vaccine is currently the main one being used in the EU.

Others in the EU vaccine portfolio include those from AstraZeneca — which delivered far below the quantities it had promised, and whose jab has been tarnished by a link to very rare blood clots — as well as from Moderna and Johnson & Johnson.

After a slow start, the EU's vaccination rollout has greatly picked up speed, with more than a quarter of its population having received at least one jab. The 27-nation bloc is on track to have 70 percent of adults fully vaccinated by late July, and is already cautiously reopening ahead of its vital summer vacation period.

Von der Leyen has stood by the EU strategy of her Commission being responsible for negotiating vaccine contracts for all member countries, despite early criticism that rollout was too slow. Europe is now debating with the United States over whether lifting patents on Covid vaccines could boost supplies to poorer countries.

The EU has so far sent more than 200 million doses to non-EU countries, while the United States has dispatched just 2.7 million to Mexico in what it describes as a "loan".

The head of the World Health Organization, Ted-



Friends toast each other as they drink a beer on a terrace in Brussels, on Saturday, as the Belgium government eased the restrictions put in place to curb the spread of Covid-19. —AFP

EU invites 'concrete' US  
plan on lifting vax patents

**Porto, Portugal, May 8:** Europe on Saturday passed the ball back to Washington in a debate over Covid vaccine patents, pushing the US for a concrete proposal and a commitment to export much needed jabs.

European Council chief Charles Michel, attending an EU summit in Portugal, said the bloc was ready to discuss a US offer to suspend patent protection on vaccines — once the details are clear. "We are ready to engage

on this topic, as soon as a concrete proposal would be put on the table," Michel said, as EU leaders discussed the issue in Porto. Michel, who represents the EU's 27 national leaders, cautioned however that the bloc has doubts about the idea being a "magic bullet" in the short term. The quickest solution to ramp up the distribution of vaccines globally was exports, and the EU encouraged "all the partners to facilitate the export of doses," he said.

France has adopted a similarly sceptical approach — with President Emmanuel Macron saying Saturday that "patents are not the priority" — while Germany is openly hostile to the idea.

Influential voices have risen to back the push to waive patents, not least Pope Francis, who on Saturday criticised putting "the laws of the market or intellectual property above the laws of love and the health of humanity". —AFP

● **THE CONTRACT,** on top of the 600 million BioNTech/Pfizer doses the commission has already secured, aims to supply the bloc — population 450 million — with enough jabs for booster shots, the EU said.

Britain finalises post  
Covid travel system

**London, May 8:** The UK government has set out 12 so-called "green list" countries under its traffic light system where people from England will be able to travel quarantine-free when the country's next level of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions are lifted on May 17.

Non-essential travel will no longer be classed as illegal from May 17, but strict border control measures will be in place for those entering the UK in order to keep a check on Coronavirus variants.

India remains on the "red list" since last month amid a second wave surge in Coronavirus infections, which means all travel remains banned between India and the UK except for British residents and nationals who must self-isolate for 10 days in a designated quarantine hotel.

The Maldives, Nepal and Turkey have now been added to the "red list" of around 40 countries, amid concerns around new variants. —PTI

## Blast near Afghan school kills 25

**Kabul, May 8:** A blast outside a school in the Afghan capital on Saturday killed at least 25 people and wounded another 52 including students, the interior ministry said.

Residents were out for shopping ahead of Eid-al-Fitr next week that marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting, when the blast took place.

"Fifty-five wounded people have been taken to hospitals," interior ministry

spokesman Tariq Arian told reporters.

Arian's deputy Hamid Roshan said that an investigation had begun into what he said was a "terrorist attack", adding that casualties included students.

Health ministry spokesman Dastagir Nazari said several ambulances had been rushed to the site and were evacuating the wounded.

"People in the area are angry and have beaten a number of ambulance

workers," he told reporters.

The blast comes as the US military continues to pull out its last remaining 2,500 troops from the country, despite faltering peace efforts between the Taliban and Afghan government to end a decades-long war in Afghanistan.

The Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood is populated largely by the Shiite Hazaras and is often a target for Sunni Islamist militants.

In May last year a group

of gunmen attacked a hospital in the area in a brazen daylight raid that left 25 people killed, including 16 mothers of newborn babies.

No group claimed that attack, but Afghan President Ashraf Ghani blamed the Taliban and the Islamic State group.

On October 24, a suicide bomber blew himself up at a tuition centre in the same district killing 18 people including students in an attack that also went unclaimed. —AFP

SAUDI-PAK  
SIGN PACT TO  
IMPROVE TIES

**Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, May 8:** Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed agreements on Saturday to improve ties, after months of strained relations between the close allies over the disputed region of Kashmir.

