

The Assam Rising

Projecting the best of Northeast India everyday

Vol. No. VI ■ Issue No. 94 ■ RNI-ASSEN/2014/58385 | GUWAHATI ■ THURSDAY ■ MAY 20, 2021 | PAGES 8 ■ PRICE RS. 7.00

Michael Burry of 'Big Short' fame takes on Elon Musk; bets...

05

Gilchrist to Vaughan: Ex-cricketers agree with Bancroft's ...

07

NEWS IN BRIEF

230 inmates test COVID positive

Guwahati, May 19 : Jails in Assam are witnessing a sudden rise in number of cases among the inmates. As many as 233 inmates in 16 jails of Assam tested positive for COVID-19. Out of these 233 cases, 105 were detected from the Sivasagar and Dibrugarh jails in the last couple of days. As many as 54 inmates in Dibrugarh jail and 51 in Sivasagar jail tested COVID-19 positive. Over 230 inmates in Assam jails test COVID-19 positive. However, the rate of infection among the inmates in the jails in Assam is less compared to last year when the pandemic broke. Over 2500 inmates in Assam jails had tested positive for COVID-19 last year. Nearly 1000 inmates in Assam jails have been vaccinated for COVID-19 till May 18. Among those who received jabs of COVID-19 vaccines are declared foreigners. Recently, the Gauhati High Court had registered a suo moto PIL in regards to vaccination of inmates lodged in different jails of Assam.

Tiger kills Assam man

Guwahati, May 19 : A 35-year-old zoo attendant was attacked and killed on Tuesday by a Royal Bengal tiger in Itanagar's Biological Park in Arunachal Pradesh. The deceased has been identified as Poulash Karmakar, a native of Dhekiajuli in central Assam's Sonitpur district. Zoo curator Raya Flago said the incident occurred at 2.30 pm on Tuesday when the zoo attendant entered the tigress's cage to clean the water pond. "There are three gates that lead to the cage and all of them were left open. We are assuming that this led to the tigress attacking the zoo attendant," Flago said while adding that a police investigation has been launched in the case. Royal Bengal tiger kills Assam man in Itanagar zoo. A case under unnatural death has been lodged at the Itanagar police station and the body of the deceased has been sent for post-mortem at the R K Mission Hospital.

New Covid19 cases

Guwahati, May 19 : Confirming the news, Assam health minister Keshab Mahanta in a tweet on Tuesday evening said the new cases were confirmed out of 90,251 tests conducted in the last 24 hours. Health minister Mahanta said the overall positivity percentage of the state stood at 6.47% on Tuesday of the new cases, the Kamrup Metro district alone reported 921 cases. The state's Covid19 recovery rate was 85.31% on Tuesday. Also read: Assam records highest single-day spike of 92 Covid19 deaths. Summary of 18/5/2021 - Today's Total 5835; Overall Positivity Percentage (5835 cases out of 90251 test done = 6.47%); Kamrup (M) 921; Death 73; Recovery Rate 85.31%," Mahanta tweeted.

Several key decisions taken in the Cabinet meeting chaired by Assam chief minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma



Guwahati, May 19 : Several key decisions were taken in the Cabinet meeting chaired by Assam

chief minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma held on Wednesday in Dispur. The Cabinet decided to ap-

point Sri Debojit Saikia as the new Advocate General of Assam. To avert the Oxygen crisis in Assam, the following decisions were taken in Cabinet: If any new Oxygen plant is set up, State Govt would provide 100% free power supply. For reviving closed Oxygen plants, 100% free power would be provided. In case of expansion of existing plant, the new unit would be given free power. All existing Oxygen plants would be given 20% free power. All these decisions would come into effect from January 1, 2021 but financial

implications would be from April 1, 2021. CEM BTR, CEM Karbi Anglong & CEM Dima Hasao will be accorded Cabinet Status. The nomenclature of I/C minister would be changed to Guardian Minister who would take responsibility of their respective districts. The Chief Executive Members (CEMs) of the district councils BTR (Bodoland Territorial Region), Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao have been accorded with cabinet status. The decision was taken during the weekly cabinet meeting

Contd...Page 6

Devajit Lon Saikia appointed as the Advocate General of Assam

Rajib Prakash Baruah, Nabab Ali congratulate Debojit Lon Saikia



Guwahati, May 19 : The Assam Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday decided to appoint Devajit Lon Saikia as the Advocate General of Assam. Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma informed it in a Tweet stating, "The Cabinet decided to appoint Sri Debojit Saikia as the new Advocate

Contd...Page 6

First black fungus case reported in Guwahati

Guwahati, May 19 : Assam on Tuesday reported its first case of black fungus infection Mucormycosis, in a Covid-19 patient. A 27-year-old man, who has been admitted to a private hospital in Guwahati, has reportedly tested positive for the rare fungal infection. Sources said the man was admitted to the city's Apollo Hospital two days back. Sources said the patient is stable. Mucormycosis, also known as black fungus, is caused by a group of mould called mucormycetes. These fungi live in the environment, particularly in soil and in decaying organic matter, such as leaves, compost piles, or rotten wood, according to



the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. When someone breathes these fungal spores, they are likely to get the infection that commonly affects the sinuses or lungs. Medical experts

Contd...Page 6



CM reviews flood preparedness of Revenue & Disaster Management Department

Relief compensation should reach flood affected people immediately: CM

Guwahati, May 19 : Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma today reviewed the functioning of Revenue and Disaster Management Department at his conference hall at Janata Bhawan and took stock of the flood preparedness in view of the forthcoming rainy season. Taking note of delay in releasing the allotted amount for purchasing clothes, utensils and other

household items for the flood affected people by district administrations, the Chief Minister directed the department to empower the DCs to immediately release such funds to affected individuals. He also directed for broadening the definition of relief camps so that all people in a flood affected area are provided compensation and not only

Contd...Page 6

After Cyclone Tauktae, another storm likely to hit India, this time on east coast

New Delhi, May 19 : After Cyclone Tauktae left a trail of destruction in its path at the west coast impacting five states and causing severe damage to property, another cyclone is likely to hit India by May 26-27 but on the east coast of the country, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday. The weather agency informed that a low pressure area is very likely to form over north Andaman Sea and adjoining east-central Bay of Bengal around May 22. Under its influence, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Odisha, West Bengal and adjoining Assam and Meghalaya will likely witness rains from May 22. The intensity of the rainfall will increase

substantially after May 25. In a bulletin issued by the Cyclone Warning Division of the IMD, it said, "It is very likely to intensify gradually into a cyclonic storm during the subsequent 72 hours. It is very likely to move northwards and reach West Bengal - Odisha

Contd...Page 6



PM Modi hails Bihar's HIT COVID app, seeks details for countrywide use

Patna, May 19 : Prime Minister Narendra Modi was impressed when he came to know about the HIT COVID app developed by the Bihar government to track COVID-19 patients undergoing treatment in home isolation. The Home Isolation Tracking (HIT) app was launched in Bihar on Monday (May 17) and is currently being used across all districts of the state. The prime

minister got information about the app through Patna district magistrate Chandrasekhar Singh while he was interacting with officials of several districts of nine states. Impressed with the concept, PM Modi ordered to share details about it with the union home ministry so that it could be utilised in other places as well. "The health department

Contd...Page 6



Assam, Meghalaya to Experience Heavy Rains, Thunderstorms and Possibly Mudslides from May 19-21

Guwahati, May 19 : Following the lead of India's cyclone-hit southern and western states, parts of Northeast India are now set to witness some intense rainfall activity as well, with heavy rains set to lash the region for the next three days. According to The Weather Channel's met team, a cyclonic circulation located over Northeast India will give rise to widespread rains, thunderstorms, and gusty winds blowing at 30 to 40 kmph across the region. Some areas will also experience isolated heavy showers. The rainfall activity will be especially intense from Wednes-

day to Friday, with rain totals in excess of 100 mm a day expected over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and adjoining places. Apart from the heavy precipitation, these areas will also be at the risk of facing swollen rivers and mudslides due to the drag on rain activity, weather.com meteorologists have warned. In view of these predictions, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a yellow watch over the entire northeastern region on Wednesday and Thursday. Come Friday, Assam and Meghalaya will be the only two states to retain the same advi-

sory, which urges residents to 'be aware' of the local weather situation. 5-day precipitation forecast

over India from Wednesday to Sunday. Within Assam, the IMD's regional

Contd...Page 6



IT ministry sends notice to WhatsApp to take back its new Privacy Policy

New Delhi, May 19 : The ministry has given 7-day time to instant messaging app WhatsApp to respond to notice or "necessary steps in consonance with law will be taken". The ministry has given 7-day time to the instant messaging app to respond to notice or "necessary steps in consonance with law will be taken",

Contd...Page 6



Water Resource Minister inspected the construction of embankments



SIPAJHAR, May 19 : The Water Resource Minister Pijush Hazarika has inspected the construction work of embankments levees along the Brahmaputra at Kurua, Garukhuti and also erosion effected Kiringibori area under Sipajhar revenue circle in Darang district. He was accompanied by Dr Paramananda Rajbansi, MLA, Sipajhar LAC, Guru Jyoti Das, former MLA, Mangaldai LAC, Syedain Abbasi, Additional Chief Secre-

tary and the divisional Officer of the Water Resource Department. Furthermore he also visited the Alikhapara area near Patharighat to inspect the construction work of embankment of the Nonoi river. The Minister had direct to Water Resource Department officials to complete the construction work of the embankments which could not be completed earlier. He also reviewed the construction of the Patidarrang Drainage Project.

437 more fresh COVID cases recorded, two more people die of COVID at Nagaon

NAGAON, May 19 : 437 more fresh COVID positive cases were recorded today, taking the total cumulative active COVID positive cases in the district to 2909 while two more people succumbed to the virus today. Including these two death cases, total 34 people died of COVID 19 in the district till date, sources said. Sources claimed that among those who tested positive today, 97 patients were admitted to COVID hospital while the rest were put in home quarantine. Rapid Antigen Test was conducted on 4180 people today while RT-PCR test was conducted on 45 swab samples, sources added further. Meanwhile 266 positive patients who were undergoing treatment in hospital as well as in home quarantine, were recovered from infection of the virus. Sources claimed that a total of 3425 positive patients were recov-

ered from the virus in the district till filing of this report. On the other hand, local party leader from Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP), Anup Laskar went ahead to extend his hand to help the COVID victims in Nagaon Sadar constituency and provided medical support as well as other essential items to those COVID victims who were under poverty line and being isolated at their homes. Speaking to this correspondent, AJP leader, Anup Laskar said that the COVID victims of Nagaon Sadar constituency who were under the poverty line and being isolated at their homes could directly contact him and his associates on 9101032901/9435161434 for urgent help. He said they will provide medicine, masks, hand sanitizer, food items as well as other essential items to the COVID victims of the constituency.

25,000 sqm. of Land Donated at Darka Village for Establishment of District Court Complex

Aalo, May 19 : 25,000sqm. of land has been donated by two individuals of Darka village for the establishment of District Court Building Complex. Shri Dakto Doji has donated 15,000 sq m of land bounded in the north up to Hipu River, south up to the land of Shri Komba Taso, East Hisum River and West up to the roadside. Another donor Shri Gemin Ete has donated 10,000 sq m. bounded in the north by Natural Nallah, south private land of Kardak Doji, East private land Shri Gemin Ete and on the west up to Approach Road; Natural Nallah. The West Siang Deputy Commissioner, Shri Moki Loyi has served

a notification on 12th May 2021 for any claims and objection by any individuals on the said stretch of donated land. Such claims and objections, if any should be done within 30 days from the issue of notification in writing and clearly stating thereasons for such objection.

Tea Garden Worker Succumbed to Covid : Workers Gheraoed Head Office

Golaghat, May 19: Today situation become tensed when a tea garden worker succumbed to Covid and other workers raised allegations of negligence against the garden authorities and protested in front of the Head Office of the Tea Estate. According to the report a woman worker named Binu Karmakar of Koomtai Tea Estate in Golaghat passed away today. She was tested Covid positive on May 14. She was on Home Isolation since then. But today she became unwell and later died. The workers of the Garden raised allegations that the lady worker did not get proper treatment and she lost her life for the negligence of the the Garden authorities. Protesting against the garden authorities the angry workers Gheraoed the Head Office of Koomtai Tea Estate and expressed their anger against the garden authorities as well as the government. Still a tensed situation prevailed in the garden.

R. R K Dutta Passes Away- Colossal Loss To Assam's Oil And Gas Industry

Guwahati, May 19 : Mr. R. K Dutta, the first Managing Director of Numaligarh Refinery Limited (from August 1995 to April 2002) passed away today at Kolkata after a brief illness. He was 75. Mr. Dutta also held the position of CMD of Oil India Limited (from May 2002 till his superannuation in February 2006). His wife Mrs. Julie Dutta predeceased him last year. Mr. Dutta was considered a colossus in the Oil and Gas Industry in the country and his contribution to the development of the Oil and Gas industry in the North East is unparalleled. He was one of the rare professionals in the Indian oil industry who had worked, headed and excelled in all the streams of oil industry, i.e., downstream, upstream and midstream. He started



his career at Assam Oil Company, Digboi- the birth place of oil industry in India. As a hard core oil marketing professional, he expanded Assam Oil's penetration in retail

marketing by building up retail outlets, developing fleet owners, building storage and supply terminals all over the North East India. One of his biggest achievements was introduction of LPG in the army cook houses in 1985. Assam Oil was the first company to introduce this green fuel in the cook houses of the army at a time when the general perception was to use kerosene or fire wood as a kitchen fuel all over the country. Mr. Dutta was able to strengthen and spread the marketing network throughout the North Eastern India and the visibility of its logo of the Charging one horn rhino is seen even today all across the north eastern region. He headed the organisation for 11 long years till 1995. In 1995, Mr. Dutta was handicapped by the

Government of India to head the historic 'Assam Accord' refinery now known as Numaligarh Refinery Limited. He not only constructed and commissioned the refinery within its scheduled time, but also created a new company - a PSU which is a glowing example of successful business enterprise in the region. Mr. Dutta, possessed an inherent 'risk-taking capability and also took hard decisions, whenever required, while maintaining the essential qualities of humility and courtesy. He was a humanitarian to the core and maintained the highest standard of honesty and integrity and always led by example. The State of Assam in particular and the Indian Oil Industry in general is much poorer by his demise.

