

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 2 MAY 2021



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Covid situation in India tragic, have committed support to them: Harris

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Actress Payal Rajput says she is shooting for films to beat pandemic stress



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WINDOWS



French President Emmanuel Macron holds some Lily of the Valley flowers during the traditional Lily of the Valley ceremony at the Elysee palace in Paris on Saturday. — AP

Final phase of Afghan pullout by US, Nato begins

Kabul: The final phase of ending America's forever war in Afghanistan after 20 years formally began 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. ■ **More on Page 6**

₹1.41L cr record GST collected in April

New Delhi: GST collections crossed the ₹1 lakh crore mark for the seventh month in a row and touched a record high of over ₹1.41 lakh crore in April, indicating economic recovery, the finance ministry said on Saturday. ■ **More on Page 4**

Top US doc suggests long India lockdown

Washington: Top US epidemiologist Anthony Fauci has suggested a lockdown for a few weeks in India as an immediate step to contain the spread of the coronavirus as its deadly second wave shows no signs of ebbing. Dr. Fauci said another most important thing in the immediate is to get supplies of oxygen, medication, PPEs. ■ **More on Page 3**

COUNTERPOINT



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

WEATHER

Max: 38°C
Min: 26°C
RH: 23%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula Shashti till 2.55 pm
Star: Purvashada till 9.01 am
Variyam: 4.48 pm to 6.22 pm
Durmuhurtam: 4.52 pm to 5.42 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.56 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.38 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.46 PM
MOONSET TODAY 10.15 AM

COVID SURGE: INDIA RECORDS 400,000 +VE CASES, 3,523 DEATHS IN 24 HOURS

18 killed in Gujarat hospital fire

Bharuch, May 1: Eighteen persons including 16 Covid-19 patients and two trainee nurses died in a fire at a hospital at Bharuch in Gujarat in the early hours of Saturday, officials said.

The state government said a judicial inquiry will be conducted into the fire that destroyed the Intensive Care Unit of Patel Welfare Hospital, run by a charitable trust. "Sixteen coronavirus patients and two nursing staff were either charred to death or died due to suffocation inside a Covid-19 unit," Superintendent of Police Rajendrasinh Chudasama said.

As many as 57 patients were undergoing treatment at the Covid-19 facility, out of which 22 were in the ICU on the ground floor when fire broke out around 1 am, probably because of short circuit, said a hospital official.

Apart from fire brigade personnel, around 100 policemen including 15 officers were deployed at the spot for the rescue operations. The fire was doused within an hour, a civic official said.

Local people and the kin of patients helped in the rescue operation during which dozens of patients were shifted to other facilities by ambulance. Some were brought out of the



A relative attends a Covid patient during a fire break out in Patel Welfare Hospital at midnight in Bharuch, Gujarat, on Saturday. — PTI

■ **AS MANY AS 57** patients were undergoing treatment at the Covid-19 facility, out of which 22 were in the ICU on the ground floor when fire broke out around 1 am, probably because of short circuit, said a hospital official

building on wheelchairs or on make-shift stretchers of cloth.

Police also had to control a nearly 15,000-strong crowd which gathered outside the hospital after hearing about the fire, but no law and order issue was reported, an official release of the Bharuch police said.

The four-storey designat-

ed Covid-19 hospital stands on the Bharuch-Jambusar highway, 190 km from Ahmedabad.

Assistant Police Commissioner Vikas Suda has been handed over the inquiry into the fire incident.

Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani announced ex-gratia aid of ₹4 lakh to the next of kin of the deceased.

He also directed Additional Chief Secretary (Labour) Vipul Mitta and Commissioner of Municipalities Administration

Rajkumar Beniwal to conduct inquiry. The two IAS officials arrived at the site on Saturday afternoon

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12 die in Batra as hospital runs out of oxygen

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 1

Twelve critical Covid-19 patients died at the Batra Hospital in Delhi's Mehrauli area allegedly due to oxygen shortage. Six of the 12 people who died had been admitted to the hospital's ICU (intensive care unit) and among the deceased is the hospital's gastroenteritis head, Dr R.K. Himthani (62).

"We ran out of oxygen at 11.45 am. Supply came at 1.35 pm (a second tanker reached at around 4 pm). We were out of oxygen for 1 hour and 20 mins," the hospital told the Delhi high court which was holding the 11th day of hearings into a crisis triggered by a massive wave of Covid infections. "We hope no lives were lost," the court responded, to which the hospital said: "We have... including one of our own... one doctor."

About 230 people were left without oxygen for 80 minutes.

Once a patient is pushed to the edge without the support of oxygen, it is very difficult to revive him. Unfortunately, we are expecting more fatalities.

— S.C.L. Gupta, Hospital official

Batra hospital has 327 patients out of which 48 are in the critical care unit. It has been raising alarms since Saturday afternoon over depleting levels of oxygen supply.

"Once a patient is pushed to the edge without the support of oxygen, it is very difficult to revive him. Unfortunately, we are expecting more fatalities," said Sudhanshu Bankata, executive director of the hospital. Dr Himthani, head of the gastroenterology department, was among

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Two faces of pandemic: Grief and relief



(Above) Relatives of a Covid-19 victim react outside the Lok Nayak Jaiprakash Narayan Hospital in New Delhi on Saturday. (Right) Youngsters pose for photographs after receiving a dose of Covid-19 vaccine during the third phase of the inoculation drive at Rajawadi Hospital in Mumbai on Saturday. This phase of vaccination drive is for people between the age group of 18-45 years. — PTI



As pressure for vaccine rises, Poonawalla leaves for UK

Pune, May 1: The third phase of the vaccination campaign in the country started on Saturday for the people in the 18-44 years age group. The demand for the vaccine is increasing continuously in the country.

Meanwhile, Adar Poonawalla, CEO of Pune-based the Serum Institute of India (SII) which is producing the Covishield vaccine, has spoken about the increasing pressure for the vaccine. In Britain, Poonawalla has also alleged that many powerful people of India including Chief Ministers of states, business tycoons and others are harassing him for the vaccine. Poonawalla was recently provided with Y-category security by the central government.

The head of SII said that due to this pressure, he has come to London with his daughter and wife before the UK government banned flights from India. 40-year-old Poonawalla said, "I have stayed this extra time because I don't want to go back to that position. Everything has fallen on my shoulder."

— Agencies

Vaccination for 18+ begins in few cities amid shortage

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 1

The third phase of Covid-19 vaccination in the country began on Saturday amid a shortage of vaccine doses. States like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan were among the few that conducted the vaccination drive for people between 18 to 45 years of age, but only in certain districts. Other states, including Delhi, West Bengal, Assam and Karnataka, didn't launch the third phase due to a paucity of vaccine doses, while some like Odisha organised a symbolic inoculation drive for those between 18 and 45 years.

With 4,01,993 cases, India on Saturday recorded its highest single-day coronavirus infections and 3,523 fatalities on Saturday. Active cases crossed the 32-lakh mark, according to data updated by the Union health ministry. The infection tally rose to 1,91,64,969, while the death toll increased to 2,11,853. Registering a steady

India gets 1.5 lakh doses of SputnikV Russian vaccine

Hyderabad/New Delhi: As many as 150,000 doses of the Sputnik V vaccine first consignment 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.

■ **More on Page 3**

increase, India's active cases have increased to 32,68,710, accounting for 17.06 per cent of the total infections, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate has dropped to 81.84 per cent.