Although the kingdom was the first foreign country Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan visited after his 2018 election, Riyadh appeared frustrated with Islamabad last year.

And while the wealthy nation has supported Pakistan with billions of dollars in aid and loans in recent years, observers say the kingdom is also keen not to upset India, a key business partner and importer of Saudi oil.

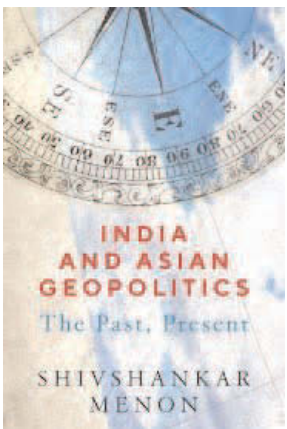
Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and Khan, who arrived Friday for a three-day visit, held talks in which they stressed "the importance of expanding and intensifying the horizons of cooperation." Officials from both countries signed two agreements in the western city of Jeddah addressing the treatment of criminals, and crime. —AFP



INDIAN TOP 10  
BESTSELLERS

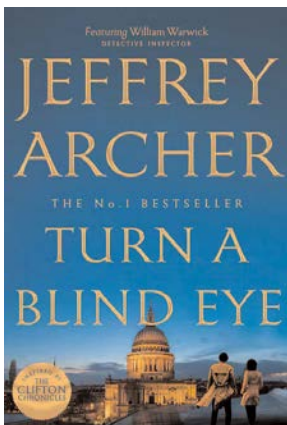
## NON-FICTION

- 1 **INDIA AND ASIAN GEOPOLITICS: THE PAST, PRESENT**  
Shiv Shankar Menon  
Penguin, ₹699
- 2 **KARMA: A YOGI'S GUIDE TO CRAFTING YOUR DESTINY**  
Sadhguru  
Penguin, ₹299
- 3 **INDIA'S POWER ELITE**  
Sanjaya Baru  
Penguin, ₹699
- 4 **BORN A MUSLIM: SOME TRUTHS ABOUT ISLAM IN INDIA**  
Ghazala Wahab  
Aleph, ₹999
- 5 **GHALIB: A WILDERNESS AT MY DOORSTEP: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY**  
Mehr Afshan Farooqi  
Allen Lane, ₹799
- 6 **REPUBLIC OF HINDUTVA**  
Badri Narayan  
Penguin Viking, ₹499
- 7 **ALL ROADS LEAD NORTH — NEPAL'S TURN TO CHINA**  
Amish Raj Mulmi  
Context Westland, ₹799
- 8 **REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION**  
Aanchal Malhotra  
HarperCollins, ₹599
- 9 **THE MYSTERY OF THE PARSEE LAWYER**  
Shrabani Basu  
Bloomsbury, ₹699
- 10 **INDUS BASIN UNINTERRUPTED**  
Uttam Kumar Sinha  
Penguin Vintage, ₹799



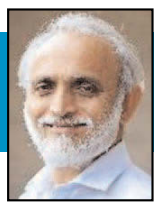
## FICTION

- 1 **TURN A BLIND EYE**  
Jeffrey Archer  
Pan Macmillan, ₹450
- 2 **WHEREABOUTS**  
Jhumpa Lahiri  
Penguin, ₹499
- 3 **THE LAST QUEEN**  
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni  
HarperCollins, ₹599
- 4 **SHUGGIE BAIN**  
Douglas Stuart  
Picador, ₹499
- 5 **TAKEDOWN**  
Brad Thor  
Emily Bestler Books—Atria, ₹599
- 6 **THE BEGUM AND THE DASTAN**  
Tarana Husain Khan  
Tranquebar, ₹499
- 7 **KLARA AND THE SUN**  
Kazuo Ishiguro  
Faber & Faber, ₹699
- 8 **MURDER AT THE MUSHAIRA**  
Raza Mir  
Aleph, ₹799
- 9 **CLUB YOU TO DEATH**  
Anuja Chauhan  
Picador  
₹499
- 10 **A TIME FOR MERCY**  
John Grisham  
Hodder & Stoughton  
₹699



Bahrisons, New Delhi

# The exit of Delhi durbar, elite media's unmasking

Parsa Venkateshwar  
Rao Jr

review

When academician-turned-journalist and former media advisor to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wrote without a twinge in his facial muscles about how Prime Minister Narendra Modi has effortlessly dislodged the power elite with its St Stephen's College-Oxbridge background, many mistook it for a dirge for the defeated lot with good manners and right accents. What was attractive about *India's Power Elite Class, Caste And A Cultural Revolution* (Penguin; 2021) was its anecdotal style with a gossipy tinge to it. Baru places himself as an outsider/insider in Delhi's dress circle and with tongue-firmly-in-cheek pronounces the rather unlamented exit of Delhi's elite from the corridors of power. And to soothe the wracked nerves of this elite, he compared the Modi invasion to that of decade-long Mao's macabre bacchanalia Cultural Revolution with frenzied Red Guards chomping and stomping and destroying a whole generation of sensible middle rung communists. He was careful enough to point out that the fanatical Hindu vigilante were relatively less hysterical than the raging Red Guards in terms of intensity and range.

