

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SUNDAY 2 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 37°C
Min: 24°C
Rainfall: 3%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Chithirai 19
Tithi: Shasti
Star: Puradam
Rahukalam:
4.30 pm to 6.00 pm
Yamagandam:
12 noon to 1.30 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.34 am
Luhar: 12.11 pm
Asar: 3.16 pm
Maghrib: 6.24 pm
Isha: 7.38 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.24 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.48 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 11.59 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 10.38 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+3,52,991)	(+2,812)
1,91,77,029	2,11,915

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+18,692)
TN: 11,66,756 14,046

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

15,21,34,031

DEATHS

31,96,536

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

CBSE announces marking policy for class 10 board exams, results by June 20

New Delhi: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Saturday announced a policy for tabulation of marks for class 10 board exams which have been cancelled in view of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country. According to the policy, while 20 marks for each subject will be for internal assessment as every year, 80 marks will be calculated on basis of the students' performance in various tests or exams throughout the year. "The students will be assessed out of maximum 100 marks for each subject. As per the policy of the board, 20 marks are for internal assessment and 80 marks are for year-end board examinations. "The weightage in terms of maximum marks for schools which have conducted the tests and exams through the year will be -- periodic test/unit test (10 marks), half-yearly exam (30 marks) and pre-board exams (40 marks)," CBSE Examination Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj said. — PTI

COUNTER POINT



Hypertension, nausea, pain... don't worry, it's not Covid, it's due to counting!

US eases travel curb on students, academics

Washington, May 1: Certain categories of students, academics, journalists and individuals have been exemption from the India travel ban announced by President Joe Biden, the US state department said. The exemptions were issued by secretary of state Tony Blinken, hours after Mr Biden issued a proclamation restricting travel from India beginning May 4 because of

the "extraordinarily high Covid-19 caseloads and multiple variants circulating in the country". Students seeking to commence studies in the fall, academics, journalists and individuals who provide critical infrastructure support in countries affected by a geographic Covid-19 restriction may qualify for the exception, the state department said. — PTI



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Pollard shines in Mumbai's win



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Patients choke, burn to death

Doc among 12 Covid patients died due to oxygen shortage in Delhi hospital

1 hour delay in arrival of O2 caused deaths

New Delhi, May 1: Twelve Covid-19 patients, including the head of the department of gastroenterology of Batra Hospital here died allegedly due to oxygen shortage, officials said on Saturday. "We are trying to resuscitate five other critical patients," said S.C.L. Gupta, medical director of the hospital. Of the patients who died, six were admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) and two others were in high density wards, he said, adding that R.K. Himthani, head of the gastroenterology department, was among those who died due to lack of oxygen. Dr Himthani had been admitted to the hospital for the last 15-20 days, the medical director said. The hospital had sent out an SOS message about oxygen shortage on Saturday. Dr Gupta said they had informed the authorities about lack of oxygen Saturday morning when they had 2,500 litres of the life-saving gas left. Around 12.30 pm, the hospital authorities claimed they had run out of oxygen. The oxygen tanker arrived at 1.35 pm, they said. In a related development, Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj has stopped taking admissions due to acute shortage of oxygen, officials said. — PTI

Night fire kills 12 patients in Guj hospital

Bharuch (Gujarat) May 1: At least 12 coronavirus patients died after a fire broke out at a hospital in Gujarat's Bharuch in the early hours on Saturday. Gut-wrenching visuals of the tragedy showed remains of some patients roasted alive on stretchers and beds. There were around 50 other patients at the four-storey Welfare Hospital when the fire broke out in the Covid-19 ward at 1 am. They were rescued by locals and firefighters, an official said. "As per information at 6.30 am, the death toll in the tragedy stood at 18. Immediately after the fire, we had confirmation of 12 deaths," a police official said. "The 12 patients in the Covid-19 ward died due to the fire and resultant smoke, Bharuch superintendent of police Rajendrasinh Chudasama said. It is not clear if the remaining six died in the Welfare hospital or while being shifted to other hospitals. The Covid-19 designated hospital is situated on the Bharuch-Jambusar highway, around 190 km from the state capital Ahmedabad and is being run by a trust. The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained, the official said. The fire was controlled within an hour. — PTI



Paramedics rescue patients during a fire break out in Patel Welfare Hospital at midnight, Saturday. — PTI

Covid tally crosses 4 lakh; Fauci suggests lockdown

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 1

India touched another grim milestone fighting the pandemic Covid 19 on Saturday when the tally of daily caseload crossed 4 lakh for the first time with 4,01,993 new cases testing positive even as top US epidemiologist Anthony Fauci suggested that India declare a few weeks' lockdown to curb the spread of the virus.

The active Covid-19 cases in the country crossed the 32-lakh mark,

according to date updated by the Union health ministry on Saturday.

The infection tally rose to 1,91,64,969 while the death toll increased to 2,11,853 with 3,523 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

Registering a steady increase, the active cases have increased to 32,68,710, accounting for 17.06 per cent of the total infections.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,56,84,406, while the case

fatality rate stands 1.11 per cent, the data stated.

Dr Fauci said it important in the immediate is to get supplies of oxygen, medication, PPEs.

He said looking at the magnitude of the crisis, India should look at putting together a crisis group that would meet and start getting things organised.

Without naming any government, he said one of the things that should have been recognised that "victory was declared maybe too prematurely".

India brings oxygen in warships

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 1

As part of "Operation Samudra Setu II", the Indian Navy has deployed seven warships for shipment of liquid medical oxygen-filled cryogenic containers and related medical equipment from the Gulf and south-east Asia.

As on Saturday, the



Indian Air Force (IAF) had also carried out 28 sorties from abroad, airlifting 47

oxygen containers with 830 MT of capacity, while from within the country, it carried out 158 sorties, airlifting 109 containers with 2,271 MT capacity.

The Navy and the Air Force have also supplied nearly 500 portable oxygen cylinders from their stores to various civilian hospitals.

In a statement, the ministry of defence (MoD)

said, "In support of the nation's fight against Covid-19 and as part of operation 'Samudra Setu II', seven Indian Naval ships viz. *Kolkata, Kochi, Talwar, Tabar, Trikan, Jalashwa* and *Airavat* have been deployed for shipment of liquid medical oxygen-filled cryogenic containers and associated medical equipment from various countries."

'Give O2 or face contempt'

New Delhi, May 1: The Delhi High Court directed the Centre to supply 490 metric tonne of allocated oxygen to the national capital on Saturday itself, or face contempt.

The court took note of eight deaths in Batra Hospital due to lack of oxygen supply and told the government "enough is enough".

"Do you mean we will shut our eyes to the people dying in Delhi," it asked the Centre.

"We mean business. Water has gone above the head," the court said and declined to defer its order.

The court said the government had made an allocation of oxygen to Delhi and should fulfill it.

The court also directed all hospitals to provide information on daily admissions and discharge of Covid-19 patients and of those admitted for over 10 days, since April 1.

A bench of justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli, which held a four-hour-long special hearing on a holiday on issues relating to the Covid-19 situation, said it appears there is choking of beds taking place in hospitals and nursing homes. — PTI

EC petitions SC against HC

New Delhi, May 1: The Election Commission (EC) moved the Supreme Court on Saturday, challenging the critical observations made by the Madras High Court holding it responsible for a surge in Covid-19 cases in the country, saying the remarks were "uncalled for, blatant and disparaging".

A bench of justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah would hear the appeal of the poll panel against the orders of the high court on Monday.

The high court had, on April 26, castigated the EC for the surge in Covid-19

cases during the second wave of the pandemic, holding it "singularly" responsible for the spread of the viral disease, called it the "the most irresponsible institution" and even said its officials may be booked under murder charges.

The EC's appeal against these remarks was trashed by the division bench of the high court on April 30, leading the poll watchdog to approach the top court. "We have filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the high court orders," EC's counsel Amit Sharma said. — PTI

1.5 lakh doses of Sputnik V arrive

Hyderabad/New Delhi, May 1: As many as 150,000 doses of first consignment of the Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine landed here from Russia on Saturday, Dr Reddys Laboratories said.

The drug maker, which has tied up with Russian Direct Investment Fund for the vaccine, said in a statement that the initial quantity will be used across different channels as a pilot to line up the supply chain for the larger vaccination program rollout.

Subsequent consignments will arrive in the next few weeks, it further said.

"We are pleased to announce that the first consignment of 150,000 doses of the Sputnik V vaccine has landed in Hyderabad from Russia."

"The rollout of the consignment will be subject to the necessary clearances, which will be processed over the next few days," Deepak Sapra, chief executive officer of



API and Services, Dr. Reddys, said.

In September 2020, Dr. Reddys and RDIF entered into a partnership to conduct clinical trials of Sputnik V, developed by the Gamaleya National Research Institute of Microbiology and the rights for distribution of the first 100 million doses in India.

Later it was enhanced to 125 million.

Dr Reddys has already received approval from Indian drug regulator for restricted emergency use of Sputnik V.

Sputnik V will be the third vaccine to be used in India against coronavirus. — PTI

been closed since March last year and, this week, the government clamped down even further, banning all flights, including repatriation dashes, from India.

According to the ABC, it is for the first time that Australia has made it a criminal offence for its own citizens to enter the country.

The ministry said the decision will be revised on May 15 following advice

from the chief medical officer (CMO).

"The CMO will consider the epidemiology in India and likely impacts on Australia's quarantine capacity, and provide a further expert assessment of the public health risk to Australia to inform a proportionate response," it said, adding it is important that the integrity of the Australian public health and quarantine system are protected. — PTI



GST revenues for April hit all-time high of ₹1.41 lakh

New Delhi, May 1: Collections under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in April touched a record high of over Rs 1.41 lakh crore, indicating sustained economic recovery, the finance ministry said on Saturday.

The revenues for the month of April 2021 are 14 per cent higher than Rs 1.23 lakh crore collected in March.

During the month, the revenues from domestic transaction (including import of services) are 21 per cent higher over the last month.

"GST revenues have not only crossed the Rs 1 lakh crore mark successively for the last seven months but have also shown a steady increase," the ministry said. "These are clear indicators of sustained economic recovery during this period. Closer monitoring against fake-billing, deep data analytics using data from multiple sources including GST, income-tax and customs IT systems and effective tax administration have also contributed to the steady increase in tax revenue."

The gross GST revenue collected in the month of April 2021 is at a record high of Rs 1,41,384 crore, of which CGST is Rs 27,837 crore, SGST Rs 35,621 crore, IGST Rs 68,481 crore (including Rs 29,599 crore collected on import of goods) and cess Rs 9,445 crore (including Rs 981 crore collected on import of goods). The ministry said businesses are paying their GST dues in a timely manner. — PTI

Australia threatens to jail returnees from India

Melbourne, May 1: Australian citizens could face five-year jail term or hefty fines up to A\$66,000 if they try to return home from India after Canberra made the journey temporarily illegal in an effort to curb the spread of the deadly viral infection in this country.

The temporary ban begins on Monday and applies to any travellers who have visited India within 14 days of their

intended arrival date in Australia.

There are an estimated 9,000 Australians in India and over 600 of them are classified as vulnerable, according to *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper.

The decision was announced by the health ministry on Friday after a meeting of the national cabinet. The move aims at keeping the coronavirus spread in check in

Australia as India is facing a surge in infections cases.

The decision was based on the proportion of overseas travellers in quarantine in Australia, who have contracted the infection in India, health minister Greg Hunt said.

The move was due to an "unmanageable" number of arrivals from the country who have tested positive for Covid-19, he was quoted as saying by the state-run Australian

Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

Breaches of the travel ban could lead to five years' imprisonment, a A\$66,000 fine or both, the report said. "Failure to comply with an emergency determination under the Biosecurity Act, 2015, may incur a civil penalty of 300 penalty units, five years' imprisonment or both," the health ministry said in a statement.

Australia's borders have

OTHER STORY

Customs seize gold and red sanders

Chennai, May 1: Air customs at the Chennai Airport on Saturday seized gold from Mohamed Badurudeen, a passenger from Dubai and arrested him. Based on intelligence, Mohamed Badurudeen (23) of Nagapattinam, who arrived from Dubai by an Emirates flight, was intercepted at the exit as he was hurrying through and appearing to be nervous. He was questioned and a 55" LED TV he was carrying was taken up for examination. On opening the back cover of the TV, two heavy black rectangular bars were found ingeniously concealed inside the speakers. Two gold bars weighing 1.2 kg valued at ₹57.75 lakhs were found inside.

Chennai Sea Customs officials foiled an attempt to smuggle red sanders valued at about ₹5 crore to Taiwan. The Customs Department said that on receipt of specific intelligence officials intercepted an export container concealing 6.4 tonnes of red sanders valued at ₹5 crore and seized it.

The prohibited goods were camouflaged as pavement stone and declared for shipment to Taiwan, to escape examination, the Customs said. —DC

1 Lakh cops deployed for counting exercise security

Chennai, May 1: All arrangements are in place for counting of votes on Sunday as per Covid-19 guidelines for the Assembly polls held on April 6 in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry as political parties anxiously await the results.

Counting is set to start at 8 am in 75 counting centres across Tamil Nadu and all arrangements are in place to smoothly conduct the exercise, which would be monitored by observers, authorities said. Chennai has three counting centres, Loyola College, Queen Mary's College and Anna University.

Directions, including RT-PCR tests and two doses of vaccination for candidates and agents to enter counting halls, would be followed strictly. Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo participated in a virtual meet chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra, who reviewed the counting arrangements in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Cumulatively, there would be 3,372 EVM tables and depending on the constituency and votes polled, the counting exercise is estimated to be completed after

anywhere between 13 and 43 rounds in each of the 234 Assembly segments.

Separately, there would be tables to count postal ballots and in total, it shall be 4,000 plus tables. Over 16,000 personnel have been deployed to perform the counting exercise. Postal ballots would be taken up first and EVM votes half-an hour later.

The counting centres, with CCTV surveillance, have been brought under a three-tier security cover with personnel from Central Armed Police Forces and the state police guarding the strong rooms. The arrangement is set to continue till the completion of the process.

In total, over one lakh police personnel have been deployed across the state for the counting exercise and authorities said that as per guidelines, no 'victory procession' or congregations by parties would be allowed.

There are nearly 4,000 (3,998) candidates in the fray, including top AIADMK leaders, Chief Minister K Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam. DMK president MK Stalin and his son and party youth wing secretary, Udhayanidhi Stalin, who is seek-

ing to enter the Assembly for the first time.

AIADMK's rival and Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) chief TTV Dhinakaran, MNM's Kamal Haasan, BJP state unit chief L Murugan and the saffron party's Khushboo Sundar are among the prominent candidates. AMMK-DMK combine and Nam Thamizhar Katchi are also in the fray.

Polls were held to 234 constituencies in Tamil Nadu and by-election was also held to the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat, where Congress party's Vijay Vasanth and BJP leader and former union minister, Pon Radhakrishnan are the key candidates.

In the union territory of Puducherry, the former Chief Minister N Rangaswamy-led All India NR Congress-BJP-AIADMK alliance and Congress-DMK combine are the key contenders for power. Exit polls have predicted a win for the front led by Rangaswamy.

As many as 1,382 personnel would be deployed for counting of votes in the UT, while about 400 police personnel shall be on security duties. —PTI

Thanjavur all set for counting

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, MAY 1

Counting of votes for the eight assembly segments will be taken up in three counting centres in Thanjavur, Kumbakonam and Pattukottai, in Thanjavur district, on Sunday.