As the national capital continues to grapple with rising Covid-19 cases and oxygen shortage, chief

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Some students, academics, journalists and individuals exempted US restricts travel from India from May 4

Washington, May 1: President Joe Biden has imposed restrictions on travel from India that stops most non-American citizens from entering the US for an indefinite period from May 4, citing the surging Covid-19 pandemic in the country.

Mr Biden issued a proclamation on Friday restricting travel from India starting on May 4.

Certain categories of students, academics, journalists and individuals have been exempted from the ban, the US state department said.

US nationals, those having green cards, their non-citizen spouses and children below 21 years of age, are among the various categories exempted from the

Australians arriving from India could face 5 years' jail and fine

Sydney: Australian residents and citizens who have been in India within 14 days of the date they plan to return home will be banned from entering Australia as of Monday and those who disobey will face fines and jail, government officials said.

The temporary emergency determination,

restrictions. The new travel restrictions have been imposed for an indefinite period and will require another presidential proclamation to end it. "I have determined that it

issued late on Friday, is the first time Australia has made it a criminal offence for its citizens to return home. The move is part of strict measures to stop travellers to Australia from the world's second most populous nation as it contends with a surge in Covid-19 cases and deaths.

■ **More on Page 6**

Thailand to fly back envoys from Delhi

New Delhi: Thailand is evacuating some of its diplomats from New Delhi in view of the serious Covid situation in the national capital. The Thailand government has sent its aircraft to evacuate some Thai embassy officials from India. The Thai aircraft also came with oxygen aid.

■ **More on Page 3**

the Republic of India during the 14-day period preceding their entry into the United States," says the proclamation signed by Mr Biden on Friday. — PTI

■ **More on Page 6**

Since April 20, the entire allocated quota of oxygen has not been delivered to Delhi even on a single day.

— Delhi high court

Kejriwal extends lockdown in Delhi by one more week

New Delhi: The Covid lockdown in Delhi — due to end 5 am Monday — has been extended by a week, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted Saturday evening. The national capital has been under lockdown since April 19, as the AAP scrambles to contain a fresh wave of infections and a positivity rate that remains over 30 per cent. "Lockdown in Delhi is being extended by one week," Mr Kejriwal tweeted. This is the second extension of the lockdown in the national capital.

■ **More on Page 2**

ASSEMBLY POLLS VERDICT TODAY

Counting halls doubled to contain Covid spread

New Delhi, May 1: Beginning 8 am on Sunday, the counting of votes for the 822 Assembly seats spread across West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry will take place at 2,364 counting halls following the Covid-19 protocols, the Election Commission (EC) said on Saturday.

In 2016, the total number of counting halls was 1,002. The over-200-per cent increase is due to the distancing norms being followed by the poll panel to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

West Bengal will have the maximum number of 1,113 counting halls, Kerala 633, Assam 331, Tamil Nadu 256 and Puducherry 31, the EC said.

Another reason the commission has attributed to the increase in the number of counting halls is the jump in the figure of postal ballots used in the five Assembly polls.

"The commission's measures to extend the postal ballot facilities to the electors in the categories of senior citizens (those above 80 years), people with disabilities and those affected by the coronavirus witnessed an increase of 400 per cent in the number of postal ballots (from 2.97 lakh in 2016 to 13.16 lakh in 2021) in the four states and a Union Territory," it said.

The commission has designated 822 returning officers and more than 7,000 assistant returning officers for the purpose of counting of votes in the four states and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

Nearly 95,000 counting officials, including micro-observers, will perform the task of counting.

No candidates or their

■ **Turn to Page 4**



SHORT TAKES

DU teachers want suspension of classes, exams

New Delhi: The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) wrote to the varsity's acting vice-chancellor PC Joshi demanding suspension of classes and cancellation of exams since many students and teachers have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The varsity on Thursday had said it will take stock of the exam schedule, amid demands from students asking for exams to be deferred in view of spiking Covid-19 cases in the country. The university is slated to hold online exams for final year undergraduate and postgraduate students between May and June. "The second wave of the pandemic has wreaked havoc in the lives of all sections of the university community. The loss of so many lives is tragic and is causing physical and psychological trauma to all," the letter said. Students, teachers and karmacharis (staff) are unable to cope with the spread of Covid-19 and the effect it is having on every individual life, it said, adding that it is incumbent upon the university administration to be sensitive to the trauma all around and take steps to alleviate the stress in the lives of people. "The fact that students are battling illness of self and family members is evident from the fact that the attendance in classes has significantly dropped... Hence, the DUTA demands that classes be suspended as students and teachers are not mentally and physically in a state to continue with the teaching learning process," the body said. — PTI

35-year-old doctor hangs self at home

New Delhi: A 35-year-old doctor at a private hospital in south Delhi allegedly hanged himself inside his residence at Malviya Nagar, police said on Saturday. According to police, Malviya Nagar police station received information on Friday at 11.16 pm where it was mentioned that the husband of the caller's friend was not opening the door. "Police reached at the given address on the second floor of a building in Malviya Nagar and found that a person was hanging from a ceiling fan with a saree," Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Atul Kumar Thakur said. The deceased has been identified as Vivek Rai. He used to work as a doctor in Max Hospital, Saket and was living at Malviya Nagar with his wife, police said. The body was shifted to AIIMS mortuary and post-mortem of the deceased was got conducted. After the autopsy, the body was handed over to his cousin, the DCP said. Police searched the room and a suicide notice was found wherein no allegation was made against anybody by the deceased. The suicide note addressed to his family and friends in which the deceased has wished well for all his known persons, police said. Inquest proceeding under section 174 CrPC is being done, police added.

2 held for selling fake Remdesivir vials at high price

New Delhi: Two men were arrested from east Delhi for allegedly selling fake Remdesivir injections at exorbitant prices, police said on Saturday. The accused have been identified as Anshuman (31), a resident of Rohini, and Kartik (24), a resident of Tilak Nagar, they said. On Friday, information was received that one Anshuman, who was selling fake Remdesivir injections at exorbitant price, would come near Cross River Mall around 8 pm in his car to sell injections to someone, a senior police officer said. Police spotted the car around 8.15 pm and was signalled to stop. Two persons came out of the vehicle with polythene bags in their hands and tried to flee, but were apprehended, he said. A total of 17 Remdesivir injections and one car were recovered from their possession, he said. Interrogation revealed that they procured these injections from one Akarshan, a resident of Noida, through one Anil. They were selling these injections at a price of ₹35,000 per vial, the officer said. They have cheated many people in the national capital, police said. — PTI

Amid Covid surge, lockdown of Delhi extended to May 10

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.



Arvind Kejriwal

▶ 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.

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

Man falls asleep at wheel, car rams into police picket killing constable

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 1

A 42-year-old man allegedly rammed his car into a police picket killing a constable in Vasant Vihar area early on Saturday morning, officials said.

The accident took place around 4 am at Al-Kausar picket when the accused, Samit Yadav, dozed off while he was returning from a hospital after attending to his Covid-19 positive wife, police said.

The deceased constable was identified as Munshi

Lal, 57, they said. "The offending vehicle, Honda CRV, rammed into the picket tent that was erected for staff to ensure lockdown and dragged Lal for 30 to 40 meters," Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Ingit Pratap Singh said.

The constable was rushed to AIIMS trauma center where he died during the course of treatment, he said. Yadav, a resident of Munirka, who works in IT sector, was apprehended from the spot, police said. He told police that he

felt asleep while returning from Max Hospital, Gurgaon, to attend to his wife, the DCP said. Yadav was taken to Vasant Vihar police station and given a PPE kit and isolated in police station premises. His medical test will be conducted soon, police said, adding a case has been registered under relevant sections of law and investigation is underway.