What attracted attention, obviously, was his taking note of the upheaval caused

by Mr Modi's arrival in Delhi as Prime Minister; dealt with much panache in the first two chapters of the book under the attention-grabbing headings of "Bombard The Headquarters" and "and 'Modi's Metaphors'". But Baru digs deeper and looks at the changes that have come about among the elites — there is not a single group calling the shots — across the country and in different spheres. And he follows the example of his acknowledged inspiration for the book, American outlier sociologist C. Wright Mills' 1956 classic *The Power Elite*.

That there have emerged new elites from time to time in Independent India is rather an unattractive if factual proposition. What Baru outlines as he goes along is the emergence of new elite groups in different spheres, in politics, in business, in agriculture, in bureaucracy and military. He describes the ascent of Mr Modi as the conquest of the backward castes of an upper caste-based Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This will remain a debatable thesis because the OBC revolution in RSS-BJP was carefully engineered and it was the reason behind the emergence of Mr Modi. Baru indirectly raises the moot question whether the success of Mr Modi in national politics is due to the fact that as an OBC representative he

wins the approval of the numerical OBC majority in the country. But it remains an untested proposition because this presumes that all the designated OBCs form a single class or that they have shared class interest in the same manner that it is assumed that Hindus form a monolith.

He also narrates the shift in power from the feudal lords, zamindars and landlords to that of the rich peasants, who are mostly from the backward classes, and the rich peasants became the new rural elite. The transmutation continues as the "rural landowning castes who have acquired political power are able to obtain urban land and become super-rich." And he draws the conclusion, "Every major urban conglomeration across the subcontinent is now fertile ground for the enrichment of the provincial rich." The story of the elites in Baru's telling is a complex process.

INDIA'S POWER ELITE: CLASS, CASTE AND A CULTURAL REVOLUTION  
By SANJAYA BARU  
Penguin Viking, ₹699

The more interesting aspect of Baru's analysis of the changing elites is that of business interests in the country and their connection to the political elite. He traces the founding of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci) inspired by Mahatma Gandhi as evidence of the alignment of the national bourgeoisie with the political class. He points out the compulsion of the political class, which has to perforce champion the cause of the poor, and it should appear to be distant from business magnates, and shows how Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Mr Modi take an anti-elitist stance.

He argues the case of the Bombay Club, comprising top industrialists, who prepared an economic manifesto of sorts in 1944, advocating a mixed economy with an assigned role for the state in developing economic assets which are later to be transferred to the private sector. And controversially Baru argues that the First and the Second Five Year Plans, and especially the Second, which is attributed to P.C. Mahalanobis, was really a reflection of the ideas of the Bombay Club.

The chapter on "Business and the State" shows once again the change or displacement of old elites with the new. He traces the new business players with close links to the top political leadership, from that of the Tata and Birlas of the 1950s and the 1960s to that of the Ambanis, Nandas and Hinduja of the 1980s. He implies that that the much derided crony capitalism has been a part of modern India from the days before Independence.

Baru maintains the neutrality of a social scientist while describing the changes that had happened with the political and economic elites, but he offers for the first time an indirect moral critique of the elite groups when he writes about the policy intellectuals and public intellectuals, the media and the celebrity class. While pointing out that in the time of Nehru and Indira could become part of the power elite "because of their access to the PM", he cites the example of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's "first introduction to Nehru was made by Singh's Amritsar neighbour Mulk Raj Anand, a Cambridge scholar who became famous as a novelist..." he marks out the "corrupt" journalist category along with the "professional".

While dealing with the intellectual and celebrity class, he returns to the theme of how Mr Modi has bypassed the experts and the media, he seems to hold himself back from commenting on the consequences of doing away with intellectual inputs or a watchful media. It is indeed the right thing to do because there are enough number of people lamenting the anti-intellectual stance of the Prime Minister. Baru's book is a teaser where it seems to offer good gossip but it abandons the temptation and does out serious stuff in an easy-to-read style. It promises to be the 1991 bestseller, *You Will Not Eat Lunch Again In This Town* of Julia Phillips, the Hollywood outsider/insider, but settles into a sober social analysis tract.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

## THE GRANDEUR AND MYRIAD HORRORS OF A BEGUM'S DASTAAN

Aditi  
Sriram

review

Books are defined, at their most basic, as stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end. But classics like the *Mahabharata* and *The Thousand and One Nights* are enjoyed for how frequently these three sections are interrupted. Structuring a book to consist of stories within stories allows author to escort the reader through some portions of the story, and later force the reader to plunge, unassisted, into a new section. The result is dizzying, but unforgettable. Characters blend into one another, time and space collapse, and dreamworlds feel real.

