

EXCEPTION AND EXEMPTION: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON AUSTRALIA DENYING ENTRY TO NOVAK DJOKOVIC

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[Novak Djokovic being denied entry into Australia](#) in the early hours of Thursday after his visa was cancelled following a 10-hour stand-off with the Australian Border Force (ABF) at Melbourne airport is one of sport's most sordid tales. The World No.1 and a three-time defending Australian Open champion, also a vaccine sceptic, had [secured a medical exemption from the Victorian State government and Tennis Australia](#) — the sport's national governing body — to circumvent a mandatory vaccination requirement to play at the season's opening Major. But in a stunning turnaround, the Serb was stopped at the border control after ABF, which operates under the Australian government, deemed the evidence supporting his medical exemption as insufficient, sparking a diplomatic row. Faced with the prospect of deportation, Djokovic has now mounted a legal challenge, the fate of which will be known by Monday. Shorn of all the drama, this month could have been momentous for the 20-time Major winner as he is on the cusp of overtaking Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal for the most Grand Slam men's singles titles. Melbourne is his favourite hunting ground, having won an Open Era-record nine titles there. Instead, it could end in ignominy for one of the game's bona fide greats.

This is a saga from which no one party emerges with credit. In the past, Djokovic has disapproved of vaccine mandates for travel and play and has asked for everyone's personal choice to be respected. But in a public health crisis, the exercise of free will comes with responsibilities and reasonable restrictions, a fact Djokovic has been unmindful of all along. In the present case, the least Djokovic could have done is to explain the nature of the exemption he sought, and got. The Australian public, of which over 90% of the over-16 population is fully vaccinated, was understandably furious, for it has endured some of the harshest lockdowns, missed birthdays, marriages and funerals of loved ones to limit the death toll to among the lowest anywhere in the world — around 2,300, as on Thursday. That said, for two independent medical boards, one formed by Tennis Australia and the other by Victoria, to approve a medical exemption that cannot pass muster with its own federal authorities raises considerable doubt. For Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison to take a hard-line stance on Djokovic's participation, a day after leaving the decision in the hands of the State government, indicated that he was aware which way the political wind was blowing. The centre-right government has seen its popularity slump in recent months, as it has struggled to halt the unending cycle of rising cases and lockdowns. It will be sad if Djokovic becomes a political football, whether or not he pushed the envelope.

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U.S. President Biden should not buckle to pressure from irate anti-vaccine campaigners

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