Votes will be counted on 14 tables for each constituency and rounds will differ for each of them. Thanjavur Collector-cum-district election officer,

M. Govinda Rao, said that votes for Thanjavur assembly constituency will be counted in 29 rounds, Thiruvaiyaru in 28 rounds, Kumbakonam in 27 rounds, Papanasam and Thiruvudaimarthur in 26 rounds each, Orathanadu and Pattukottai in 25 rounds and Peravurani in 23 rounds. IAS officers from other states have been appointed as observers (counting) for each assembly constituency.

Votes will be counted at Kundavai Nachiyar Government Arts College for Women in Thanjavur for Thanjavur, Orathanadu and Thiruvaiyaru assembly constituencies, at Kumbakonam Government Arts College for Kumbakonam, Thiruvudaimarthur and Papanasam assembly constituencies and for Pattukottai and Peravurani at the Government Boys Higher Secondary School, Pattukottai.



Anna University will be one of the counting centres in Chennai.

As D-Day dawns, the wait for people's verdict is over

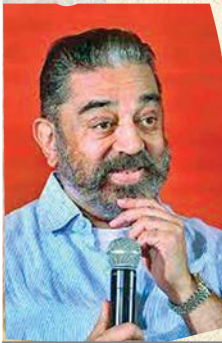
R. Mohan

Namma
Chennai diary

There is a saying in cricket that you must wait till the last ball is bowled. That won't suit the exit pollsters who must venture to place the fruits of their findings in public space as early as possible. No sooner the last vote was cast in an excruciatingly long 8-phase Bengal poll than the pollsters began telling their story with a bang in the highly cinematic manner of today's visual media. This business of psephology is not too far removed from astrology though the inputs come from people rather than the stars here. The rule of thumb is you take exit polls with a pinch of iodised salt.

It is the universality of their predictions across four of the five regions which voted that gives them greater credibility this time. All of them seem convinced that Tamil Nadu will see DMK storm back to power and the Left Front in Kerala will buck anti-incumbency while Puducherry will flip from UPA to NDA. Many of them were wrong about Tamil Nadu in 2016 when they predicted a DMK victory though in the sweepstakes in Deccan Chronicle office everyone was right in predicting Jaya's AIADMK would come back and they differed only about the margin.

The gap between the time the last vote was cast and the announcement of the results is not so big this time even though the poll itself was held in the first week of April and we will soon have all the numbers of the people's verdict. The chief minister, Edappadi Palaniswami, was right when he said that a Tamil TV station, which takes polls so seriously as to predict the possible verdict in each seat, did not give him a chance in 2016 in Edappadi whereas he won by a margin of over 42,000 votes. Such are



POLL FACTOIDS

VOTE COUNT

72.81% April 6 (In 2016 turnout 74.81%)

4,57,76,311 Total votes polled

2,31,71,736 Women

2,26,03,156 Men

1,419 Third gender

Highs & Lows

■ KAMAL tried to be a very serious politician but results may not match his efforts

■ IN THE WINGS Stalin might get just reward for his patient waiting in the wings for several decades

2016 Results - Seats won

■ AIADMK 136

■ DMK + 98 (DMK 89, Congress 8, IUML 1)

■ BJP 0, PMK 0, DMKD 0, TMK 0, VCK 0, CPI 0, CPM 0,



the vagaries of micro predictions.

If the verdict in Tamil Nadu is as forecast, the ruling party, which has had a good run of 10 years despite the major hurdle of losing Jayalalithaa along the way, would have to introspect on whether it had made mistakes in dealing with the complex caste equations of the State. The major whisper one heard in the course of the run-up to the polling day and soon afterwards was that AIADMK may have erred in granting the 10.5 per cent reservation in education and jobs (within the 20 per cent quota for MBCs) sought by the PMK for Vanniya. People of other castes, including the Thevars who are diehard AIADMK supporters, were not pleased with the privilege granted to one community only with an eye on the vote bank, that too very close to the election.

Over time, reservation has become such an entitlement in terms of community and caste that it is bound to play a big role in the equilibrium of caste equations too. The building of vote banks plays

a role too. BJP, an alliance partner of AIADMK, inspired a positive change by bringing Pallars and six other Dalit sub-castes under the Scheduled Caste list with the common name of Devendrakula Vellalar. However, since the AIADMK stated in its manifest that it was for naming the Madurai international airport as Muthuramalinga Thevar Airport, it may have alienated the DVKs who want it to be named after their own Immanuel Sekar.

The ruling party may have further miscalculated in terms of seeking support of castes in denying Puthiya Thamizhagam its minor place in the alliance, however small the outfit may be. Word on the ground has it that Kongu Nadu in the west may have kept its faith with the ruling party. Whether that is sufficient to propel it again towards power is moot even if a sweep of the 60 seats in the west would represent more than a quarter of the assembly strength of 234. It is Chennai, the central districts and the south that may have decided AIADMK's fate in the

bid to defy anti-incumbency, a term without which no election analysis is complete. Curiously, it was also said that there was no great feeling of anti-incumbency, particularly since the chief minister who, as a well grounded person, confidently backed his key officials in the fight against the pandemic. If there is one particular reason to pick as the defining reason for the possible outcome in Tamil Nadu is that the ruling AIADMK lost its image with the voter because it aligned with the BJP. This may have been seen as an affront to Tamil identity. While the same may not apply to the Union Territory of Puducherry where Rangasamy's image might have swung the popular vote, it is true that Tamil Nadu is dead against the BJP and it may take the national party years of work to set that right. For Congress, hanging on to coattails has become part of its DNA.

(R. Mohan is Resident Editor of the Chennai and Coimbatore editions of Deccan Chronicle)



SECURITY BEEFED UP

(Top) Loyola College, one among Chennai counting centres, saw Police personnel visit for inspection day before the counting. —DC

(Left) District Collector K.Vijayakarthyayan inspects a vote counting centre at LRG college in Tiruppur on Saturday. —DC

Comply with Covid protocols, top city cop appeals

From P1

Of them, 155 have taken both doses of Covid-19 vaccines while RTPCR tests were conducted on 911 counting officials. Apart from this, 153 media persons have also taken RTPCR tests.

Meanwhile, Chennai city police said that the candidates, chief agents and counting agents would be allowed to bring only plain paper or notepad and a duplicate copy of Form-17C, furnished by the presiding officer concerned. Holders of passes issued by the Election Commission will

be allowed with hand-held cameras. No one is permitted to carry cell phones, cameras, firearms, explosive substances, pen knives, sticks, water bottles, tins, containers, tiffin boxes, matches, lighters, liquids or chemicals and edible items. No one is permitted to carry sharp objects and objectionable materials inside the counting centre, the police said.

Since the Election Commission of India (ECI) banned all forms of victory celebrations in the view of ongoing pandemic, the Greater Chennai Police have beefed up

security in all four counting stations in order to ensure peaceful counting of votes. Police Commissioner Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal appealed to the representatives of political parties and candidates to comply with the Covid-19 protocols.

"Only people who are authorised need to come to the centres. No additional person other than the candidates, chief agents and counting agents would be allowed to enter the centres. Any crowding outside the counting centre is prohibited," the commissioner said.

Meanwhile, political parties

have asked its chief agents and counting agents to be vigilant on the counting day. The AIADMK, responding to the exit poll prediction, said exit-poll results were against them in the 2016 election also but within a few hours of counting the party had emerged victorious with a majority and formed a government under the leadership of the late chief minister J. Jayalalithaa.

DMK president M.K. Stalin, however, urged party cadre to stay home and not gather at public places to celebrate the party victory on Sunday.

A return to politics amidst coronavirus havoc



G. Babu Jayakumar

Just spamming

The long interregnum between polling and counting of votes turned out to be a period of distress. A sudden spike in Covid-19 cases coupled with a mad scramble for beds, drugs and vaccines took the collective concern of the people away from the EVMs that were locked up in 75 centres. So when political interest was revived by the exit poll results a couple of days ago, there was a suspicion if it was to divert the attention from the worsening pandemic

conditions.

Well, the curiosity in people to know who would win the election, in which they had just cast their vote and forgotten about it, is fully legit as every voter has the right to know if someone with a penchant to lock up a distraught youth in jail for seeking a medicine for his ailing father through social media could become the next Chief Minister. Also the next regime can play a better role in managing the health crisis and hence it is natural for

people to know who would win.

Since there is no inherent insensitivity behind talking politics even if long queues are formed in the scorching sun for a vial of drug, let's take a trip down memory lane to the elections. Oh, again let us now squarely blame the elections, the rallies and the campaigns for the spurt in Covid-19 cases. For the States, from where vignettes of agonized long queues outside hospitals, crematoriums, pharmacies and oxygen warehouses and harrowing tales of deaths due to lack of medical help came in, did not actually go to the polls in April.

The hustings that preceded the April 6 election, which might have turned hazy in our collective memories overwhelmed by recent images from the scene of

persisting pestilence, saw many urbanized, modern-day, fashionably attired people, who would otherwise look at politics contemptuously, donning the candidate's cap. One party that facilitated many such people with a modern outlook to enter the fray was Kamal Haasan's Makkal Neethi Maiaam. But the entire brigade failed to make an enduring impression in the electoral theatre and among their specific electorates, probably with the sole exception of Haasan, because they lacked in perseverance, a basic necessity in politics.

Of course other parties too had candidates of that category – spiffy first timers with a confident swagger and a new approach to vote getting. Possibly some candidates of Naam Thamizhar Katchi, led by actor Seeman,

would have fitted the bill. For the party had given 50 per cent seats to women. But they remained in total obscurity, not even familiar to the local people with Seeman grabbing the limelight.

Otherwise, there was Khushboo, fielded by the BJP in Thousand Lights, who went about the constituency with ease hugging women and entering their kitchens, all the time dressed elegantly. If she does not make it when the results come, it should be blamed on her prime opponent, who happened to be more flamboyant. As DMK's nominee, Ezhilan Naganathan, even dispensed with medical advice – of course he is an accomplished medical practitioner – to sick voters as he went about seeking their votes. He came across as a new generation politician

with contemporary views.

Similarly, another DMK candidate with a difference was Karthikeyan Sivasenapathy, who is primarily into protecting the environment and conservation of native cattle breeds. Taking on an old guard of the AIADMK, S P Velumani, at his home turf, Thondamuthur, he hopes to make a mark despite being new to politics. He efficiently used social media to highlight some of the alleged attacks on him from the rival camps, which is a sign of modern outlook.

Then, there was the former IPS officer K Annamalai, fighting it out in Aravakurichi in a BJP ticket, who in the course of the campaign trail became infamous by saying that he has another face, meaning that he was a violent person as a

police officer in Karnataka. Another youngster the BJP fielded in Harbour constituency was Vinoj P Selvam, who even tried to endear himself to a section of voters in a slum area by promising to build free toilets with his own money, if he won the polls. He also managed to endear himself equally to the rich North Indian population in the constituency.

DMK's candidate for Thiruvallikeni-Chepauk, Udhayanidhi Stalin, however, was the first time contestant who really created a stir all over the State. Apart from DMK President MK Stalin, AIADMK's Chief Ministerial candidate Edappadi K Palaniswami and probably Seeman, it was Udhayanidhi Stalin who went on a whirlwind tour of all constituencies. That he

drew huge crowds and his manner of speaking became popular put him in the top league of politicians in his debut electoral bid itself.

Raising a brick at a meeting, saying that it was the AIIMS in Madurai that he had brought along to show them, and his displaying household articles to know the price of them from the crowd and then mentioning the rates at which the government bought them to highlight the corruption in purchase of articles were two instances through which he connected well with people. Whether the new breed of politicians make it to the Assembly or not they are likely to add a new flavor to politics. So let's welcome them to the world of politics as a winner may even contribute to efficient tackling of the pandemic.

OTHER STORY

Hyundai posts total sales of 59,203 units in April

New Delhi, May 1: Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) on Saturday reported total sales of 59,203 units in April 2021, a decline of 8 per cent from 64,621 units it had sold in March this year. Domestic sales stood at 49,002 units, while exports were at 10,201 units last month, the company said in a statement. April sales this year are not comparable with that of the same month last year as there were no domestic sales due to the nationwide lockdown imposed in the wake of the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic in the country.

The company, however, exported 1,341 units in April last year. HMIL Director (Sales, Marketing and Service) Tarun Garg said, "In these challenging times, we stand in solidarity with the nation and are continuing all efforts to support the affected... While our efforts presently focus primarily on supporting the lives and livelihood of people, we have also received positive sales results in April 2021."

—PTI

IOB launches retail loans on digital platform

Chennai, May 1: Indian Overseas Bank has launched retail loans (home loan, personal loan & clean loan) on digital platform. The loans are now available through various channels - bank website (www.iob.in), Internet Banking and Mobile Banking App. IOB customers may apply for these loans through the bank website, mobile banking and internet banking, while non-customers may apply only through the bank website.

Applicants may apply for housing loans and home loans under PMAY schemes. They will also have the option to switch over their home loans from other banks to IOB. Applicants may also apply for two & four wheeler loans and personal loans in easy steps. The launch was presided over by Mr. Partha Pratim Sengupta, MD&CEO, IOB in the presence of EDs Mr. A. K. Srivastava and Mrs. Srirathy S. The digital Loan Initiative is a step towards providing enhanced banking experience.

FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

State adds nearly 20k Covid-19 cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 1

Tamil Nadu added 19,588 new Covid-19 cases on Saturday and as many as 147 persons lost their lives. The comparable figures of infections and deaths on Friday were 18,692 and 113 deaths. The Covid-19 tally in the state has touched 11,86,344 while the death toll has reached 14,193 including 4,791 in Chennai.

The city recorded a total of 5,829 new cases and 47 deaths on Saturday, which is a jump from 5,473 new cases 42 deaths on Friday. The number of cases in the district touched 3,39,797.

Chengalpattu district, which had added 1,215 new cases on Friday, reported 1,445 cases on Saturday. A total of 11 people also succumbed in the district. Total cases in the district now stand at 80,038.

The number of daily cases in Coimbatore has gone up to 1,257 from 1,113 on Friday. One death was also reported. While Selam (594) Madurai (711), Thoothukudi (638), Tirunelveli (812), Thiruvallur (779), and Trichy (528) reported 500-plus cases districts like Erode (357) Kancheepuram (473), Krishnagiri (422) Theni (363) Tiruppur (438),

Thanjavur (492) Tirupur (438), Villupuram (354), Virudhunagar (405) and Vellore (442) recorded 300-plus cases. Apart from this, 8 districts crossed the 200 mark and 6 districts reported over 100 cases.

The contribution of Chennai and surrounding districts including Thiruvallur and Chengalpattu on Saturday was 8,053, a rise from 7,593 on Friday. The daily active cases had gone up to 1,17,405 from 1,15,128 on Friday. The daily total active cases in Chennai district touched 31,475, a surge from 31,222 of Friday.

While Salem and

Thiruvallur recorded 14 deaths each, 7 people died of Covid-19 at Tirupattur. The death toll in other districts - Cuddalore-2, Dindigul-4, Erode-5, Kancheepuram-6, Kanyakumari-4, Ranipet-2, Thenkasi-3, Theni-2, Thiruvannamalai-2, Thoothukudi-2, Tirunelveli-6, Trichy-5, and Vellore-4. Apart from this, 7 other districts reported one death each.