Readers like me delight in these narrative rabbit holes; we become Alice, eager to explore Wonderland with the book as our guide.

Tarana Husain Khan's *The Begum and the Dastan* is one such nested story about a Muslim family and the fate of its women, generation after generation. Feroza is forced to become Begum to

Nawab Shams Ali Khan in Sherpur (which appears to be a fictionalized version of Rampur in Uttar Pradesh), in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ameera is her great granddaughter (p.6), of school-going age in 2016, who is forced to stay home because her father cannot afford the fees.

Restless Ameera implores her dadi to tell stories about Feroza Begum, whose own restlessness had ruined her life. What follows is a 250-odd page book about inheritance, religion, and the occult. A map is most definitely required.

Khan realises this. Her chapter headings are accompanied with a narrator's name and the year, and every few pages, footnotes identify various sources Khan has used to build her story: Urdu poetry, unpublished memoirs from the royal harem, the oral traditions of dastangoi, and photographs. As Ameera's grandmother warns, once: "There are stories, whispers and then there is the truth. My

story can draw from any of these or from all of these." (p.31).

Indeed, Khan's novel does. Having acquainted her readers with Feroza Begum and Ameera, she introduces a third narrator, Kallan Mirza, who is a professional storyteller, or dastan. Appearing every few chapters, he recites scenes from the famous *Tilism-e-Hoshrub*, an Indo-Islamic fantasy epic?contemporaneous with Feroza's story. It is not a coincidence that the protagonist of this story is another royal woman.

Princess Lalarukh, and the calamities written into her fate.

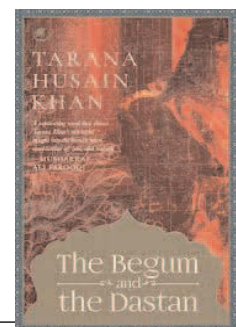
This braid of stories weaves between Feroza Begum, Ameera, and Princess Lalarukh. But the writing style becomes hectic at times. Sections begin with quotations from varied sources, including Urdu couplets which Khan has herself translated. Words are inconsistently in brackets or italics, creating unnecessary hierarchies between Urdu and English. Occasionally, one narrator's direct address to another character clashes with the exposition that follows. Structurally, too,

Ameera's circumstances feel temporary compared to Feroza Begum's lifelong entrapment; the latter is better synchronised with Lalarukh's adventures.

But Khan accomplishes much: a flavour of Nawabi daily life, Rohilla military culture, the Sunni-Shia tensions mixed in with colonial influence, and, ultimately, the women representing each of these categories. What these protagonists share is ?*Ujmed*, hope in the face of fate.(p.94), which propels each of their stories onto the next page, through a time portal, over an interruption, and finally, to the last page.

Such novels rely as much on author's mastery as on the reader's commitment, and Khan's attempt is deeply researched. But for a novel which can manipulate time and space, whose characters are consummate storytellers, it doesn't land as powerfully as one of its colleagues, *The Hakawati* by Rabih Alameddine published in 2009, which opens thus: ?isten. Allow me to be your God. Let me take you on a journey beyond imagining. Let me tell you a story."

Aditi Sriram teaches writing at Ashoka University and has authored Beyond the Boulevards: A Short Biography of Pondicherry (2019)

THE BEGUM AND THE DASTAAN  
By TARANA HUSAIN KHAN  
Tranquebar, ₹499

## Laugh and also ponder what patriarchy might do next



Kushalrani Gulab

review

When judging a book by its cover, ask these questions: Is the cover so attractive that you would consider buying the book whatever the story might be like? Or is the cover only worth the price of the book because of what lies beneath it?

I juggled these questions in my head before I started reading Aditi Patil's *Patriarchy and the Pangolin: A Field Guide to Indian Men and Other Species*. Because the fact is, I did buy this book for its cover — a painting by Sheela Roy that gives me little thrills of happiness whenever I look at it. But I also bought it in the hope that the story would be as charming as the cover.

Fortunately, I judged the cover correctly. *Patriarchy and the Pangolin* is a delightful account by a beleaguered conservation researcher of field trips in Gujarat to investigate the impact of the government's agro-forestry policy on farmers. As she gamely gets to work, she encounters more men with moustaches, bureaucrats and lawyers than actual wild creatures along the way.