CM reviews functioning of Education Department

CM directs to strictly enforce posting and transfer act

Guwahati, May 19 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today took a comprehensive review of the functioning of the Education Department in presence of Education Minister Ranoj Pegu and Finance Minister Ajanta Neog with officials of the department in a meeting held at the conference hall of Janata Bhawan and laid stress on development of the basic fundamentals related to the governance in the schools for quality delivery of education to the students in a wholesome manner. Stating that the Education sector will be accorded the topmost priority and all functionaries of the Education Department must dedicate themselves for the overall upliftment of the education sector, the Chief Minister directed to strictly enforce Transfer and Posting of Teachers as per the provisions of the "Assam Elementary and Secondary School Teacher (Regulation of Posting and Transfer Act) 2020. He suggested developing software immediately to execute the transfer and posting of teachers through an Online Portal which would also include merit based preferential choice of posting against vacancies. The Chief

Minister while giving a direction to immediately initiate the process of transition of dissolved Madrasa

Poly Technic and Engineering colleges for expeditious filling up of vacancies. Further instructing the

struction gaps identified during "Gunotsav". He asked the department to conduct Gunotsav in 2022. The Chief Minister also directed creation and recruitment of administrative and other posts for the newly created Districts and Education Blocks, besides streamlining of distribution of free text books for ensuring timely availability of free text books and developing e-text at the earliest by Assam Text Book Production and Publication Corporation Limited. The Chief Minister also directed the officials to ensure that all newly provincialised Teachers and Tutors draw their salary by 1st of June and distribution of Scooty that is pending is completed by 15th of June this year. The Chief Minister also asked the Education Department to examine to bring all the Elementary level contractual Teachers under one umbrella, which may be the Directorate of Elementary Education. Principal Secretary of Higher Education B Kalyan Chakravarthi, Commissioner & Secretary of Secondary and Elementary Education Pritom Saikia and other senior officers were present in the meeting.



to general schools asked the officials to ensure recruitment of teachers on priority basis particularly in provincialised and government schools and meeting up of periodic gap. He further asked the department to empower the Head of the Institutions to periodically and instantly fill up the vacancies on need based basis. The Chief Minister also suggested constituting independent recruitment boards for

department to operationalise new Model Schools and evolving a policy for teachers' retention, the Chief Minister directed to create posts in the newly established up-graded schools in Tea Garden areas where the PWD had completed the construction. Moreover saying that recruitment of College Teachers should be a continuous process, the Chief Minister directed to immediately complete civil con-

Assam Girl in Israel

Golaghat, May 19: The world is witnessing the fierce battle between Israel and Palestine. The whole country of Israel has turned into a war zone. Seeing all this the parents of a brilliant student from Golaghat, Assam are now having sleepless nights. The reason is their daughter is now in Israel. Teacher, writer and Vice President of Golaghat District

Sahitya Sabha Tafajul Hoque Borborah and teacher Mofida Begum's elder daughter Naziha Tarannum from Dergaon Narikalguri area in Golaghat is now in Israel. Naziha who had been a bright student since starting went to Israel in the year 2017 for Research. She after completing her Masters in Chemistry took training at Science and Technology

Institute in Hyderabad and from there she went to Israel for higher Research in her subject. But now seeing the present situation in Israel Taniha Tarannum's parents, family members and friends are very much worried about her safety. However Taniha has been in contact with her parents and keeping them all the updates daily.

Active Covid cases cross 2000 mark in Lakhimpur district

North Lakhimpur, May 19 : With the number of Covid patients rising daily during the second wave of the pandemic, the total number of active patients affected by the deadly virus in the Lakhimpur district has crossed 2000 and the figure stands at 2109 on Wednesday. The death toll in the district due to Covid during the second wave has risen to 24 on Wednesday, with as many as three deaths today. It has been reported that till now during the second wave 1190 persons have been discharged, out of which 159 persons from hospital and 1031 from home isolation.

COVID-19 Control Room (24x7) and Telemedicine Counter Set Up By Hojai District Administration

Hojai, May 19 : The District Administration Hojai has set up a COVID-19 Control Room (24x7) and Telemedicine Counter in the premises of the

Office of Deputy Commissioner, Sankardev Nagar, Hojai keeping the prevailing situation of CORONA Virus (COVID-19) and it's monitoring in view.

The telephone numbers for the facilities are as follows: 1) COVID-19 Control Room: 03674-284001; 2) Telemedicine Counter: 03674-284002 03674-284003.

Chief Minister Sarma visits Assam Police Headquarter

Advocates for police modernisation with fundamental changes in five years

Guwahati, May 19: Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma visited the Assam Police Headquarters here today and interacted with the Director General of Assam Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta and all ADGPs and IGP's on a whole gamut of issues including police modernization. Chief Minister Sarma asked DGP, Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta to prepare a blueprint for modernisation with a target to bring about fundamental changes to police within five

years. He said that as part of modernization of the police forces, government will push for transparent recruitment for absorbing the youths into all levels of the police forces. He also said the recruitment in the police forces will be carried out as part of the government's commitment of recruiting one lakh youths in government departments. Talking to reporters on the side line of his visit, Chief Minister Sarma said that government is working



to rationalise the police stations across the state with regard to the demands. He also said plans are on the anvil to reduce pressure on the police forces. Regarding the allegations on syndicate, Sarma said that if there is report of syndicate doing the rounds in the state, the matter should

be brought immediately to the attention of the DGP for the police to take a remedial step instantly. He also said that transfer and posting will be exclusively dealt with on the basis of performance and everybody will be given a fair treatment in this regard.

Biswanath AASU submits memo to the health minister

Biswanath Chari, May 19 : The All Biswanath District Students' union had submitted a memorandum to the health minister of Assam through the deputy commissioner of Biswanath on May 17 at the latter's office. The AASU body placed a demand to make vaccines available for those above 45 of age group.

Further, the students' body had requested the state government to look into the issue of those who don't have smart phones for registration. The Biswanath AASU further placed a demand to increase the number of vaccination centers at Biswanath for smooth functioning of the government initiative.

Nurse who cared for Boris Johnson resigns over 'lack of respect' for NHS workers

London, May 19 : A nurse who cared for Boris Johnson when he was gravely ill with Covid-19 says she has handed in her resignation, such is her disillusionment with the "lack of respect" shown by the government for the NHS and healthcare workers. Jenny McGee, who kept vigil by the prime minister's bedside for two days when he was in intensive care, also revealed that his staff had later attempted to co-opt her into a "clap for the NHS" photo opportunity with him during what she thought would be a discreet thank you visit to Downing Street. "We're not getting the respect and now pay that we deserve. I'm just sick of it. So I've handed in my resignation," said McGee, referring to the government's proposed 1% pay rise for NHS staff, which unions have described as a "kick in the teeth". She was also critical of the government's handling of the Covid crisis, adding: "Lots of nurses felt that the government hadn't led very effectively

another nurse, Luis Pitarma, on the day he left hospital, telling the world's media: "The reason in the end my body did start to get enough oxygen was because for every second of the night, they were watching." Photographs of Johnson hosting both of them in the garden of Downing Street in July were subsequently released by No 10 as the NHS marked 72 years. McGee, who is originally from Invercargill in New Zealand, said she had been asked but declined to take part in a "clap for carers" at the event. "It would have been a really good photo opportunity. You know, kind of like Boris and his NHS friends, but I wanted to stay out of it. Lots of nurses felt that the government hadn't led very effectively, the indecisiveness, so many mixed messages. It was just very upsetting," she said. "Yes, we have put ourselves on the line and we have worked so incredibly hard, and there's a lot of talk about how we're all heroes and all

would make them feel more valued. Across the NHS and independent sectors, the percentage thinking of leaving the profession increased to 36%, or more than a third, from 27% at the end of 2019. Of those thinking of leaving, 61% cited pay as a factor. Other factors cited include the way nursing staff have been treated during the pandemic (44%), low staffing levels (43%), and lack of management support (42%). Pat Cullen, the acting general secretary and chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing, said: "Nursing staff are exhausted and burnt out after a punishing year of tackling the Covid-19 pandemic." To hear the government's proposed 1% pay rise is an insult and shows how little the government listens to and respects nursing staff who have been putting their lives on the line. "At the same time, there continued to be a steady increase in the number of people from within the UK applying to become nurses, accompanied by continued growth in the numbers of new recruits coming from other parts of the world, such as India and the Philippines. But established nurses from the EU have been leaving the UK. Since the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, there was a steep (89%) decline in the number of European Economic Area (EEA) nurses entering the registry, and a 91% drop in EU and EEA applicants to join the Nursing and Midwifery register. Labour leader Keir Starmer said on Twitter that McGee's comments were: "A devastating indictment of Boris Johnson's approach to the people who put their lives on the line for him and our whole country." In a statement released on Tuesday through Guy's and St Thomas' NHS foundation trust, McGee said: "After the toughest year of my nursing career, I'm taking a step back from the NHS but hope to return in the future. I'm excited to start a nursing contract in the Caribbean, before a holiday back home in New Zealand later in the year. I'm so proud to have worked at St Thomas' hospital and to have been part of such a fantastic team." A Downing Street spokesperson said: "Our NHS staff have gone above and beyond over the past year and this government will do everything in our power to support them. We are extremely grateful for the care NHS staff have provided throughout the pandemic in particular." That is why they have been exempted from the public sector wide pay freeze implemented as a result of the difficult economic situation created by the pandemic. "At the same time we have invested £30m to support staff mental health and are expanding the number of places available for domestic students at medical schools in England to continue expanding our workforce."



- the indecisiveness, so many mixed messages. It was just very upsetting." McGee made the comments in a Channel 4 documentary to be broadcast on 24 May about the 15 months of Covid in Britain. Jenny McGee in the Channel 4 documentary The Year Britain Stopped. It coincides with the first anniversary of when the Guardian and Daily Mirror revealed Dominic Cummings' breach of lockdown rules. The documentary pinpoints the revelation as a turning point for when the resolve and sense of togetherness that had manifested in the UK throughout the first lockdown began to fray. McGee, a lead intensive care nurse at St Thomas' hospital in London, described how she found the prime minister when she arrived for work: "All around him there was lots and lots of sick patients, some of whom were dying. I remember seeing him and thinking he looked very, very unwell. He was a different colour really." But in the documentary, The Year Britain Stopped, she told of how she felt deeply disappointed in the government's treatment of healthcare workers - particularly over nurses' pay. Johnson named McGee and

that sort of stuff. But at the same time, I'm just not sure if I can do it. I don't know how much more I've got to give to the NHS." "I shook hands with everybody," says Boris Johnson weeks before coronavirus diagnosis - video McGee recalled the situation leading up to Christmas last year - a period when the government was coming under heavy criticism for not acting sooner to impose new restrictions as data suggested that measures at the time were not limiting public mixing as much as during the March lockdown. She described what took shape in her hospital as "a cesspool of Covid". "This time there was more than the first surge. The nurses are stretched even more. An absolute shitshow to be honest. At that point, I don't know how to describe the horrendousness of what we were going through. We were desperate." Research carried out last year by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) showed a sharp rise in the proportion of nursing staff considering quitting the profession, driven primarily by concerns about pay. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of 42,000 members who responded to the survey across the UK said higher pay