A total of 1,45,731 persons were subjected to Covid tests through 264 labs while total individual tests on Friday were 1,38,235. At least 2,24,24,611 individuals have been tested so far in the state.



Mega Covid screening centre with X-Rays and laboratory was set up by Omandhurar government hospital and Madras Medical College at Kendriya Vidhyala school near Chennai Central on Saturday.

—DC



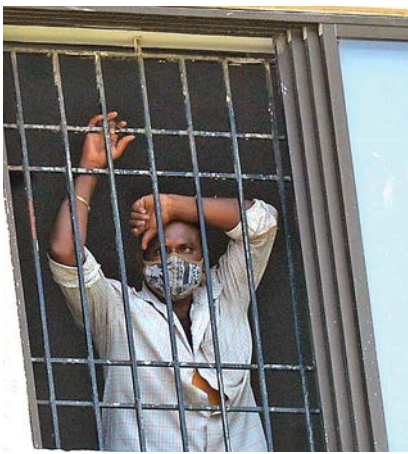
11 VIALS OF REMDESIVIR SEIZED

From P1

The officials of Kanchipuram civil supplies CID laid a trap and caught them red-handed in Pallakaranai. Six vials of Remdesivir drugs were seized from them.

Meanwhile, in another incident, based on a tip-off that a gang was indulging in the illegal act of selling drugs in the black market, the Kanchi Civil Supplies CID team caught two persons including a doctor in Pallavaram.

The arrested were identified as doctor John Kingsley (41). He had procured Remdesivir from Perumal, (30) a pharmacist. Eleven vials of Remdesivir were seized from them.



A day at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital in Chennai on Saturday.

—E.K.SANJAY

Workers given sweets on May day

K.SENTHIL NATHAN | DC
VELLORE, MAY 1

Over 2,000 workers of the Vellore Corporation were on Saturday given sweets by municipal Commissioner, Sankaran. Vellore district is divided into four zones where about 2,000 sanitary workers are employed.

These workers through thick and thin go door to door every day and collect garbage, and sort it. In addition, they are involved in dengue mosquito eradication programme and swine flu prevention programme. Currently, they are fully involved in Corona eradication.

All the streets in the corporation area are being cleaned by these workers. They also go

around houses distributing 'Kapusura' medicinal drink, to tackle Corona.

In appreciation of their hard labour, Commissioner Sankaran had ordered providing sweets to the sanitary workers in the corporation, on the eve of Labour Day. Sanitation supervisors who served well during the Corona period were honoured by the commissioner in a function held at the old bus stand in Vellore.

Two such workers were honoured by Commissioner Sankaran with shawls. All others were provided sweets, hand gloves and other sanitary safety kits. Town welfare officer Chithra Sena and regional health officer, Shivakumar, were present.

Shopkeepers, traders stage black flag protest in Vellore

DC CORRESPONDENT
VELLORE, MAY 1

Shop owners and traders staged a black flag protest here on Saturday demanding opening of shops whose premises span around 3,000 square feet.

The government had announced closing of commercial establishments all across the state, which had commercial space of 3,000 square feet and above, in an effort to contain the rapid spread of the second Covid-19 wave.

Opposing this, members of the trading community on behalf of the Vellore Merchants' Association

staged a protest on Saturday near Netaji market. Gnanavelu, district president, Chamber of Commerce, presided. Secretary A.V.M. Kumar, vice-presidents Balu and Ramesh Kumar, district youth wing secretary Arun Prasad, several executives, members and others carried black banners and chanted slogans demanding withdrawal of the government order to close the shops.

Besides their demand to withdraw the shop closure order, the protesters urged the concerned authorities in future to convene a meeting with trader associations before announc-

ing curfews. They said that the merchant community was also mindful of the pandemic crisis and the welfare of the public. If shops of 3,000 square feet are closed, then public would flock to smaller shops, which again would violate social distancing norms, which is vital to stop the Corona spread.

Hence, they suggested that the authorities can enforce curfew every alternate day, so that both the public demand as well as traders' revenue would be met in a balanced manner.

Several traders in the market areas also joined the black flag protest.

1,700 kgs of chemically ripened mangoes seized

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC
SALEM, MAY 1

About 1,700 kgs of chemically ripened mangoes were seized near Ayodhyapatnam in Salem on Saturday.

With the onset of the mango season in the district, there were complaints that mangoes were being sprayed with chemicals to ripen fast. During an inspection by a team of food security officers in Mettupatti Dathanur village, Ayodhyapatnam area, on Saturday,

officials found about 1,700 kg of mangoes, three litres of ethanol and four litres of dissolved ethanol in a warehouse owned by Venkatesh, and seized it.

The confiscated fruits valued at ₹1.40 lakh and chemicals were dumped at the Chettichavadi landfill owned by the Salem Corporation. The warehouse owner will also be prosecuted under the Food Security Act, said district Food Security Officer, Kathiravan.

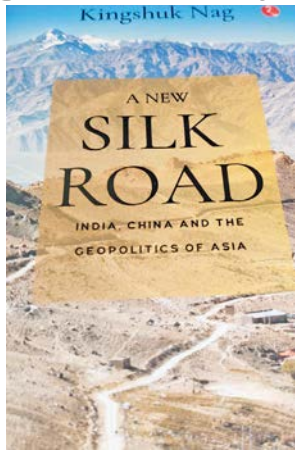
Decoding the mystery that is China

R.MOHAN | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 1

There are very few who can claim to know China well enough to offer an analytical view other than the superficial one of what a mystery China is. It was a revelation then to read A New Silk Road by Kingshuk Nag. Everyone is aware of how aggressive China has been against India since 1962. What the author provides here is a huge amount of background news and their effects on how India-China geopolitics is playing out post Galwan Valley of 2020.

As Xi Jinping motored down from Chennai to Mamallapuram over a couple of days in 2019, shortly after having rocked with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the same ornate Onjal (swing) in Ahmedabad, it did seem a huge breakthrough had been made and that the ties between the two countries were going to improve out of sight. Imagine our surprise that PLA troops must behave as they did on the LAC in 2020.

The essence of the character India is dealing with may have been captured in a few



A NEW SILK ROAD - INDIA, CHINA AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF ASIA

AUTHOR: KINGSHUK NAG
(RUPA PUBLICATIONS)

scathing lines on Xi - "After a difficult childhood (preceded by a privileged background), Xi has metamorphosed into a heartless but passionate power player. He has forgotten his old days and from a victim, he has transformed into a cruel megalomaniac. One can only wonder if he will ever have the sensitivity to reflect on what he has turned into.

BOOK | REVIEW

This is the tragedy of Xi Jinping."

Xi is also in the midst of consolidating his position after having changed his party constitution to become the president for life. Things may, however, brewing in terms of discontent in the inner party at levels just below him and he may be reacting to all that even as international pressure rises on the suppression of Uighur Muslims. To understand Xi, it becomes important to know what is happening in China whose news curtain is nearly total in not letting news come in, much less go out.

China was engaging with India in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation even when facing the condemnation of the world in the wake of the coronavirus. While most analysts may insist that China got proactively aggressive in the Ladakh LAC as a diversion to Covid, the author attributes it to the ambitious plans Xi has for his nation. It is to strengthen the China Pakistan Economic Corridor that leads from the Gwadar port in Balochistan

to China's Xinjiang province and passes through PoK that Xi is acting as he is with the Asian subcontinent.

The author presents, in much detail, the history of China and how it came to add on provinces like Tibet, Xinjiang and a part of PoK also. He brings out the kind of importance that China is attaching to the trade corridor with Pakistan as well as the OBOR project, which it is dangling in front of many nations in order to cement its superiority and flex its economic clout. There is a warning that such projects might ultimately become debt traps as we have seen in Sri Lanka, etc. But, are people listening?

To keep ourselves informed of China and its intentions is to keep ourselves prepared for what the neighbor may have in store for us even as a trade imbalance before Covid-19 hit seemed to balloon out of control and in favour of China. And then, of course, there is the matter of China leading India on after sweet-talking the nation into surrendering the advantage of Galwan Valley heights that had been dearly gained in the confrontation of 2020.

HC quashes order suspending operations of 100+ brick kilns

J.STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 1

Slamming Coimbatore District officials for not discharging their duties properly as mandated by the statute, Madras high court set aside the orders of the Tahsildar, Coimbatore, suspending more than 100 brick kilns operating in the district.

Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana was passing orders on a batch of petitions from K.Sundarraj and 112 others, challenging the orders of the Tahsildar ordering disconnection of power supply, suspension and closure of the brick kilns and seizure of the premises.

Setting aside Tahsildar's orders, Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana said "The Coimbatore District Collector, who is the competent authority under the statute, shall pass appropriate orders with respect to all the petitioners after affording them a hearing within four weeks. The orders would be treated as notices to the petitioners for appearing before the District Collector and no separate notice would be issued to the petitioners who are at liber-



ty to submit all relevant documents in support of their claims. It is made clear that no further extension of time would be granted to the District Collector to complete the above exercise of passing the appropriate orders qua these petitioners."

Concurring with the submission of senior counsel P.Wilson and other counsels for the petitioners that the Revenue Tahsildar, who passed the order, was not vested with the power to pass such orders, it was the District Collector, who alone was competent to pass such order, the judge said. She added that it was the duty of the Tahsildar and other officials, who could be placed on a par with the Taluk Level Task Force, only to examine the adherence to norms in

terms of the licence and submit a report to the District Collector and they can do nothing more than that and the competent authority alone can initiate action against the offenders.

Referring to the submission of the petitioners that they had valid licence till 2011 and they sought renewal of the same every year in vain, after remitting the necessary charges, the judge said there was no explanation forthcoming from the officials as to what was done with respect to the renewal applications, which were only piling up every year without any process, in spite of receiving the fees paid by the petitioners, which runs to several lakh rupees. The counter affidavit filed by the government was also silent about further action taken on the applications for renewal of licences. The petitioners were made to continue to invest money in men and material and now face the wrath of this court. They have been carrying on quarrying activities for more than a decade, by simply remitting the licence fees without valid licence.

"The authorities have also turned a deaf ear and blind eye to these illegal activities

without taking any appropriate action in the manner known to law. The authorities are duty bound to regulate the brick kilns activities by reviewing the permission/licence or clearance granted to the petitioners, which they failed. This shows the callous attitude of the authorities in the discharge of their duties. It is unfortunate to note that the entire district administration, in dealing with the issue at hand, failed to discharge their duties as mandated by the statute. When the authorities are empowered to function under a statute they are expected to act accordingly. There may be bona fide loss to any person in discharge of the duties," she said.

"The Earth is common for all creatures and one should not encroach upon the other's space. All creatures have their own role in balancing the ecological and food cycle. Despite the statute mandating several restrictions, the breach of the same by the authorities and the petitioners renders the same useless. It is high time that the authorities should act with more responsibility," the judge added.

SHORT TAKES

COUNTING OF VOTES IN UP AFTER SC'S NOD

Lucknow, May 1: Counting of votes for the panchayat polls in Uttar Pradesh will be held on Sunday with the Supreme Court on Saturday refusing to stay the process and the State Election Commission (SEC) saying the candidates and their agents will be allowed to enter the counting centres only if they have tested negative for Covid-19 in the 48 hours prior to the commencement of the counting process or taken both doses of the vaccine.

In a special urgent hearing on a holiday, a bench of justices AM Khanwilkar and Hrishikesh Roy passed the order after taking note of several notifications and assurances of the SEC that the Covid-19 protocols will be followed at all the 829 counting centres.

The court directed that there will be a strict curfew in the entire state till Tuesday morning and no victory rallies will be permitted. It also asked the SEC to fix the responsibility for observance of Covid-19 protocols at the counting centres on gazetted officers.

The bench directed the poll panel to preserve the CCTV footage of the counting centres till the Allahabad High Court concludes its hearings on the related petitions before it.

It also ordered that the government officials, candidates and their agents will have to produce RT-PCR test reports to show that they are Covid-19 negative before entering the counting centres.

The Uttar Pradesh Prathmik Shikshak Sangh (UPPSS), in a letter dated April 29 and addressed to the chief minister and the state election commissioner, had said if the counting of votes on May 2 was not cancelled, the teachers will boycott poll duty.

KUMBH RETURNEE SEER IS DEAD

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MAY 1

A seer who returned here after attending Kumbh Mela at Hardwar in Uttarakhand on Saturday died of Covid-19.

Seer of famous Gufa Mandir here Pt. Chandrama Das Tyagi (42), who was admitted to a private hospital here after he tested positive for coronavirus a couple of weeks ago, succumbed to Covid-19.

According to doctors treating the seer, his lung was cent-per cent infected by the virus.

According to Pt. Krishna of the shrine, the priest along with his two dozen disciples had gone to Hardwar Kumbh and returned here 15 days ago. The seer tested positive for the virus, while others were found not infected.

The seer was admitted in a private hospital here immediately after he tested positive. He passed away this afternoon.

Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed grief over the demise of the seer.

Senior BJP leader and Rajya Sabha member Jyotiraditya Scindia has also expressed his anguish over the death of the seer.

Meanwhile, 22 of the 83 devotees who returned to Gyasara in Vidisha district in Madhya Pradesh after attending the Kumbh were found missing, pressing the panic button in the local administration.

Of the remaining 61, 60 have tested positive for Covid-19.

Delhi extends lockdown till May 10 after 27,000 new cases

National capital also battles shortage of beds, oxygen in its hospitals

New Delhi, May 1: Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced an extension of the ongoing lockdown in Delhi by another week on Saturday amid a sudden surge in Covid-19 cases as the national capital battles an acute shortage of beds and medical oxygen in its hospitals.

"Lockdown in Delhi is being extended by one week," Kejriwal said in a tweet.

The lockdown that was scheduled to be in force till 5 am on Monday now stands extended by another week till May 10.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), in its order on the extension of the lockdown, stated that a review of the pandemic situation showed that the numbers of positive cases, positivity rate as well as bed occupancy (oxygen-supported or ICU beds) in the dedicated Covid-19 hospitals are very high.

"...therefore, in order to contain the spread of the virus and break the transmission chain, the curfew needs to be extended for another week in the territory of NCT of Delhi (except for essential activities and services)," it said.

In view of the spiralling number of fresh Covid cases and a high positivity rate, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government imposed the lockdown in Delhi on April 19. It was subsequently extended by a week on April 25.

The DDMA has directed to extend the curfew (lockdown) on the movement of individuals (except for essential activities and services) till 5 am on May 10 or further orders, whichever is earlier.

The Covid situation in the national capital is extremely grim as the festering crisis due to the shortage of oxygen claimed 12 lives in the Batra hospital on Saturday, even as the Centre and the city government are involved in a blame game.

The number of fresh Covid cases is still soaring, despite the lockdown.

The number of positive cases in a 24-hour period stood at over 27,000 with a positivity rate of 32.69 per cent and 375 deaths, according to the Delhi government's health bulletin on Friday.

"We will have to watch the situation for a few more days whether the number of cases decreases or increases," Kejriwal had said on the first extension of the lockdown.

Chamber of Trade and Industry chairman Brijesh Goyal said 65 per cent of the traders are in favour of an extension of the lockdown.

