

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
ANANTAPUR | SUNDAY | 2 MAY 2021



WORLD | 5
Covid situation in India tragic: Harris



SPORTS | 8
Sunrisers sack Warner as captain

TABLOID
IPL players chip in for Covid relief



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WEATHER

Max: 40.0°C
Min: 18°C
RH: 38%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 40/18 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula Shashthi till 2.55 pm
Star: Purvashada till 9.01 am
Varjyam: 4.48 pm to 6.22 pm
Durmuhurtam: 4.52 pm to 5.42 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
HJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 18,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 06.08 AM
SUNSET TODAY 06.33 PM
MOONSET 09.27 AM
MOONRISE 11.19 PM

RAMZAN TIMINGS
IFTAR: 6.49 (Today)
SEHRI: 4.34 (Tomorrow)

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

Time extended for tax compliance

New Delhi: The government on Saturday extended time-lines for various income tax compliances, including the filing of belated or revised return for the 2019-20 fiscal, till May 31. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said it had received representations from various stakeholders for relaxation on compliance requirements.

SBI home loan rate cut to 6.70%

Mumbai: State Bank of India (SBI) Saturday said it has reduced home loan interest rate to 6.70 per cent. The lender said home loan interest rates are now starting from 6.70 per cent for loans up to ₹30 lakh and 6.95 per cent for loans above ₹30 lakh to ₹75 lakh. The interest rate on home loans above ₹75 lakh is 7.05 per cent, the bank said in a release.

GST collections hit ₹1.41 lakh cr

New Delhi: GST collections in April touched a record high of over ₹1.41 lakh crore, indicating sustained economic recovery, the Finance Ministry said on Saturday. The revenues for the month of April 2021 are 14 per cent higher than ₹1.23 lakh crore collected in March. During the month, the revenues from domestic transaction (including import of services) are 21 per cent higher over March.

Poonawalla cites pressure for vax

London: Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla on Saturday spoke out about the pressures he was under over the production of Covid-19 vaccines to meet the ever-increasing demand in India. He told *The Times* in an interview about receiving aggressive calls from some of the most powerful people in India, demanding supplies of Covishield.

Vaccination for all adults starts



A woman gets inoculated with a dose of Covishield vaccine against the Covid-19 at a vaccination centre in Mumbai on May 1 on the first day of vaccination drive to all adults. Several states deferred the plan due to lack of vaccines. — AFP

Counting of votes in Covid shadow today

New Delhi, May 1: Counting of votes will be held on Sunday in the high-stakes Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry Assembly elections, overshadowed by the raging Covid pandemic.

There will be 2,364 counting halls as compared to 1,002 halls in 2016 in 822 Assembly constituencies, a more than 200 per cent increase, in view of the Covid guidelines, according to the Election Commission which had drawn flak from the courts over the conduct of polls during the pandemic. At least 15 rounds of sanitisation will be carried out at each polling centre, besides social distancing and other precautions, including a ban on gatherings, will be strictly followed, officials said. They said counting of votes will begin at 8 am and continue

YSRC LEADERS DEBATE ABOUT WINNING MARGIN IN TIRUPATI LOK SABHA BYPOLL

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MAY 1

With counting of votes set to begin in Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election on Sunday, ruling YSRC leaders are debating about winning margin of their nominee Gurumoorthy. In all, 28 candidates fought the bypoll, including former union minister Panabaka Lakshmi of TD, former Karnataka chief secretary Rathna Prabha of BJP and former MP Chinta Mohan of Congress.

TD leadership appears to have given up main-

taining that its nominee Panabaka Lakshmi will certainly secure a sizable vote share.

All arrangements have been made for counting of votes at DKW College in Nellore and SV University in Tirupati.

Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency consists of seven Assembly seats, comprising Sarvepalli, Gudur, Venka-tagiri and Sullurpet in Nellore district and Sathyavedu, Srialahasti and Tirupati in Chittoor district.

■ Page 2: Dry day on Sunday

late into the night. As many as 1,100 counting observers will watch the process and candidates

and agents will have to produce a negative Covid test report to get an entry. — PTI

Professor, 5 medicos held for exam malpractice

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MAY 1

Police have booked a case against a professor and five MBBS students of Narayana Medical College in Nellore in an examination-related malpractice during the supplementary examination held here on Friday. A police team led by Dargamitta circle inspector Nageswaramma caught students red-handed when they were writing first-year biochemistry (Paper II) at the residence

of the professor at Saraswathy Nagar in Nellore late on Friday night. The police team reached the house after an anonymous call that MBBS classes are being run in a house. They were surprised when they found the students writing on answer sheets with help from the professor.

According to police, the exam had actually been held at the college on Friday afternoon. The professor, with the help of two middlemen and a courier

agent, managed to access an answer sheet bundle booked through Speed Post. As there was a time gap before dispatching all parcels of answer sheets by Speed Post through RMS (Railway Mail Service), answer sheets belonging to specific students were removed from the bundle to enable them to write the exam afresh, before return the papers to the bundle.

■ Page 2: Plan misfired as police arrive

12 critical Covid patients die due to lack of oxygen

18, including 16 covid patients die in Gujarat hospital fire

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC with agency inputs NEW DELHI/AHMEDABAD 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.