Lal, an ex-serviceman, was posted in Vasant Vihar police station since August 28, 2020, police said.



Bodies of Covid victims being consigned to flames at a crematorium in New Delhi on Saturday.

— G.N. JHA

PMO provides 150 ventilators to ITBP Covid care centre

New Delhi, May 1: The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has provided 150 medical ventilator machines from the PM CARES fund to a Delhi-based Covid care centre run by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), officials said on Saturday.

Bhaskar Khulbe, advisor to the PM, has written in this context to the Union health ministry, as per a copy of the letter provided by ITBP officials.

The 150 ventilators, equipped with global positioning system (GPS), will be installed at the Sardar Patel Covid Care Centre (SPCCC) that began operating on April 26 at the Radha Soami Beas campus in South Delhi's Chhatrapur area.

The ITBP, a border guarding force, has been entrusted to run the centre with the administrative support and funding of the state government.

The SPCCC was opened by the Centre on Delhi government's request in view of the recent massive surge in coronavirus infections in the national capital.

— PTI

■ Pvt hospitals in city yet to start vaccination of people above 18 yrs

Vaccination for 18-44 age group in Delhi from tomorrow: Kejriwal

New Delhi, May 1: Inoculation of people in the 18-44 age group against Covid-19 will begin in Delhi from Monday, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Saturday, saying 4.5 lakh vaccine doses have been received by the city government.

The chief minister visited a vaccination centre at Saraswati Vihar for a "symbolic launch" of the nationwide drive to inoculate people aged 18 years and above against the viral disease.

"Vaccination for the citizens in the age group of 18-44 years will begin in Delhi from May 3. We have already received 4.5 lakh vaccines and are distributing those to all the districts," he said.

Kejriwal urged people not to queue up outside the vaccination centres, saying walk-ins are not allowed yet. "I appeal to everyone, vaccination is not walk-in yet, so please do not queue up at the centres. Everyone will be given appointments and should get their registration done online," he said. The vaccination drive will be geared up as soon as the national capital receives more consignments of the vaccines, the chief minister said.

"In one way, today is symbolic as the vaccination drive has started only at one centre from today onwards for those between 18-44 years. From May 3, the vaccination drive will begin on a large scale in Delhi," he said.

Kejriwal told a press briefing on Friday that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has ordered 67 lakh doses each of Covishield and Covaxin, and said everyone in Delhi will be inoculated against Covid-19 in three months.

Some private hospital chains commenced the Covid-19 immunisation

▶ APOLLO HOSPITALS sources said the drive commenced at its centres in Hyderabad and Kolkata, but not in Delhi. They said that they are waiting for the vaccines to arrive and that the immunisation in Delhi is likely to begin either by Monday or Tuesday. The drive is yet to begin at Fortis Healthcare since it is waiting for the vaccine doses to arrive, sources said.

drive for the 18-44 age group at limited centres in the country on Saturday, officials said. Apollo Hospitals sources said the drive commenced at its centres in Hyderabad and Kolkata, but not in Delhi. They said that they are waiting for the vaccines to arrive and that the immunisation in Delhi is likely to begin either by Monday or Tuesday. Max Healthcare announced the drive will begin at "select hospitals in the network in the NCR of Delhi".

The drive is yet to begin at Fortis Healthcare since it is waiting for the vaccine doses to arrive, sources said, adding it will start later in the day. Fortis Healthcare, in a statement, had said people in the 18-44 age group will be administered Covaxin for ₹1,250, which will include the cost of vaccine and administration charges, at its "centres across north India from Saturday". Max Healthcare had said all the hospitals in the network would be used to vaccinate the citizens as supplies of vaccine doses smoothen up. "Presently, vaccines will be available at Max Healthcare facilities at Panchsheel Park, Patparganj, Shalimar Bagh, Rajinder Place (BLK-Max Hospital), Noida and Vaishali in the NCR," its statement read. — PTI



Covid-19 patients take free oxygen at Gurudwara Damdama Sahib in New Delhi on Saturday.

— G.N. JHA

Record 412 Covid deaths in Delhi as hospitals seek urgent O2 supply

New Delhi, May 1: The national capital recorded its highest 412 Covid-19 fatalities in a day and 25,219 new instances of the infection with a case positivity rate of 31.61 per cent on Saturday, according to a bulletin issued by the Delhi health department.

The city has so far recorded 11,74,553 cases, of which over 10.61 lakh have recovered. The death toll due to the viral disease stands at 16,559, the bulletin said.

A total of 79,780 tests, including 16,509 rapid-antigen tests, were conducted in a day. The city currently has 96,747 active cases, it added.

Out of the 21,227 Covid beds in various hospitals of the city, only 1,295 are vacant. A total of 50,554 patients are recovering in home isolation, the bulletin said.

According to it, 45,353 vaccine doses were admin-

istered in a day and included 21,828 who received the first dose and 23,525 who got the second dose. The number of containment zones in the city has jumped to 39,556 from 37,223 the previous day.

Several hospitals in the national capital reported precipitous drop in their oxygen stocks on Saturday and sent out desperate messages of help. Delhi government-run GTB Hospital said it has stock till 8 pm while Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital maintained that their oxygen stock will last for four hours. Sources at the Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital said their facility has put admissions on hold due to the depleting oxygen supplies. The hospital has nearly 350 patients and all of them are on oxygen support. At 7.35 pm on Saturday, Sir Ganga Ram

Hospital also pressed the SOS button as it said it has only 2,500 cubic metres of oxygen left for five hours. The hospital requires a minimum of 11,000 cubic metre of oxygen per day and has a consumption of 10,000 cubic metres on a daily basis. The hospital has 560 Covid patients.

Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj also stopped taking admissions due to oxygen shortage and had only four hours of oxygen left, sources had said in the afternoon.

Later, the issue was resolved after the hospital received an oxygen tanker around 4 pm. According to the Delhi Corona mobile application, the hospital has 106 coronavirus patients.

Sehgal Neo hospital in Meera Bagh too sent out an SOS message on Twitter about its dwindling oxygen. — PTI

Centre raises Delhi's daily oxygen quota to 590 MT

New Delhi, May 1: Amid an acute shortage of oxygen in Delhi hospitals, the Centre on Saturday raised the national capital's daily quota of the life-saving gas to 590 metric tonne from 490 MT.

According to the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry, Delhi will get an additional 75 metric tonne of oxygen from LINDE Kalinganagar and 25 MT from JSW BPSL J h a r s u g u d a (Odisha).

With new allocation, Delhi will get 590 metric tonne of medical oxygen every day.

However, the Delhi government is demanding 976 MT of oxygen from the Centre due to spiralling cases of the coronavirus in the city.

— PTI

Jailed ex-RJD MP Shahabuddin dies of Covid-19 in Delhi hospital

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/PATNA, MAY 1

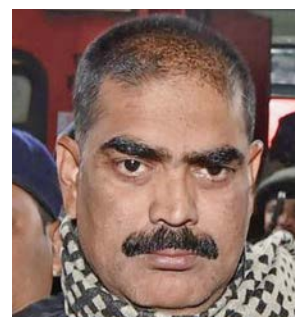
Former RJD MP Mohammad Shahabuddin passed away at a hospital in New Delhi on Saturday due to complications from Covid-19.