Community platform LocalCircles said 75 per cent respondents in a survey conducted by it in the national capital favoured extending the lockdown.

Many believe that till Delhi goes back to a daily caseload of 10,000 and a test positivity rate of less than 10 per cent, the lockdown would be needed, LocalCircles chairman Sachin Taparia said. — PTI

● **THE NUMBER** of positive cases in a 24-hour period stood at over 27,000 with a positivity rate of 32.69 per cent and 375 deaths.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers prayers at Sis Ganj Sahib Gurudwara on the 400th Prakash Purab of Guru Teg Bahadur in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

Build consensus, evolve national policy to deal with pandemic, Sonia tells govt

New Delhi, May 1: Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday urged the Centre to evolve a national policy to deal with the pandemic after bringing about a political consensus on it.

In a video message, she said it is time for the central and state governments to wake up and fulfil their duties.

Mr Gandhi also said Covid-19 jobs should be provided free of cost to all citizens and sought compulsory licensing to ramp up vaccine production to speed up the country's inoculation drive to help save Indians.

"I urge the central government to evolve a national policy to deal with the COVID crisis in the country and a strategy to bring about a political consensus over it," the Congress president said.

She also said that the central government should "first think about the poor and provide them with Rs 6,000 each to the bank accounts of all to stop their migration, till the end of the

pandemic". Ms Gandhi called for increasing testing and checking the black marketing of essential life-saving drugs besides providing oxygen, medicines and other equipment to hospitals on a war-footing.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the entire world is shaken by what is happening here and accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi for queues everywhere, whether for oxygen cylinders, for life-saving medicines, for hospital beds and even outside

crematoriums. "Rely on yourself is the motto. No one will come to help you. Definitely, not the prime minister," Gandhi said, while alleging that the Covid-19 situation has gone completely out of control for the Modi government, and wondered whether it was their way of making the states and the citizens truly 'Aatmanirbhar'. In an exclusive interview, the former Congress chief alleged that the government completely failed to understand or to tackle the pandemic.

Mr Gandhi also said Covid-19 jobs should be provided free of cost to all citizens and sought compulsory licensing to ramp up vaccine production to speed up the country's inoculation drive to help save Indians.

States delay vaccination plan due to big shortage

New Delhi, May 1: India rolled out the third phase of its Covid-19 vaccination drive for those in the 18-45 age group on Saturday though the inoculation process failed to take off in some states due to shortage of vaccines.

While Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir among other states and union territories launched the vaccination drive, Karnataka and Odisha made only a symbolic start to it.

Blaming organisations authorised by the Centre for not making vaccines available, the Jharkhand government said it will announce fresh dates for the jabs once they reach the state.

Chief Minister Hemant Soren said he has sought the

Centre's intervention in facilitating procurement of at least 50 lakh vaccine doses. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry had also said on Friday that they do not have adequate stocks of vaccines to meet the expected rush of immunity seekers.

After these states expressed their inability to start the latest phase of the vaccination drive from May 1 citing paucity of doses, the Centre had said those, which have already coordinated with manufacturers, will kick off the drive on the designated date.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that inoculation of people in the 18-45 age group will begin in the national capital from Monday, adding 4.5

lakh vaccine doses have been received by the city government. He visited a vaccination centre at Saraswati Vihar for a "symbolic launch" of the nationwide drive. He also urged people not to queue up outside the vaccination centres, saying walk-ins are not allowed yet.

The Kerala government said that vaccination of those in the over 18 years age bracket will be delayed due to shortage of vaccines and urged the Centre to take steps immediately to ensure their availability.

"The vaccination of those above 18 years of age will be delayed by a few days. As efforts are on to procure vaccines from manufacturers, those in the 18 plus category cannot be given the jabs now," CM Vijayan said.

CENTRE RELEASES `8,873 CRORE TO STATES AS AID

New Delhi: The Centre has released ₹8,873.6 crore to states as the first instalment of the central share of the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for 2021-22 for various Covid-19 containment measures, including setting up of hospitals and oxygen generation. The home ministry said as a special dispensation, the department of expenditure, under the ministry of finance, has released the amount in advance of the normal schedule at its recommendation.

An amount of ₹8873.6 crore has been released to the states. Normally, the first instalment of the SDRF is released in June. However, in relaxation of the normal procedure the release of the SDRF been advanced, the ministry said.

Got aggressive calls from the powerful: Adar

London, May 1: Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla on Saturday spoke out about the pressures he was under over the production of Covid-19 vaccines to meet the ever-increasing demand in India as the country battles through a devastating second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

In his first comments since he was provided with Y category security by the Indian government earlier this week, Poonawalla told The Times' in an interview about receiving aggressive calls from some of the most powerful people in India, demanding supplies of Covishield — the Oxford AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine that the Serum Institute is producing in India.

That pressure is largely behind his decision to fly into London to be with his wife and children, the 40-year-old entrepreneur said.

"I'm staying here (London) an extended time because I don't want to go back to that situation. Everything falls on my shoulders but I can't do it alone...I don't want to be in a situation where you are just trying to do your job, and just because you can't supply the needs of X, Y or Z you really don't want to guess what they are going to do," Poonawalla told the newspaper.

The level of expectation and aggression is really unprecedented. It's overwhelming. Everyone feels they should get the vaccine. They can't understand why anyone else should get it before them, he said. — PTI



Adar Poonawalla

India should not have exported vax: Ajit Pawar

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 1

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has blamed the Union Government for the scarcity of Covid-19 vaccines in the country. The Centre's decision to export vaccines to other countries led to its shortage, he said.

"I feel the Centre should not have exported Covid-19 vaccines to other countries. There was no need to send vaccines abroad in the initial stage. Had that not happened, it would have been possible to vaccinate more people in Maharashtra and other states," said Mr Pawar to the media after the state foundation day event in Pune, of which he is the guardian minister.

"We had planned to start the third phase in a big way in the state, but due to inadequate supply of vaccines, it could not be done. The union government should now allow the states to import the vaccine, at least the number of vaccines that were sent out in the initial stages," he added.

Mr Pawar said the state government has allocated 6,500 crore for the third phase of vaccination, which has a target population of 5.81 crore and it is ready to pay lump sum cash for this.

The government has discussed the vaccine availability issue with Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla and Bharat Biotech. "However, it seems that we cannot fully rely on the two Indian firms. Hence, we are keen to import vaccines from foreign manufacturers with the permission of the Union government," he said.

Ever since the vaccination drive has started in the country, Maharashtra has continued to top the chart in terms of inoculating people. It has already reached a milestone of vaccinating 1.5 crore people in the state.

Centre trying to defame Uddhav: Sena

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, MAY 1

The Shiv Sena on Saturday launched a scathing attack on the Centre saying Delhi's rulers are trying to corner the state during the coronavirus pandemic as the state has a Chief Minister with a 'Marathi pride'. A conspiracy has been hatched to defame the state by creating political and economic chaos, alleged the party.

As Maharashtra celebrated its 61st foundation day on Saturday, the Sena said that the state is bravely fighting against the Covid-19 crisis. It blamed the Centre for "creating hurdles" in the battle. "The vaccination drive in Maharashtra has been halted due to Delhi's obstinate nature. Maharashtra is not being provided with adequate injections and medicines and it is also facing acute shortage of oxygen," said the Sena in an editorial in the party mouthpiece Saamana.

It alleged that Maharashtra is being cornered by the Delhi's rulers as the state has a CM and a government, which endorses 'Marathi Bana' (pride). "Though the governments in Delhi have changed, their enmity against Maharashtra has continued. The state has helped the country immensely in economic terms, but these governments have kept on robbing Maharashtra. Several projects and schemes in the state have been shifted to Gujarat with an aim to diminish Mumbai's importance and cut off Maharashtra's financial support," said the editorial.

Thailand to fly back envoys from Delhi

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 1

Thailand is evacuating some of its diplomats from New Delhi in view of the serious Covid situation in the national capital even a special cargo flight carrying the first consignment of one and a half lakh doses of the Russian Sputnik-V vaccine landed in New Delhi from Moscow.

Medical aid is pouring in from around the world to India with the latest help coming from Thailand to fight the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Thailand government has sent its aircraft to evacuate some Thai embassy officials from India. The Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) flight, which arrived in India on Saturday for evacuation,

also carried 15 oxygen concentrators as donation from the Thailand government to the Indian Red Cross, along with 15 concentrators donated by the Hindu Samaj of Bangkok.

The Indian community in Thailand is also mobilising oxygen-related supplies in a big way.

Announcing the delivery of the first consignment of 1.5 lakh doses of the Sputnik-V vaccine, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted, "Millions of doses to follow. Plans to 'Make in India' for use in and third countries. Deeply value support from long-standing friend Russia. Over a decade of special and privileged strategic partnership." Qatar Airways also intends to transport 300 tonnes of aid from across its global network.

SAD | DEMISE

Cine personalities take to Twitter to pay rich tributes

Actor Bikramjeet passes away

Mumbai, May 1: Actor Bikramjeet Kanwarpal, who has appeared in films like *Page 3* and *2 States* as well as popular television show *Adaalat*, has died due to Coronavirus-related complications. He was 52.

The actor, who was admitted in a city hospital here, passed away on Saturday morning.

"He was admitted to hospital ten days ago at Seven Hills, he was later shifted to ICU as his condition worsened. He passed away today morning at around 5 am," Kanwarpal's close friend Himanshu Dadbhawala said.

After retiring from the Indian Army, Kanwarpal made his acting debut in early 2000. His other movie credits include *"Rocket Singh: Salesman of the Year"*, *"Jab Tak Hai Jaan"*, *"Aarakshan"* and *"The Ghazi Attack"*. On television, some of his



Bikramjeet Kanwarpal

noteworthy performances were in Anil Kapoor-starrer *"24"*, *"Adaalat"*, *"Diya Aur Baati Hum"* and *"Yeh Hai Chahatein"*.

He was last seen in Disney Plus Hotstar web series *"Special Ops"*. Kanwarpal is survived by his parents.

Soon after the news of the actor's demise, several cine

personalities took to Twitter to pay tributes to one of the most "disciplined, energetic and positive man".

Actor Neil Nitin Mukesh said Kanwarpal's sudden death has left him heartbroken. "Extremely sad news. I've known Major Bikramjeet for so many years.

He and I have worked on so many films together. The last being Bypass Road. Such a fantastic, encouraging and energetic human being he was and will always be remembered as. #RIP. My dear friend will miss you," he wrote.

Music composer-singer Vishal Dadlani called him a man of dignity. "A man who lent dignity to everything he did, #BikramjeetKanwarpal carried the Fauji stamp. Jai Hind, Sir," he said.

Actor Siddhant Kapoor shared a photograph of him on his Instagram Stories.

"I'm so sorry major! Will have dinner with you on the other side some day! Love you may your beautiful soul RIP thank you for serving the nation, lost a friend and a co-star," he wrote.

Rohit Bose Roy remembered Bikramjeet for his jovial nature. "And we lose another one... The happiest, most gentlemanly, always positive and smiling Major Bikramjeet... RIP," he said.

Actor Bidita Bag said he was a disciplined man while serving in the army and also as an actor. "As an army officer he religiously served India. He was a disciplined man in his previous post as also in his current thespianic art. He was lively, vibrant, full of energy. My grief goes boundless that I would ever never get him as an inspiring co-actor. RIP #BikramjeetKanwarpal," she said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

THUNDERSTORM
KILLS 11, INJURES
102 IN CHINA

Beijing: An extreme thunderstorm hit an eastern Chinese city, leaving 11 dead and 102 injured, with strong winds causing buildings and trees to collapse.

Nantong city, located in the eastern province of Jiangsu, was among the hardest-hit when the extreme weather swept the Yangtze Delta on Friday night, according to state-affiliated newspaper *Global Times*.

Rescuers evacuated 3,050 people, a local government notice said. Wind speeds of 162 kilometers (100 miles) per hour overturned a fishing ship. Two sailors were rescued and search operations were underway for the nine remaining crew, the notice said. Electricity has been restored in Nantong, and collapsed trees, damaged vehicles as well as windows that have been blown away were being cleared.

YEMEN FLOODING
FROM SEASONAL
RAINS KILLS 13

Sanaa: Floods swept through parts of Yemen amid heavy seasonal rains, leaving at least 13 people dead, including two children, security officials said on Saturday.

Fatalities were reported in the provinces of Sanaa, Ibb, Shabwa and Hodeida, where it began raining late last month, the officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

Heavy rains also pelted the provinces of Aden, Taiz and Hadramawt, where flooding damaged houses and vehicles, they said. Rescuers managed to save some residents trapped in their cars.

Yemen's National Meteorological Center issued statements in recent days warning Yemenis to stay away from flood ducts in affected areas and to take necessary precautions. Yemen's rainy season runs from April through August.

KYRGYZ, TAJIK
LEADERS MOVE TO
SAVE CEASEFIRE

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: The presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan spoke by telephone on Saturday hoping to maintain a fragile ceasefire after the worst border clashes between the ex-Soviet countries left at least 33 dead.

The talks came after Kyrgyzstan accused Tajikistan of violating the truce, but the press services of Kyrgyzstan's leader Sadyr Japarov and Tajikistan's Emomali Rakhmon said they discussed fulfilling the agreement reached on Thursday, when the fighting erupted.

Clashes between communities over land and water along the long-contested border are regular occurrences, with border guards often getting involved, however this week's violence was by far the most serious during the Central Asian pair's 30 years of independence.

Kyrgyzstan on Saturday announced two days of mourning and said that its death toll had risen from 31 to 33, with over a hundred other Kyrgyz injured and at least 30 properties destroyed in its southwestern Batken region.

AFGHAN SUICIDE
BOMBING KILLS
21, INJURES 90

Kabul: The death toll in a powerful suicide truck bombing that struck a guest house in eastern Afghanistan rose to 21 with as many as 90 others wounded, officials said on Saturday.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the late Friday night bombing in Pul-e-Alam, the capital of Logar province. There was no indication why the guest house was targeted.

In Afghanistan, guest houses are lodgings often provided for free by the government, usually for the poor, travellers and students. The Interior Ministry quickly blamed the Taliban. There was no immediate response from the Taliban. The attack came on the eve of the official date set for the start of the final withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan. The Taliban, who had demanded that all US troops pull out of Afghanistan by May 1, have not offered any guarantees for the safety of the departing troops. There was no indication the bombing was connected to the pullout.

Covid situation in India tragic: Harris

We as a country have made a commitment to support the people in India, says V-P

Washington, May 1: Vice President Kamala Harris has described the Coronavirus situation in India as "tragic" and said the US has made a commitment to support the country in battling the challenge.

"There is no question that it is a great tragedy, in terms of the loss of life, and as I have said before, and I will say again, we as a country have made a commitment to the people of India to support them," Harris told reporters on Friday in Cincinnati, Ohio. "We have already made a commitment in terms of a dollar amount that will go to PPE and a number of other things. But it is tragic. My prayers go to the people on the suffering, the blatant suffering that is happening," Harris said in response to a question.

Earlier, the White House announced restrictions on travel from India because of "extraordinarily high Covid-19 case-loads" and multiple variants circulating there". Harris said she hasn't spoken to her family in India since the news of the ban was made public. On the advice of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Administration will restrict travel from India starting May 4, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki had said.

"The policy will be implemented in light of extraordinarily high COVID-19 case-loads and multiple variants circulating in India," Psaki said in a statement.