Meanwhile, at least 16 Covid-19 patients and two nurses died on Saturday when a four-storey hospital in Bharuch, Gujarat, caught fire. There were around 50 other patients when the blaze began at 1 am. It was put out.

The death toll stood at 18, police official Rajendrasinh Chudasama said, "including 16 patients and two nurses."

Primary investigation revealed that the fire started due to a short-cir-



Paramedics rescue Covid patients from a fire breakout in Patel Welfare Covid Hospital at midnight on Saturday. — PTI

cuit in the ICU of the hospital," he 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 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.

Meanwhile, the Delhi

High Court while hearing the shortage of oxygen said, "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. 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 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.

KCR TAKES CHARGE OF HEALTH, ETALA KEPT SANS POST

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MAY 1

On a day of swift developments, Etala Rajendar was on Saturday stripped of the health and family welfare portfolio. TS Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan has transferred the portfolio to Chief Minister K. Chandrabab Naidu with immediate effect.

The decision was taken on the advice of the Chief Minister, a release from the Raj Bhavan said. Consequently, Rajendar is now minister without a portfolio. Rajendar, who represents Huzurabad constituency, is in the thick of a controversy over allegations of encroaching assigned lands in Achampally and Hakimpet in Medak district for poultry farms.

■ Page 2: Rao ordered probe into allegations

PCB issues closure notice to Jay Galla's battery unit

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MAY 1

Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (AP PCB) on Saturday ordered immediate closure of plants belonging to Amara Raja Batteries Limited (ARBL) at Karkambadi and Nunegundlapalli villages in Chittoor district. The board attributed closure orders to severe pollution caused by ARBL plants in the surrounding villages.

ARBL belongs to the family of former TD legislator Galla Arunakumari and Guntur TD MP Galla Jayadev.

In the notice served to Amara Raja company on Saturday, board officials underlined presence of high levels lead in blood samples collected from people of the villages. "The lead values in blood

are high (35%). Excess lead values in blood samples of those in surrounding villages show that operation of these units is endangering public health," the notice said.

PCB further requested AP SPDCL to disconnect power supply to ARBL-run MVRLA, automotive batteries division, small battery unit, tubular unit, and unit 3 located along Chittoor-Bangalore road at Nunegundlapalli village

of Bangarupalem mandal in Chittoor district. Management of ARBL has said they are taking all necessary steps to comply with orders given by AP PCB. They have also pressed into action contingency plans to avoid dislocation in supplies of batteries to their customers across product segments, including essential-service segments like defence, hospitals and telecom.

"We shall continue to make our efforts to engage with AP PCB authorities in the interest of avoiding dislocation in supplies to some of our largest clients in sensitive sectors. At a time of a national emergency in the form of the Covid pandemic, such dislocation could be calamitous," the management said in a press release on Saturday.

COVID | EFFECT Restrictions for indefinite period from May 4; Exceptions given to students, academics, scribes

US curbs travel from India, non-Americans restricted

Washington, May 1: US 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.

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 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 is in the interests of the US to take action to restrict and suspend the entry into America, as non-immigrants, of non-citizens of the US who were physically present within India during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the

US," says the proclamation signed by Biden on Friday. The decision has been taken at the recommendation of the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), within the Department of Health and Human Services, which determined India is experiencing widespread, person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19.

After reviewing the public health situation within India, the CDC has concluded that proactive measures are required to protect the nation's public health from travellers entering the US from that jurisdiction, he said.

According to the State Department, the travel ban exemption to certain categories is in line with a sim-

ilar exemption that the US has granted to some categories of travellers from Brazil, China, Iran and or South Africa.

Students seeking to commence studies in the fall, academics, journalists and individuals who provide critical infrastructure support in countries affected by a geographic Covid-19 restriction may qualify for the exception, it said.

This includes qualified applicants who have been present in India, Brazil, China, Iran, or South Africa, it added.

As always, visa applicants should check the website of the nearest embassy or consulate for the most up-to-date information about visa appointment availability, the State Department said. — PTI

Aussies from India to face 5-yr jail if they try to return

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

The temporary ban begins on Monday and applies to any travellers who have visited India within 14 days of their intended arrival date in Australia.

There are an estimated 9,000 Australians in India and over 600 of them are classified as vulnerable, according to *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper. The decision was announced by the health ministry on Friday after a meeting of the National Cabinet. The move aims at keeping the coronavirus spread in check in Australia.

The decision was based on the proportion of overseas travellers in quarantine in Australia, who

have contracted the infection in India, health minister Greg Hunt said.

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

Breaches of the travel ban could lead to five years' imprisonment, a 66,000-Australian dollar (\$50,876) fine or both, the report said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Duronto Exp
cancelled

Visakhapatnam: The Duronto Express between Visakhapatnam and Secunderabad has been cancelled on both the directions temporarily due to lack of passengers. A release from Waitair Division on Saturday said the train was cancelled from May 3 to May 31 until further orders. However, the Yesvantpur-Danapur summer special express will run one way from May 6.

DRY DAY ON
SUNDAY

FROM PAGE 1

District collector and returning officer of Tirupati byelection K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu said that they will commence counting at 8 am on Sunday with counting of electronically transmitted postal votes, followed by those recorded on electronic voting machines.