He was admitted to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital in Delhi for treatment after he tested positive on April 20. The gangster turned politician was lodged in Tihar jail where he was serving a life sentence in a 2004 double murder case.

Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar along with others expressed condolences over the death of former RJD MP RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav also expressed his condolences in a tweet and said that "Shahabuddin's untimely demise due to corona infection is painful. His death is an irreparable loss for the party".

Shahabuddin, considered close to RJD chief Lalu Yadav, was elected to Lok Sabha four times between 1996 and 2004. He was also an MLA for two terms between 1990 and 1995.

He was disqualified from



Mohammad Shahabuddin

contesting elections following his conviction in the kidnapping and disappearance of CPI (ML) activist Chote Lal Gupta. He was also accused of killing several other communist party activists, including former JNU student leader Chandrasekhar.

He was accused in over three dozen criminal cases including murder and kidnapping. Before being shifted to Tihar jail in 2018, he was lodged in Siwan and Bhagalpur jail for a long time. In 2015, a Siwan court had convicted Shahabuddin in a 2004 double murder case and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Later in 2017, the Patna High Court

had upheld the life imprisonment awarded to former RJD MP Mohammad Shahabuddin and three others. The incident had occurred on August 16, 2004, when three sons of a local businessman Chandeshwar Prasad was picked up from their house and was taken to Pratappur, the native village of Shahabuddin where acid was splashed on two of the victims.

Rajiv Roshan, the third brother somehow managed to escape from the scene of occurrence but was murdered on June 16, 2014 — three days before he was to appear in the court as a witness.

Shahabuddin who was earlier declared Type A history-sheeter by the state police had over three dozen criminal cases pending against him. Besides being convicted for murdering two brothers in 2004 he had been held guilty in several other criminal cases. Sources said, until November 2014, he had around 38 criminal cases pending in Siwan court. He was also facing trial in connection with the murder of journalist Rajdeo Ranjan.

TEMPORARY CANCELLATION OF TRAINS DUE TO POWER TRAFFIC BLOCK

It is notified for the information of railway passengers that NHAI/Dehradun will undertake the work of removal of RH Girders on Road Under Bridge/Raiwala situated between Raiwala - Kansrao stations on Lakshar Jn - Dehradun section in connection with construction of balance work of 4 laning of Haridwar - Dehradun section of NH-58 & NH-72 in the state of Uttarakhand over Moradabad Division of Northern Railway. To execute this work a power & traffic block will be taken for a duration of 09.00 hours (from 06.30 hrs to 15.30 hrs) on 05.05.2021. As a result following trains will be temporary cancelled as under:-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS		
Train No.	Train Name	Date of Cancellation (from originating station)
02017/02018	New Delhi - Dehradun - New Delhi Shatabadi Special Exp.	on 05.05.2021
04041	Delhi - Dehradun Festival Special Express	on 04.05.2021
04042	Dehradun - Delhi Festival Special Express	on 05.05.2021

For any other information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

RailMadad Helpline No. 139 • Visit RailMadad website: www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in & download Railmadad app.

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visit us at: www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in

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Centre releases
₹8,873cr to states

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, not only has the release of the SDRF been advanced but the amount has also been released without waiting for the utilisation certificate of the amount provided to the states in the last financial year. — *PTI*

Jailed Azam Khan
tests +ve for Covid

Sitapur, UP: Senior SP leader Mohammad Azam Khan tested positive for Covid-19 along with 13 other prisoners in Sitapur jail. The 72-year-old Rampur MP and the other prisoners tested positive for the infection in both rapid antigen and RT-PCR tests, said R.S. Yadav, jailer, Sitapur jail. He said the Covid-19 tests were conducted after complaints of fever and cough. Meanwhile, the SP demanded that Khan be shifted to a high-level hospital considering his age. News of MP Azam Khan getting infected is extremely saddening. Considering the age of Khan, he should be immediately shifted out of the jail hospital, and admitted to a high-level hospital by the government," the party said in a tweet in Hindi. Yadav said the treatment of the SP leader is going on as per Covid protocol and he has been isolated. — *PTI*

WHITE-BELLIED
HERON SPOTTED
IN ARUNACHAL

Itanagar: The white-bellied heron, a rare and elusive bird, was spotted at Walong in the Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Saturday. Walong is around 557 kilometers from the state capital. The bird was spotted and photographed by divisional forest officer of Anjaw Santosh Kumar Reddy, range forest officer Nosing Pul and scientist Dekbin Yonggam earlier this month. The white-bellied heron is categorised as 'critically endangered' in the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red Data Book and is listed in Schedule IV in the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. It is one of the rarest birds in the world and is at present found only in Bhutan, Myanmar and the Namdapha Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh. It had also been recorded in the adjacent Kamlang Tiger Reserve in Lohit district in camera trap images. The recent sighting at a height of 1,200 meters above sea level is a first at such a higher elevation in India, forest officials said. The presence of nesting sites within this area is a positive sign for the future habitat as the breeding season of the white-bellied heron starts in February and lasts till June, they said. Principal chief conservator of forests R.K. Singh said it is great news that the critically endangered bird is establishing new habitats beyond its traditional range. — *PTI*

'Centre is
trying to
defame
Uddhav'BHAGWAN PARAB
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.

Bengal relaxes partial
lockdown within 24 hrs

Allows weddings, familial gatherings, caps invitees at 50

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
AND PRANMOY
BRAHMACHARI
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE,
MAY 1

A day after imposing a partial lockdown, the Mamata Banerjee government tweaked restrictions despite a scarcity of Covid-19 vaccines, which has made the vaccination drive for the age group of 18-45 years a non-starter in the state amid a new record in daily cases of fresh infections and deaths.

On Saturday afternoon state chief secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay said in an order, "Marriage gatherings and other familial gatherings will also be seriously restricted and subjected to strict observance of Covid appropriate norms (e.g. strict use of masks, sanitisers, physical distancing, etc). The number of invitees to marriages and other familial gatherings should be restricted to minimum possible number and at no point of time should there be congrega-

Streets in Kolkata wear a deserted look during a shutdown to combat the Covid situation on Saturday. — *PTI*

tions of more than 50 persons in any ceremony."

On Friday the state government had banned all social and cultural assembly. Mr Bandopadhyay added, "The principle of keeping shops open in bazaars/hats during 7-10 am and 3-5 pm will apply to all retail and stand-alone outlets-shops also, excepting in case of retail outlets providing services relating to health care, electricity, telecom, transport, grocery, sweets, meat shop, milk supply, etc., which will remain outside the confines of the embar-

go. Use of masks, sanitisers and physical distancing would be compulsory in all these public places."

The state reported 17,512 fresh cases with 103 deaths in the last 24 hours. Meanwhile, the vaccination drive, which was earlier scheduled to start during the day for persons between 18-45 years was hit due to a lack of vaccine supply. The government stated that it would "notify" the date of the initiative once the vaccines reach the state. It has also decided to buy 2,000 oxygen concentrators.

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 virulent 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 deliv-

ery 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."

Gulf airline Qatar Airways also intends to transport 300 tonnes of aid from across its global network to Doha where it will be flown in a three-flight cargo aircraft convoy directly to destina-

tions in India on Monday (May 3) where it is most desperately needed.

Chinese ambassador Sun Weidong tweeted, "India is our neighbour and partner. China's actions speak louder than words. We've provided convenience in customs clearance and transportation for India to transport medical supplies from cities in China. We will continue to ensure smooth functioning of export channel of materials to India. China has the tradition of standing together with mutual assistance amid difficulties."