— PTI



Visitors wearing face masks gather at a viewing area overlooking the Forbidden City at a public park in Beijing on Saturday. Chinese tourists are expected to make a total of 18.3 million railway passenger trips on the first day of the country's five-day holiday for international labor day, according to an estimate by the state railway group, as tourists rush to travel domestically after the Coronavirus has been brought under control in China.

— AP

WHO approves Moderna
vax for emergency use

Geneva, May 1: The World Health Organisation has given the go-ahead for emergency use of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine.

The mRNA vaccine from the US manufacturer joins vaccines from AstraZeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech and Johnson & Johnson in receiving the WHO's emergency use listing.

Similar approvals for

China's Sinopharm and Sinovac vaccines are expected in the coming days and weeks, WHO has said.

The greenlight for Moderna's vaccine, announced late on Friday, took many months because of delays that WHO faced in getting data from the manufacturer. Many countries without their own advanced medical regulatory and assessment

offices rely on the WHO listing to decide whether to use vaccines. UN children's agency UNICEF also uses the listing to deploy vaccines in an emergency like the pandemic.

The announcement, however, wasn't likely to have an immediate impact on supplies of Moderna's vaccine from the developing world.

— AP

IRELAND

INDIA ADDED TO
MANDATORY
QUARANTINE LIST

London, May 1: India is among the five countries that will be added to Ireland's mandatory hotel quarantine list from Tuesday, the Irish government has announced.

Besides India, the other countries that have been added to the list for mandatory quarantine from May 4 are Georgia, Iran, Mongolia and Costa Rica.

The passengers are required to pre-pay for their stay during the quarantine period.

— PTI

NEPAL

22 ENTRY POINTS
WITH INDIA SET
TO BE CLOSED

Kathmandu, May 1: The Nepal government has decided to close 22 border points with India amid a sharp surge in Covid-19 cases in the neighbouring country.

The decision came after the Covid Crisis Management Coordination Committee on Friday recommended to the Council of Ministers to shut down 22 out of a total of 35 border points between Nepal and India, according to officials.

Now, only 13 border points between Nepal and India will now remain operational.

— PTI

CANADA

Global students not
to be allowed entry

Toronto, May 1: Canada is all set to suspend entry of international students, including from India, to Ontario, the worst-hit province which is battling the third wave of the Coronavirus.

According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), an education service provider based in Ottawa, there were 530,540 international students in Canada in 2020, of which the maximum were from India (34 per cent) followed by China (22 per cent). Ontario has the maximum number of foreign students at 242,825 or 46 per cent, it said.

During a press confer-

ence on Friday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that the government is considering halting the arrival of international students in Ontario, following a request from the province's premier Doug Ford to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the globalnews.ca reported. "Because currently Ontario is the only province to request it, we are happy to work more closely with them," he said. Trudeau said they will be "reaching out to their officials" to formalise the request.

However, there is no clarity as yet on when the change will take effect or how long it will last.

— PTI

New virus cases put
New Zealand-Oz
travel bubble at risk

Wellington, May 1: New Zealand's fledgling quarantine-free travel arrangement with Western Australia faced disruption for the second time in eight days on Saturday following fresh community cases of Covid-19 in Perth.

A worker at a managed isolation facility in the city and two people he shares accommodation with have tested positive, authorities said.

Western Australia Premier Mark McGowan said the state would not go into lockdown "at this point".

But New Zealand health ministry officials said

they had conducted a "rapid" assessment and had "determined scheduled direct flights from Western Australia to New Zealand should be immediately paused while a further assessment is carried out."

A flight scheduled to arrive in Auckland from Perth at 5.50am on Sunday (1750 GMT Saturday) has been cancelled, but travel to other Australian states and territories is not affected.

It is the second such disruption since the two countries opened their quarantine-free travel bubble on April 18.

— AFP

AUSTRALIA

US DEFENCE INTEL:
INDIA FOREIGN
POLICY IN 2020
WAS ASSERTIVE

Washington, May 1: India, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, pursued an assertive foreign policy in 2020 aimed at demonstrating the country's strength and its perception as a net provider of security in the strategically vital Indian Ocean Region, a top American intelligence agency has said.

The Defence Intelligence Agency also told lawmakers adding that New Delhi also hardened its approach towards an aggressive China. "Throughout 2020, Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi's government pursued an assertive foreign policy aimed at demonstrating India's strength and its perception as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean Region," Scott Berrier, Gen Director of Defense Intelligence Agency told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee during a Congressional hearing on worldwide threats.

In the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, New Delhi played a leading role in delivering medical equipment to countries throughout South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East he said on Friday.

— PTI

Iran N-talks to resume in Vienna

Vienna, May 1: Parties to the Iran nuclear agreement are to resume on Saturday the third round of negotiations in Vienna aimed at bringing the United States back into the accord.

The deal, which curbs Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief, has been on life support since then US president Donald Trump bolted in 2018.

The remaining partners to the 2015 accord have been engaged in negotiations since early April to try to revive it.

The third round of talks started on Tuesday and, after several days of tech-

● **THE THIRD** round of talks started on Tuesday and, after several days of technical discussions between expert groups and delegations, will resume on Saturday.

● **AFTER THE** talks, the delegations will return to their respective capitals.

nical discussions between expert groups and delegations, will resume on Saturday.

The service of EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement that delegates from Britain, China, France, Germany, Iran and Russia

would meet in person at around 3 pm (1300 GMT).

"Participants will continue their discussions in view of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and on how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the JCPOA," the statement said, using the acronym of the agreement's formal name.

After the talks, the delegations will return to their respective capitals to receive instructions, Iran's foreign ministry said.

A European diplomat said that the American, European, Russian and

Chinese delegations held a joint meeting on Saturday morning, but without Iranian representation as Tehran has refused to negotiate with the US directly.

As well as bolting from the accord, Trump's administration slapped sweeping sanctions on Iran, which in turn started ramping up its nuclear activities.

New US President Joe Biden supports the agreement — with which Iran was in compliance before Trump's sanctions — but has called on Tehran to roll back its measures before Washington ends sanctions.

— AFP

ADVENTURE | JOY

It is the greatest feeling ever, says a mother after park opens after 400 days

Fans have a ball as Disney theme park reopens

Anaheim, United States: Fans wearing Mickey Mouse ears lined up as Disneyland in California finally reopened Friday, more than 400 days after the pandemic forced an unprecedented closure for the self-styled "Happiest Place on Earth."

"It is the greatest feeling ever!" said Momi Young-Wilkins, a 55-year-old mother as she brought her children to the world-famous park near Los Angeles.

"I promised my daughters we would be back here

on opening day, and I made it happen." Disneyland Park — the world's second-most visited theme park — and neighboring Disney California Adventure Park have been closed the longest of all the Mouse House's globe-spanning parks, delayed by California's sharp winter Covid spike and tough restrictions.

But with the Golden State now boasting the nation's lowest per capita infection rate, the sprawling resort flung open its gates Friday to the delight

of many of its most obsessive devotees.

Sisters Carla and Jasmine, 23 and 17, who preferred not to give their last name, used to visit "pretty much every day" before the pandemic.

"We would go after school, after work, and just go on rides, even if it was for a couple hours," said Carla, as they eagerly waited to re-enter.

"We've been excited for this opening day.. it's very exciting and emotional!"

— AFP

Portugal reopens
border, eases norms

Lisbon, May 1: Portugal reopened its land border with Spain on Saturday and began the final stage of its programme to ease Covid-19 restrictions.

The country was hit hard at the start of the year by a wave that saw 300 Coronavirus

deaths a day overwhelm hospitals.

But the measures have since helped bring the numbers down, with zero fatalities recorded on Friday for the second time in a week — the previous day without a Covid death was in August.

— AFP

PAKISTAN

PAK TO REDUCE
INBOUND GLOBAL
FLIGHTS BY 20%

Islamabad, May 1: Pakistan has decided to reduce the inbound international flights up to 20 per cent of the current numbers from May 5 as part of measures to contain the spread of coronavirus in the country, authorities said on Saturday.

The National Command and Operation Center (NCOC), which is the main anti-corona body of Pakistan, said that the decision to decrease the number of inbound flights was taken in view of the prevailing pandemic situation.

In view of prevailing global and regional disease trends, Pakistan has decided to reduce inbound international travel from May 5 to May 20.

International flights to Pakistan will be reduced to 20 per cent during this period, the NCOC said in a statement.

It said that travelers from the existing list of 22 countries banned to enter Pakistan would remain in place.

— PTI

HONG KONG

MIGRANT STAFF
ALARMED AT RULES
TO MAKE JAB MUST

Hong Kong, May 1: Hong Kong migrant worker groups on Saturday criticised plans to make Coronavirus vaccines compulsory for all foreign domestic helpers, labelling the move "discriminatory and unjust".

Health officials said they were planning to roll out mandatory inoculations for the 370,000 domestic helpers in the city, mostly poorly-paid women from the Philippines and Indonesia.

Those wanting to apply for work visas — or renew their current ones — would need to show they had been vaccinated, officials said on Friday.

If the plan goes ahead it would be the first time Hong Kong has directly tied working rights for foreigners to vaccines.

"This is clearly an act of discrimination and stigmatisation against migrant domestic workers," Dolores Balladares Pelaez, chair of United Filipinos in Hong Kong, told reporters.

— AFP

Final phase of
Afghan pullout by
NATO, U.S. begins

Kabul, May 1: The final phase of ending America's "forever war" in Afghanistan after 20 years formally began on Saturday, with the withdrawal of the last US and NATO troops by the end of summer.

President Joe Biden had set May 1 as the official start of the withdrawal of the remaining forces — about 2,500-3,500 US troops and about 7,000 NATO soldiers. Even before Saturday, the herculean task of packing up had begun. The military has been taking inventory, deciding what is shipped back to the US, what is handed to the Afghan security forces and what is sold as junk in Afghanistan's markets.

In recent weeks, the military has been flying out equipment on massive C-17 cargo planes. The US is estimated to have spent more than \$2 trillion in Afghanistan in the past two decades, according to the Costs of War project at Brown University, which documents the hidden costs of the US military engagement. Defence department officials and diplomats said the withdrawal has involved closing smaller bases over the last year. They said since Biden announced the end-of-summer withdrawal date in mid-April, only roughly 60 military personnel had left the country.

The US and its NATO allies went into Afghanistan together on October 7, 2001 to hunt the al-Qaida perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks who lived under the protection of the country's Taliban rulers. Two months later, the Taliban had been defeated and al-Qaida fighters and their

● **PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN** had set May 1 as the official start of the withdrawal of the remaining forces — about 2,500-3,500 United States troops and about 7,000 NATO soldiers.

leader, Osama bin Laden, were on the run.

In his withdrawal announcement last month, Biden said the initial mission was accomplished a decade ago when US Navy SEALs killed bin Laden in his hideout in neighbouring Pakistan. Since then, al-Qaida has been degraded, while the terrorist threat has "metastasised" into a global phenomenon that is not contained by keeping thousands of troops in one country, he said.

Until now the US and NATO have received no promises from the Taliban that they won't attack troops during the pullout. In a response to AP questions, Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen said the Taliban leadership was still mulling over its strategy. The insurgent group continues to accuse Washington of breaching the deal it signed with Biden's predecessor more than a year ago.

In that agreement, the US said it would have all troops out by May 1. In a statement on Saturday, Taliban military spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the passing of the May 1 deadline for a complete withdrawal "opened the way for (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) mujahidin to take every counteraction it deems appropriate against the occupying forces."

— AP

HUNGARY REOPENS
FOR PEOPLE WITH
IMMUNITY CARDS

Budapest (Hungary), May 1: Hungary on Saturday loosened several Covid-19 restrictions for people with government-issued immunity cards, the latest in a series of reopening measures that have followed an ambitious vaccination campaign.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

2 MAY 2021



Shashi Warriar
Off the beaten track

Criminal? Or practical, though only for temples?

People across southern India celebrated their new year, and other occasions, in the middle of April... “Celebrated” is the wrong word to use in the midst of the rising second wave of the coronavirus, but that was what it looked like. The little temple across the street, for instance, that came up illegally two years ago, had its second anniversary a few days before the new year. The temple committee announced a comprehensive day-long programme of festivities. There were to be six hours of noise and feasting: exuberant *bhajans* sung into a sound system that could be heard half-a-kilometre away, and a “traditional” lunch and dinner consisting mostly of rice and other starchy foods. Hundreds of people turned up, with vehicles crowding the narrow street, and not a mask in sight. And, of course, there were large piles of the garbage that the temple workers and visitors simply tossed across the wall into the vacant lot to its south.

A few days later came the new year, Ugadi in these parts, celebrated with vigour by crowds of devotees, accompanied by the noise, the feasting, and the garbage that seem to be an integral part of every celebration. Masks and social distancing were forgotten. Following shortly after was a week-long festival at one of the oldest and largest temples in the neighbourhood, involving three daily rounds of crowds and noise and gorging, and, of course, garbage in the aftermath. News emerged during the festival that the head of one of the large *akharas* involved in the Kumbh died of Covid-19 after getting the disease during the *mela*. Devotees either didn’t know or didn’t care, for the festivities went right on. The police filed a First Information Report against the temple committee for violating Covid guidelines, to no effect.

In the midst of all this came my wife’s birthday. In the time of the pandemic, she gets Zoom calls and good wishes instead of visitors and presents, and she doesn’t complain. My friend the professor from the business school called on Zoom, as he did last year, and, when he had finished with the greetings, I took the opportunity to pour out my complaints to him, about the crowds and noise and the waste of food and the garbage.

He heard me out without batting an eyelid. “I have only bad news for you,” he said, when I had finished my rant.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“All this stuff is not going to stop in the near future,” he said. “It’s how business evolves.”

“What do you mean, business?” I asked, mystified. “I thought we were talking about crowds and gluttony and noise and garbage associated with temples and blind faith.”

“Yes,” he said. “It’s what happens when you convert faith into income. It’s called monetisation.”

“Nonsense!” I said.

“Relax,” he said. “Let me explain. Look at the Kumbh. It happens every twelve years, and millions of pilgrims gather for it: it’s in the Guinness Book of World Records, you know, for the largest gathering of people.”

“So?” I asked.

“Think about it. Taking care of several million people for several days means a lot of money. All of them eat and drink and sleep and pray and bathe in the Ganges. So somebody has to arrange travel and lodging and food and security and logistics. It’s a huge, expensive affair. They clean up entire cities, build new roads, arrange for cities of tents, and for hundreds of tons of food. Think of just the food. It means grain and vegetables and spices and oils and fuel and cooks... You know all that. Figure it out for yourself.”

“Right,” I said. “But what does all that have to do with the temples here?”

“Every festival is a smaller version of that,” he said. “Every celebration involves money. Where there’s money there’s business. Where there’s business there’s a business model. And every business model requires growth.”

“But the big temples are rich!” I said, for the faithful can be generous. “They’ve got enough!”

“It’s all part of the business model,” he said. “Every temple wants more visitors. Every big temple collects lots of money. They do a little social service, feeding the poor every now and again, but that’s it. The rest of the money they collect goes into getting more visitors. So they make it easier for people to get there. There are lots of old temples that were hard to get to: you had to walk cross-country to get to them, or climb steep old flights of stairs. All that is changing. They’re building roads so you can get there easily... They’ve built a new road to Mansarovar that goes close to the Chinese border, that cuts three days off a five-day journey.”