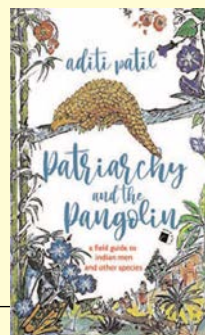
The book has no plot of course. It's the diary of a field researcher, funny, eye-opening and cynical in turns, written in the style of a person who often laughs to stop herself from crying.

Patil is an idealist, a person who quit a well-paying information technology job to help save the world. But her ideas of the things that constitute field research and conservation are similar to the ideas of bureaucrats and men with moustaches only in the most superficial way. The bureaucrats just want to know that their policies work (please note: not 'if' the policies work). The mustachioed men cannot bring themselves to communicate with women and in any case have no intention of causing trouble for themselves, courtesy bureaucrats, law enforcers and lawmakers, by discussing any sort of truth. In the face of all this resistance, Patil grits her teeth and gets on with her job, even fighting past her own occasional belief that her work will accomplish nothing.

Her observations, therefore, are often hilarious, especially on those occasions when she tries to escape reality by focusing on something completely unrelated to the issue at hand. This is her way of coping, she explains. "I've looked away from problems all my life," she says in the book. "Not facing them is a skill I've developed over the years and it has taken a lot of practice." In spite of this self-deprecation, Patil has no choice but to face the problems and in presenting them in this book, she shoves them in our faces. What kind of lives do we lead, her book makes us ask, that we're so casual about destroying the very things that support our lives on this planet? What kind of lives do we expect to lead that we don't ensure our governments and their machinery actually work to conserve our only home?

Humour is a fabulous way to get harsh points across. Patil does this brilliantly. As for the cover that got me to buy the book, I'm tearing it off and framing it.

Kushalrani Gulab is a freelance editor and writer who dreams of being a sanyasi by the sea

PATRIARCHY AND THE PANGOLIN: A FIELD GUIDE TO INDIAN MEN AND OTHER SPECIES  
By ADITI PATIL  
Hachette India, ₹399



SHORT TAKES

Abid hits double ton for Pakistan

**Harare:** Pakistan took total control on the second day of the second Test against Zimbabwe on Saturday, outclassing the home side with both bat and ball to take a big step towards sealing a 2-0 series victory. Zimbabwe were 52 for four at the close in reply to Pakistan's 510 for eight declared, 458 runs behind.

Opening batsman Abid Ali made 215 not out and Nauman Ali slammed 97 before being stumped off a wide.

The Zimbabwe innings got off to a bad start when 36-year-old debutant Tabish Khan struck in his first over before a run had been scored.

Three more wickets fell before the close and Zimbabwe looked in desperate trouble. — **AFP**

**Brief scores: Pakistan 510/8 decl. (Abid 215\*, Nauman 97, Muzarabani 3-82) vs Zimbabwe 52/4 (Chakabva 28\*, Sajid 1/0, Hasan 1/7).**

Bopanna out of Madrid Open

**Madrid:** India's Rohan Bopanna and Denis Shapovalov of Canada fought hard before losing in three sets to German duo of Alexander Zverev and Tim Puetz in the men's doubles quarterfinals of the Madrid Open here.

Bopanna and Shapovalov went down 6-4, 3-6, 10-5 against their German opponents to crash out of the ATP Masters 1000 tournament.

The Indo-Canadian pair hit five aces as against their opponent's three, but they committed more double faults, which hampered their prospects.

Bopanna and Shapovalov had committed five double faults as against two by the German pair. Earlier in the tournament, the unseeded pair of Bopanna and Shapovalov had stunned top seeds Juan Sebastian Cabal and Robert Farah in straight sets. — **PTI**

9th straight title for biggie Bayern

**Dortmund, Germany:** Bayern Munich were confirmed as Bundesliga champions for the ninth straight season on Saturday after Borussia Dortmund beat second-placed RB Leipzig 3-2.

Leipzig's defeat meant it can no longer overhaul Bayern, who held a seven-point lead — 71 to 64 — before hosting Borussia Monchengladbach in the late game.

Two rounds remain after this weekend's games.

England winger Jadon Sancho netted twice in Dortmund's home win, a result that meant Bayern became champions without kicking a ball before their home game.

The victory lifted Dortmund into the Champions League places, but Eintracht Frankfurt can knock them out of fourth place if they beat Mainz on Sunday. — **AFP**

Short-handed Jazz outshine Nuggets

**Los Angeles:** Bojan Bogdanovic torched Denver for a career-high 48 points as the Utah Jazz remained in top spot in the Western Conference with a 127-120 victory over the Nuggets on Friday night.