Fauci suggests
lockdown in
India to break
chain of Covid

New Delhi, May 1: Top US epidemiologist Anthony Fauci has suggested a lockdown for a few weeks in India as an immediate step to contain the spread of the coronavirus as its deadly second wave shows no signs of ebbing.

Dr Fauci, in an interview to a newspaper, said another most important thing 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". He said when China had a big explosion of coronavirus cases a year ago, they completely shut down.

Dr Fauci said it is not necessary to shut down for six months, but it can be a temporary one to put an end to the cycle of transmission. — *PTI*

Kumbh-returnee
seer dies of Covid
22 pilgrims missing in MP distRABINDRA 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

■ MEANWHILE 22 of the 83 devotees who returned to Gyasara in Vidisha district in MP after attending the Kumbh were found missing, spreading panic

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.

"All those who have attended the Haridwar Kumbh are being traced and tested. As many as 83 people from the area were found to have attended the Kumbh. Of them, 61 have been traced and tested. The rest 22 people were still missing", local block medical officer J D Abbas said.

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General Public is hereby informed that an unidentified dead body of a female Namely Unknown S/o Unknown, R/o Unknown Age: about 35-40 years, Height: 5'2", Complexion: Fair, Face: Round, Built: Strong, Wearing: Grey coloured t-shirt and lower, has been found dead on 24.04.2021 at Railway Line Jyoti Nagar, Delhi. In this regard a DD No. 16-A, dated 24.04.2021 has been lodged at P.S. Jyoti Nagar, Delhi.

If any one having any clue about deceased female may kindly inform the undersigned and contact on following numbers.

SHO
P.S. Jyoti Nagar, Delhi
Ph.: 011-22810525, 22810524
Mob.: 8750870731



■ Modi govt focussed on imagery, brand-building

World shaken by India's
Covid situation: RahulSANJEEV CHOPRA
NEW DELHI, MAY 1

As India logged a world record of over four lakh coronavirus infections on Saturday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the entire world is shaken by what is happening here and accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "dropping the ball and throwing it to states" after prematurely taking credit for having "won against Covid-19" when the second wave was already underway.

"Rely on yourself is the motto. No one will come to help you. Definitely, not the Prime Minister," Mr 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 to PTI, the former Congress chief alleged that the government completely failed to understand or to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic,

EVOLVE NATIONAL POLICY TO
FIGHT COVID: SONIA TO CENTRE

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 govern-

ments 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. — *PTI*

right from the very beginning, despite repeated warnings, including from scientists.

Training his guns on the Prime Minister and Union home minister Amit Shah, Mr Gandhi said India must be the only country in the world facing this massive pandemic without the guidance of an expert and empowered group that is charged with fighting the virus and protecting the people, with planning ahead, anticipating needs and taking the decisions that will result in swift action to save

lives. "They continuously ignored rising cases and were busy instead with election campaigns. They encouraged super-spreader events. They even bragged about them. Our Prime Minister and the home minister were not even wearing masks in public over the past few months. What sort of a message is that sending to citizens?" Mr Gandhi said.

He was referring to election rallies that were recently held for five assemblies for West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. — *PTI*

Navy, Air Force step up war against Covid

AGE 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 southeast 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 the operation 'Samudra Setu II', seven Indian Naval ships viz. *Kolkata*, *Kochi*, *Talwar*, *Tabar*, *Trikand*, *Jalashwa* and *Airavat* have been deployed for shipment of liquid medical oxygen-filled cryogenic containers and associated medical equipment from various countries."

The MoD added, "INS *Kolkata* and *INS Talwar*, mission deployed in the Persian Gulf, were the first batch of ships that were immediately diverted for the task and entered the

port of Manama, Bahrain on 30 April 21. INS *Talwar*, with 40 MT liquid medical oxygen embarked, is headed back home. INS *Kolkata* has proceeded to Doha, Qatar for embarking medical supplies and will subsequently head to Kuwait for embarking Liquid Oxygen tanks."

The MoD further said, "Similarly, on the Eastern seaboard, *INS Airavat* too has been diverted for the task, while *INS Jalashwa*, the LPD which played a key role during op *Samudra Setu* last year was pulled out of maintenance readied and sailed out to augment the effort. *INS Airavat* is scheduled to enter Singapore for embarking liquid oxygen tanks and *INS Jalashwa* is standing by

in the region to embark medical stores at short notice. The second batch of ships comprising *Kochi*, *Trikand* and *Tabar* mission deployed in the Arabian sea has also been diverted to join the national effort."

Pointing out that from the Southern Naval Command, the Landing Ship Tank *INS Shardul* is being readied to join the Operation within 48 hours, the MoD said, "Indian Navy also has the surge capability, to deploy more ships when the need arises to further the nation's fight against Covid-19. It is pertinent that the ships are combat-ready and capable of meeting any contingency in keeping with the attributes of the versatility of sea power."



Govt. of Haryana

Let's Stay Alert
to combat
Corona Strain

Sh. Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana

Only You and I
can break this
virus chain



Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana



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SHORT TAKES

Truck with vaccines found abandoned

Bhopal: A truck carrying 2.40 lakh doses of Covaxin vaccine worth ₹8 crore was found abandoned 'mysteriously' for 12 hours in Madhya Pradesh's Narsinghpur district, police said on Saturday. The matter came to light on Friday afternoon when the locals alerted the police about the 'abandoned' truck. The vehicle with Bharat Biotech mentioned on it was parked near Kareli bus stand, around 17 km from district headquarters of Narsinghpur, for 12 hours, the police was alerted. "The Tamil Nadu-registered truck sans the driver was found parked near the bus stand. We contacted the transport company TCI of Gurgaon and detailed them on the abandoned vehicle. The company people said they were also worried that the GPS system showed the truck remaining stationary at Kareli and the driver was missing", Narsinghpur district superintendent of police Vipul Srivastav said.

Scribe Pritiman dies of Covid in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Pritiman Mohapatra, a senior journalist from Odisha, succumbed to Covid virus on Saturday evening. He was 50. The scribe was undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Bhubaneswar after being afflicted by the disease eight days ago. Mohapatra was working with the Bhubaneswar edition of Times of India. He had also worked with *The New Indian Express*, Bhubaneswar. Mohapatra, an alumnus of Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Dhenkanal, started his career with Sun Times. Earlier this week, five veteran journalists of the state-Deendra Samantaryay, Adwaita Prasad Biswal, Amjad Badshah, Bhanu Prakash Rath and Manas Ranjan Jaipuria had died of the coronavirus disease.

Sitar maestro Pandit Debu Chaudhuri dies

New Delhi: Sitar maestro Pandit Devbrata Chaudhuri died of Covid related complications at a Delhi hospital on Saturday, his son Prateek Chaudhuri said. He was 85. Prateek announced the death of his father, more popularly known as Debu Chaudhuri, on his official Facebook page. "My Father, The Legend of Sitar, Pandit Debu Chaudhuri... is no more. He was admitted with Covid along with dementia complications and was put in ICU on ventilator around midnight today. (May 1, 2021)... after which he suffered a heart attack and could not be revived... In spite of all efforts and prayers he could not be saved," Prateek wrote. — *PTI*.