That made sense. That big old temple nearby used to have a steep stone staircase to the shrine, and when it rained it got really slippery. They did it up last year, so now you can climb safely up even in the heaviest rainstorm. “Right,” I said.

“There’s more,” he continued. “You have people who happen to be temple committees organising bus tours on special occasions, or hotel accommodation. Running a temple is now a position of power, you know. It combines business and politics.”

I couldn’t help agreeing. The temple committee had no trouble dealing with that police FIR. “I see,” I said.

“Blind faith leaves you unaware of its ill effects,” he continued. “There’s a profit to be made out of that faith.” He pushed. “You know, sometimes it looks like governing people is like growing mushrooms.”

“How so?” I asked, mystified.

“You keep them in the dark and feed them plenty of horses**t!” he replied.

Shashi Warriar has written fairy tales, thrillers, a semi-fictional biography, satires, and a love story. Besides writing, he teaches strategic communication at a business school.

Subhani



Reprieve, for now, from Yogi’s victim-blaming



Pavan Varma
Chanakya’s View

Yogi Adityanath, the saffron-dhara CM of UP, believes that everything in his state is hunky dory. There is no shortage of oxygen, hospital beds, ventilators, essential medicines. Those who say there is are criminals in league with blackmarketeers and anti-social elements and must be dealt with stringently under the law. Like the proverbial pigeon that closes its eyes and believes that the cat has gone, Adityanath thinks that if he closes his eyes all the miseries that people in his state are facing will disappear.

But unlike the pigeon, Yogi has teeth to bite. On April 24, he asked his officials to take action under the draconian National Security Act (NSA) and the Gangsters Act against anti-social elements who spread “rumours” and propaganda on social media and try to “spoil the atmosphere”. His additional director general of police, Prashant Kumar, added that those who desperately vent their anguish at the transparent mismanagement and shortages in the state, want to “tarnish the image of the government”, and FIRs will be filed against them. Hospitals were imperiously told to keep their mouth shut about the crisis of oxygen supplies, or else they will face the majesty of the law.

A PIL was filed by a social activist in the Allahabad high court against slapping of criminal charges on families of critical patients issuing an SOS on social media. The

PIL stated that people are afraid that they will be arrested for “spreading rumours about scarcities”. It further stated that some relatives were actually arrested for this crime.

The Supreme Court has now given a fitting rejoinder to the undemocratic high-handedness of the likes of the UP CM. The hon’ble court on April 30 said: “If a citizen ventilates his grievances through social media posts, there is no presumption that it is not genuine. There cannot be and should not be any clampdown on free speech. If anyone is booked for airing their grievance about non-supply of oxygen, medicines or availability of hospital bed, it will amount to a clampdown and we will treat it as contempt of this court (Emphasis mine).” For good measure the court further added: “Let a loud message go out to the states and the DGPs. We will brook no violation of the rights to free speech of a citizen when the country is going through a humanitarian crisis during a health emergency. Let there be free flow of information. Grievances aired through social media posts could actually help the government and local administration to attend to common deficiencies in the healthcare sector and attend to them speedily.”

Obviously, Adityanath disagrees. From the beginning of his term, his entire approach is to misuse the law for clamping down on anyone who remotely seems to suggest that all is not well in his

On April 24, he asked his officials to take action under the draconian National Security Act (NSA) and the Gangsters Act against anti-social elements who spread ‘rumours’ and propaganda on social media and try to ‘spoil the atmosphere’

state. Earlier, we have seen how sedition cases were slapped on journalists who had the temerity to report the poor quality of food being provided in midday meals in schools in the state. Really, Mr Adityanath? Sedition? As the Allahabad high court once exasperatedly alluded, the tendency of the CM to treat everything as my highway or the wilderness, has gone too far. Siddiqui Kappan, a journalist from Kerala, was arrested by the UP police on his way to Hathras to cover the dalit teenager’s heinous gangrape. At that time the venerable Yogi had used his magisterial powers to prevent journalists from meeting the family, and done everything else to somehow hush up the case. Kappan, in poor health, has languished in jail ever since, until a recent judicial intervention to shift him to AIIMS.

The central government obviously thinks that Adityanath is doing the right thing. On April 25, it invoked the IT Act 2000 to instruct Twitter to remove for viewing in India over 50 posts that were critical of the government’s handling of the pandemic. These tweets related to the shortages of medicines, beds, oxygen, the huge crowds at Kumbh Mela and the tragic visuals of mass cremations.

There is only one reason why governments begin to behave this way. It is the hubris of power. When people in power begin to believe that that power entitles them only to praise, and that all criticism is against the interests of the state, and those interests are their exclusive monopoly, they react in this undemocratic way. There is also the myth of the so-called “strong” leader. To my mind, Adityanath loves the image of the autocratic leader who will brook no opposition. Possibly, he draws his inspiration from the perceived persona of the PM himself, who as the “strong” leader has refused to hold a direct press conference ever since he came to power, and considered meeting with the leaders of the farmer’s agitation as inimical to his strong-man image. The net consequence of such hubris is demagoguery, and the justification, at any cost, of gross incompetence in governance.

Democracy is a fragile plant. If those who have been elected to tend to it believe that the entire garden is their preserve, and everybody else is an unwarranted trespasser, the plant will wither. For the moment, Adityanath has been soundly put in his place by the Supreme Court. But, such tendencies do not evaporate by one reprimand. They become part of a mindset, and reinforce the actions of other would-be demagogues. To Adityanath, and his ilk, I have only this couplet in response: “*Yun dikkhata hai aankhen mujhe baghban, jaise gulshan pe kuch haq hamara nahin*.” The gardener looks at me in such a way, as though I have no rights to the garden.”

The writer, an author and former diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

LESSON NOT LEARNED

The latest report of fire in a Gujarat hospital in which more than a dozen patients perished is tragic. Fire in hospitals where normal and bedridden inpatients become the victims is not a first-time occurrence and this has become almost a regular feature which is proof of the lack of and inadequate maintenance of electrical installations in hospitals. When fires occur in other places, the inmates at least have a chance to run away but in-patients with disabilities are unable to move. The upkeep and periodical replacement of wiring and other electrical implements kept in hospitals should be made mandatory for hospitals where patients stay and receive treatment. All rules will be in books but not implemented or shoddily enforced. Any slackness or complacency shown in this regard is likely to endanger the patients who need to stay in hospitals for treatment.

S. Nagarajan Iyer,
Coimbatore

REAL HEROES

Kudos to actors like Vikram, Surya, Sivakarthikeyan who have stalled the final stages of shooting of their films to stop spreading the virus to save the state. No, doubt some of our political leaders have also preached to their cadre not to celebrate their candidate’s victory in public. But we are not sure whether they would obey their leaders, who never bothered to follow Covid norms during their pre-pol meetings. Hope good sense would prevail upon all our leaders to at least think about the welfare of common man in our states and nation now.

N. Mahadevan,
Chennai

SHOULD IPL BE PLAYED NOW?

The cash-rich Indian Premier League is on at Ahmedabad and New Delhi after having moved from Chennai and Mumbai. This hardly makes news when lakhs of people are testing Covid-19 positive and many are losing their lives daily. Right now in these two cities, while cricketers are battling to further enrich their lives, within a few kilometres from the stadiums, many are battling for their lives in hospitals. The giant floodlights that light up the night sky inside the playing arena look small before the massive darkness of gloom diffusing the entire nation. The whack of a cricket ball that often lands beyond the ropes pales into insignificance before the bawling of the people who have lost their dear ones. In the background of a grieving nation, it raises the all-important question whether the IPL should really need to carry on. No doubt, sports have the power to heal wounds, but not always.

R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

Shikha Mukerjee



Revisiting the legend @100: Ray’s iconic role to endure

Cultural power surpasses the transient aggregation of political heft in West Bengal. In the natural order of things, there is a rise and a fall of political leaders and political parties, and power waxes and wanes in proportion to the will exercised by the people as voters. Ousting a cultural icon from his, and more rarely her, space in the pantheon of secular deities is an entirely different matter; it has not happened in recent memory.

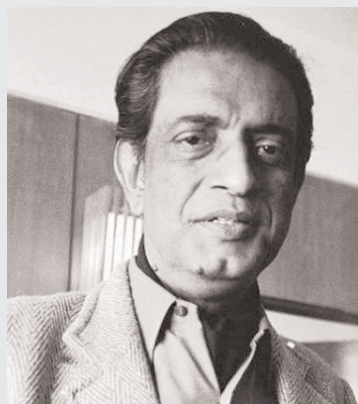
The deification of the creative genius is a metamorphosis that is imperceptible but very real. There are two pantheons in Bengal. The first is the conventional pantheon of the divine, crowded by so many avatars of the goddess or gods that only the cognoscenti know the difference. The second is the pantheon of cultural deities, reflecting a particular aspect of the Bengali sensibility, an eclectic array of political leaders, litterateurs, artists, musicians, performers and filmmakers, almost anyone who the Bengali considers to be uniquely gifted and on whom is bestowed the status of an icon.

Satyajit Ray is part of the second pantheon. His centenary year, which begins from May 2, is a moment when the process of this metamorphosis will

be visible. In these pandemic times, the homage, the tributes, the celebration and the cultural programmes may have to be in a virtual space, but that will not deter devotees of Ray’s genius from honouring him by revisiting his work and his creativity in as many ways as possible.

The tributes will not be exclusive offerings of aficionados; the inclusivity of the celebrations will affirm his status as an icon. When Ray died in 1992, even manufacturers of objects as entirely mundane as shovels and construction equipment offered their tribute through advertisements, as a reflection of how significant the filmmaker’s transition was from mere mortal to one of the pantheon. It did not matter that his films were never the sort of blockbusters that appealed to the masses. In the Bengali perception, Ray was an icon; his work was quintessentially Bengali, but his contribution was recognised as India’s gift to world cinema.

It is revealing of West Bengal’s unusual ethos that even the BJP, with its claim to being the world’s largest party, scrambled to deploy Satyajit Ray to increase its appeal to the Bengali intelligentsia. If the BJP government in New Delhi lives up to its promise of an Oscar-like film award in the name of Satyajit Ray,



Satyajit Ray (1921-1992)

Bengalis may be pleased, but that is impossible to predict.

Satyajit Ray’s oeuvre was not limited to making films, or writing his own scripts, or composing the music for his films. His work is part of the popular imagination. Snatches of his music from the fantasy series, *Goopey Gayne Bagha Bayne*, have become signatures in the culture of modern West Bengal. His *Hirak Rajar Deshe* is now the title of an animation series that is a regular satirical take on current politics on a local television channel. The dialogue of

his film series featuring the detective that he created, Feluda, is part of the language in which Bengalis think and speak. He pervades the mind and is embedded in the Bengali spirit.

He was not a filmmaker to begin with. He worked as an artist in advertising. He also designed book jackets that are now classics in the world of book design. He created fonts. He created a visual language through his films that is now part of the grammar of filmmaking. The trilogy, the first of which, *Pather Panchali (The Song of the Road)*, made in 1958, is the one of the greatest films ever made. It was the first of the total of 29 films and five documentaries that Ray made.

He worked with unknowns, including the legendary cinematographer Subrata Mitra, who improvised to create the amazing light in *Pather Panchali*, and the slew of films including *Jalsaghar*, *Teen Kanya*, *Charulata*, *Devi*, *Mahanagar* and *Nayak*. And through that work, men like Subrata Mitra emerged with their extraordinary talent. Soumitra Chatterjee, the legendary actor who passed away in 2020, was a Ray discovery. As were Sharmila Tagore, Aparna Sen and even Madhavi Mukherjee, who had worked in cinema before, but never displayed the

awesome talent she did in *Charulata*, which remains her most lyrical performance ever.

There were distinct periods in the work that Satyajit Ray did. His early films — *Apur Sansar*, *Parash Pathar*, *Jalsaghar*, followed by films like *Kanchenjunga* and *Abhijan*, documentaries including the film on Rabindranath Tagore commissioned on the insistence of Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, *Bala*, on the great Bharatanatyam dancer Balasaraswati, who performs on the Madras Marina with the wind blowing her hair and snatching at her sari, are masterpieces.

The last three films by Ray — *Ganashatru (Enemy of the People)*, *Shakha Proshakha* and *Agantuk* — were very different. These were bold critiques on contemporary social issues, including the conflict between rational science and irrational religion, the idea of the civilised and the primitive, of what is normal and sickness of the mind. Ray did not start out as a filmmaker with an agenda. He was a storyteller. But he responded to the shifts and changes in the world at large and his conclusions were sharp, critical and almost a call to action.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

OUR CRITIC'S RATING

Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

Harsh, unrelenting, brilliant

Pebbles (Koozhangal)

(Tamil)

CAST: Chellapandi, Karuththadaiyaan**DIRECTOR:** P.S. Vinothraj**RATING:** ★★★★★

Will be available online, at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles

SUPARNA SHARMA

Writer-director P.S. Vinothraj's *Pebbles* is a film born out of a trauma that he was witness to. In 2015, his sister's husband threw her out of their house and she walked 13 kms to her mother's house, carrying her two-year-old child.

Pebbles makes the husband walk and a young boy stalks him, taunting him with his silence and gaze that's a mix of anger and raging indifference.

P.S. Vinothraj's debut film, which won the prestigious Tiger Award at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in February this year, is a harsh, relentless, bare-foot trudge through a pale, malnourished land that seems stunned by the complete lack of water. It's dry to the bone and is slowly shedding itself, turning first to pebbles and then to sand. The film declares its intent at



the onset with two scenes — first when young Velu (Chellapandi) stands in silence looking at his father (Karuththadaiyaan) who has taken him out of his class is asking, "Do you love your mother or me?"

Velu is to accompany his angry, drunk father to her mother's maternal house, to deliver the message that if she doesn't return, he'll remarry.

They get onto a bus, and at the very next stop a woman gets on, carrying three plastic pots of water. The bus conductor charges for each pot.

Shot in Arittapatti, *Pebbles'* plot almost seems like a screenwriting and direction challenge. As if someone told Vinothraj, write and direct a movie that covers just half a day with two main characters, father and son. They both go to get his mom, but return because she has already returned home.

Pebbles narrates this incident mostly with silence and through long, unrelenting shots that tell the story of the lifetime of a people and a land in pursuit of water.

As the sun beats down on the

dusty land with dry, rocky mud, and we follow Valu and his father, listening to each footfall. We feel the harshness of the land on our own skin, and like Velu, who always stays at a safe distance from his father, we too fix him with a disdainful stare.

This walk is interrupted by sudden bouts of violence and small digressions.

En route we meet a family of two women, one girl and a man who are smoking out rats from a hole. We see the entire capturing and cooking process that involves breaking tiny legs, and

roasting. This brutality is life-sustaining in this brutal landscape.

The camera of Parthib and Vignesh Kumulai is a character in *Pebbles*. It's us. Stalking, staring. But it's an angry stare. Like Velu's.

When he picks up a broken piece of mirror, and while sucking on a pebble that's lodged in his cheek, aims the reflection on his father's bare back, we smile, like Velu. It feels right to surreptitiously assault the father's arrogant swag from this safe distance.