The under-manned Jazz were without their dynamic guard duo of Donovan Mitchell and Mike Conley, but throughout their injury absences other Utah players have been stepping up and Friday it was Bogdanovic's turn. Mitchell has missed the last 11 games with a right ankle sprain and Conley has missed six straight games with a hamstring injury. — **AFP**

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** Wolves vs Brighton from 4.30 pm; Aston Villa vs Manchester United from 6.35 pm; West Ham United vs Everton from 9 pm; Arsenal vs West Brom from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1, 1HD

**Italian League:** Genoa vs Sassuolo from 4 pm; Parma vs Atalanta 6.30 pm; Roma vs Crotone from 9.30 pm; Juventus vs Milan from 12.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2, 2HD

FORMULA ONE

**Spanish GP:** Main Race from 6.25 pm Star Sports Select 2, 2HD

ENGLISH SUMMER

Pietersen pitches for postponed IPL to be held in England

**London, May 8:** Former England captain Kevin Pietersen wants the remaining matches of this year's postponed Indian Premier League to be shifted to the United Kingdom in September, instead of the UAE.

Pietersen feels moving the IPL to UK would be the best decision as there is a window in September just after England host India in a five-match Test series that concludes on September 14.

"I have seen people talking about the UAE as a possible destination to finish the IPL in September, but I actually think the IPL should move to the UK.

"There is a window in September after the England vs India Test series has finished. All the best Indian players would already be there, and all of the best English players would be available as well," Pietersen wrote in a column for *Betway*.

The 40-year-old right-hander, who also served as England captain for a brief period, said the weather in September would be ideal to host cricket matches in England.

"Mid-to-late September is the most beautiful time in the UK. They could use Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham and the two London grounds. There is also a good chance that crowds will be allowed in the grounds, and there will be great atmospheres.

"The IPL has been to the UAE; it's been to South Africa, and I think England would now be the perfect place to house the remaining fixtures," Pietersen said.



Kevin Pietersen poses in Maldives. — **Twitter**

● **Pietersen made the statement after four English counties — Middlesex, Surrey, Warwickshire and Lancashire — have expressed interest in hosting the remaining 31 games of the IPL.**

Pietersen made the statement after four English counties — Middlesex, Surrey, Warwickshire and Lancashire — have expressed interest in hosting the remaining 31 games of the IPL. — **PTI**

HAMILTON TAKES 100TH POLE IN SPAIN

**Barcelona, May 8:** World champion Lewis Hamilton celebrated his 100th pole on Saturday after setting the fastest time in qualifying for the Spanish Grand Prix and declared "It's like my first!"

The Mercedes driver's latest milestone puts him 32 clear of Michael Schumacher in the all-time pole chart and leaves him in prime position to secure a record-extending 98th win in Sunday's race.

"I'll always remember that one," a beaming Hamilton said after reaching triple figures.

"I can't believe we are at 100 and it's down to the men and women back at the factory who are continuously raising the bar. The support I have, it's a dream to work with these guys. Who would have thought at the end of 2012 when we made the decision to partner, we'd be qualifying at 100. I feel humble and grateful — it's like my first!"

Alongside the Briton on the front row in Barcelona will be his Red Bull title rival Max Verstappen. Hamilton reached his century 14 years after securing his maiden pole in the Canadian GP in 2007, which he went on to win to take the first step on the road to becoming Formula One's most successful driver. — **AFP**

IOC says nothing can stop Games from going ahead

**Sydney, May 8:** International Olympic Committee vice-president John Coates was adamant Saturday that nothing could stop the Tokyo Olympics from going ahead, despite ongoing risks from Covid-19.

Asked if there was any scenario in which the Games, which are due to start in July, could be cancelled or postponed again at this late stage, he replied: "No, there's not."

"The prime minister of Japan said that to the president of the United States two or three weeks ago, he continues to say that to the IOC."

"We're working with him (Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga) on all of the safety measures. It's going ahead."

Suga held talks with US leader Joe Biden in April and stressed the Asian nation was doing everything possible to contain Covid-19 infections and hold a "safe and secure" Olympics.

But questions continue to be raised about the viability of the Games, given the ongoing pandemic and a virus state of emergency in Tokyo and other parts of Japan being extended on Friday.

Coates, who heads the IOC's Coordination

**Bengaluru, May 8:** Kolkata Knight Riders pacer Prasidh Krishna has tested positive for coronavirus and is in quarantine in his home town Bengaluru, a BCCI source said on Saturday.

Another KKR player New Zealand's wicket-keeper-batsman Tim Seifert has also tested positive and will not be on the charter flight back home with other players and support staff.

The 25-year-old Krishna, who was named in the Indian squad for the England tour as a stand-by on Friday, is the fourth KKR player to have contracted the dreaded virus.

Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier are the other KKR players, who tested positive earlier.

According to the BCCI source, both Krishna and Warrier contracted the virus from Chakravarthy during one of the training sessions. He said Krishna is Chakravarthy's close friend.