Chakradhar said it will be mandatory for counting agents to wear PPE kits. Counting staff will have to wear their face-shield and masks while performing their duties.

"No candidates, agents or media will be allowed inside the counting hall without undergoing RT-PCR / RAT test or without having had the two doses of vaccination against Covid-19," the collector maintained.

Dry Day has been declared on Sunday. No liquor shops, hotels, restaurants, clubs or other establishments selling or serving liquor will be permitted to open from 12 midnight on May 1 to 10 am on May 3, 2021.

Trends and results can be obtained from <https://results.eci.gov.in> or through "Voter helpline" Mobile App available at Google Play and Apple App Store.

PLAN MISFIRED
AS POLICE ARRIVE

FROM PAGE 1

However, their plan misfired after police arrived on the scene. Police said they have detained the five students, professor, and two middlemen after registering cases for cheating and malpractice against them. A lookout has been issued for the courier agent.

Sources said each student had paid ₹2.5-₹3 lakh to the professor through middlemen to get access to their answer sheets and write the exam

RAO ORDERED
PROBE INTO
ALLEGATIONS

FROM PAGE 1

Rao had ordered a probe on Friday into the allegations against Rajendar. Even as inquiry teams from Vigilance, ACB, revenue and survey departments were in Achampally and Hakimpet villages on Saturday, the decision to remove the portfolios from him was announced.

The decision shocked Rajendar and his supporters, who questioned the logic behind the hasty move when the inquiry report was yet to be submitted to the Chief Minister.

Rao had ordered two simultaneous investigations by Chief Secretary Suresh Kumar and Vigilance DGP Poornachander Rao into the allegations and had sought a preliminary report. Official sources said that the preliminary inquiry report that was submitted to Rao by noon on Saturday and prima-facie had found that the allegations against Etala were true.

TTD DISTRIBUTES
HEALTH KITS TO
WORKERSDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 1

TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy distributed health kits to 500 sanitation workers of TTD on Saturday at the Vaishnavotsava mandapam by with contributions from Vijayawada donor Sekhar Reddy.

Speaking on the occasion TTD chairman said sanitary workers were frontline warriors in the 14 months long battle against pandemic Covid.

Lauding their services to Srivari devotees and wishing them the best of health he said the health kits would go a long way in improving their services at Tirumala.



Two empty cryogenic tankers airlifted from Vijayawada airport to Bhubaneswar to transport medical oxygen to AP from Angul on Saturday.

State nears 20,000 mark of
Covid-19 cases, 61 deaths

Ten districts registered more than 1,000 fresh cases; Chittoor still tops

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 1

Andhra Pradesh has neared the 20,000 mark of fresh Covid-19 infections by registering 19,412 in the last 24 hours and 61 deaths.

The state health authorities reported here on Saturday that out of the 98,214 samples tested, 19,412 persons were infected with Covid-19.

Out of a total number of 1,64,88,574 samples tested so far in the state, 11,21,102 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 9,82,297 were recovered while 1,30,752 are still active with the virus.

Except three districts out of 13, all of them recorded more than 1,000 fresh infections with Chittoor leading the state with 2,768 followed by 2,679 in East Godavari, 2,048 in Srikakulam, 1,750 in Guntur, 1,722 each in Anantapur and Visakhapatnam, 1,381 in Kurnool, 1,106 in Prakasam, 1,091 in Nellore, 1,053 in West Godavari, 792 in Kadapa, 694 in Krishna and 606 in Vizianagaram.

Chittoor district found to be severely affected by recording the highest number of cumulative active cases at 18,284 followed by 14,991 in Srikakulam, 13,927 in East Godavari, 13,734 in Guntur, 13,479 in Nellore, 10,534 in Visakhapatnam, 9,685 in Anantapur, 8,044

Panic as 20 persons die in
a day in Anantapur districtDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 1

At least 20 people succumbed to Covid-19 virus, in a day, in Anantapur district on Saturday.

While a 39-year-old deputy tahsildar, Paruchuri Venkatesh, who was infected with the virus since the past few days died after being shifted to Bengaluru, another 54-year-old, Srinivasulu, a headmaster, died while receiving treatment at a private hospital in Anantapur.

Srinivasulu's family members claimed that he was suffering from fever since the past week, and was being treated at Madakasira. After his situation worsened, he was shifted to a private hospital in Anantapur, where he

breathed his last. Similarly, a 60-year-old farmer and his 32-year-old son were shifted to a hospital after their situation turned critical. While the

son passed, the father was battling for life. Meanwhile, a number of deaths due to high-risk cases were reported at the government general hospital. The oxygen plant at the hospital was reportedly under repair, and cylinders were used to supply oxygen to patients.

After scarcity of oxygen and failure of the oxygen plant were ascribed as the reason for these deaths, the district administration condemned such reports, and stated that the deaths were due to Covid-19 and not due to failure of oxygen supply as claimed.

● Vizianagaram registered eight followed by seven each in Visakhapatnam, Chittoor and East Godavari, six in Anantapur, five each in Prakasam, Kurnool and Krishna, four in Nellore, two each in Guntur, Kadapa and Srikakulam and one in West Godavari. With this, the death toll scaled up to 8,053.