Give Delhi 490 MT O2

■ **Continued from Page 1** MT positively today by whatever means. Considering the fact that Delhi is not an industrial state and does not have availability of cryogenic tankers of its own, which could be requisitioned under the Disaster Management Act like other states have done, it falls upon the Central government to arrange the tankers as well, so that the allocation made to Delhi could be fulfilled, lest it remains only a paper allocation. The Centre shall ensure availability of cryogenic tankers as well for the said supply," the bench said. It also noted that since April 20, the entire allocated quota of 480 MT oxygen and thereafter, 490 MT has not been delivered to Delhi even on a single day. Late on Saturday evening, the Centre raised Delhi's daily quota of the life-saving gas to 590 metric tonne from 490 MT. According to the Union health ministry, Delhi will get an additional 75 metric tonne of oxygen from LINDE Kalinganagar and 25 MT from JSW BPSL Jharsuguda (Odisha). With new allocation, Delhi will get 590 metric tonne of medical oxygen every day. However, the Delhi government is demanding 976 MT of oxygen from the Centre. Earlier the court said hospitals should learn from their experiences regarding oxygen scarcity during the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic and set up plants for generating the life-saving gas. The two-judge bench said for commercial considerations, some hospitals reduce capital expenditures on things like oxygen plants which are essential in a hospital, especially the big ones.

GST collection surge to record ₹1.41L cr in Apr.

GST collections in April are 14 % higher than ₹1.23L crore mopped up in March

New Delhi, May 1: GST collections crossed the ₹1 lakh crore mark for the seventh month in a row and touched a record high of over ₹1.41 lakh crore in April, indicating economic recovery, the Finance Ministry said on Saturday. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections, which directly reflect the state of economic activity, in April are 14 per cent higher than ₹1.23 lakh crore mopped up in March.

In April last year, the revenue had plummeted to a record low of ₹32,172 crore, after the government imposed a nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus.

As economic activity picked up, GST collections started crossing the ₹1 lakh crore mark since October last year.

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 ₹27,837 crore, SGST ₹35,621 crore, IGST ₹68,481 crore (including ₹29,599 crore collected on import of goods) and cess ₹9,445 crore (including ₹981 crore collected on import of goods).

During April, revenues from domestic transaction (including import of services) are 21 per cent higher than in March.

"GST revenues have not only crossed the ₹1 lakh crore mark successively for the last seven months but have also shown a steady increase. These are clear indicators of sus-

■ **THE GOODS and Services Tax collections, which directly reflect the state of economic activity, in April are 14 per cent higher than ₹1.23 lakh crore mopped up in March**

tained 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 ministry said.

Tax experts, however, said that since the April collections reflect economic activity in March, the GST mop-up in the coming months could see decline owing to lockdowns in certain parts of the country to curb surge in Covid cases. Deloitte India Senior Director M.S. Mani said, "The all-time high collections which relate to supplies made in March 2021 could now give way to muted collections in the coming months due to the lower economic activities in April."

Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co. Partner Rajat Bose said the collection figures for April represent the tax collected towards transactions done in the month of March 2021. "Since its the year end, most companies close their books and raise invoices during the financial close."

— *PTI*

■ 21 minor, 4 pregnant women among held captive at brick kiln 79 guest workers rescued in T'gana

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 1

As many as 79 migrant labourers, including 21 minor and four pregnant women, hailing from western Odisha districts of Nuapara and Bolangir were rescued from a brick kiln in Sangareddy district of Telangana and sent to their hometowns on Friday, reports said on Saturday.

The labourers were rescued with the help of a social activist and lawyer Ranjeeta Priyadarshini of Bargarh.

According to Ranjita who practices law in Odisha high court, she received a phone call from some labourers engaged

in the brick kiln. The callers told her that some of their co-workers were suffering from high fever and cold and the brick kiln owner did show any interest to provide them treatment. Instead, he forced them to work in the brick kiln at Annaram village in Sangareddy district.

Ranjeeta informed the matter to the Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik, the district collectors of Sangareddy, Nuapada and Bolangir through mails.

"The brick kiln workers narrated to me their harrowing ordeal in the hands of their owner. They told me that they were assaulted and forced to work in inhumane conditions. Later, I immedi-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi offering prayers at Sis Ganj Sahib Gurudwara here on 400 Prakash Purab of Guru Teg Bahadur in New Delhi on Saturday.

■ Agency to quiz Mamata's nephew again in coal scam case

CBI tightens noose around Abhishek

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI MAY 1

More trouble seems to be in store for Trinamul Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee, nephew of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, as the CBI is now preparing to examine him again in connection with the alleged coal scam.

"Abhishek Banerjee may be examined again by the CBI as his name surfaced in the recent remand note of another central probe agency—Enforcement Directorate, which is also probing the scam", sources said. In March, the family members of Abhishek Banerjee's sister-in-law appeared before the CBI in connection with the multi-crore scam.

The CBI had registered

TOP BENGAL IPS OFFICER GETS CBI SUMMONS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MAY 1

A senior IPS officer, Gyanwant Singh, who is heading the VVIP security wing of the West Bengal Police that also provides the Z-plus category protection to chief minister Mamata Banerjee, has been summoned by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for his questioning in the high-profile coal smuggling case.

the case against the alleged kingpin of the pilferage scam Anup Manjhi alias Lala, Eastern Coalfield Ltd general managers Amit Kumar Dhar and Jayesh Chandra Rai, ECL chief of

Mr Singh has been asked to appear at the anti-corruption branch office of the CBI at Nizam Palace in south Kolkata on May 4.

The additional director general-rank IPS officer, against whom governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has also been vocal over some steps, has been posted as director at the directorate of security following the suspension of Vivek Sahay by the Election Commission due to the security lapses, which left

the Trinamul Congress supremo injured in Nandigram.

Mr Singh earlier served as the ADG (law and order). According to sources, the CBI came across his name in the statements of many suspects including some IPS officers who were earlier grilled in the scam. Many of them referred to Mr Singh's link when he was posted as Inspector General (Western Zone), sources claimed.

The CBI has also summoned another TMC leader Vinay Mishra for questioning in connection with the coal scam. He will appear before the agency sleuths on May 3.

UP rural polls counting allowed by SC after poll body's assurance

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 1

The Supreme Court, in a special hearing on Saturday, gave the go ahead to the counting of votes for the panchayat election in Uttar Pradesh following an assurance by the state government and the State Election Commission that all the essential measures for safety and security of all concerned would be adhered to in letter and spirit and the curfew will be imposed.

A bench comprising Justice A.M. Khanwilkar and Justice Hrishikesh Roy allowed the counting of votes taking on record the assurance by the Uttar Pradesh government and

■ **THE COURT was assured that the operating protocol is "being and will be adhered to by all the stake holders as well as duty holders without any exception."**

the State Election Commission (SEC).

The court was assured that the operating protocol is "being and will be adhered to by all the stake holders as well as duty holders without any exception." The court also took on record the assurance by the Uttar Pradesh government and the SEC in the course of the hearing that strict curfew would be imposed in areas particularly "in and around the

Bengal BJP neta plotted to kill party choice, held

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 1

A BJP leader was arrested by the Malda police in West Bengal, on Saturday, for allegedly masterminding the shooting on his party's Assembly election candidate Gopal Chandra Saha, which left him injured, in the district recently.

The accused, Nitai Mondal, is the BJP Grameen Mandal president in Old Malda Block. He is also the leader of opposition at the Old Malda Panchayat Samiti.

According to the police, Nitai is the main conspirator of the attack on Mr Saha, who contested at Malda seat.