A Japanese rhythmic gymnast performs during a test event in Tokyo on Saturday to prepare for the Olympic Games. — **AP**

Commission for the Tokyo Games, said a huge amount of work had been done to ensure the safety of athletes and the Japanese public.

"We spent the first half of last year identifying all the worst-case scenarios," he said in Sydney on the sidelines of the Australian Olympic Committee's annual general meeting.

"We spent the next six months looking at the countermeasures that are necessary. We're implementing those countermeasures, predicated on there being no vaccine, so that situation has improved. The Games will go ahead."

US drugs giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech on Thursday announced a deal with the IOC to provide vaccines to competitors and staff at the Games, which Coates said it was a major step.

"All of the precautions that we have been taking are aimed at the health of the athletes and the health of the people of Japan," he said.

"We've put an amazing amount of work into the procedures that ensure the safety of the athletes through testing ... Boosted now by all athletes around the world now having access to the vaccine." — **AFP**

PANT DONATES TO PANDEMIC RELIEF FUND

**New Delhi, May 8:** India wicketkeeper batsman Rishabh Pant on Saturday joined the fight against the raging Covid-19 pandemic, pledging an undisclosed amount to procure oxygen cylinders with beds and kits for the affected patients.

The 23-year-old said he will donate the amount to Hemkunt Foundation, a Gurugram-based NGO.

"I am supporting the Hemkunt Foundation through a monetary donation that will help provide O2 cylinders with beds, Covid-relief kits and much more to those suffering across the country," Pant said.

Pant saluted the country's frontline workers, who have been working tirelessly to help the infected people. — **PTI**

Two KKR players test +ve

"Prasidh like all India players left bubble on May 3 after getting two negative results. However on reaching Bengaluru he tested positive," the source said.

The BCCI is hoping that by the time the UK-bound players enter the bio-bubble in India on May 25, Krishna will test negative.

Seifert is also in isolation in Ahmedabad from where he will go to Chennai for treatment at a private hospital. — **PTI**

BIG 3 DEFEND SUPER LEAGUE, DENOUNCE UEFA

**Rome, May 8:** Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus on Saturday defended the aborted Super League project in the face of "threats" from UEFA.

The three clubs are the only ones from the original 12 yet to renounce the proposed competition that would guarantee its founding members involvement every season, instead of having to qualify.

The nine clubs who have dropped out — Tottenham, Arsenal, Manchester City, Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool, Atletico Madrid, Inter Milan and AC Milan — were on Friday given a financial penalty by UEFA for their involvement.

UEFA also said it would take "appropriate action" against the three clubs who still support the Super League project.

In response, Real, Barca and Juventus said in a joint statement "the founding clubs have suffered, and continue to suffer, unacceptable third-party pressures (and) threats. This is intolerable under the rule of law."

They said the Super League had been launched "with the aim of providing solutions to the current unsustainable situation in the football industry". — **AFP**

Hockey stalwarts succumb to Covid

**New Delhi, May 8:** Former India hockey player and coach M. K. Kaushik on Saturday died after battling Covid-19 for the past three weeks. He was 66 and survived by his son and wife.

Kaushik, a member of the 1980 Moscow Olympics gold-medal winning Indian team, had tested positive for Covid-19 on April 17 and was admitted to a nursing home in New Delhi.

"He was shifted to ventilator this morning but passed away just now," Kaushik's son Ehsan said.

Another former India hockey player and a member of the 1980 Moscow Olympics-winning side Ravinder Pal Singh also died on Saturday morning in Lucknow after battling Covid-19 for nearly two weeks. He was 60.

Kaushik had coached both the senior men and women's teams. Under his coaching, India men's team won a gold medal at the 1998 Asian Games in Bangkok.

Also, Indian women team had won bronze medal at the Doha Asian Games in 2006 under his coaching.

He was awarded the Arjuna Award in 1998, before being bestowed with

● **M. K. Kaushik and Ravinder Pal Singh, members of the 1980 Moscow Olympics gold-medal winning Indian hockey team, lost their battle to Covid on a sombre Saturday for sport.**

the Dronacharya award in 2002.

Singh was admitted at the Vivekananda Hospital on April 24 after contracting the deadly virus.

According to family sources, Singh had recovered from the virus and was shifted to non-Covid ward on Thursday after testing negative. But his condition suddenly deteriorated on Friday and he was put on a ventilator.

Singh, who also played at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, did not get married and is survived by a niece, Pragya Yadav.

Singh also played in the 1979 Junior World Cup and took voluntary retirement from State Bank of India after quitting hockey.

Born in Sitapur on September 6, 1960, Singh excelled as a centre-half from 1979 to 1984. — **PTI**

WOMEN HOCKEY PLAYERS RECOVER FROM COVID-19

**New Delhi, May 8:** Indian women's hockey captain Rani Rampal, her six team-mates and two support staff members have recovered from Covid-19 infection after spending two weeks in quarantine at the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Centre in Bengaluru.