The film is also an editing marvel. Ganesh Siva (editing) doesn't do us the favour of cutting the harshest scenes — of an endless walk, of slowly drawing out water, half a mug at a time from a little puddle, or when the father breaks his toe nail.

It makes us watch all these, as if the movie is watching us fidget and get uncomfortable.

The film's last scene is heart-breaking. Velu returns home with a puppy and he and his sister and playing with it. He then takes the pebble out and tosses it into a small mound of pebbles.

We link this to the names he was scratching on a rock "Shanthi, Lakshmi, Velu, Ganapathy" and we know this is a trip he has made several times. And on each of these trips he has sucked on a pebble.

Pebbles will be playing at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles, from May 20-27. It's a virtual film festival and passes are available online.

Michael B. Jordan seeks revenge in *Without Remorse*

LINDSEY BAHR

In the new Tom Clancy adaptation, *Without Remorse*, Michael B. Jordan is a Navy SEAL about to trade military life for private security when his pregnant wife (Lauren London) is executed in their Washington D.C. home. It's part of a calculated ambush: The assassins are picking off the men in his unit because of a mishap in Aleppo where the Americans attacked the Russian military instead of Syrians. They were following orders without knowing the full story and soon the Russians are in the US retaliating. Jordan's John Kelly was the target, but he happened to be on the couch with noise canceling headphones and not the bed when they broke into his home.

It's somewhat frustrating that movies like this tend to be so similar that it almost ensures zero emotional investment in the inciting incident whatsoever. The dead, pregnant wife is a launching off point and the screenplay (written by Taylor Sheridan and Will Staples) doesn't do us (or them) any favors. Never has there been a more generic couple than the Kellys. One of the precious few scenes with them together has them reminiscing about what appears to be a prom photo that's framed in their dining room. Soon enough, she's dead and John and the movie can really get started.

I suppose it's just as well, since no one is coming to *Without Remorse* for a story about a couple. It just feels like a wasted opportunity to show Jordan in full expectant father mode instead of just fast-forwarding through loaded signifiers to get to a motive.

The good news is that *Without Remorse* is pretty great when it comes to the action, and there is a lot of it. Director Stefano Sollima, who directed the "Sicario" sequel (which Sheridan wrote), keeps the engines moving forward and the set pieces dynamic and distinct from the start. And although John Kelly might not be the most layered guy on the page, it's impossible to take your eyes off him — the power of movie star charisma? He's best when he's playing opposite Jodie Turner-Smith, playing Lt. Cmdr. Karen Greer. She is steely and intimidating without being cliché and makes you want a spinoff about how she got her position.

Clancy's novel was published in 1993 and it's a story that has been bouncing around Hollywood almost as long as it's been on shelves with everyone from Keanu Reeves to Tom Hardy circling the project at various points in the past two decades. But besides the names used, the book and the film seem to have almost nothing else in common. Instead of setting it during the Vietnam War, Sollima and the writers have made it modern with escalating tensions between Russian and the US Jamie Bell co-stars as a humorless and Robert Ritter as a suspect CIA officer who was the reason for the Aleppo snafu. Guy Pearce adds some gravitas as the Secretary of Defense. With its glossy pedigree, it will be no surprise to anyone that this was originally intended as a Paramount theatrical release before the pandemic.

Although it has a few twists and turns that you might not see coming, *Without Remorse* is also in some ways exactly what you expect it'll be. It doesn't exactly have anything revelatory to say about global diplomacy or the American military and it takes itself very, very seriously, which makes it a little disarming to see Brett Gelman show up at a key moment. It's also setting up at least one sequel. Jordan will likely be reprising John Kelly (by the end he's John Clark) in *Rainbow Six*. Maybe by then the filmmakers will allow themselves to have some fun with his character. Even so, he's just the shot in the arm that the Clancy-verse needed.

—AP

Without Remorse

CAST: Michael B. Jordan, Jodie Turner-Smith, Jamie Bell, Guy Pearce, Lauren London**DIRECTOR:** Stefano Sollima**RATING:** ★★★★★

Streaming Amazon Prime Video

Another Round

CAST: Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Bo Larsen, Magnus Millang, Lars Ranthe**DIRECTOR:** Thomas Vinterberg**RATING:** ★★★★★

Streaming on BookMyShow

SUPARNA SHARMA

Danish write-director Thomas Vinterberg's film, *Another Round*, ends with a two-and-a-half minute joyous dance sequence. Performed by Mads Mikkelsen, a trained gymnast, it's a spontaneous, free-spirited metaphor for life, a suggestion of how to do it. It seems to say, take a swig and then take a leap of faith. You may find what you are looking for, or you may not. But it's worth trying.

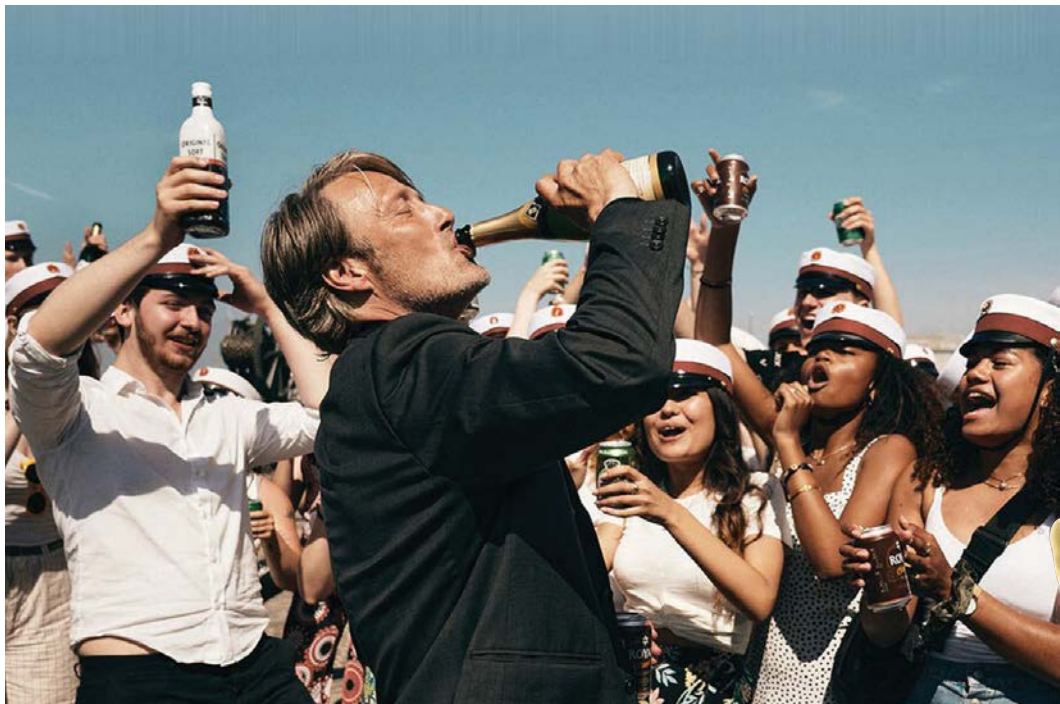
That's why, perhaps, last week the Academy bypassed Jasmila bani's absolutely brutal and brilliant Bosnian war drama, *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, and handed the Oscar for best international film to Vinterberg.

The Academy likes happy endings, and that's also the need of the hour, whatever the reality.

In that sense, *Another Round* was the perfect choice.

It's a celebration of life, love and friendship that's framed in a personal tragedy.

In his acceptance speech for the Oscar, Vinterberg said that the film is dedicated to his daughter Ida who tragically passed away when he was filming.



"Four days into shooting, the impossible happened. An accident on a highway took my daughter away. Someone looking into a cell phone," he said.

His daughter had loved the script, he said. Probably because *Another Round* resonates in these worst of times — when we are living physically isolated and scared in our homes, but spend most of the time inside our heads, going over regrets, of things not attempted, of paths not walked, of emotions left unexplored.

Another Round tells the story of four high school teachers in their 40s. There's the sports teacher

Tommy (Thomas Bo Larsen), psychology teacher Nikolaj (Magnus Millang), music teacher Peter (Lars Ranthe) and the history teacher, Martin (Mads Mikkelsen) who seems most obviously frozen by sadness. It's taken hold of his soul.

"Am I boring?" Martin asks his wife, and breaks down at a dinner with his friends. They have all lost touch with their younger selves, their dreams, and are now mildly depressed versions of who they were.

So when Nikolaj talks of Norwegian psychiatrist Finn Skårderud's claim that humans are born short of 0.05% Blood Alcohol Content, and to

function at our best — physically, intellectually and emotionally — we must drink, they order another round.

The next day Martin tests this theory and his dull, confusing, rambling history class becomes engaging, fun. He tells the others and on Nikolaj's suggestion they all agree to test the theory under the ruse of conducting an experiment. A few swigs before and during work — to make up for the

0.05% shortage — and take notes.

Alcohol transport them back to a version of themselves in their youth — carefree, getting thrills by breaking rules. It energises them into taking charge, it makes them smile, reach out, take risks, precipitate things.

They reconnect with themselves, and that helps them connect with others. There's a family trip and sex, happy kids, and some heartwarming moments.

But, there's also temptation to drink more, and soon some relationships, lives begin to capsize. There's a suspension and a death.

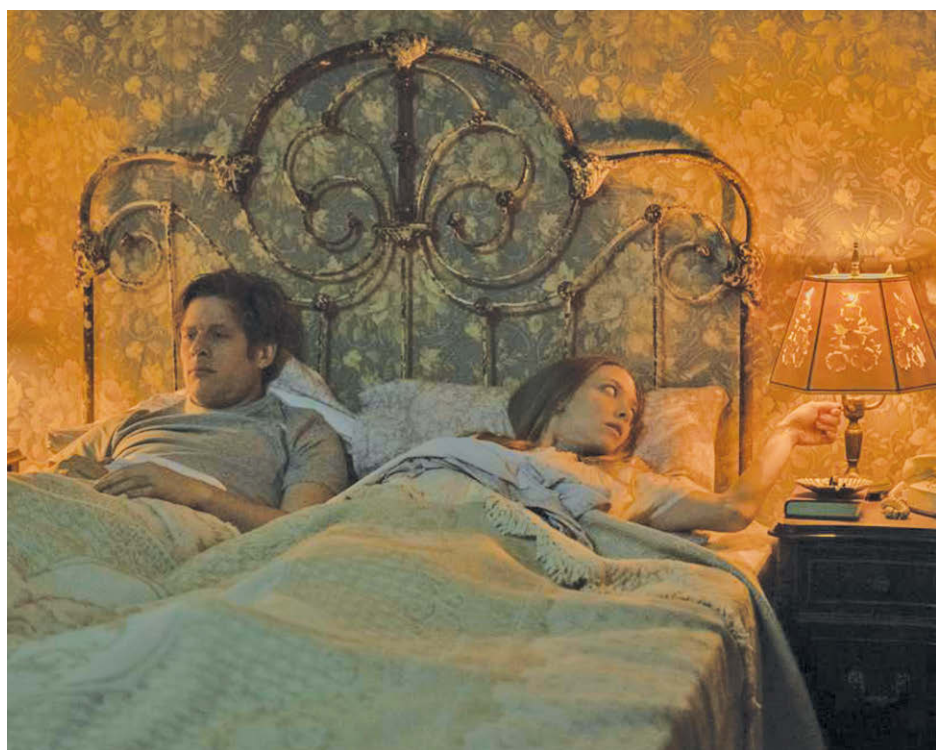
"What is youth? A dream. What is love? The content of the dream."

These lines, by Søren Kierkegaard, appear at the beginning of *Another Round* which is simultaneously funny, sad, real, scary, warm, joyous. It also has a fabulous soundtrack that should be downloaded immediately, especially *Cissy Strut* by The Meters and *What a Life* by Scarlet Pleasure.

Every time you listen to them, you'll unfreeze. You'll feel like moving to the beats. You'll know that life is not just a sum total of the things we didn't do, the goals we didn't achieve. It is a collage of the moments we lived, the chances we took, the songs we sang, the joy we experienced.

Last week the Academy bypassed Jasmila bani's absolutely brutal and brilliant Bosnian war drama, *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, and handed the Oscar for best international film to Vinterberg's *Another Round*

Seyfried lends grounding presence to campy thriller



JOCELYN NOVECK

Hollywood thrillers in which sophisticated, attractive city folk move to creaky old country homes and experience scary things are a dime a dozen. Less common is when those Hollywood thrillers are based on the theology of 18th-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg.

But here we are — a Swedenborgian thriller — and thus it's not a bad idea to read up a bit on the man, by which we mean to Google him, before diving into *Things Heard & Seen*, a well-cast and often entertaining but campy and sometimes obvious thriller starring Amanda Seyfried and James Norton.

What you'll learn is that Swedenborg believed (among other things) that death was just a continuation of life — and that people lived on, in the spiritual world, past the expiration of their physical body. For the film's purposes, we'll boil it down for you: Ghosts!

In fact the film, based on the novel "All Things Cease to Appear" by Elizabeth Brundage, begins

Things Heard & Seen

CAST: Amanda Seyfried, James Norton, Natalia Dyer, Ana Sophia Heger, Charlotte Maier, Kristin Griffith**DIRECTOR:** Shari Springer Berman, Robert Pulcini**RATING:** ★★½

Streaming on Netflix

with a Swedenborg quote: "Things that are in heaven are more real than things that are in the world." So even if you've skipped your theology homework (tsk tsk), this should alert you to a spectral influence in the story — maybe even a seance or two.

We begin in the winter of 1980, when a perturbed-looking George Claire (Norton) drives up a snowy road to his isolated home. Immediately, it's obvious something terrible has happened.

Flashback to the spring before, in a Manhattan apartment. George and wife Catherine (Seyfried) are celebrating the fourth birthday of

their daughter, Franny. George — handsome and chiseled, with the kind of tousled hair that looks breezy but you know he works on it — has an announcement to make: Not only has he completed his Ph.D in art history, but he's found a teaching job upstate. "Oh, at Bard?" asks a (snobby) friend. No, he replies, at a place called Saginaw.

Nobody is impressed, but Catherine, despite having no desire to leave her coveted job as an art restorer, feels the need to support her husband. For one thing, she tells a friend, they need the money — his wealthy parents have finally cut him off. The friend warns Catherine she's giving up a lot to go live in a place filled with "rich horsey weekenders and full-time rednecks."

But move they do, to beautiful Hudson Valley (writer-directors Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini draw out both the charm and the isolation of the place) and their chosen town, which is ominously called ... Chosen. (Certain things are unabashedly telegraphed in this film. Then again, sometimes they're red her-

rings. Maybe? Why is Catherine bulimic, for example?)

The house George has found, on an old dairy farm, is huge and creaky and needs work, but Catherine launches into the job. Soon, however, it becomes clear the family is not entirely alone. As happens in haunted house movies, there are strange noises and strange voices and dodgy electricity. There are also historical hints sprinkled through the home, suggesting past trauma.

Catherine is much more attuned to these than George, who's spending most of his time trying to curry favor with colleagues in his art history department, including the chairman, Floyd DeBeers, who has a fascination not only with Swedenborg but his influence on prominent landscape painter George Inness (DeBeers is played by a deliciously august F. Murray Abraham.)

Catherine also develops an affection for two brothers, Eddy and Cole, who live next door and offer to do odd jobs. As we suspect early on, there's more to these brothers and their connection to the home than meets the eye.