'Urgent. Oxygen needed': Nepalis mobilise to take charge in Covid crisis

Kathmandu, May 19 : Aping and: "ICU bed needed. Please it's urgent." Another ping: "Where can I find Remdesivir. EMERGENCY." Ping: "Very urgent oxygen cylinder needed, patient at last stage." The messages never let up; a constant stream of posts pleading for hospital beds, oxygen, plasma and medicine. It's not Nepal's government helpline, but an online group set up by a 24-year-old public health graduate. When Prashikchhya Parajuli and her friends saw the rise of coronavirus cases in India, they knew Nepal would be next. They launched a Viber group to share health advice with the public, but it was soon swamped with messages begging for help. In response to every desperate request, advice is given, phone numbers are shared and tips on where to find a hospital bed are passed on. "There is a public health crisis and a political crisis," says Parajuli. "People are crying out for help but they are not being heard. The government is preoccupied with its own survival. So everyone is doing their best from their own side. Even those who have lost loved ones are still trying to help. It's heart-wrenching." In Nepal, the battle against the pandemic is being fought not just by medics in hospitals, but by volunteers and

activists through social media, online groups and community organising, while political leaders are widely seen as incompetent and indifferent. Last week the prime minister, KP Sharma Oli, lost a vote of confidence in parliament but retained his post after rival political parties were unable to form a new government. The political turmoil began in December, after Oli dissolved parliament and called for early elections in an apparent effort to avoid a power-sharing agreement. The move was deemed unconstitutional, prompting weeks of political manoeuvring by rival parties just as cases of Covid-19 were starting to soar. The country's fragile health system has been overwhelmed, with 44%

of people tested in the first week of May found to be infected with the virus. According to official figures, in the past week there have been on average 183 deaths and more than 8,600 new cases a day, up from less than 200 cases a day in the first week of April. But experts say the true figures are likely to be much higher. "The situation is stretched. It's really bad," says Anup Bastola, chief consultant at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital in Kathmandu. "I get calls asking for ventilators many times every day... It's a terrible time. I warned people there would be a second wave, but I never thought it would happen like this." Elke Wisch, Unicef's country representative, says there is an urgent need for

in-kind donations to combat the "alarming" rise in cases. "Care staff are stretched to the limit, hospitals and health centres are unable to cope and there is not enough oxygen to support the rapidly increasing number of people requiring treatment," she says. And so, Nepalis are turning to social media - and one another - for help. "It is the government's responsibility to deal with this, but if the government is not doing enough, we have to step up. It's a crisis," says Luna Ranjit, a member of the Covid Alliance for Nepal, which is mobilising a response on multiple fronts. The alliance has focused efforts on securing vaccines for the country, where only around 1% of the population has received two vaccine doses. "The most urgent need is oxygen, but if we are going to stop these surges coming again and again, we need vaccines," says Ranjit. With India pausing the export of vaccines, the alliance has been lobbying the US embassy in Nepal and US lawmakers to redirect some of the country's excess supply to Nepal. But Ranjit accepts the limits of a citizen-led response. "It seems like civil society is shouldering the bigger burden but our

efforts are not centralised and so there is lots of duplication," she says. "It's somewhat haphazard." This has not stopped the efforts of dozens of groups, inside and outside Nepal, often composed of urban young people who were schooled in the response to the 2015 earthquake. They include teams who are making ventilation equipment and PPE, providing food relief, setting up helplines and importing oxygen. Samaya Khadka, of volunteer-run network Covid Connect Nepal, says his team has been working for two weeks without rest to find hospitals beds, oxygen and ventilators for hundreds of worried families. After requests are verified, the team start calling hospitals and any contacts they have for help. We are working almost 24 hours a day. Yesterday we were up until 3am until we found a hospital bed for someone. "We are working almost 24 hours a day. Yesterday we were up until 3am until we found a hospital bed for someone," says 20-year-old Khadka, who has a team of more than 150 young volunteers across the country. "If we save just one life, it's worth it." The need is far greater than the available resources. On Saturday Khadka's group received 315 requests for help, but were only able to solve 19 of them.



A visitor poses for photos in Kumtag Desert in Shanshan County, northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

GSK and Medicago report positive Covid vaccine trial data

London, May 19 : GlaxoSmithKline has unveiled positive interim results from mid-stage trials of a Covid-19 vaccine it is developing with the Canadian biotech firm Medicago, a day after releasing strong data from its vaccine collaboration with the French drugmaker Sanofi. The double dose of positive vaccine news gives GSK a boost at a time when its chief executive, Emma Walmsley, is under intense pressure from a new activist investor, the New York hedge fund Elliott Management, which took a sizeable stake in April. The UK drugmaker and Quebec-based Medicago said the vaccine, a plant-based jab, triggered protective antibody levels 10 times higher than in patients recovering from Covid-19. The response was

similar in all age groups who were given two doses three weeks apart, without serious side-effects. Up to 30,000 volunteers are enrolling for phase 3 trials of the Medicago vaccine, which can be stored in the fridge, in Canada, the US, the UK and Brazil. It has received fast-track designation by the US health regulator and the companies hope it will be on the market in late summer or early autumn. Many low- and middle-income countries are struggling to get enough Covid shots to vaccinate their populations. India's crisis is worsening, with a record 4,329 deaths in the last 24 hours. GSK is providing an adjuvant, designed to boost the body's immune response, to the vaccine developed by Medicago,

similar to its collaboration with Sanofi. The vaccine project with Sanofi has suffered delays, but on Monday, GSK and Sanofi said interim results from a mid-stage trial showed a "strong neutralising antibody response" in all adult age groups, and raised no safety concerns, which means the jab will move into late-stage clinical trials within weeks and could be on the market at the end of the year. Walmsley, who plans to split the GSK consumer healthcare arm off from the pharmaceuticals and vaccine business next year, is under pressure to improve the company's performance. The share price has fallen 15% since she took the helm four years ago, as the firm battles to keep up with rivals and rebuild its portfolio of new medicines.

Return of local Covid lockdowns risks public backlash, MPs warn

London, May 19 : The return of local lockdowns in England would trigger a huge public backlash and inflame community tensions, MPs have warned, as ministers said restrictions could remain in Covid hotspots next month. George Eustice, the environment secretary, suggested that areas where the new, virulent strain of Covid is most widespread may have to remain in a local lockdown while freedoms return for the rest of the country on 21 June. He said: "If we do have a deterioration in some of these areas then, of course, we can't rule out that we would put in place certain local lockdowns." One suggestion reportedly under consideration is that areas with a high number of cases of the variant first identified in India - such as Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen and Bedford - would be placed in the equivalent of tier 4, meaning pubs, restaurants, non-essential shops and gyms are closed and people are told to leave home only for essential reasons. There would be significant public anger if curbs



were imposed in Greater Manchester and Lancashire, where restrictions have been in place for most of the last 15 months and longer than anywhere else except Leicester. Andy Burnham, the Greater Manchester mayor, said he would oppose such a move. He said: "Last year, tiers did not work - they did not stop the spread of the virus. It would be hard for me to put out a message of caution in Greater Manchester when nationally the messaging is very different, that the roadmap is proceeding. We struggled with that mixed messaging all of last year." The government would also face opposition from some of its own MPs, including influential backbenchers such as Graham Brady and William Wragg. Wragg, the MP for Hazel Grove in Stockport, Greater Manchester, told Hancock on Monday to boost vaccinations in the region rather than "to flirt even momentarily with the idea of imposing local restrictions, which are not helpful and create a great deal of resentment". Yasmin Qureshi, the Labour MP for Bolton South East, said people would be "incredibly upset and very angry" if their freedoms were taken away again. Bolton has the highest infection rate in the UK after an increase of the B.1.617.2 variant first detected in India. Bolton and nearby Blackburn with Darwen accounted for a fifth of the UK's 2,323 confirmed cases of the B.1.617.2 variant, although hospitalisations have remained low. Qureshi said the government was peddling a "dangerous" narrative of blaming people who have not been vaccinated for the resurgence in cases, which she said had already manifested in an "element of racism" from some. Those tensions would worsen, she said, if Bolton was kept in restrictions. Mark Logan, the Conservative MP for Bolton North East, shared the sentiment. "I absolutely vehemently oppose pointing fingers or blaming people, especially down group lines," he said. Some groups or people may have an array of reasons to be hesitant, he added, but "you deal with what you have, and at the moment, we have a high infection rate across the metropolitan borough of Bolton so we have to, as one community in Bolton and as one country, pull together". Logan has been pushing for the mass rollout of the vaccine to all adults in the area, pointing out that aside from three weeks last July, Bolton has been in some form of restrictions since the start of the pandemic. "People are just fatigued and businesses want to get back to operating as freely as possible and as soon as possible," he said. Transmission in the town has been among younger age groups, he said, with a risk of the variant spreading between multigenerational households, which is why his argument is that the best way to tackle to outbreak was with surge vaccinations. "We want Bolton to be the first town in the UK to be vaccinated," he said.

THE ASSAM RISING

VOL. NO. VI, ISSUE NO. 94 THURSDAY, MAY 20, 2021

Highly transmissible variant B.1.617

Just when it felt like we could begin to relax again, Covid-19 has thrown us yet another curveball. While we've been debating in the UK where to go for a holiday and booking long-overdue nights out with friends, the virus has been causing havoc across the world. The Kent variant, B.1.1.7, found its way into countries such as Taiwan and Singapore; P.1 is causing another wave in Brazil; and most devastatingly, the highly transmissible variant B.1.617 (which has three subtypes) is causing a public health crisis in India. The country has seen cases surging with estimated deaths to be several times greater than that being reported by the government, which continues to downplay the epidemic. The UK has done well, largely through strong public compliance, in bringing its case numbers down, but Boris Johnson has repeated his mistake from last summer and left the borders open. The Sunday Times estimates that at least 20,000 passengers from India were allowed to enter the UK while Johnson delayed imposing a travel ban because he didn't want to upset the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, while negotiating a trade deal. This is at a time when other countries such as New Zealand and Hong Kong completely stopped all flights. This puts us now in a precarious situation. The World Health Organization has identified B.1.617 as a "variant of concern" because it is at least as transmissible as the Kent variant, potentially even more so. This means that the virus can jump faster among those susceptible and accelerate out of control. The UK has not fully vaccinated enough of the population to avoid a third wave among younger people that could still strain the NHS. We're now in a race between the spread of the virus (especially as we begin to mix more freely) and getting jabs into arms. Open up too quickly and we face a third wave like Chile and the Seychelles did, and yet another period of lockdown. Open up too slowly and we face continued economic costs and a frustrated public. Such decisions are incredibly difficult, and taken with considerable scientific uncertainty. There is still not enough data to know whether the Indian variant could undermine vaccine effectiveness; initial reports are encouraging that vaccines will offer protection, but nothing conclusive yet. Still, it is far better to have full or partial protection from a vaccine than to get Covid-19 and gamble with your health. The vaccines even seem to reduce transmission, as a study in Scotland among healthcare workers indicated, and reduce long-term health effects associated with long Covid. What is absolutely clear is that we have it in our power to prevent another lockdown by speeding up vaccinations, and in particular targeting areas in which an outbreak is occurring. Surge testing (both PCR and lateral flow rapid tests) can locate infectious individuals and support them to isolate. Up to a third of cases may show no symptoms, which means relying purely on signs such as fever or cough, or feeling unwell, just isn't enough. Those who are unvaccinated are still susceptible and should continue to meet people outdoors, wear masks indoors and wait until getting vaccinated before engaging in riskier indoor activities. The plan is still for all adults in the UK to be offered their first dose by mid-July, so the end is in sight, but patience is needed for the coming weeks. Vaccines will eventually do the heavy lifting and allow us to stop using face coverings, end physical distancing and get back to somewhat normal life. Instead of an incoherent travel light system, the UK should align with the US and EU to only allow visitors who have proof of full vaccination and a negative PCR test prior to arriving. This is a much safer way to open up international travel, and a system that has been used for other diseases such as yellow fever. The virus (including variants) moves when infectious people move; vaccines reduce the likelihood of someone being infectious. Finally, richer countries through the G7 need to continue to offer vaccines and support low- and middle-income countries that are struggling. This is a global problem requiring a global solution. If the right policy steps are taken, and the public are provided with a clear message about the current state of the pandemic, the UK could avoid a third wave and another national lockdown.

Why Singapore's lockdown is a smart combination of the blunt and the precise



Singapore has suffered a big reversal in its battle against Covid-19. More accustomed to applause than demerits for all but stamping out the virus, the city-state is returning to lockdown-like conditions. Authorities are now scrambling to deploy a mix of scalpels and hammers to contain a recent outbreak. Mastering this balance will be the key to any economic recovery. The first wave of restrictions were announced Friday. Work from home becomes the default, not long after employees were encouraged to repopulate offices. Eateries are limited to takeout only. Indoor gyms are closed, attendance at worship services is tightened and social gatherings reduced to two, from five previously and eight only a few weeks ago. Then came the blunter instrument: Officials said Sunday evening that most in-school classes would close by midweek. Leaders cited virulent mutations that attack younger children. They plan to vaccinate kids under 16. (Large portions of the adult population have yet to get shots.) The measures have compromised attempts to restore links to the outside world, critical for an economy dependent on travel. The World Economic Forum canceled the annual meeting it was planning to hold in

Singapore in August, while the air travel bubble between Singapore and Hong Kong has again been postponed. This all makes for a disappointing lockdown anniversary. One year ago, during Singapore's two-month "circuit breaker," we knew relatively little about this disease. Vaccines weren't available. Contact tracing was in its infancy and masks had only just been made compulsory. Workplaces had yet to be refashioned for social distancing. Today, inoculations are proceeding, contact-tracing apps and tokens are mandatory, plastic screens are wrapped around office cubicles. Testing is widespread. Few residents expect, let alone attempt, to travel in and out of the country, given strict quarantine requirements. Yet Singapore still hasn't been able to avoid reinstating the tough measures. "We are testing more intensively, and doing our utmost to ring-fence the transmissions," Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in a Facebook post. "But we also need stricter restrictions to stop more cases from popping up." The challenge comes down to an elusive goal of near-total virus suppression and the reality of slow vaccinations - a dilemma that Singapore isn't facing alone. A hand-

ful of Asian governments that initially got high marks for controlling the virus now find themselves reintroducing curbs on activity. Taiwan, which went without a single domestic case between April and December, asked people to stay home last weekend and imposed limits on gatherings after record new cases. In Japan, which at first managed to contain the virus while largely avoiding strict lockdowns, economically vital regions are under a state of emergency. Its vaccine rollout ranks among the slowest in the developed world, and Tokyo is under pressure to cancel the Olympics for fear it becomes a super-spreader event. Did the early milestones in Asia under-

prepare nations for what comes after containment? My Bloomberg News colleagues Michelle Fay Cortez and Jinshan Hong wrote that, in some ways, the success of "Covid Zero" locations is becoming a straitjacket. Singapore's new restrictions come after recording 24 new local cases Friday, a number that swelled to 38 on Sunday, the most in more than a year but still exceedingly low on a global scale. Unlinked infections - the most concerning to officials, as they signal undetected spread - climbed to 18. The country has fully vaccinated over 22% of the population, or about 1.3 million people, as of May 13, according to the Ministry of Health. Champions point to a quick pace relative to the rest of the region, which has employed even harsher control measures, and for longer. But shouldn't a country with one of the highest per capita incomes in the world be aiming higher? With a population of about 5.7 million, fully vaccinating just over a fifth is hardly a standout rate. Residents aged 45 and below have been told they can register for their shots starting in June. That's a stark contrast with the U.S. - once a source of scorn and sympathy for mishandling the pandemic - where