The six other India players are Savita Punia, Sharmila Devi, Rajani, Navjot Kaur, Navneet Kaur and Sushila while the two support staff are video analyst Amrutaprakash and scientific advisor Wayne Lombard.

All seven tested positive following the Indian women's hockey core group's return to the national camp in Bengaluru on April 24 after a 10-day break. All of them were asymptomatic.

"Thank you everyone for the love and mental support through messages/calls during the last two weeks. Me and my teammates and support staff are fully recovered from the Covid now," Rani said in a statement on her Twitter handle. — **PTI**

Croatia is safer to train for Moudgil

**New Delhi, May 8:** Olympic-bound rifle shooter Anjum Moudgil does not mind being away from home till the end of the Tokyo Games as she feels training in Croatia will be safer than in a coronavirus-ravaged India.

The Olympic-bound 15-member Indian team will depart for Zagreb on May 11 for a training-cum-competition tour in that country and from there it will directly fly to Tokyo for the Olympics, which opens on July 23.

"It is not all right for us to train here in India. I don't have a private training range for 50m rifle three positions. I have to either travel to Delhi or Pune which is not safe under this pandemic conditions," she said at a virtual press conference arranged by the Sports Authority of India.

"I think Croatia must be better than India currently (in terms of Covid-19 situation) and being with the team also gives you confidence. I don't see any problem from being away from home for three months."

She said the Indian team will undergo a seven-day quarantine after reaching Croatia. They will fly to



Anjum Moudgil

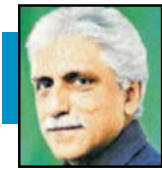
Tokyo on July 17.

"SAI has arranged a chartered flight for us and making a sort of bio-bubble also there in Croatia," said the 25-year-old from Chandigarh.

Moudgil was picked in the Indian team for the 50m rifle three positions and 10m air rifle mixed team but missed out on 10m air rifle in which she won a silver in the 2018 World Championships.

She said she has taken it in her stride. Moudgil won a gold in 50m rifle 3 positions in the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

"I respect the decision of NRAI. I still have two events in the Olympics. I am ready for the 50m 3 positions." — **PTI**



Ayaz Memon Over The Top

The most important office bearers of the BCCI — President Sourav Ganguly, secretary Jay Shah and treasurer Arun Dhumal — have shrugged off responsibility for the IPL fiasco by claiming that nobody could have known the intensity of the second wave of the Covid pandemic

ic that hit the country from the first week of April. I'm afraid, this does not wash.

While cricket administrators are not experts in virology and epidemics, the Corona virus tsunami was being widely discussed by experts from January onwards. Only it was obfuscated by a gloat-

ing government, and a cricket administration that preferred to toe the populist line rather assess the looming threat indefinitely.

The previous IPL season played in the UAE had gone off without hitch. Since there were to be no spectators allowed at the ground even in India, the 'atmosphere' of IPL such as it was, was hardly going to be affected.

This was foolish disregard for the Corona threat, and the BCCI compounded the problem by shocking complacency, as was revealed from breaches in

the 'bubble' that came to light last week, forcing the tournament to be suspended indefinitely.

Infringements in the healthy safety protocol, if one goes by reports, includes teams based in being exposed to staff of a private club where the players had gone for practice, food being brought in from the outside, as well as two impostors — ostensibly working for bookies — who were arrested with fake accreditations for matches!

What happens to the truncated IPL 2021 season from here is subject to sev-

eral imponderables. The BCCI is looking at a 15-20-day window later in the year to complete the tournament, which may not be easy to find in a packed international calendar.

On the face of it, it is possible to squeeze in the completion of the IPL after the England tour finishes and the T20WC begins. But this means foregoing a confirmed tour by South Africa to India for white ball series in late September-early October.

Given the BCCI's clout, the Proteas can be cajoled to scrap this assignment with promise of a bigger

tour later. However, whether overseas players from other countries will be available for completion of the IPL is moot. Their countries may want them for preparatory camps for the T20 WC, rather than be fatigued. To resume the IPL post T20 WC may be even more unkind on the players, who may in any case have other international assignments.

However, the biggest challenge for the BCCI now is to show it has learnt from the present disaster and is capable of handling mega tournaments in times of Covid.

There is talk of a third wave hitting India in end-August or September. Everybody prays it doesn't, but nothing can be left to chance or propaganda. Preparations for the tournaments to be played at home or putting in place Plan Bs in case the situation is serious have to be done with commitment, diligence and based on domain expertise, not in an airy-fairy manner as was done this IPL season.

Money lost because of the IPL being suspended will be easy for the BCCI to recover, not so the massive loss of credibility.