Preliminary investigation revealed that Nitai wanted a ticket to fight the Assembly polls but was denied by his party. He later demonstrated with his followers outside the BJP office during a massive state-wide protest over discontent on ticket distribution two months ago.

Getting no results, Nitai, through his nephew Akash Mondal (19), who has criminal records, hired two young sharpshooters, Saheb Ghosh and Bittu Majumdar, for a supari (contract) of ₹50 lakh to eliminate Mr Saha, the police learnt.

On the evening of April 18, Saheb, leading a gang of six miscreants, opened fire on Mr Saha at Jhantu More after he finished his poll campaign. The BJP candidate survived as he suffered the bullet injuries in his throat. He was admitted to a hospital.

counting centres and will be continued until the counting process of the concerned counting centre is completed in all respects including declaration of results."

The court was additionally assured that no victory rally will be permitted throughout the state "after the results are announced or while the counting process is in progress."

The top court nod to the counting of votes came in the course of the hearing of an appeal by one Sachin Yadav challenging the April 7, 2021, Allahabad high court order rejecting a PIL for deferring the panchayat election in UP in the wake of the second wave of Covid.

Vaccinations for 18+ begins

■ **Continued from Page 1** minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday announced that the lockdown in the capital would be extended by one more week. This means restrictions will be in place till May 10. This will be the second extension of the lockdown in the city to contain the Covid pandemic.

West Bengal on Saturday reported the highest one-day Covid-19 deaths with 103 people succumbing to the infection. The state's coronavirus death toll is 11,447 now. The state's tally rose to 8,45,878 with a record single-day spike of 17,512 cases on Saturday. Haryana reported 13,588 new cases and 125 deaths on Saturday.

Maharashtra reported 63,282 new cases, 802 deaths and 61,326 discharges. A total of 3,908 new cases, 90 deaths and 5,900 recoveries were reported in Mumbai. Andhra Pradesh reported 19,412 new cases, 61 deaths in the past 24 hours and Karnataka recorded 40,990 new cases.

Himachal Pradesh reported 2,751 new cases, 1,220 recoveries and 28 deaths during the past 24 hours. There were 13,847 new positive cases in Gujarat in the last 24 hours.

12 die in Batra as hospital runs out of O2

■ **Continued from Page 1** those who died due to lack of oxygen, said Dr S.C.L. Gupta, medical director of the hospital. He had been admitted to the hospital for the last 15-20 days.

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. The oxygen tanker arrived at 1.35 pm, they said, adding that they were without oxygen for 80 minutes. Saturday was the second time in the space of a week that the hospital ran out of oxygen.

Delhi chief minister

Arvind Kejriwal expressed grief over the incident. "This news is very painful. Their lives could have been saved - by giving them oxygen on time. Delhi should get its quota of oxygen. Can't see our people dying like this. Delhi needs 976 tonnes of oxygen, but it received only 312 tonnes yesterday. How will Delhi breathe in such a less amount of oxygen?" he said on Twitter in Hindi.

Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj has stopped taking admissions due to oxygen shortage. The hospital has four hours of oxygen left, sources said. According to the Delhi Corona mobile application, the hospital has 106 coronavirus patients.

Sehgal Neo hospital in Meera Bagh too sent out an SOS message on Twitter about its dwindling oxygen. "We request urgent assistance in getting #SOSoxygen. We are running out of our backup supply, and have been waiting for a supply since early morning. We have 90 patients on O2 & 13 in ICU," the hospital tweeted around 12.40 pm.

Hospitals across the national capital and its suburbs have been sending out desperate messages of help on social media and other platforms, flagging their dwindling stocks of oxygen.

Delhi has recorded between 24,000 and 28,000 new coronavirus cases per day over the past two

weeks, and has also reported record numbers of Covid-related deaths per day. The city's quota of oxygen had been raised to 490 metric tonnes per day, but supply is only around 400 MT, the state government has said.

Sir Ganga Ram Hospital had last week reported the death of 25 of its "sickest" patients as the administration struggled with depleting oxygen supplies. Twenty people died at the Jaipur Golden Hospital last week amid shortage of oxygen.

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia had on Friday said that not for a single day has Delhi been able to receive the allocated quantity of 490 MT of oxygen.

Counting halls doubled to contain Covid

■ **Continued from Page 1** agents will be allowed inside the counting halls without a negative coronavirus report, according to the latest result-day guidelines issued by the EC.

According to the information received from the state chief electoral officers (CEOs), the contesting candidates have given the details of nearly 1.5 lakh counting agents (including substitutes) in the four states and the UT. More than 90 per cent of

them have already undergone RTPCR or RAT tests. The remaining are being provided with the test facility by the district election officers on Saturday.

Test reports from any authorised laboratory would also be accepted, the EC said.

This is also being followed for the counting of votes in the bypolls held to Lok Sabha and Assembly seats across the country. The media authorised by the commission to cover the counting process is

■ **ACCORDING TO the information received from the state chief electoral officers, the contesting candidates have given the details of nearly 1.5 lakh counting agents (including substitutes) in the four states and the UT**

also being facilitated with coronavirus tests. Around 12,000 mediapersons have been given the authority to cover the counting.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)

Sushil Chandra reviewed the counting arrangements with senior EC officers and the CEOs of the four states and the UT at a virtual meeting on Saturday.

He directed that all laid-down instructions of the EC must be adhered to. He also directed that the counting halls must be fully COVID guidelines compliant.

The CEC complimented the CEOs for a successful completion of polling in the challenging situations of the pandemic. — *PTI*

THE ASIAN AGE

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: excruciating *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 diid 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 on 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 paused. “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-dhari 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 dikhata 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

BIG DADDY LOSING?

This refers to the editorial, “How govt’s spin is losing us the war against Covid” (May 1). The Union government faces criticism both within the country and from the international media that a major cause of the crisis is its reluctance to acknowledge its own failure to prepare for a calamitous second wave. Questions fired at it by high courts are also on these lines. Its affidavit before the Supreme Court is not in touch with the ground reality. Good to know that citing Covid emergency, the Times Now news channel is set to curtail its election result coverage. News watchers feel that Big Daddy is losing the elections, after all.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

SPIN DOCTORS

MODERN ERA politics, like the Wuhan virus, thrives on triggering endless division within the society to then set a frenetic pace of an “us vs them” syndrome. Polarisation is the watchword today and its staple is the spin on chosen narratives. A partisan visual media, given a locked down audience, is not shy to reveal its source of patronage in the reports they file with such concern. Crises then worsen, notwithstanding the respite from such loyal spin doctors. Under the onslaught of a merciless virus, the common man is at least entitled to hard facts, if little else.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

SLAP ON THE WRIST

THIS REFERS TO “SC warns govt against action on those airing Covid distress” (May 1). The SC chiding is timely and warranted. It is outrageous that people making SOS calls are booked for criminal offence. The BJP government is only interested in perception management, aided and abetted by pliable media. It can manipulate and obfuscate the Covid deaths but the crowded crematoriums and burial grounds are speaking for themselves. The government is losing the plot and ought to double down on their efforts at pandemic management instead of stifling innocuous and desperate tweets or voices of dissenters.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

DEADLY OPACITY

KYLE HARPER, a historian, wrote a book in 2017 called *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*. The book teaches us how climate change and epidemics are inextricably linked. If we can’t handle everything right now, in the near future we will have to face pandemics as well as a civil war. The plague riots in Bombay in 1896 should not be forgotten. Even in 1897, Pune plague commissioner W.C. Rand was assassinated. And there were two main reasons — opacity regarding the government’s plague policy and rumours. Nowadays, too, there is similar ambiguity over government policy, with rumours circulating about viruses and vaccines.