Why the Covid variant from India won't halt UK's reopening plans, at least not yet

Although the eradication of SARS-CoV-2 would be nice, most people accept we'll have to live with the virus for some time, almost as we do with the flu. But a variant from India is now forcing the U.K. to define just what "living with it" means. It comes as England reaches another milestone on its roadmap to unlocking. From Monday, people can mix inside homes (up to six people or two households); pubs and restaurants will be able to serve customers indoors. Hotels are reopening, as well cinemas, theaters and concert halls. School children no longer have to wear masks. Those reopenings will go ahead, but the phase after that suddenly looks a little less certain. There are several strains fueling India's rampant Covid crisis,

but the variant formally known as B.1.617.2 is the one casting a shadow over Britain's plans to end most restrictions from June 21. The official number of cases of the variant in the U.K., at 1,300, looks low enough to wonder what the fuss is about. There are more than 200,000 cases of the dominant variant in Britain - the Kent variant, also known as B.1.1.7, which Public Health England estimates is up to 50% more infectious than the original strain. And while there were concerns about variants from South Africa and Brazil, neither has derailed the country's reopening plans. But numbers of cases tied to the Indian variant have doubled in the past week - and current



Therese Raphael

figures are likely gross underestimates, since it takes

a couple of weeks for positive cases to show up in the data. The variant is now evident in most regions of the U.K. (with signs of an exponential rise in Scotland), and there is every likelihood that it will spread further. The question is whether that poses a significant risk to life. For Prime Minister Boris Johnson, this must feel like déjà vu. He told people to plan for a merry Christmas of family gatherings after a second national lockdown, only to U-turn when the Kent variant grew rampant. In January he put the country into another state of cryogenic suspension. Also read: UK likely to speed up vaccine second doses due to fear of Covid variant from India. And yet there are reasons to be hopeful that this time will be different. First, some 90% of people over the age of 40 in England have now had a first vaccine dose. A new analysis by Public Health England suggests that by the end of April, vaccines had saved almost 12,000 lives and prevented around 33,000 hospital admissions. So far the cases are largely among people who haven't yet been vaccinated. And those who are getting the variant after being vaccinated seem to be getting a much milder form of Covid. In the northern town of Bolton, which has seen a concentration of the Indian variant, rates of infection have increased far more sharply in the under-60s group than in the over 60s, which has a higher vaccination rate. Even in India, it seems that vaccination is affording some protection against the variant. Second, it's not clear yet whether the new variant is intrinsically more transmissible than the other ones circulating. If transmissibility is higher, then the expectation is that the Indian variant will supersede the other strains.

That doesn't seem to be the case so far. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia, speaking to the BBC on Friday, said early indications suggest that the Indian variant is not as resistant to vaccines as the South African variant, but is more resistant than the Kent variant. A third reason for hope: We have better detection now. The widespread availability of rapid testing can help identify clusters of cases. The government has also put in place surge testing, even going door to door to test people in some places with a high concentration of the new strain. And now the U.K. is seeking to reduce the time between first and second vaccinations for more vulnerable people. (There's currently a lag of up to 12 weeks.) Although this may accelerate vaccinations in worrying hotspots, it will also mean taking supply from elsewhere. The current reopening roadmap remains dependent on four tests: the continued rapid rollout of vaccinations and continued effectiveness of vaccines, as well as the infection rate and presence of new variants. If the India variant does continue to increase at the same rate, there will be a large number of infections by June. Johnson faces pressure to stay the course, but he's well-placed to resist it given his parliamentary majority and recent election boost. Another key indicator should be hospitalizations. As of May 6, there were fewer than 1,000 hospital beds occupied by Covid patients; and only 144 were beds with ventilators. Keeping those numbers low is critical, not least because the NHS has a huge backlog of non-Covid cases to clear through. Epidemiologists have been warning that a third wave of some kind is likely and we may now be facing it. Unlike previous waves, we have better defenses and more experience with adaptation. Nothing is certain with this virus, but the odds look better this time around.

Central Vista needs revamp. But here are 7 non-Covid reasons why Modi govt has got it wrong



The Central Vista project in the heart of the capital has been universally panned. Before one gets into how the project is all wrong, there is something to be said for change. First, the Modi government is not the first one to say that Parliament House is now unsafe. Nor is it that the Central Vista is a great sight today. The place is unfriendly to visitors, parked cars have encroached wholesale on green areas, and there is poor land use in a prime area. The "Bhavans" themselves are functional but in various stages of disrepair. People have played around with flooring material and office lay-out, the doors and windows show their age, and toilets often stink. There is almost no central air-conditioning, which in this day and age should be essential. The security arrangements are haphazard and repetitive. The whole place needs a makeover, internal redesign, and better maintenance. So, a project that promises better land use, better connectedness between buildings, space for underground parking, and central air-conditioning has something to say for itself. Does

that justify the Central Vista project in its current form? Not at all. For a start, the project shows a lack of respect for history, even if an inalienable part of it is colonial history. Second, re-doing buildings or putting up new ones is a good time to review work processes, as the two have to be in alignment. If the intention is to switch to open office plans and fewer work silos (as Narendra Modi has wished), does the government want to switch to a desk-officer system with just two levels of decision-making, as the first Administrative Reforms Commission suggested half a century ago - implying an end to the current file-movement system of working? No such review has been done. Third, old signature buildings can be repurposed, and re-built inside out for the modern age with greater structural strength and without changing the external profile, as has been done with the White House, the Bundestag, and many others much older than the Lutyens-Baker buildings. If the Lok Sabha chamber is too small to accommodate more members (as may become necessary), the Central Hall can be made the lower house. Fourth, some of the "temporary" barracks dating back to World War II can make way for parking towers, with a park and

ride system initiated, to get rid of the current parking mess. Fifth, there is no particular merit in wanting all government offices close together; it might even be a security risk. Indeed, contrary to the logic of congregating offices, the new Army headquarters will be far away, in the city's cantonment area, while the air headquarters remains where it is - though the defence services are integrating both planning and operations. Nor is uniformity of building design a virtue; consider the architectural variety of the Washington Mall. And sixth, how will the millions of priceless artefacts and fragile collections of the National Museum and National Archives be logged and stored safely before being re-housed in North Block and South Block, which may be unsuitable as museums, especially if they are unsafe? Finally, newer government buildings have tended to be inferior to older ones. They are either eye-sores (like Sena Bhavan, the current Army headquarters, and Lok Nayak Bhavan not far away), or adopt a wasteful expansiveness: The defence research building behind South Block, the Comptroller and Auditor General's new head office a few kilometres away, and the new home of the External Affairs Ministry, built on the assumption that prime land is both costless and limitless. Individual offices in some of these buildings (including those in the Lodi Road Institutional Area, another unsightly congeries) are bigger than a badminton court. How does one avoid a repetition of this history, or its descent into vandalism of a historical area? In short, why should such an important project, massive in scale, conceived in secrecy, shared selectively with small groups but shut out of the public eye, without considering cheaper and better alternatives, be executed in the midst of a pandemic when every rupee that can be spared should go into improving the country's medical capabilities?

TN Ninan

Michael Burry of 'Big Short' fame takes on Elon Musk; bets half a billion dollars against Tesla



Mumbai, May 19 : Famous investor Michael Burry has disclosed a short position against Elon Musk's Tesla Inc on shares worth \$534 million. Recent filings with the US capital market regulator Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) showed that Michael Burry's Scion Asset Management has long put options against 800,100 shares of the electric car manufacturer. Michael Burry was among those who called out the subprime mortgage crisis of 2007 and made billions betting against mortgage securities. Michael Burry was played by Christian Bale in the movie based on Michael Lewis's book on the 2008 financial crisis, 'The Big Short'. The put options against 800,100 shares of Tesla, placed by Michael Burry, were seen as of March 31. These give Burry's Scion Asset Management the right to sell Tesla shares at a specified strike price on or before a certain date. Investors holding put positions stand to benefit if the price of the underlying security falls. Michael Burry will only stand to benefit if Tesla shares fall below the deter-

mined price by the specified date. The price and date have not been disclosed by Scion Asset management. Bitcoin, Elon Musk's Tesla share price, Elon Musk's Bitcoin U-turn: Tesla stops car purchases using Bitcoin; cryptocurrency sinks, Tesla shares fall Earlier in December, Michael Burry, on Twitter had said that Tesla's reliance on regulatory credits to generate profit was a red flag. CNBC reported. Tesla only generates profits at present by selling tax credits to other auto manufacturers. However, this could change as more and more car manufacturers come up with their electric cars and competition increases for Tesla. They added that in the first quarter of this year, Tesla reported \$518 million in regulatory credit sales. Burry had back then said that Tesla stock price was "ridiculous". Tesla's share price skyrocketed a massive 755% between the end of March last year and the first half of January this year. Since then stock has fallen 35% to now trade at \$576 apiece. Meanwhile, Cathie Wood of ARK Invest is among those bullish on the stock. Earlier this year in March, analysts at ARK Invest said that post the pandemic, Elon Musk's Tesla could surge more than 400% from current levels by 2025 to reach a target price of \$3,000 per share. The post said that ARK Invest sees a 50% possibility of Tesla hitting \$3,000 apiece price. They see a 25% possibility of the stock quoting \$1,500 by 2025 and 25% possibility of it hitting \$4,000 apiece - their bull case.

Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance launches Vision LifeIncome Plus, a plan to suit customer's money needs at all life stages

Guwahati, May, 19 : Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance (ABSLI), the life insurance subsidiary of Aditya Birla Capital Limited (ABCL), announced the launch of a hyper-flexible savings plan - ABSLI Vision LifeIncomePlus Plan that provides guaranteed regular income plus flexible bonus payouts. This non-linked participating individual plan has been designed to offer various plan options which can be tailor-made to perfectly suit customers' unique financial needs across different life-stages. This savings plan provides a customer with the comfort of a guaranteed regular income for up to 30 years to help them achieve their evolving life goals while reaping the benefits of a comprehensive life insurance cover. Additionally, the plan also brings an upside through completely flexible bonus pay-outs which can be accumulated for wealth creation or withdrawn at the customer's convenience for an instant access to their money. ABSLI Vision LifeIncomePlus Plan offers tax-free guar-

anteed additional income for life, besides providing the benefit of liquidity or cash in hand whenever one requires funds. Commenting on the launch, Mr. Kamlesh Rao, MD & CEO, Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance, said, "Amid the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, ups and downs in the economy and the markets, saving sufficiently for the future - tomorrow or three decades from now - has become extremely crucial. Individuals today need plans which can be personalized to fit their unique needs at different life stages and can assure complete security of future financial goals. ABSLI Vision LifeIncomePlus Plan will cater to this immediate need of customers by maximizing their income and minimizing risk. This holistic solution will not only help individuals meet their short and long-term financial requirements, do legacy planning but will also offer bonus income to further increase wealth or build contingency fund."

Maruti Suzuki, Zydus opens hospital in Gujarat: Initial start as a 50-bed Covid facility

Mumbai, May 19 : The 24x7 super specialization hospital offers services like emergency care and trauma, advanced diagnostics, critical care for stabilization in life-threatening conditions, along with mother & childcare, cardiac care, eye care, burns, ENT, internal medicine and also, general medicine. India's leading carmaker Maruti Suzuki in partnership with Zydus Hospitals has announced the start of a multi-specialty hospital at Sitapur in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. With a total capital expenditure of Rs 126 crores, the said hospital has been fully funded by the Maruti Suzuki Foundation - a CSR initiative of Maruti Suzuki. The hospital will be managed and operated by Ramanbhai Foundation, the CSR arm of Zydus Group. The hospital is also taking care of Covid-19 patients during its initial start. The company said in a press release that the said facility is expected to serve more than 3.75 lakh people residing at Sitapur and adjoining villages at quite affordable charges. The hospital is starting as a 50-bed facility initially and as and when the demand increases, it can be expanded to 100 beds. The company says that the infrastructure is already in-place for the expansion of the facility, which is spread over 7.5 acres of area. The hospital is the first one in the area with super specialization services. The 24x7 super specialization hospital offers services like emergency care and trauma, advanced diagnostics, critical care for stabilization in life-threatening conditions, along with mother & childcare, cardiac care, eye care, burns, ENT, internal medicine and also, general medicine. The hospital is currently manned by qualified and experienced doctors recruited and trained by Zydus Hospitals. It further has an integrated residential facility with 160 dormitory occupancy and 20 two-BHK flats for the staff that is employed in managing operations of the hospital. The residential



facility has a gymnasium, cafeteria, shops, library, and a garden as well. Speaking on the announcement, Kenichi Ayukawa, MD, and CEO, Maruti Suzuki India said that when the company's Gujarat car plant started, there was no major medical facility available in the region. Maruti Suzuki decided

to build a good quality multi-specialty hospital for the benefit of all residents of the area and partnered with Zydus Hospitals. He adds that fortunately, it was in time for the Covid-19 second wave and the hospital has been converted into a Covid-19 care facility to help fight the pandemic.