Among the daily deaths, Vizianagaram registered eight followed by seven each in Visakhapatnam, Chittoor and East Godavari, six in

Anantapur, five each in Prakasam, Kurnool and Krishna, four in Nellore, two each in Guntur, Kadapa and Srikakulam and one in West Godavari. With this, the death toll scaled up to 8,053.

The state health authorities discharged 11,579 patients after recovery from the hospitals in the last 24 hours in the state.

PVT HOSPITAL
WARNS ON FAKE
COVID DEATHSDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 1

Amid rumours of multiple deaths of Covid patients at KS Care Hospitals here, district collector G. Veera Pandian said details of four patients who died at the hospital were being collected while a few more patients were being shifted to Kurnool Government General Hospital.

However, after unfounded reports on several deaths in this private hospital went viral on social media, the district administration has strongly denied the rumours and warned those who spread fake news of severe action.

The district collector, in a message, said, "Only three persons died due to suspected Covid-19. Even they are also not tested positive for Covid. They did not die due to lack of oxygen." The hospital had adequate oxygen stock, he said, adding that he had personally checked it in the presence of the Superintendent of Police, the (DMHO), DC Aarogya Sri.

Rag pickers make money
burning Covid dead bodiesK.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 1

Undeterred or unaware of the Covid complications, hundreds of rag pickers including children are helping the families in cremating the dead bodies at various cremation grounds in Visakhapatnam city.

Their demand has increased after more and more deaths were reported from various hospitals and lack of staff from GVMC to dispose of the bodies.

This has also become a racket involving sanitary workers of the hospitals and ambulance operators who appoint these rag pickers for the cremation. On an average, each

worker is paid ₹1,500 to ₹2,000 for each body depending on the demand.

According to observers, the moment the hospital announces the death of a patient, sanitary workers call the ambulance to take the body. These ambulance drivers charge around ₹15,000 to ₹20,000 to complete the process of cremation which includes payment to the cremation ground personnel, material and wages to the rag pickers.

The only amount spent for the cremation is ₹1,500 for two quintals of fire wood, ₹200 for two litres of petrol and another ₹300 for miscellaneous goods. The rest is shared by the ambulance operator, sanitary worker at the hospi-

tal and cremation ground in-charge.

"These rag pickers are not seen every day. After making little money, they disappear and another batch appears," said chief medical officer of GVMC Dr K.S.L.G. Sastry.

Talking to *DC* on Saturday, he said on an average 40 to 50 bodies are cremated in various cremation grounds and all need not be Covid infected deaths. Even for natural deaths, the family members are reluctant to participate in the rituals as the bodies are burnt close to the Covid bodies. A health volunteer said it was shocking to see young children cremating the bodies without even wearing the mask.

COVID | WARRIOR

27-year-old MBA graduate cremates Covid dead for free
Psychological weakness killing: PashaVADREU SRINIVAS | DC
KAKINADA, MAY 1

As bodies of Covid-19 infected patients are abandoned by their near and dear ones over fear of contracting the virus, a 27-year-old MBA graduate has taken it upon himself to ensure a dignified funeral for the dead.

Maliseti Bharat Raghav,

a resident of East Godavari's Bommuru, carries the bodies of victims in his auto, free of cost, and cremate them. Since the start of the pandemic, he claims to have cremated 130 bodies.

"When a village secretary died in his chair in Malepalli village of Gandepalli mandal in the district, his colleagues did not notice that he was

dead for hours. Even as night approached, no ambulance reached the spot, following which the employees called me. I drove from Bommuru, and took the body to the cremation ground at Rajamahendravaram," he added.

"When a businessman passed away in a house in Rajamahendravaram, nobody was sure whether

State to strengthen
manpower in hosps
to treat Covid-hitDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 1

Andhra Pradesh government to strengthen manpower by taking up recruitment of doctors and health personnel based on requirement in government hospitals to provide better health care to the Coronavirus infected patients.

Health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal told media persons here on Saturday that in the wake of steep rise in caseload of Coronavirus infected patients in the state, they had permitted the district collectors to go ahead with recruitment of doctors and health personnel in the hospitals as per requirement and added that out of over 13,000 personnel recruited during the first wave of the pandemic, nearly 9,000 were recruited on a permanent basis and wished that a few more were to be recruited as per need.

Maintaining that nearly 88,898 persons opted for home isolation in the state, he said that they were going to avail the tele consultancy services from 2,668 doctors registered for such service in addition to ANMs visiting their houses and inquiring about their health and other issues from Saturday onwards. He said that the doctors through tele consultancy assess the health status of the persons in home isolation and refer them to either Covid Care Centres or to Covid hospitals depending upon the health condition.

The health principal secretary said that as they were providing better healthcare and facili-

ties at Covid Care Centres, more number of people were going there resulting in bringing down the demand for beds in Covid hospitals and added that at present, 8,709 persons were accommodated in such centres and sounded confident that the number might go up to 15,000 in the next two to three days. He assured efforts to start Covid-19 tests and declaration of results at Covid Care Centres in two to three days.

He pointed out that the medical oxygen consumption had gone up to 443 in the last 24 hours in the state and said that they had asked the Centre to enhance its allocation to AP.