Ardendu Banerjee
Kolkata

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

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.

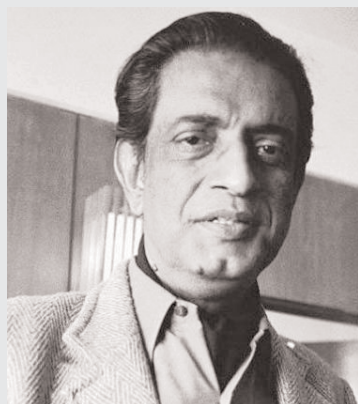
The deification of the creative genius is a metamorphosis that is imperceptible but very real. There are two pantheons in Bengal. The first is the conventional pantheon of the divine, crowded by so many avatars of the goddess or gods that only the cognoscenti know the difference. The second is the pantheon 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 *Abhijana*, 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

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 for 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

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.

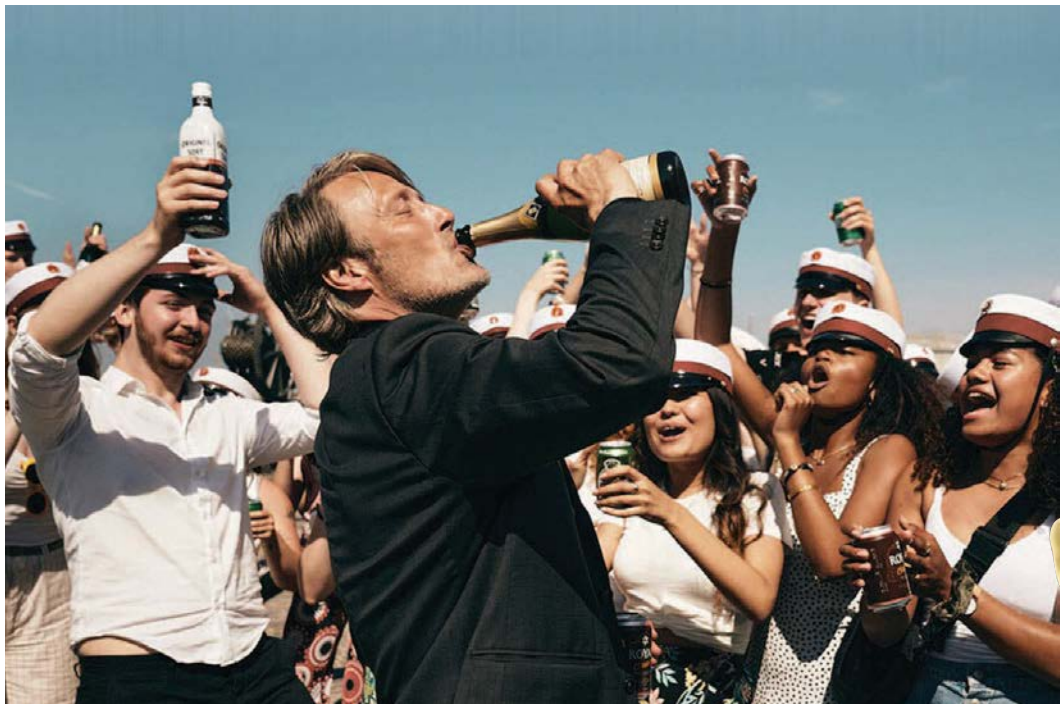
That's why, perhaps, last week the Academy bypassed Jasmila bani's absolutely brutal and brilliant Bosnian war drama, *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, and handed the Oscar for best international film to Vinterberg.

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.

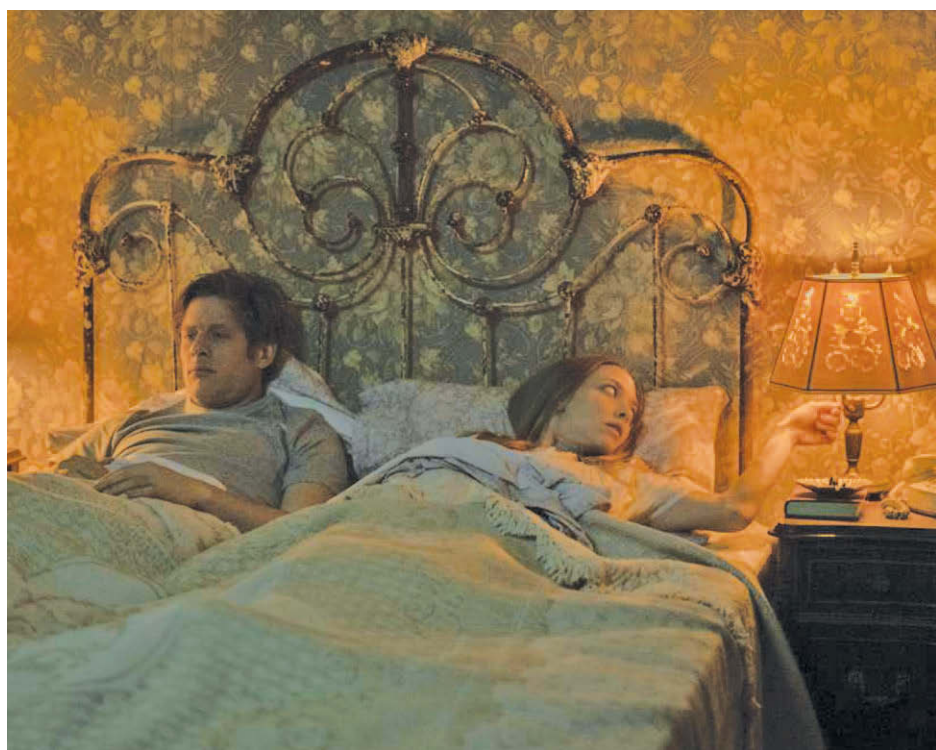
"What is youth? A dream. What is love? The content of the dream."

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:** ★★

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**

World 107 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. — **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

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Newcastle vs Arsenal from 6.30 pm; Manchester United vs Liverpool from 9 pm; Tottenham vs Sheffield United from 11 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

Italian League: Udinese vs Juventus from 9.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD

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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 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 including the Super Over defeat against Chennai Super Kings.

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**

Punjab spinners aim to trick DC

Ahmedabad, May 1: Young Punjab Kings spinners Harpreet Brar and Ravi Bishnoi wouldn't mind another dream day in office against a menacing Delhi Capitals here on Sunday, aiming to take a giant leap forward in their bid for an Indian Premier League play-off berth.

Brar's match-winning 3/19 was wonderfully complemented by Bishnoi's 2/19 as their combined haul of 5/36 in 8 overs decimated a star-studded Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Come Sunday, the duo will face a tougher task against the Delhi team which has a slightly better record against spin attacks with openers Shikhar Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw in imperious form.

Dhawan (311 runs) and Shaw (269 runs) have provided flying starts with five half-centuries between them along with 71 fours and 15 sixes. For any bowling unit, facing the Dhawan-Shaw duo is a scary proposition.

In fact, Bishnoi, who primarily bowls the googly,

HEAD to HEAD

Matches	27
PBKs	15 DC 12

FOR THE RECORD

- Lokesha 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

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
(Aguero 57, Torres 59)	
Southampton	1
(Ward-Prowse 61-pen)	
Leicester	1
(Evans 68)	

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**