Covid-19 effect: KTM India extends service, warranty period till July 31, 2021

Mumbai, May 19 : Due to the devastating second Covid-19 wave, several manufacturers have extended the warranties of their products. At the same time, periodic service schedules too have been extended. Now KTM India has followed suit and has extended warranties as well as periodic service schedules till July 31, 2021. This is applicable for all those vehicles whose scheduled services as well as warranties were till May 31, 2021. Due to the curfew and lockdown situation in a majority of the states and the understanding that vehicle owners are supposed to stay inside their homes and not go outside, the warranties have been extended. The warranty extension is also applicable on Husqvarna products, two of which are currently sold in the Indian market - Svartpilen 250 and Vitpilen 250. Commenting on the initiative, Sumeet Narang, President, Bajaj Auto (Probiking) said, "Due to the second wave of the pandemic, various states have announced lockdowns and we are aware that customers may struggle to get their vehicles serviced on time, or avail warranty benefits that may have expired during this period."

Road to Circular Car Economy: Challenges, opportunities for Indian automotive sector

Mumbai, May 19 : That electric mobility is the future and the next big thing and the next frontier is something we all have heard a lot over the last few years. Quite frankly though in present times no one is interested in knowing anymore whether or not electric mobility is the next step for the automotive industry. We all know by now that e-mobility is the obvious progression globally so the more pertinent question now is how to achieve a holistically efficient electric mobility infrastructure. When we talk of holistic efficiency, one has to look at well-to-wheel emissions of electric vehicles (EV) and not just the usage cycle. It's well-known that EVs produce lower emissions than internal combustion (IC) vehicles during operation but the manufacturing process for such vehicles is more energy-intensive and hence leads to higher emissions than IC vehicles. In an ideal scenario, a car that would have zero emissions during production, usage and disposal cycles will be termed a 'Circular Car'. That said, there's a lot more to being a circular car than just sporting a bunch of zeros on the emission front but at the same time chasing this title is especially important for emerging and huge automotive markets such as India.

In order to understand the term Circular Car or Circular Car Economy better and the potential and challenges for it in India, we got in touch with Raghu Gullapalli, Managing Director and Lead APAC Middle East, Industrial & Mobility, Accenture. Mentioned below is an excerpt from the conversation. Express Drives: Can India be made into a circular car manufacturing hub? What steps need to be adopted by carmakers in this regard? Gullapalli: Circularity requires the implementation of a set of solutions across the value chain to achieve environmental impact or to create business value. This can be driven by automotive OEMs, as well as by other players with an interest in making the full value chain circular. Our recent report identifies four pathways to address one distinct variable related to circularity. This includes: Energy decarbonization: A complete shift to renewable energy sources in the production and use phase. This pathway is led by the OEM, enabled by suppliers (through investments in low-carbon technologies). Decarbonization relies on significant investments in renewable energy sources,

low-carbon production processes and the integration of vehicles with the grid. Materials circularity: This aims at achieving 100% circular material content (recycled or renewable materials). This process is led by OEMs and enabled by partners along the value chain (suppliers and end-of-life recyclers). It requires adapting the design for recyclability, investing in materials and scrap recovery (in production and at end of life), extensive reverse

bonize and prepare for the increasing mobility demand which is - in terms of both passenger miles and predicted vehicle stock - is expected to increase 70% globally by 2030. When we think about how to 'decarbonize the car', our research shows that Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs) might use less energy in operation, but they use more energy in production. Shifting to low-carbon electricity for the use phase helps drastically, however, only cir-

cular economy innovations (outlined in the four pathways) combined with such practices will help us get closer to circularity. The ideal, or Level 5 circularity, is a scenario in which cars help to optimize their surrounding ecosystem - improving system-level use of different transportation modes, upgrading materials, and improving energy grids. This overall system is highly integrated, optimized, and sustainable. Through effective industry leadership, policies, business models and engineering, it is possible to achieve Level 5 circularity on a shorter time horizon than many would imagine. Does bringing in sustainable guidelines including the scrappage policy help when it comes to circular vehicles? Circular economy can not only help to serve the growing mobility demands of our country but also help in reducing resource consumption to a level that is truly sustainable. As the fourth largest automotive market in the world, the recent sustainable guidelines announced by the Government of India such as voluntary vehicle scrapping policy for subsidizing scrappage of old vehicles, implementation of BS-VI emission norms and FAME II policy to incentivize and fund EV manufacturing, ushers in the next era of circular cars. To achieve circularity, automotive companies need to embrace a consistent and holistic approach leveraging best-in-class technology tools that requires collaboration with the broader ecosystem over the coming years. What measures can be taken for electric battery recycling? How is the progress on the same? The revolu-



tion in automotive sustainability is right now at a critical juncture with the automotive industry dramatically overshooting its estimated carbon and resource budgets. Critical components, those generally considered of higher value, are sold as a service rather than as a product by original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). Batteries are an example of a high-value component with the potential for an extended life in automotive and non-automotive applications such as an energy storage for households. Batteries enable the entire low-carbon energy system, including electric cars. At the same time, they are, although the price per GW is decreasing, still relatively expensive and more energy-intensive to produce. Example: In a combustion engine vehicle, about 17% of the overall emissions are generated before the car's ignition has been started for the very first time. With electric vehicles, this number is even rising to about 30-35%, mainly driven by the very energy-intensive production of the battery, as laid out in Raising Ambitions: A new roadmap for the automotive circular economy, a joint research from the World Economic Forum and Accenture. The trend of ever-increasing electric vehicle (EV) ranges, gaining significant momentum is not necessarily environmentally desirable and increases EV cost unnecessarily. Viewing batteries through a component-as-a-service lens allows for a more economically rational, inclusive and environmentally friendly approach to electrification. A major enabler of this system is battery swapping, where consumers no longer own their battery, but pay for electricity and battery use on a subscription basis, which helps on two additional fronts: it tackles the "range-anxiety" and makes "topping-up" an EV as convenient as fuelling an ICE. This subscription-based model can be adopted by B2Bs with the battery manufacturer providing the battery to the OEM in a full-service model and the OEM selling the car including battery to the consumer.

Why are banks deducting Rs 330 from your savings account in May?

Why are banks deducting Rs 330 from your savings account in May?

Mumbai, May 19 : PMJJBY is a one-year life insurance scheme, renewable from year to year, offering coverage for death due to any reason, and is available to people in the age group of 18 to 50 years. PMJJBY, scheme details, renewal, date, benefits, age-limit, Rs 330 insurance scheme, government's insurance scheme, SBI, HDFC, bank, Under PMJJBY scheme, a life cover of Rs. 2 lakh is available at a premium of Rs.330 per annum per individual and the scheme is automatically renewable every year. Many savings account holders are finding a debit entry of Rs 330 in their bank statements. For others, such a deduction may happen anytime in the month of May if they have enrolled themselves in the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), the government of India's insurance scheme. The renewal date of PMJJBY falls on June 1 each year and the banks deduct the charges anytime in May to ensure the scheme benefits are available to the individual. In the case of multiple bank accounts held by an individual in one or different banks, the person would be eligible to join the scheme through one bank account

only. It is better to check your bank statement to see if there has been more than one deduction of Rs 330. In that case, you will have to write to the other bank to reverse the charges as the claim amount is to be provided only once. COVID-19: Know how home hospitalisation works in health insurance policies The panel has suggested synchronised efforts to popularise the new insurance products so there is demand for the title insurance product from individual buyers, banks and lending institutions. Insurance & real estate: Panel moots cover for allottees & successors PMJJBY is a one-year life insurance scheme, renewable from year to year, offering coverage for death due to any reason and is available to people in the age group of 18 to 50 years (life cover up to age 55) having a savings bank account who give their consent to join and enable auto-debit. The cover is for a one-year period, starting June 1 to

May 31. Under PMJJBY scheme, a life cover of Rs. 2 lakh (term insurance) is available at a premium of Rs.330 per annum per individual and the scheme is automatically renewable every year. In case of a joint account, all holders of the said account can join the scheme provided they meet its eligibility criteria and pay the premium at the rate of Rs.330 per person per annum. This is how the break-up of the premium works - a. Insurance Premium to LIC / other insurance company: Rs.289 per annum per member. Reimbursement of expenses to agent/bank: Rs.30 per annum per member. Reimbursement of administrative expenses to the participating bank: Rs.11 per annum per member.



Contd. From Page 1

Several key decisions taken

of the Assam Cabinet on Wednesday. While, UPPL president Pramod Boro is the CEM of BTR, Tuliram Ronghang is the CEM of Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council (KAADC) and Debolal Gorlosa is the CEM of North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC). Moreover, the cabinet also decided to appoint senior advocate Debojit Saikia as the Advocate General of Assam. Assam: CEMs of BTR, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao district councils accorded cabinet status 1Also read: Delhi gears up for third wave of COVID-19, to create special task force to save children from virus Debojit Saikia is also the Secretary of Assam Cricket Association. He is a former Ranji player and an administrator. Other decisions taken in the cabinet meeting:If any new Oxygen plant is set up, State Govt would provide 100% free power supply. For reviving closed Oxygen plants, 100% free power would be provided. The nomenclature of I/C minister would be changed to Guardian Minister who would take responsibility of their respective districts.

CM reviews flood preparedness

camp inmates. Chief Minister Dr. Sarma also instructed for carrying out flood damage assessment and subsequent release of reimbursements through a single window system of circle officer who would be made nodal officer for the purpose. He said that too many departments and agencies delay the process of releasing the payments to the beneficiaries. The Chief Minister also said that projects of immediate nature under SDRF must be completed within one financial year and works of projects going beyond 2 financial years must be foreclosed and the contracts should be terminated of those contractors. He also directed the department to issue Standing Instruction towards completion of such projects within 31 st March of every year from now onwards. Brining transparency and providing relief compensation to maximum number of individuals without delay must be the objective of the department and district administration, he said. He also asked the Revenue and Disaster Management Department to direct the DCs to prepare for purchase of tarpaulin, medicine beforehand. He directed the department to match data with satellite mapping mechanisms to identify the actual flood affected areas so that funds are precisely used. The directed the department to actively engage in flood mitigation before the start of the season so that damages can be reduced and relief can be provided without delay. Minister Revenue & Disaster Management Department Jogen Mohan, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Samir Kumar Sinha, Principal Secretary of Revenue & Disaster Management Department Avinash Joshi, MD ASDMA G.D. Tripathi were present in the meeting among others.

First black fungus case reported

say mucormycosis is an “opportunistic infection” – it latches on to people who are battling illnesses or are on medications that lower the body’s ability to fight infections.According to Union health ministry Mucormycosis is not entirely new. For prevention of black fungus attack, the government has recommended not to give steroids at the onset of Covid-19 but after the sixth day when there will be oxygen requirement.“When a patient is put on oxygen support, which has a humidifier containing water, the chances of him or her getting the fungal infection increases. It should be ensured that water does not leak from the humidifier,” the government has recommended. Mucorales are ubiquitous throughout the environment and commonly found in decaying organic matter, soil, compost, and animal excreta, particularly in a wet environment. Predisposing factors for Mucormycosis include HIV/AIDS, uncontrolled, cancer, kidney failure, organ transplant, long-term corticosteroid and immunosuppressive therapy, among others. The black fungus frequently infects sinuses, brain or lungs.

After Cyclone Tauktae, another

coasts around 26th May evening.”The IMD explained that other atmospheric and oceanic conditions like conducive environment for convection, sea surface temperatures are favourable for persistent cloudiness over Andaman Sea and adjoining areas of east-central and southeast Bay of Bengal around May 22 which will help in formation of a low pressure area over north Andaman Sea and adjoining east-central Bay of Bengal around May 22.The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are likely to witness light to moderate rainfall at most places with heavy to very heavy falls at isolated places on May 22 and 23. While, Odisha, West Bengal and adjoining Assam and Meghalaya are likely to receive light to moderate rainfall at most places with heavy falls at isolated places are very likely to commence from evening of May 25. In May 2020 two cyclones hit the Indian coasts -- super cyclonic storm Amphan and severe cyclonic storm Nisarga -- which hit the eastern and western coast, respectively.

UP CM Yogi Adityanath declares

steps are being taken by the government to ensure the health security of the people of the state. The overall COVID-19 positivity rate in the state is 3.6 per cent. Whereas in the last 24 hours, this rate has been 2.45 per cent. Meanwhile, a total of 7,336 cases of coronavirus infection in the state in the last 24 hours. This number is about 30,000 less than 38,055 cases that came on April 24. In the last 24 hours, 19,669 infected persons have been discharged after treatment. At present, the number of active cases of COVID-19 infection in the state is 1,23,579, which is 1.87 lakh less than the maximum number of active cases as on April 30, 2021 from 3,10,783. Thus, there has been a decrease of 69% in the maximum number of active cases at present relative to April 30.

PM Modi hails Bihar’s HIT

has sent one-page detail of the HIT COVID App to the union health ministry," Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Pratyaya Amrit was quoted Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had launched the app on Monday to ensure regular monitoring and tracking of those COVID-19 patients, who are in home isolation across the state.Under this initiative, health workers will visit the patients at home every day and feed data in the app after measuring their temperature and oxygen level.These data will be monitored at the district level. If the oxygen level of a patient is below 94, they will be shifted to the nearby dedicated COVID health centres for proper treatment.The HIT App has been developed by the Bihar State Electronics Development Corporation (BELTRON) under the guidance of the health department.The app was initially launched in five districts on a trial basis and seeing its success, it has been expanded across the state.