With regard to usage of remdesivir injections, state health senior official said that 5,371 vials were used in the last 24 hours in government hospitals while 27,615 vials are available for usage. He also said that out of 43,498 beds in 551 hospitals in government and private sectors available, 32,301 were occupied while nearly 11,000 beds were available for the virus infected patients to take treatment.

Anxious moments



A man waits in autorickshaw with his child as the wife went to the Covid-19 test at the Covid testing centre in Vijayawada on Saturday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

Anantapur stops
sample collectionDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 1

The medical and health department stopped collection of samples from Covid-19 suspect persons across the district on Saturday. The district administration said the government asked to stop collection of samples till completion of testing of pending samples at the laboratories in the district. In the view of the huge number of samples collected from various parts of the district, the capacity of the laboratories were unable to complete testing of pending samples.

No samples were collected in the district on Saturday, official release said and ruled out rumour over stopping collection of samples.

On Saturday, 1,722 positive cases were reported

in the district including 4 from other states and countries. A total of 9,685 active cases existed and 1,385 patients were in covid hospitals while 431 in Covid care centres and 7,869 persons with positive in home isolation.

Meanwhile, the government was concentrating on identification of primary and secondary contacts.

Collector Gandham Chandrudu directed the medical, revenue, municipalities and MPDOs to complete tracing of primary and secondary contacts of covid-19 positive patients to avoid further spreading of virus.

"Every positive case should have 10 primary and 21 secondary contacts and mapping should be completed through special teams by Revenue Divisional Offices," he said.

Pasha also added that psychological weakness was killing people as well. "One patient, who was confident while being admitted at the hospital, died of shock after his Covid-19 results turned out to be positive."

SHORT TAKES

COVAXIN IS ONLY FOR SECOND DOSE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 1

District collector Chevuru Hariikiran has appealed to those who are newly taking the first dose in the district to get protection against Corona, which must be vaccinated with the Covishield. To this end, he released a statement on Saturday. "We have two types of vaccines, Covishield and Covaxin, and a large amount of Covishield vaccine is coming to our state from the Central government," he said. The collector said we are receiving the lowest dose of Covaxin. In this context, Covaxin is being given only to those who have already taken the first dose and are waiting for the second dose as per the government directives. So the collector called on those who have not been vaccinated so far, that is, those who are newly vaccinated, to be vaccinated with the Covishield vaccine.

ROUND THE CLOCK CORONA HELP DESK IN KRISHNA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 1

The Corona round-the-clock emergency cell and help desk started in Krishna district to serve Covid-19 patients. Krishna district collector A. Md Imtiaz here on Saturday said that an home isolation help desk cell has been started to help Covid patients who were undergoing Corona treatment in their homes. He said that the home isolation patients facing any problem regarding health issues and others can call to 9440572803, 8801612923 and 0866-2474804/2474803 phone numbers to get help from 9 am to 5 pm.

Mr Imtiaz further said that if the Corona patients in home isolation face medical emergency then they can call round-the-clock emergency cell for help. He stated that the patient can call to 9963244527 and 9963062819 phone numbers.

RARE HEART SURGERY SUCCESSFUL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 1

Rare knife-less, Sutureless Aortic Valve Replacement surgery successfully through TAVR performed to a nonagenarian in Vijayawada. Andhra Hospitals Chief Interventional Consultant Cardiologist Dr J. Srimannarayana, said that a 90-year-old female, N. Adilakshamma from Vijayawada came to the Heart and Brain Institute (Andhra Hospitals) complaining of severe breathlessness. She is diagnosed to have severe calcific aortic stenosis with heart enlargement and heart failure. She is a known hypertensive and has undergone PTCA+Stenting previously for heart attack.

'OPPN LEADERS ACTING WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY'

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 1

Asserting that the state is taking all possible steps to check the spread of Covid-19, government adviser (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy slammed opposition leaders for their cheap politics during the pandemic and panicking people with their false propaganda.

Mr Ramakrishna Reddy said that the opposition leaders have been acting irresponsibly even during the crisis, while the state government has been striving to control the virus spread with the directions from Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy who has been constantly reviewing the situation. He criticised TD chief Chandrababu for creating panic among the people, including the students and employees across the state. He said that Chandrababu has become a Non-Resident citizen of Andhra Pradesh, who is indeed scared to live here but falsely alleging the state government through Zoom meetings. Sajjala had termed Chandrababu as the worst villain for the state.

Mr Sajjala said that some people had laughed when the CM had said that coexistence with Covid-19 was inevitable, but today it became a reality



Women making PPE kits to doctors and sanitation workers in Vijayawada on Saturday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

Postpone SSC exams: Desam

Naidu appeals to state government

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 1

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday expressed concern over YSR Congress government taking the second Coronavirus wave lightly, despite it playing havoc with lives of workers, employees and students.

Addressing a meeting of Telugu Nadu Trade Union Council (TNTUC) as part of party's May Day celebrations, he demanded that the state government forthwith postpone Class X and Intermediate examinations in order not to harm lives of students, their parents as also teaching and non-teaching staff.

Naidu asked how students could be forced to write examinations when they are in the grip of fear psychosis triggered by the massive rise in Covid-19 infections all around. Fear is not letting them focus on their studies. Further, students aged less than 18 years are not eligible for vaccination. Under the circumstances, it will not be correct to force them into reaching examination centres for taking their exams.