—AP

SHORT TAKES

SL spinner takes 6 wickets on debut

Pallekele, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka left-arm spinner Praveen Jayawickrama took six wickets on his debut to dismiss Bangladesh for 251 and put the hosts in a strong position on day three of the second Test on Saturday.

Jayawickrama, a replacement for the injured Lasith Embuldeniya, has had a modest record in first class cricket, but impressed at Pallekele with his six wickets for 92 to give Sri Lanka a healthy 242-run first-innings lead. He was backed by off-spinner Ramesh Mendis who took two wickets.

Sri Lanka, who declared earlier on 493 for seven, did not enforce the follow on and were 17 for two. The first Test in the two-match series was a draw.

— AFP
Brief scores: Sri Lanka 493/7 decl. & 17/2 vs Bangladesh 251 (Tamim 92, Mominul 49, Jayawickrama 6-92).

Hasan leads Pak's rout of Zimbabwe

Harare: Fast bowler Hasan Ali registered career best figures of 5/36 to lead Pakistan to a comprehensive innings and 116 run annihilation of Zimbabwe in the first Test in Harare on Saturday. The 26-year-old finished with 9/89 in the match as Zimbabwe's batting crumbled for the second time in the match, all out for 134 with an hour remaining on the third day at Harare sports club. The victory gives Pakistan a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

The second Test is also in Harare from May 7. Zimbabwe, who were bowled out for 176 in the first innings, were facing an innings defeat at tea with the total at 118-5.

— AFP
Brief scores: Zimbabwe 176 & 134 (Musakanda 43, Hasan 5/36) lost to **Pakistan 426** (Fawad 140, Butt 91, Abid 60, Muzarabani 4/73).

Winning start for Osaka in Madrid

Madrid: Japan's Naomi Osaka began her bid to capture a first clay court title with a 7-5, 6-2 win over compatriot Misaki Doi in the opening round of the Madrid Open on Friday.

The 23-year-old world number two recovered from an early break to ease into the last 32 in 87 minutes on the back of six aces, the last of which came on match point, and five breaks of serve.

For left-handed Doi, the world 79, it was a 21st loss in 21 meetings against top 10 players. Osaka, the reigning US and Australian Open champion, has seven career hard court titles to her name, but has never managed to lift a clay court trophy. The closest she came to breaking that run was a semi-final spot in Stuttgart in 2019.

— AFP

Qualifier sends Zverev packing

Munich, Germany: Top seed Alexander Zverev crashed out of Munich's ATP clay court tournament after a shock defeat to qualifier Ilya Ivashka in the quarter-finals on Friday. Despite winning the opening set on a tie-breaker, Zverev, the 2017 and 2018 Munich champion, bowed out 7-6 (7/5), 5-7, 3-6 after Ivashka of Belarus converted his first match point.

The 27-year-old is ranked 101 places below world number six Zverev. "This is a match I should never have lost — I'm sad and disappointed," admitted Germany's Zverev. Half of his 14 double faults came in the deciding set as Zverev lost after two hours, 33 minutes while Ivashka reached a semi-final on tour for the first time in his career. In Saturday's semis, Ivashka faces Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff who needed exactly three hours to seal a 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (7/3) win over fourth-seed Filip Krajinovic. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

IPL: Rajasthan Royals vs Sunrisers Hyderabad from 3.30 pm; Punjab Kings vs Delhi Capitals from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FORMULA ONE

Portuguese Grand Prix: Main Race from 7.25 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

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MI in Poll position

Pollards' unbeaten 87 off 34 balls downs table-toppers Chennai

New Delhi, May 1: Mumbai Indians beat table-toppers Chennai Super Kings by four wickets in their IPL match here on Saturday.

Kieron Pollard blazed away to the fastest half-century of the ongoing league, reaching the landmark in 17 balls and remaining unbeaten on 87 off 34 balls at the end of the match.

CSK scored 218 for 4 after being asked to bat. Moeen Ali (58) and Faf du Plessis (50) shared a 108-run stand before Ambati Rayudu pummelled the MI bowling attack into submission with an unbeaten 72 off 27 balls at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

Rayudu, who notched up his fifty in just 20 balls, went hammer and tongs with seven sixes and four fours during his stay in the middle.

For Mumbai, Pollard (2/12) snared two wickets while pacers Trent Boult (1/42) and Jasprit Bumrah (1/56) grabbed a wicket each.

In reply, MI were off to a brisk start with Rohit Sharma and Quinton de Kock putting on 71 runs for the first wicket in just 7.1 overs.

Three wickets fell in quick succession to leave Mumbai Indians at 81 for three in the 10th over, but Pollard took charge of the situation after that, hitting a barrage of sixes and fours to keep his team in the reckoning.

However, Sam Curran bowled a brilliant 17th over, in which he picked up the wicket of Krunal Pandya to break a threatening 81-run partnership while giving away only two runs, to bring CSK back into the match.

But Pollard won it for Mumbai Indians off the last ball.

— PTI



Mumbai Indians' Kieron Pollard plays a shot against Chennai Super Kings in their IPL match at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi on Saturday.

— IPL

SCORECARD

Chennai Super Kings: Ruturaj Gaikwad c Hardik Pandya b Boult 4, Faf du Plessis c Bumrah b Pollard 50, Moeen Ali c de Kock b Bumrah 58, Suresh Raina c Krunal Pandya b Pollard 24, Ambati Rayudu not out 72, Ravindra Jadeja not out 22. Extras 10 (lb-2, w-7, nb-1) 10. **Total (for 4 wkts, in 20 overs) 218.**

FoW: 4-1, 112-2, 116-3, 116-4. **Bowling:** Trent Boult 4-0-42-1, Dhawal Kulkarni 4-0-48-0, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-56-1, Rahul Chahar 4-0-32-0, James Neesham 2-0-26-0.

Mumbai Indians: Quinton de Kock c & b Ali 38, Rohit Sharma (c) c Gaikwad b Thakur 35, Suryakumar Yadav c 'Dhoni b Jadeja 3, Krunal Pandya lbw b Curran 32, Kieron Pollard not out 87, Hardik Pandya c du Plessis b Curran 16, James Neesham c Thakur b Curran 0, Dhawal Kulkarni not out 0. Extras (w-8) 8. **Total (for 6 wkts, in 20 overs) 219.**

FoW: 1-71, 2-77, 3-81, 4-1, 5-202, 6-203.

Bowling: Deepak Chahar 4-0-37-0, Sam Curran 4-0-34-3, Lungi Ngidi 4-0-62-0, Shardul Thakur 4-0-56-1, Ravindra Jadeja 3-0-29-1, Moeen Ali 1-0-1-1.

Struggling SRH sack captain Warner

New Delhi, May 1: In a desperate attempt to arrest their slide, SunRisers Hyderabad have thrust Kane Williamson into the leadership role by removing David Warner as they prepare to take on Rajasthan Royals, who are also struggling like them, here on Sunday.

In a surprise move, SRH removed struggling batsman Australian

Warner from the captaincy on Saturday as the side has lost five of the six matches under him this IPL season.

The Royals are not faring any better as they have managed to win only two matches out of the six they have played. No wonder, the Royals are placed seventh just above SRH.

SRH are coming into Sunday's match after losing their last two matches

HEAD to HEAD

Matches 13

SRH 7 RR 6

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

- Rajasthan Royals beat Sunrisers by 5 wickets at Dubai
- Sunrisers Hyderabad defeated Rajasthan Royals by 8 wickets at Dubai.

STATS: S. PERVEZ KAISER

including the Super Over defeat against Chennai Super Kings.

SRH rely heavily on their top-order — Warner, Jonny Bairstow, Manish Pandey and Williamson — but they did not fire together.

There is a possibility that Warner could be dropped from the playing XI and West Indies captain Jason Holder is likely to replace him.

— PTI

BOTTAS TAKES POLE, DELAYS HAMI'S 100TH

Portimao (Portugal), May 1: Valtteri Bottas took pole position for the Portuguese Grand Prix with seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton completing a Mercedes front-row lock-out in qualifying on Saturday.

Hamilton's pursuit of a 100th pole at the track where last year he notched up his record 92nd win was delayed when Bottas earned the 17th of his career.

"It's a good feeling to be on pole," said Bottas.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen, one point off Hamilton in the drivers' standings, took third on Sunday's grid with his teammate Sergio Perez alongside him on the second row in Portimao.

Carlos Sainz for Ferrari came in fifth ahead of the Alpine of Esteban Ocon, Lando Norris, in a McLaren, and Charles Leclerc in the second Ferrari.

Hamilton paid tribute to Bottas "and our team" for us both to be on the front row. "It was not expected. We have to be happy for that, it was not the perfect lap but I gave it everything. You can never be satisfied, we exist to keep moving forward but I'm happy with what we're doing and the steps we're taking."

— AFP

HEAD to HEAD

Matches 27

PBKS 15 DC 12

FOR THE RECORD

- Lokesh Rahul with 96 sixes in 49 innings of as many matches, needs four sixes to become first batsman from Punjab Kings to complete a century of sixes in IPL.

- Axar Patel who took 24 wickets at an average of 32.58 in 32 innings of as many matches, needs just one wicket to become 13th bowler to complete 25 wickets for Delhi Capitals in IPL.

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

- Delhi Capitals beat Punjab Kings in Super over after match ended in a tie at Dubai.
- Punjab Kings defeated Delhi Capitals by 5 wickets at Dubai.

STATS: S. PERVEZ KAISER

will like to challenge the DC skipper, who has a knack of hitting against the spin over deep mid-wicket region. The Narendra Modi Stadium track has shown that balls tend to grip and batting becomes difficult as the game progresses. — PTI

PURPLE CAP

Harshal Patel, RCB	17
Avesh Khan, DC	13
Rahul Chahar, MI	11

ORANGE CAP

K. L. Rahul, PBKS	331
Faf du Plessis, CSK	320
Shikhar Dhawan, DC	311

IPL POINTS TABLE

Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
CSK	7	5	2	0	10	+1.263
DC	7	5	2	0	10	+0.466
RCB	7	5	2	0	10	-0.171
MI	7	4	3	0	8	+0.062
PBKS	7	3	4	0	6	-0.264
KKR	7	2	5	0	4	-0.494
RR	6	2	4	0	4	-0.69
SRH	6	1	5	0	2	-0.264

City on brink of title glory after win

London, May 1: Manchester City are within touching distance of the Premier League title after Sergio Aguero and Ferran Torres sealed a 2-0 win at Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Pep Guardiola's side sit 13 points clear at the top and will be crowned champions if second-placed Manchester United lose against Liverpool on Sunday.

After a tepid first half in south London, it was fitting that Aguero — the architect of so many big moments in City's history — should open the scor-

ing with a typically lethal finish.

Torres killed off Palace two minutes later as City eased to an 11th successive away victory in the Premier League, equalling the English top-flight record.

Even if United do not slip up against Liverpool at Old Trafford, City have four matches left to secure the one win they need to clinch the title, starting with next Saturday's home game against Chelsea.

It is a matter of when not if City add the Premier League to the

THE RESULTS

Crystal Palace	0
Manchester City	2
<i>(Aguero 57, Torres 59)</i>	
Southampton	1
<i>(Ward-Prowse 61-pen)</i>	
Leicester	1
<i>(Evans 68)</i>	

League Cup they won in April.

FOXES SALVAGE DRAW AT SOUTHAMPTON

Leicester missed a chance to cement their grip on third place in the Premier League after a 1-

1 draw against 10-man Southampton.

Southampton had to play 80 minutes without Danish defender Jannik Vestergaard after he was sent off for a foul on Jamie Vardy.

But James Ward-Prowse's second half penalty briefly put Ralph Hasenhuttl's side ahead before Jonny Evans headed Leicester's equaliser.

Leicester remain in third place, but fourth placed Chelsea would close the gap to just two points if they beat Fulham on Saturday.

— AFP



Leicester City's Jonny Evans (second from left) scores against Southampton in their English Premier League match at St Mary's Stadium in Southampton on Friday.

— AP

Torch relay detour, diving test event opens

Tokyo, May 1: The Tokyo Olympics torch relay will take another detour this weekend when it enters the southern island of Okinawa.

A leg of the relay on Okinawa's resort island of Miyakojima set for Sunday has been cancelled altogether with cases surging in Japan. Other legs on Okinawa will take place.

A 17-day state of emergency went into effect on April 25 in some areas in Japan, which has shut down department stores and bars in Tokyo and the country's second largest

metropolis of Osaka.

"We don't want people from outside the island coming in. Human life is at stake," Hayako Shimizu, a teacher in Miyakojima, said.

The relay, which will involve 10,000 runners from every corner of Japan, started six weeks ago and has been mostly on schedule despite major rerouting in Osaka and in Matsuyama City in nearby Ehime prefecture.

The relay is made up of a convoy of about a dozen vehicles with sponsors names festooned on them. The torch bearer follows,

● A six-day, on-and-off diving event opened on Saturday in Tokyo with 225 athletes from from 46 countries — but no fans.

each running for a couple of minutes, before giving the flame to the next runner who awaits holding another torch.

The torch relay — like planning for the postponed Olympics that are to open on July 23 — is filled with uncertainty, constant changes, and

questions about why it is taking place, and how it will take place.

A six-day, on-and-off diving event opened Saturday in Tokyo with 225 athletes from from 46 countries — but no fans.

It was not immediately clear where the athletes were staying or under what quarantine conditions, if any, they entered Japan. It's also not clear how many staff members accompanied the divers.

Contacted by AP, Tokyo organisers said it "understands that the athletes are entering Japan based on the guidelines provid-

ed by JASF (Japanese swimming federation) and approved by FINA."

It referred further enquires to FINA and local swim officials.

The Japanese news agency Kyodo, citing the Japanese Swimming Federation, said a coach of the Egyptian diving team tested positive for Covid-19 upon arrival in Japan. It said the rest of the team tested negative.

The diving event is one of several tests this month — all without fans.

Fans from abroad have already been banned.

— AP

KINGS RALLY TO SPOIL JAMES RETURN TO LA

Los Angeles, May 1: Los Angeles superstar LeBron James scored 16 points in his return from the longest absence of his NBA career on Friday, but the Sacramento Kings rallied to beat the Lakers 110-106 at Staples Center.

James, who missed 20 games with a sprained ankle, finished with eight rebounds and seven assists, but he also had five turnovers in 32 minutes of playing time.

"I came out unscathed. It's a pretty good start," James said.

The reigning champion Lakers are pleased to have the four time NBA MVP back for the Lakers stretch drive, but James will have to shake off some expected rust in order to get into playoff form.

"For my first game in six weeks, I felt OK," James said. "My ankle was a little tight at times. As the games go on that will continue to improve."

— AFP



Maradona underwent surgery on November 3, just four days after he celebrated his 60th birthday at the club he coached, Gimnasia y Esgrima.

However, he appeared in poor health then, and had trouble speaking.

'DEFICIENCIES AND IRREGULARITIES'

The panel concluded that Maradona "would have had a better chance of survival" with adequate treatment in an appropriate medical facility.

He died in his bed in a rented house in an exclusive Buenos Aires neighborhood, where he was receiving home care.

Maradona did not have "full use of his mental faculties" and should not have been left to decide where he would be treated, the experts said.

They also found that his treatment was rife with "deficiencies and irregularities" and the medical team had left his survival "to fate".

— AFP