Assam, Meghalaya to Experience

met centre in Guwahati has issued thunderstorm warnings over most districts. However, the Assamese districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang, Golaghat, Bishwanath, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Majuli, Charaideo, Dibrugarh, Tinsuka, Dima Hasao, Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj will be particularly vulnerable to isolated heavy rains over the next three days.Further, the districts of East Kameng, Papumpare, East Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Dibang Valley, Anjaw, Lohit, Changlang and Tirap in Arunachal Pradesh; Jiribam and Churachandpur in Manipur; and Wokha, Mokokchung, Tuensang and Mon in Nagaland will also be affected by isolated heavy rainfall in this forecast period.The intense rain activity has been ongoing since Tuesday, with the IMD observing heavy rainfall at isolated places in Assam and Meghalaya during the morning and afternoon hours of Tuesday.Meanwhile, since the beginning of the pre-monsoon season on March 1, a majority of the northeastern states have recorded below-normal rainfall as compared to their respective average figures for this period.Between March 1 and May 18, Arunachal Pradesh (392.8 mm), Assam (230.9 mm), Nagaland (146.3 mm), Manipur (178.1 mm) and Tripura (206.2 mm) have all recorded 'deficit' rainfall figures, whereas Mizoram, at 148.6 mm, has registered a 'large deficit'. Meghalaya, on the other hand, is the only north-eastern state to record 'normal' rains at 451.4 mm, albeit quite narrowly.

Devajit Lon Saikia

General of Assam.”It is to be mentioned that Devajit Lon Saikia is also the Secretary of Assam Cricket Association.Rajib Prakash Baruah, President, Guwahati Cricket Coaching centre and Nabab Ali, Secretary cum Chief Coach, GCCC congratulates . Debojit Lon Saikia on being appointed as Advocate General, Assam. It may be mentioned here that Sri. Debojit Lon Saikia was a member of the Guwahati Cricket Coaching centre since it's inception i.e, 1984 and represented the Assam Ranijit Cricket Team in 1988 from the GCCC.

IT ministry sends notice

sources told Zee Media.The IT ministry had sent notice on May 18 to WhatsApp to withdraw its Privacy Policy 2021.Amid the raging privacy debate, India took up the issue of discriminatory treatment of Indian users vis-à-vis users in Europe by WhatsApp. The Ministry has said, “It is irresponsible, for WhatsApp to leverage this position to impose unfair terms and conditions on Indian users ”Meanwhile, on May 17, WhatsApp on Monday told the Delhi High Court that it has not deferred the May 15 deadline for users to accept its new privacy policy. Kapil Sibal, the senior advocate who is representing WhatsApp, had submitted before the HC bench that it is trying to get users on board. However, if the users do not agree to the privacy policy, then the company will slowly delete these user accounts, Sibal said.The HC was hearing a plea against WhatsApp's new privacy policy in which the petitioners sought directions to the Centre to direct WhatsApp to roll back their policy or provide an option to the users of opt-out of the January 4, 2021, update.In February, the High Court had issued notice on the plea.Last week, WhatsApp said that its users will have to accept the upcoming privacy policy or else they will lose access to some crucial functions. Although users will not immediately lose their accounts or face curtailed functionalities on the platform on May 15, but they will have to eventually go through limited functions if they fail to accept the new norms in the due course of time.“For the last several weeks we’ve displayed a notification in WhatsApp providing more information about the update. After giving everyone time to review, we’re continuing to remind those who haven’t had the chance to do so to review and accept. After a period of several weeks, the reminder people receive will eventually become persistent,” a WhatsApp FAQs page said.At that time, you’ll encounter limited functionality on WhatsApp until you accept the updates. This will not happen to all users at the same time, it had added.

Black fungus infection declared an ‘epidemic’ in Rajasthan

New Delhi, May 19 : The black fungus infection has been declared as an ‘epidemic’ in Rajasthan. The black fungus infection, scientifically known as Mucormycosis, is primarily affecting people recovering from COVID-19. The Sawai Man Singh (SMS) Hospital in Jaipur is currently treating around 100 black fungus patients in a separate ward. Black fungus has been notified as an epidemic and a notifiable disease in the state under the Rajasthan Epidemic Act 2020. Black fungus infection declared an ‘epidemic’ in Rajasthan According to experts, people with diabetes are more prone to getting the black fungus infection. Rajasthan’s Principal Health Secretary Akhil Arora has stated that black fungus has been declared as an ‘epidemic’ to ensure integrated and coordinated treatment of the infection. Importantly, the medicine – Amphotericin-B injection, used in the treatment of black fungus infection is currently in short supply. “Anyone who is diabetic and whose immune system is not functioning well needs to be on the guard against this. The disease is caused by a set of micro-organisms known as mucormycetes, which are present naturally in the environment, seen mostly in soil and in decaying organic matter like leaves, compost and piles,” the Union Health Ministry said. Meanwhile, the first case of black fungus infection has also been detected in the North-east. Assam on Tuesday reported the first case of black fungus infection in the Northeast. A 27-year-old COVID-19 patient, who has been admitted to a private hospital in Guwahati, has reportedly tested positive for the rare fungal infection. The black fungus frequently infects sinuses, brain or lungs.

Boris Johnson under fire for delaying Covid public inquiry until 2022

London, May 19 : Boris Johnson has come under fire from experts and bereaved families for delaying until spring 2022 the newly announced public inquiry into the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.Work will now begin to appoint a chair and other potential panellists, and draw up terms of reference, with some hopeful that the inquiry will be led by a judge. The investigation is likely to start in a year's time, Johnson told the Commons.Experts said it could take three to six months to establish so could be up and running much sooner than spring 2022 if desired. Labour's Lord Falconer, who passed the Inquiries Act as lord chancellor, said the government would be confident the Covid inquiry would not conclude before the next general election, expected in 2023.After the UK had one of the world's worst Covid death tolls, exceeding 150,000, experts and MPs have pushed for an inquiry to investigate whether ministers followed scientific advice on lockdowns and other decisions; the level of support provided to disadvantaged groups and frontline workers; contracts for personal protective equipment awarded to those with links to government; and the £37bn NHS test and trace programme run by the Conservative peer Dido Harding.It is also likely to explore "long Covid", whereby people suffer apparent after-effects of the disease for weeks or months, including severe fatigue.Johnson signalled the inquiry was unlikely to start before next spring because of a high likelihood that Covid cases would increase again in the winter. "We must not inadvertently divert or distract the people on whom we depend in the heat of our struggle against this disease," he said."I think the house will agree that it would not be right to devote the time of people who are looking after us, who are saving lives, to an inquiry before we can be absolutely - much more - certain than we are now that the pandemic is behind us."The prime minister said it would be fully independent and have "the ability to compel the production of all relevant materials and take oral evidence in public, under oath". A senior World Health Organization (WHO) official criticised the delay, saying coronavirus was still "roaring ferociously" through the world so "if there are lessons to be learned, they should be learned quickly and applied now". David Nabarro, a special envoy on Covid, told the BBC that the inquiry's start date was a bit "distant" and that "people ought to be doing studies now".The start date was branded "simply too late" by Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice, who said "lives are at stake with health experts and scientists warning of a third wave later this year". They added: "A rapid review in summer 2020 could have saved our loved ones who died in the second wave in winter."Prof Sir Lawrence Freedman, who sat on the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war, said that if by next October the government "felt reasonably confident" a third wave would not materialise, then it should start "setting things in motion" quickly. He added the inquiry could also do a lot of preliminary work before calling witnesses so that it was in a fitter state to formally start taking evidence next spring.Falconer, now the shadow attorney general, said Johnson had invented a "totally bogus excuse" for pushing back the start date and that the inquiry should "get up and running now". He said "to be realistic, we're not going to see a report for two years" and that ministers will be "confident that it won't come out until after the next election"."They need to be producing terms of reference and the opening date as quickly as possible," he told the Guardian, adding that the inquiry panel would "be as conscious as anybody" about not wanting witnesses to be distracted who may still need to help deal with the pandemic. "I would trust the inquiry much more than I would trust the government to strike that balance," he added.Ben Howlett, a former Tory MP who now chairs the Public Policy Projects health thinktank, said it was "mad" that the inquiry would not start until next spring. "I am surprised at the timing," he said. "There is clearly a huge amount of evidence coming forward to show that lessons weren't learned after the first wave, in time for the second.

Britain to host first global conference on LGBTQ+ rights

London, May 19 : The first-ever global conference on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights is to be hosted in the UK next year, as the government races to fulfil its pledges to the international 42-country Equal Rights Coalition.The “Safe To Be Me” event is expected to be the largest of its kind and will invite elected officials, activists and policymakers from across the world to participate in London over two days in June 2022, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the first official London Pride marches.Nick Herbert, who was the Conservative MP for Arundel and South Downs from 2005 to 2019 before being made a lord last year, has been announced as chair of the event and as the prime minister’s special envoy on LGBTQ+ rights.The conference will be used to champion equality at home and abroad, and ministers say it will attempt to “make progress on legislative reform, tackling violence and discrimination, and ensuring equal access to public services for LGBT people”.Herbert said: “It will be the first time that a global event on this scale – including parliamentarians – has been held, and I hope it will help to drive collective action for real change.”The announcement comes at a crucial juncture, as the 2021 Rainbow Europe Map, a continent-wide benchmarking tool, reveals there has been widespread and almost complete stagnation on human rights for LGBTQ+ people across Europe over the last 12 months.In an annual survey published in full on Monday, the International Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (Ilga Europe) has ranked 49 countries and found “a disturbing standstill” on legislative and policy progress, with an increase in LGBTQ-phobic hatred and political repression.Under Boris Johnson’s premiership, the British government has been criticised by LGBTQ+ activists and human rights charities for rolling back the rights of trans people. Last Tuesday, new voter registration laws announced in the Queen’s speech were labelled “divisive and discriminatory” by lawyers at Liberty, who said that plans to force voters to carry photo identification would disproportionately affect minorities including trans and non-gender-conforming people.Last autumn, when the government scrapped reforms to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) which would have allowed allow trans people to self-identify, Stonewall’s chief executive, Nancy Kelley, described the move as “a shocking failure in leadership” where the government had “missed a key opportunity to progress LGBT equality”.The UK took over as co-chair of the global Equal Rights Coalition alongside Argentina in July 2019, and has been expected to launch a comprehensive five-year strategy to increase international action to defend the rights of LGBTQ+ people around the world. The Safe To Be Me conference has been designed to meet that commitment and is being worked on by the Government Equality Office and the Foreign Office.Amelia Abraham, the author of Queer Intentions and a forthcoming book on LGBTQ+ rights, We Can Do Better Than This, said she welcomed the announcement of the conference but was wary of the Conservative party’s track record on influencing minority rights across the world.“The prime minister should deal with some of the huge issues facing LGBTQ+ people here before holding the UK up as a bastion of progress,” she said. “For instance, the UK government should stop asking us to vote on whether gay conversion therapy should be banned, as if that’s a question at all. They should also make it legal to have a third gender option on passports – like dozens of other countries around the world do – in order to legally recognise the thousands of non-binary people living here, who were also ignored on the census.”Liz Truss, the minister for women and equalities, said: “This conference will take aim at the prejudices LGBT people still face, and look at the collective action we can take to tackle those injustices alongside our international friends and partners. People should be judged on the basis of their individual character and talents alone, and we want to ensure that this message is heard around the world.”Abraham said the minister’s comments were “a hypocritical slap in the face given Truss’s failure to support trans rights and adequately reform the GRA as government had promised to”.On Saturday, Kishwer Falkner, who was appointed by Truss to lead the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said it was “entirely reasonable” to challenge the biological status of trans women. Baroness Falkner was speaking after the commission intervened in the case of a woman who lost her job after colleagues complained that she was bigoted and transphobic.A judge ruled that the woman’s views were “not worthy of respect in a democratic society” and threw out her claim at an employment tribunal for unfair dismissal. Falkner claimed, however, that it was “a freedom of belief” that the commission was determined to protect.The foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, said next year’s conference would be a chance to promote progressive values. He said: “The right to live life without fear and persecution are the bedrock of inclusive and open societies and the UK, as a force for good, will protect and promote these values at home and around the world.”