Referring to queues of

PROVIDE COVID-19 AID TO WORKERS, SAYS LOKESH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 1

Telugu Desam national general secretary Nara Lokesh on Saturday demanded the Jagan Mohan Reddy government to come to the rescue of the workers as they were suffering financially in the second wave of Coronavirus infections. He urged the Government for extending Covid-19 assistance in order to provide some relief to the families of the workers who were facing untold hardships.

Mr Lokesh deplored that the workers were

facing the Covid-19 threat on the one side and not able to find work opportunities on the other hand.

He stated that it was by making sacrifices and agitations that the workers and all sections of society protected the Visakha Steel Plant. He further stated that now, they would not allow anybody to snatch away or steal the Steel Plant with backdoor methods.

Lokesh called upon the government to continue works and construct projects in order to provide work opportunities for the workers.

dead bodies at burial grounds, the TD national president slammed the government for letting the Coronavirus situation worsen in a manner that countless bodies are awaiting last rites. Patients living with the virus are unable to get ambulances, hospital beds or oxygen supply, he pointed out.

On occasion of May Day, Naidu targeted

YSRC for not implementing pro-worker programmes like Anna Canteens and Chandranna Bima, which had been of great help to unorganised workers during the TD rule.

He released a copy of the "Karmika Desam" weekly brought out by TD highlighting issues related to workers in organised and unorganised sectors of society.

Covid drains APSRTC's coffers as services hit

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 1

Covid-19 pandemic has crippled the Andhra Pradesh state road transport corporation, majorly impacting its services and revenue, and resulting in nearly 50 per cent loss in occupancy and revenue.

The second wave, in particular, has seen a huge drop in occupancy rates as people are reluctant to travel by buses, owing to rapid spread of the virus across the country.

According to APSRTC officials, the organisation's per day revenue through bus services in 13 districts fell from ₹12 crore to ₹5-6 crore.

Besides operational and revenue losses, the virus has also hugely

impacted the service providers' staff. Nearly 1,897 staff members had been infected between January and April, and 47 have succumbed to the virus.

With dwindling occupancy rates, the APSRTC has reduced bus services by 30 per cent since the past 10 days. As the daily number of infections near the 19,000 mark, commuters are forced to think twice before boarding buses, thereby pushing the occupancy rate below 50 per cent, and causing a huge loss in revenue for the transport corporation.

K.S. Brahmananda Reddy, the APSRTC's executive director of operations, said that while there were 10,600 bus services to various destinations, a majority

of them were cancelled in the month of April. "Presently, we are running 7,000 services per day, having cut down by 30 per cent, while incurring a 50 per cent revenue loss. All containment measures are being taken and Covid-19 protocol is strictly being implemented in buses, as well as at bus stands and APSRTC's offices."

Two commuters, K. Seshu and B. Raju, said that since the virus was spreading swiftly during the second wave, a majority of people were wary of using public transport, and preferred to use their personal vehicles to avoid the risk of contracting the virus, and added that only those without an alternative were traveling via buses.

Lemon prices fall within a week shattering farmers

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 1

Within the period of a week, prices of lemon in wholesale market here have fallen to ₹1,500 from ₹4,000-₹5,000 a bag of approximately 800 fruits.

Groves of lemon in Kadapa district are spread over about 8,000 acres in largely Chakrayapeta, Vemula, Veeraputunayunipalle,

Chintakommadinne, Pendlimarri, Vempalle, Chitveli, Penagaluru, Jammalamadugu and Mylavaram mandals.

Most of the crop is exported to Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai. But with Coronavirus delivering a serious blow in the second wave, exports have stopped, leaving lemon farmers distressed. There is not much consumption of

the fruit in Kadapa district. Amarnath Reddy, a farmer from Vempalle area, said, "We face losses in lemon cultivation every year. Until a week ago, the market price was quite good, with wholesalers buying 800 lemons at ₹4,000 and above. Now that exports have stopped, we have to request traders to buy the crop even for ₹1,500," he said.

Teachers worried over exam duty

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR |
DC
NELLORE, MAY 1

Teachers in government service working in Nellore and Chittoor districts are worried over state plans to conduct Class X and Intermediate examinations as many of them were infected and some among them died after attending election duties during the recent bypoll to Tirupati parliament seat.

Speaking to this newspaper, AP Teachers Federation State vice-president N. Mohan Doss alleged that 20 to 25 teachers succumbed to Covid among hundreds of infected after performing election duties.

He also alleged that authorities failed to provide PPE kits, sanitisers and other protective gear for those deployed for election duties.

"When there are five types of tasks at the

● AP Teachers Federation State vice-president N. Mohan Doss alleged that 20 to 25 teachers succumbed to Covid among hundreds of infected after performing election duties.

polling station but only three persons were posted and they are forced to work for 48 hours without a break," Mohan Doss said while reminding that they have to collect the election material one day before the election and move to the assigned polling stations.

He said that all these activities and exposure to the crowds resulted in the infection and demise of many teachers and now the families are in serious trouble after losing the breadwinners.

Mohan Doss observed that Class X students are not ready for the exams.