Big pharma executives mocked ‘pillbillies’ in emails, West Virginia opioid trial hears

London, May 19 : Executives at one of the US’s largest drug distributors circulated rhymes and emails mocking “hillbillies” who became addicted to opioid painkillers even as the company poured hundreds of millions of pills into parts of Appalachia at the heart of America’s opioid epidemic.The trial of pharmaceutical firms accused of illegally flooding West Virginia with opioids was told last week that senior staff at AmerisourceBergen, the 10th-largest company in the US by revenue, routinely disparaged communities blighted by the worst drug epidemic in the country’s history.One email in 2011 included a rhyme built around “a poor mountaineer” named Jed who “barely kept his habit fed”. According to the verse, “Jed” travels to Florida to buy “Hillbilly Heroin”, the nickname for OxyContin, the drug manufactured by Purdue Pharma which kickstarted an epidemic that has claimed more than 500,000 lives.Florida was well known through the 2000s for lax regulation of pain clinics where doctors illegally prescribed and dispensed large amounts of opioids to those the verse calls a “bevy of Pillbillies”.Another rhyme described Kentucky as “OxyContinville” because of the high use of the drug in the poor rural east of the state.When Kentucky introduced new regulations to curb opioid dispensing, anAmerisourceBergen executive wrote in a widely circulated email: “One of the hillbilly’s [sic] must have learned how to read :-).”Another email contained a mocked up breakfast cereal box with the word “smack” under the words “OxyContin for kids”.One of those who wrote and circulated disparaging emails was Chris Zimmerman, the senior executive responsible for enforcing AmerisourceBergen’s legal obligation to halt opioid deliveries to pharmacies suspected of dispensing suspiciously large amounts of the drugs, often in concert with corrupt doctors who made small fortunes writing illegal prescriptions.After Florida cracked down on pill mills in 2011, Zimmerman sent an email to colleagues. “Watch out George and Alabama,” he wrote, “there will be a max exodus of Pillbillies heading north.”Zimmerman told the trial he regretted circulating the mocking rhyme but it was “a reflection of the environment at the time”. He claimed the emails were simply a means of expressing frustration as the company worked to prevent opioids falling into the wrong hands. Zimmerman said the company culture was of the “highest calibre”.Paul Farrell, a lawyer for a West Virginia county, put it to the executive that the emails reflected a culture of contempt.“It is a pattern of conduct by those people charged with protecting our community, and they’re circulating emails disparaging hillbillies,” he said, according to the Mountain State Spotlight.The city of Huntington and surrounding Cabell county are suing AmerisourceBergen and two other major distributors, McKesson and Cardinal Health, as part of a series of federal cases over the pharmaceutical industry’s push to sell narcotic painkillers which created the opioid epidemic.This is the first case to go to a full trial after AmerisourceBergen, McKesson and two other companies agreed to pay \$260m to settle another of the bellwether cases in Ohio two years ago.The two West Virginia local authorities accuse the distributors of putting profit before lives and turning Cabell county into the “ground zero” of the epidemic.

Mets' Kevin Pillar given CT scan after taking 95mph fastball to face



London, May 19 : The New York Mets outfielder Kevin Pillar appeared to escape serious injury on Monday night after taking a 95 mph fastball to the face during his team's victory over the Atlanta Braves. With the bases loaded in the seventh, Pillar was hit square in the face by the fastball from Jacob Webb. The veteran outfielder was knocked to the ground with blood pouring from his nose. Pillar was quickly helped to his feet with towels covering his face as he was escorted off the field. After the game, the Mets manager, Luis Rojas, said Pillar was taken to the hospital for a CT scan. Pillar then provided an encouraging update on his Twitter account. Braves players, including Webb, watched the scene in

shock. As members of the Atlanta grounds crew covered the blood left in the batter's box area, Webb was removed from the game. "This guy is a warrior," Rojas said after the game, via News12's Kevin Maher. "He shows up every day to play hard. You guys saw him, he got up on his feet and he left. There's no chance I thought he'd be able to do that after I saw the ball hit him in the face. He got up and he left, that's at least one positive to see." Pillar's injury actually helped his team to a victory over their NL East rivals as, with the bases loaded, the automatic walk drove in a run. "You never want to see anyone get hit in the face or in the head by a ball, especially coming at that velocity," said the Mets pitcher Taijuan Walker. "Pillar is a tough guy. It's just one of those things where you just shake your head and you're sick to your stomach." Walker was injured himself in the game. He pitched only three innings, allowing one hit and no runs, before exiting with tightness in his left side. The injuries to Walker and Pillar came after the Mets added two regulars to the injured list before the game. The ace starter Jacob deGrom already is on the IL, recovering from right side tightness.

Gilchrist to Vaughan: Ex-cricketers agree with Bancroft's controversial revelation on sandpapergate

New Delhi, May 19 : Cameron Bancroft reignited the ball-tampering controversy when he indicated that it was "self explanatory" that Australian bowlers knew about it. Bancroft's recent interview with The Guardian prompted responses from former cricketers, Cricket Australia (CA) and others. A few days later, a report by Sydney Herald reveals that Bancroft has backtracked on his claims about the 2018 fiasco when CA contacted him. "Bancroft, who is playing county cricket in the UK, had responded overnight on Monday in a conciliatory manner and indicated that he did not have significant new information to share with CA," the newspaper reported. Even if the 28-year-old tried to douse the flames, it does not seem like we have seen the end of the debate around sandpapergate. CA was stringent in their actions banning senior players David Warner and Steve Smith. It is yet to be seen what actions the board takes after the new developments. Meanwhile, former cricketers have weighed in their opinions on the matter. Former Australian skipper Michael Clarke was not surprised at all by Bancroft's comments. "What's the surprise? That more than three people knew? I don't think anybody who has played the game of cricket, or knows a little bit about cricket, would know that in a team like that, at the highest level, when the ball is such an important part of the game," Clarke told Sky Sports radio. "If you'd played the game of cricket, you would know more than three people know what was going on in there. The problem Cricket Australia has is the fact they've tried to sweep it under the carpet and not come out and tell the full story," he added. Former Australian wicketkeeper-batsman Adam Gilchrist said that CA did not want to go deeper into it and get to the root of the problem. "There was an opportunity for CA if they



were going to make such a strong statement they needed to do a more thorough investigation to work out where the root of the problem was," Gilchrist was quoted as saying on SEN Radio. "Anyone would be naive to think people were not aware with what was going on about ball maintenance. I don't think Cricket Australia wanted to go there. They did not want to go any deeper than that superficial example of ball-tampering," he added. Former Australian cricketer Ian Chappell wants to know the whole story that led to Australians cheating against South Africa. "If I was Smith, Warner or Bancroft, I'd want the others publicly recognised for their part in what happened," Chappell told Nine's Wide World of Sports. "It's not just the fact the ball was tampered with at Newlands, it's all the lead-up about how it got to that point, and what caused it to reach that level of stupidity. For it to have got that far it had to have involved a lot of people, and not just those around the team. It involves people way up the ladder, and the fact that none of them were enveloped, if I was one of the three that did get pinged, I'd be pretty pissed off about it," he added. Former England

skipper expressed his thoughts in a tweet saying that it was obvious that the Australian bowlers knew that the ball was tampered with. Australia's bowling coach during Australia's tour of South Africa said that there were a lot of people who could have done something about it on the field but they did not. "It could have been stopped and it wasn't, which is unfortunate. Cameron's a very nice guy. He's just doing it to get something off his chest... He's not going to be the last," Saker told The Age and Sydney Morning Herald. "You could point your finger at me, you could point your finger at Boof [then coach Darren Lehmann], could you point it at other people, of course you could... We all know that we made a monumental mistake. The gravity wasn't as plain until it all came out," he added. Soon after Bancroft's comments, CA came up with a statement saying that they will welcome any new information about the incident. "CA has maintained all along that if anyone is in possession of new information in regards to the Cape Town Test of 2018 they should come forward and present it," the board said in a statement on Saturday.

Australian bowlers insist they had no knowledge of Cape Town ball tampering

Melbourn, May 19 : Australia's bowling group from the Cape Town Test match in 2018 has responded after comments made by teammate Cameron Bancroft, insisting they had no knowledge of the ball tampering which resulted in bans for Bancroft, David Warner and Steve Smith. Speaking to the Guardian last week, Bancroft was asked directly if Australia's bowlers knew about the plan to use sandpaper on the ball during the Cape Town Test against South Africa three years ago and replied that the answer was "pretty probably



self-explanatory." "Yeah, look, all I wanted to do was to be responsible and accountable for my own actions and part. Yeah, obviously what I did benefits bowlers and the awareness around that, probably, is self-explanatory," Bancroft said when pressed. In a joint statement published on Mitchell Starc's website on Tuesday and addressed to "the Australian public", Starc, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon said they had already answered questions many times on the issue but felt compelled to go on the record again. "We pride ourselves on our honesty," the bowlers' statement read. "So it's been disappointing to see that our integrity has been questioned by some journalists and past players in recent days in regard to the Cape Town Test of 2018. "We did not know a foreign substance was taken onto the field to alter the condition of the ball until we saw the images on the big screen at Newlands. "And to those who, despite the absence of evidence, insist that 'we must have known' about the use of a foreign substance simply because we are bowlers, we say this: the umpires during that Test match, Nigel Llong and Richard

Illingworth, both very respected and experienced umpires, inspected the ball after the images surfaced on the TV coverage and did not change it because there was no sign of damage." Bancroft, along with Smith and Warner - who both received year-long suspensions - were the only players punished following a CA investigation into the incident. The former Australia captain Michael Clarke said earlier this week he was sceptical the bowlers did not know anything about it. "Can you imagine that ball being thrown back to the bowler and the bowler not knowing about it? Please," Warner's agent James Erskine told The Age newspaper this week: "The whole thing was so badly handled, it was a joke. But eventually the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, will come out and I know the whole truth." Cricket Australia's integrity unit earlier this week contacted Bancroft, who was caught by broadcast cameras during the third Test match of Australia's tour of South Africa and banned for nine months for his role in the incident. CA asked Bancroft to shed more light on the matter but Neil Hockley, the interim chief executive of Cricket Australia, told Australian Associated Press on Tuesday : "He confirmed he has no new information. We can only deal with the facts that we have and there's nothing further that has been raised.

Relax! Australia's cricket stars are back- but it's not a double standard, right?

Melbourn, May 19 : Everybody relax - our male cricket stars are back from India. Or in fact from the Maldives, where they'd been whisked to safety from the pandemic that has been devastating millions in India who weren't lucky enough to be whisked to the Maldives. The players flew into Sydney airport on Monday aboard a flight chartered by the Indian cricket authorities, who seem far more effective at repatriating Australians than our own government. And they're now in comfy hotel quarantine in Sydney, as opposed to being isolated in Howard Springs, a place where there's no hope of getting a decent laksa on Deliveroo. This isn't a double standard, though, and that's the official position of the Australian government. The PM himself was eager to make it clear to reporters that [the cricketers] "haven't been given any [special dispensation]", because the "NSW government is happy for them to come in over the cap". Or was the PM instead trying to argue that our cricketers had received super-



duper-special dispensation with a cherry on top? He was certainly keen to take credit for this piece of immigration wizardry, saying that the cap exemption was "something we insisted upon, and [NSW was] happy to agree with that". The Morrison government had hitherto not dazzled observers with its enthusiasm for repatriating Australians from India, given that until just hours beforehand it was a criminal offence. To be fair to the players, though, they must have had a terrible shock, what with the sudden cancellation of the Indian Premier League just a few weeks after it became patently obvious to everybody, even Piers Morgan, that it should be cancelled. And nobody can begrudge any Australian citizen their safe return - it's a fundamental human right, like ignoring Piers Morgan. Nine thousand other Australians in India wanted to come home once the new strain emerged and the case count skyrocketed but weren't lucky enough to be cricketers. And some of them urgently needed to - Australia's high commissioner, Barry O'Farrell, said 900 of the 9,000

Australians waiting to return were classified as "vulnerable" by Dfat due to financial distress or health problems. Only a handful got to board the first Qantas flight home. Why are the rest less deserving of safety than our healthy, wealthy

cricketers? Surely these extremely fit, young men could have spent a while longer in their luxury hotels, while the most vulnerable people got to chillax in the Maldives then board their chartered flight? If Steve Smith had given his seat to an immunocompromised grandmother, we would all have agreed to make him the next captain, and never mentioned the sandpaper thing again. Instead, the BCCI, the game's governing body in India, kept its promise to keep everyone safe, and Cricket Australia held a press conference to say that "their welfare is our absolute No 1 priority" even though the players weren't representing their country while playing in the Indian Premier League. Multiple Australian governments made sure the 38 players were waved through, and it's rare for them to agree on anything. Full credit to the BCCI for

keeping its word - if only the Modi government were so determined to protect everyone under its care. But given the restrictions placed on Australians, the treatment of our cricketers feels fairly nauseating. If these players want to represent their country, well, we're now running it like a pernicky boarding school, where anyone who wants to leave needs formal permission, and probably won't get it. The most Australian thing our players could do right now is stay here and make anyone who wants to play them go through hotel quarantine. Still, they're home now, and no doubt everyone involved has learnt their lesson - no more unnecessary trips to risky countries just to play cricket, OK? Not quite. On the very day that they returned, Cricket Australia announced its squad will play in the West Indies in July. They'll be visiting Barbados and St Lucia, places where the US Centers for Disease Control says there's a "high" and "very high" level of Covid-19 respectively, and it advises people to avoid all travel. But these aren't just "people", they're Australian cricketers. Regular public health rules don't apply - they can flit across closed borders with the ease of Tony Abbott dashing off to London for some trade adviser job. So let's hope Cricket Australia's got more accommodation booked in the Maldives for the next tour. Perhaps the Indians could organise another plane? Our players won't be getting any better treatment from our governments than they got this time, though. And honestly, how could they? Dom Knight is a writer, broadcaster and co-founder of the Chaser

Huddersfield fend off Warrington fightback to deflate returning home fans

Warrington, May 19 : Some nights, sport is about much more than the result on the field. Ultimately, this was Huddersfield Giants' night in terms of the outcome, but really, everyone who was fortunate enough to be in attendance here must have felt like a winner at some stage given how utterly miserable the last 429 days have been as a rugby league supporter, locked out of the game you love. To truly understand how important a role rugby league plays in towns like Warrington, you have to be present for nights like these. A working-class town, where supporters work all week just for the release of watching their team at the weekend in the heart of their community. That has been taken away for the last 14 months, and without supporters, the game would have not survived in one piece. Not that any of the 4,000 Warrington supporters who had the golden ticket here would have been grateful at half-time, though. The



Wolves players were greeted by a wall of noise when they arrived for their pre-match warm-up, but less than an hour later, they were booed from the field, trailing 20-0 at half-time having been comprehensively outplayed by the Giants. At that stage, you would have forgiven any Warrington fan for heading to the pub, but those who stayed certainly got their money's worth on a night where life felt like it took a significant step back to normality. A flurry of 18 unanswered points after half-time from the Wolves - from nowhere, given how insipid they were earlier - threatened a genuine comeback. However, the Giants held firm despite Warrington supporters raising the noise, with Kenny Edwards' try in the final 15 minutes decisive. "When they got all that momentum, the crowd gave them an extra ten per cent," Huddersfield's coach, Ian Watson, said after their second win of the season. "This is what the game lives for. Our players were saying they were nervous beforehand, because no crowds has become normal. Hopefully this is just the start now, though." Watson and his players did a sterling job of silencing the crowd in the first half, though, as two early tries from Lee Gaskell put the Giants into a deserved 12-0 lead. Warrington offered little in way of response, and when Jermaine McGillvary added a third try, followed by a penalty from Aidan Sezer on the stroke of half-time, the cheers had turned to boos in the blink of an eye. "That wasn't a

reflection on the way we'd trained," Warrington's coach Steve Price said on their first-half performance. "We got what we deserved." But they responded superbly after half-time, as tries from Greg Inglis, Daryl Clark and Josh Thewlis reduced Huddersfield's lead to just two. Suddenly, the noise returned inside the Halliwell Jones Stadium with real gusto, with Thewlis's try in particular producing a roar that felt like a genuinely heartwarming moment given the prolonged absence of supporters. But to Huddersfield's credit, they held firm despite the Warrington players and supporters raising the intensity. And when Edwards forced his way across the line entering the final quarter, it reasserted the Giants' advantage. Another penalty from the boot of Sezer shortly after then opened up an eight-point lead with minutes remaining. And that ultimately deflated Warrington. They threatened another late rally when a penalty from Gareth Widdop reduced the gap to six, but they could not force extra time, as Huddersfield held on for a narrow victory, but one they ultimately deserved. However, despite falling just short, Warrington's supporters could still be heard outside making their presence felt post-match. Yes, they were beaten here, but after an arduous 14 months the sport will never forget, it was perhaps fitting that it was the fans - those who have kept this sport alive for 125 years - who were the ones who had the final say.

National team call-up inspired me ahead of AFC Champions League: Dheeraj Singh

New Delhi, May 19 : The talented Dheeraj Singh says being called for the Indian football team camp, which gave him an opportunity to train with the country's top goalkeepers, acted as huge motivation

in Group E. Speaking to AIIFF TV, Dheeraj said: "I got the national team call-up right after the ISL. It gave me the opportunity to travel with the senior team to the UAE. It was a big motivation for me to



prior to his brilliant showing for FC Goa in the AFC Champions League. The 20-year-old Dheeraj, who has been twice named in the Champions League's team of the week, played a big part in helping FC Goa secure a third-place finish

train with Gurpreet (Singh Sandhu) paaji and Amrinder (Singh) paaji. "I was so motivated at that point that I reported straight to Goa after we came back," he added. It was only around two months ago that Dheeraj was called up for the na-

tional camp. "Getting into the national team had a big impact on my confidence. Our coach also gave us a lot of confidence, taking the pressure off from our shoulders. He just told us to go out there and play our normal game, and that's what we did," added Dheeraj. With FC Goa being India's first-ever representative in the Champions League group stage, Dheeraj and his teammates had their task cut out against some of Asia's best. They had to deal with 2020 Champions League runners-up Persepolis FC (Iran), Al Wahda FC (UAE), and Al Rayyan SC (Qatar). However, the young goalkeeper got two clean sheets to his name, making 19 saves from his five appearances. "I still remember when the AFC Champions League started, many of my friends asked whether I was ready, and how many goals I expected to concede," said Dheeraj. "We came up as a very strong team that was disciplined and difficult to score against. We did really well in the first two games, and that really gave us confidence to go forward for the rest

of the matches. "I think it was the benefit of playing the ISL, that we had moved forward together, and could perform at that level." Dheeraj received compliments from opposition coaches, including the likes of French World Cup winner Laurent Blanc, who was in charge of Al Rayyan. During the last group match between FC Goa and Al Wahda, Dheeraj had to be substituted due to an injury on his throat while making a save. With the match still on, Al Wahda's renowned coach Henk ten Kate proceeded to the opposition technical and showered praises on the young Indian for his heroics under the bar. "I still remember, he came over to our side of the dug-out and shook my hand, and gave me a lot of good words. I was not able to speak much because my throat was really painful, and I could only muster a soft 'thank you'," recalled Dheeraj. "It felt very good to be praised by such a high-profile and respected coach. But I was also sad that I was not able to continue in the game."

With no football for two months, coach will find it difficult to pick team : Anirudh Thapa

New Delhi, May 19 : India midfielder Anirudh Thapa on Tuesday said that head coach Igor Stimac will find it difficult to pick the team for the upcoming World Cup Qualifiers in Qatar as there has been very little football in the last two months. Due to the raging COVID-19 pandemic, only two matches were possible in the last two months - the international friendlies against Oman and Qatar on March 25 and 29. "It will be really difficult for the coach to pick the team. We have not played for nearly two months and it will be difficult for us (players) also," Thapa said at a virtual press conference. "It (not playing for long) could be at the back of our minds, the concerns over injury, how will you react

not immune to the unprecedented chaos and devastation the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon the country. "We used to hear our near and dear ones passing away. We are also afraid that ourselves or family members may get the infection. So, we are concerned. "It is difficult times but we have to remain mentally strong," said Thapa who is yet to get his first COVID-19 vaccine jab due to "unavailability of enough doses" at his place. India played out a 0-0 draw against reigning Asian champions Qatar in Doha in the first leg in 2019. After that impressive show, India could not win against Bangladesh (at home) and Afghanistan (at neutral venue), playing out identical 1-1 stalemates. Asked about the areas of im-



to a given situation, all these could be there," he said. The players are serving quarantine at a hotel in the national capital and they are expected to leave for Qatar on Wednesday. They are awaiting the results of their RT-PCR tests for COVID-19. In Qatar, the team will be in a bio-bubble and train before the first game against the host country on June 3. The other matches are on June 7 (against Bangladesh) and June 15 (against Afghanistan). India, fourth in Group E points table, is out of reckoning for a 2022 World Cup berth but remains in contention for the 2023 Asian Cup. Thapa said fortunately, the players are fit and in good shape. "We get fitness programmes every day and we have been following them. So, we are fit and hoping to give our best. We were also told there could be matches coming up and to be mentally ready. "World Cup qualifiers are big matches. We are representing the country and that is motivation enough to give our best." The 23-year-old, however, admitted that the players are

provement if the team wants to put up a good show against Qatar in the second leg. Thapa said, "We have to create more scoring chances, score more goals." Against Qatar (in first leg), we played a different style of football. Against Afghanistan and Bangladesh, we played possession football but could not create chances and score goals. That is what we are lacking and that is our main concern. "Thapa attributed the 0-6 thrashing by UAE, in the international friendly on March 29, to inexperience of the rookie players. Stimac had given debuts to more than 10 players in the two international friendlies in March. "Nobody was expecting the result. We played well against UAE in 2019 Asian Cup but it was opposite in that (0-6 loss). Coach was disappointed and told us we need to work harder." On the personal front, Thapa said he spent time during lockdown reading books related to environment and football superstars Ronaldo, Messi and Neymar as well as Michelle Obama, the former first lady of the USA.

AB de Villiers' retirement remains final CSA after discussions with the batsman

London, May 19 : South Africa's swashbuckling cricketer AB de Villiers will not be coming out of retirement to join the squad ahead of T20 World Cup. Cricket South Africa (CSA) released a statement amidst rumours of De Villiers returning to the international side. "Discussions with AB de Villiers have concluded with the batsman deciding once and for all, that his retirement will remain final," CSA said in a statement posted on social media. AB de Villiers finalises international retirement. CSA today announced the T20I, Test squad for the tour of West Indies and ODI squad for Ireland which did not include De Villiers' name. The 37-year-old was in a splendid form in the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2021 playing for Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) before the tournament suspended due to several players and staff testing positive for Covid-19. He scored



207 runs in seven games this season at an average of 51.75 including two half-centuries. "I haven't had

a chat with Boucher yet. But we are lined up to have a chat somewhere during the IPL. But yes, we have

been talking about it. He asked me last year if I would be interested. I said 'absolutely'," De Villiers had said last month. Recently, South Africa were outsmarted by Pakistan in the home series where they were beaten 2-1 and 3-1 by the visitors in ODI and T20I series respectively. De Villiers took retirement from international cricket in 2018 ahead of World Cup 2019 where the Faf du Plessis-led team won just three out of nine games and failed to qualify for the semi-finals. SA T20I squad for West Indies: Temba Bavuma (c), Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Heinrich Klaasen, George Linde, Sisanda Magala, Janneman Malan, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne, Lizaad Williams, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius.

BCCI paying for quarantine of Australian IPL players in Sydney: Cricket Australia

New Delhi, May 19 : The BCCI is footing the bill for the 14-day quarantine of Australian IPL players, who have arrived from Maldives, Cricket Australia interim CEO Nick Hockley said on Tuesday. Most of the 38 members of the Australian contingent, including top players such as Pat Cummins and Steve Smith, officials and commentators, landed at the Sydney airport on Monday after a forced stop-over at Maldives. The players had to spend 10 days in Maldives due to a ban imposed by the

Australian government on travellers from COVID-ravaged India till May 15. Hockley said the BCCI has kept its promise and



funded the whole operation. "Yes," Hockley told 'Sydney Morning Herald' when asked if BCCI was paying for the mandatory quarantine. "BCCI at the outset committed to ensuring that they got home safely and as quickly as possible. We've been working closely with them. They've been fantastic. They've delivered on that promise." The IPL was indefinitely suspended on May 4 after four players and two coaches from four different teams tested positive for COVID-19 inside its bio-bubble. The Australian players, however, couldn't head home immediately as their country had imposed a travel ban from India, which is bat-

ting a deadly second wave of the coronavirus. The BCCI had then assured the players that it will do everything possible to ensure their safe return home. "Obviously our thoughts are with all of our friends in India. Then we've been working with the government, within the existing frameworks to make sure that they get home as quickly as possible," Hockley said. "I know the players, having texted a few of them, are extremely appreciative of the BCCI and we're really pleased that they're home safely."

India women cricketer Priya Punia loses mother to COVID-19

New Delhi, May 19 : India international Priya Punia, who is part of the UK-bound women's cricket squad, has lost her mother to COVID-19. The 24-year-old cricketer wrote a heart-felt post on social media after her mother succumbed to the deadly virus. "Today I realised why you always told me to be strong. You knew that one day I would need the strength to bear the loss of yours. I miss you so much! No matter the distance I know you are always there with me. My guiding star, my mom.. Love you always," Punia wrote on Instagram. "Some truth in life are hard to accept. Your memories will never be forgotten! Rest In Peace Mom. Please follow the rules and take precautions. This virus is very dangerous," she added. The Indian squad will assemble in Mumbai on May 19 and, subse-

quently, undergo a hard quarantine before its departure with the men's team in the first week of June. The team plays a Test, its first in seven years, in the UK besides three ODIs and as many T20s. Another India player Veda Krishnamurthy, who has not been picked for the UK tour, lost her mother and sister to COVID-19.



The bond of love and devotion.

100% DEPENDABLE... That's our guarantee !

CHIMNEYS WITH APPS | R.O. WATER PURIFIER | HOBS | GAS STOVE | OTHER KITCHEN APPLIANCES

Abhayapuri-94350-22784 | Agartala-98560-93668 | Baihata chariali-94351-42568/98641-40488 | Bangaigaon-7002184811, 9435547654, 9435121367 | Barpeta road-94350-17865 99541-41975 | Barpeta town -94350-25127 | Bhawanipur-7002206773 | Bandardewa-98649-84753 | Bijoynagar -99570-98392/94010-01157/94353-40662 | Boko-94010-02588 | Chaygaon-9435014549 | Dadara -98546-98027 | Dhupdhara-96785-16189 | Dhamaji-99546-51322 | Dhubri-94350-29279 | Diphu-94350-66701/94350-66643 | Dudhnoi-94357-21505/94351-28048 | Goalpara-70023-10904/88762-23858 | Golaghat-96132-30384 | Guwahati -94355-59057/97065-94950 | Hajo-94353-47024/88763-09327 | Hojai-94357-29521/84028-59256 | Jorhat -94350-53934/98541-06776 | Kharupitia -98541-44223 | Kokrajhar-97070-29429/99548-88721/94354-81234 | Karimganj-97061-39061 | Krishnai-88224-15337 | Lumding -94351-63327/97066-14137 | Mangaldoi -94350-87284/94351-86435/97065-39174/73994-79163 | Mirza-98540-71983/99572-81858 | Morigaon -94350-64986/80111-17171 | North Lakhimpur-88224-21077 | Nagaon-97061-79408/94355-18665 | Nalbari -98644-14515/98540-30209 | Pathsala-80110-06658 | Dhekiajuli-98548-29934 | Dibrugarh-98548-11265 | Rangia -94351-05888/96782-26563 | Silchar -97061-39061/70054-86129 | Silapathar-70028-94393 | Shillong-90869-66640 | Suwalkuchi -98643-54859 | Tinsukia-94350-35156/94350-35511/94350-36463 | Tezpur-97060-73481 | Tihu-97068-53124 | Udalguri-97063-46492

Trade enq. 9435146909/9435559057/9435559056 www.capsindia.in Toll Free: 1800 103 4646