Srikakulam dist crosses 2K mark

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 1

Srikakulam district crossed the 2,000 mark with 2,048 positive cases reported during the last 24 hours.

The district occupied third place after Chittoor (2,768) and East Godavari (2,679).

The district authorities are putting in all out efforts to contain the virus with various strategies adopted during the last couple of days. The entire town has been contained and shops asked to close after 2 pm.

Health officials said 12,302 patients are in home isolation, 1,671 in various hospitals and 1,018 in Covid Care Centres.

In all the district has 14,991 active cases.

The district has 575 non-oxygen beds, 1,550 centralised oxygen beds, 145 beds in ICU without ventilators and 235 with ventilators.

Of these beds, 426 are occupied non-oxygen beds, 1,116 are centralised oxygen beds, 338 beds oxygen beds and 48 in ICU without ventilators and 125 on ventilators.

PRADYUMNA RELIEVED AS SPECIAL OFFICER

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 1

Senior IAS officer working as commissioner and director of agriculture and marketing P.S. Pradyumna has been relieved as a special officer for Covid management and vaccination for Anantapur district.

The district collector J. Niwas in his daylong supervision reviewed the progress of the patients in various wards and interacted with the medical officers dealing with the patients.

He appealed to the people to stay indoors, wear double masks and maintain social distance.

Most of the roads were deserted look after 2 pm on Saturday.

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Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (TR), Guntakal

A0434

For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at <http://www.irops.gov.in> or www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

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Tender No.GTL-EM-02-2021-22 Date: 30.04.2021

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SHORT TAKES

COUNTING OF VOTES IN UP AFTER SC'S NOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

GST REVENUES HITS A RECORD OF ₹1.41L CRORE

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 sustained economic recovery during this period".

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

India records highest-ever 4,01,993 fresh Covid-19 cases in last 24 hours

New Delhi, May 1: India's daily coronavirus tally crossed the grim milestone of four lakh, while the death toll rose to 2,11,853 with 3,523 fresh fatalities, according to data updated by the Union Health Ministry on Saturday.

The infection tally rose to 1,91,64,969 with 4,01,993 new cases, while the active cases crossed the 32-lakh mark, the data updated at 8 am showed. Registering a steady increase, the active cases stood at 32,68,710, accounting for 17.06 per cent

of the total infections, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate has further dropped to 81.84 per cent.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,56,84,406, while the case fatality rate stands 1.11 per cent, the data stated.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7; 30 lakh on August 23; 40 lakh on September 5; and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28; 70 lakh on October 11; crossed 80 lakh

on October 29; 90 lakh on November 20; and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19. India crossed the grim milestone of 1.50 crore on April 19. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 28,83,37,385 samples have been tested up to April 30, of which 19,45,299 were done on Friday.

The 3,523 new fatalities include 828 from Maharashtra, 375 from Delhi, 332 from Uttar Pradesh, 269 from Chhattisgarh, 217 from

Karnataka, 173 from Gujarat, 155 from Rajasthan, 122 from Uttarakhand and 120 from Jharkhand, 113 each from Punjab and Tamil Nadu. A total of 2,11,853 deaths have been reported so far in the country, including 68,813 from Maharashtra, 16,147 from Delhi, 15,523 from Karnataka, 14,046 from Tamil Nadu, 12,570 from Uttar Pradesh, 11,344 from West Bengal, 9,022 from Punjab and 8,581 from Chhattisgarh. — PTI

States delay vaccination plan due to big shortage

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

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

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

Chief Minister Hemant Soren said he has sought the

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

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

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

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

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

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

FAUCI SUGGESTS LOCKDOWN TO CONTAIN COVID-19

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.

Fauci, in an interview to *The Indian Express*, 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". — PTI

Got aggressive calls from the powerful: Adar

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

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

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

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

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



Adar Poonawalla

India should not have exported vax: Ajit Pawar

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, MAY 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

Centre trying to defame Uddhav: Sena

DC CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, MAY 1

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

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

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

Queues for O2, beds, thanks to Modi: RG

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 for queues everywhere, whether for oxygen cylinders, for life-saving medicines, for hospital beds and even outside crematoriums.

"Rely on yourself is the motto. No one will come to help you. Definitely not the prime minister," Gandhi said, while alleging that the Covid-19 situation has gone completely out of control for the Modi government, and wondered whether it was their way of making the states and the citizens truly

'Aatmanirbhar'.

In an exclusive interview, the former Congress chief alleged that the government completely failed to understand or to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, right from the very beginning, despite repeated warnings including from scientists. Training his guns on the prime minister and Home Minister Amit Shah, 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.

— PTI

SAD | DEMISE

Cine personalities take to Twitter to pay rich tributes

Actor Bikramjeet passes away

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

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

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

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

On television, some of his



Bikramjeet Kanwarpal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

THUNDERSTORM KILLS 11, INJURES 102 IN CHINA

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

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

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

YEMEN FLOODING FROM SEASONAL RAINS KILLS 13

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

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

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

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

KYRGYZ, TAJIK LEADERS MOVE TO SAVE CEASEFIRE

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

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

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

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

AFGHAN SUICIDE BOMBING KILLS 21, INJURES 90

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

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

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

Covid situation in India tragic: Harris

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI



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

—AP

WHO approves Moderna vax for emergency use

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

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

Similar approvals for

China's Sinopharm and Sinovac vaccines are expected in the coming days and weeks, WHO has said. The greenlight for Moderna's vaccine, announced late on Friday, took many months because of delays that WHO faced in getting data from the manufacturer. Many countries without their own advanced medical regulatory and assessment

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

The announcement, however, wasn't likely to have an immediate impact on supplies of Moderna's vaccine 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

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

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

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

HUNGARY REOPENS FOR PEOPLE WITH IMMUNITY CARDS

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

—AP

DECCAN Chronicle

2 MAY 2021



Shashi Warriar
Off the beaten track

Criminal? Or practical, though only for temples?

People across southern India celebrated their new year, and other occasions, in the middle of April... “Celebrated” is the wrong word to use in the midst of the rising second wave of the coronavirus, but that was what it looked like. The little temple across the street, for instance, that came up illegally two years ago, had its second anniversary a few days before the new year. The temple committee announced a comprehensive day-long programme of festivities. There were to be six hours of noise and feasting: 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 died of Covid-19 after getting the disease during the *mela*. Devotees either didn't know or didn't care, for the festivities went right on. The police filed a First Information Report against the temple committee for violating Covid guidelines, to no effect.

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

RECONSIDER EXAMS

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has rightly asked the state government to reconsider its decision to go ahead with final exams for Class X and Intermediate (HC asks govt to rethink on SSC, Inter exams, DC, May 1). As the court observed it is not that easy to protect 30 lakh students and teachers from getting infected. Even though the government intends to save students from loss of academic year, the situation is very bad.

P. Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna district

VACCINATION FAIL

It is an unfortunate scenario not only in AP, but all over the country. When the vaccination drive for people aged 60 years and above on March 1, 2021 was launched there were literally no takers, because the government perhaps failed to convince the beneficiaries about their efficacy. Now after the second wave, people are flocking to vaccination centres only to find 'no stock' notice boards. It reflects badly on the efficiency of the administration at every level despite being forewarned by the experts about it. India even exported vaccine to several countries. We are over 135 crore population and only two vaccines are being manufactured. Under these circumstances, the Centre “scheduled” the Phase 3 of vaccination without adequate spade work.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

LIES DON'T HELP

No, Shobhaadi! Blatant lies can't save India from Covid19, all right. But people's resolve can. Immediately, people should adhere to Covid-19-appropriate behaviour. Even now, it's not too late. We should learn from our mistakes and not get carried away by government's camouflage of naked and blatant untruths. By the time the dust settles, we would be nearer to 2024 and fresh from the macabre situation.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

The author is upfront and called a spade a spade (*Can blatant lies save India from Covid-19? DC, May 1*). She has rightly mentioned that the people of India are the country's real strength and its biggest tragedy are its politicians.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Union Ministry expanded: 18 new entrants

NEW DELHI, MAY. 1 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi today expanded her council of Ministers by adding 18 new members to the existing total of 37 but only 17 turned up for the swearing-in ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan this afternoon.

A tribal member from Bihar, Mr. Kartik Oraon, who was appointed Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Communications, was not present to take the oath of office as he was not happy to be a Deputy Minister.

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

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

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

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

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

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).

Disabled cricket series vs Bangla

Hyderabad: The Board of Disabled Cricket Association (India) is hosting Bangladesh in a cricket series comprising a Test, three One-Day Internationals and an equal number of T20s, from June 23 to July 20.

Hyderabad will host the tour-opening Test and first ODI while the other two one-dayers will be held in Vizag and Bangalore. Later, all the three T20s will be played under lights in Jaipur.

"This is the first international cricket series for physically challenged sportspersons," BDCA secretary K. Ramireddy said at a press conference attended by BDCA director Nadeemuddin, joint secretary Ravi Kumar Banjara, Indian team captain Y. Vasanth Kumar and Chella Group CEO Eswaran, who termed his company's support to the series as corporate social responsibility.

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 wks, in 20 overs) 218.**
ForW: 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 wks, in 20 overs) 219.**
ForW: 1-71, 2-77, 3-81, 4-, 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 Australian 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

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 QAISER

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

- Lokesh Rahul with 96 sixes in 49 innings of as many matches, needs four sixes to become first batsman from Punjab Kings to complete a century of sixes in IPL.
- Axar Patel who took 24 wickets at an average of 32.58 in 32 innings of as many matches, needs just one wicket to become 13th bowler to complete 25 wickets for Delhi Capitals in IPL.

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

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

STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER

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

— *PTI*

PURPLE CAP

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

ORANGE CAP

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

IPL POINTS TABLE

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

City on brink of title glory after win

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

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

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

ing with a typically lethal finish.

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

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

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

THE RESULTS

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

League Cup they won in April.

FOXES SALVAGE DRAW AT SOUTHAMPTON

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

1 draw against 10-man Southampton.

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

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

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

— *AFP*



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

— *AP*

Torch relay detour, diving test event opens

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

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

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

metropolis of Osaka.

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

The relay, which will involve 10,000 runners from every corner of Japan, started six weeks ago and has been mostly on schedule despite major rerouting in Osaka and in Matsuyama City in near-by 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*