

# The Assam Rising

Projecting the best of Northeast India everyday

Vol. No. VI ■ Issue No. 95 ■ RNI-ASSEN/2014/58385 | GUWAHATI ■ FRIDAY ■ MAY 21, 2021 | PAGES 8 ■ PRICE RS. 7.00

Keir Starmer must lean right to win? History suggests...

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Milkha Singh tests positive

New Delhi, May 20 : Legendary Indian athlete Milkha Singh has tested positive for COVID-19. Family sources said his condition is stable, and he has moved into home isolation in Chandigarh. "I am fine and there is no fever or cough. My doctor told me I will be alright in three-four days. I did jogging just yesterday. I am in high spirits," said 91-year-old Singh. The legendary athlete is a five-time Asian Games gold medalist but his greatest performance was the fourth-place finish in the 400m final of the 1960 Olympics. Legendary Indian athlete Milkha Singh tests positive for COVID-19. Milkha Singh was also the first athlete to bag a Commonwealth Games gold for India, achieving the feat during the 1958 British Empire and Commonwealth Games. Milkha's son and ace golfer Jeev Milkha Singh is in Dubai and said he would be returning to the country this week itself. "I will be flying back home on Saturday," said Jeev.

### Drug peddler

Guwahati, May 20 : Hours after joining as the new Superintendent of Police of Darrang district, Sushanta Biswa Sarma has made his intentions clear against the anti-social elements particularly dealing with illegal drugs, cannabis and other narcotic substances. Darrang SP Sushanta Biswa Sarma has launched operations in different pockets of the district. In one such operation on Wednesday night police team led by DSP (HQ), Mamoni Hazarika nabbed one drugs peddler namely Samad Ali (32) S/O. Suruj Ali of village Ondolajhar under Dhula Police Station. A consignment of heroin in seven separate vials and a sizeable quantity of cannabis (ganja) have been recovered from the possession of the arrested person.

### Fake executive magistrate

Guwahati, May 20 : Police have arrested a fake executive magistrate in Assam's Jorhat. The arrested person has been identified as Biswajyoti Dutta alias Madhurjya Bora of Kanhargao Na-Ali Dhekiajuli of Titabar in Jorhat district. Biswajyoti Dutta was apprehended by the police on charges of posing as an executive magistrate. A police source stated that Dutta was found traveling in a car having a name-plate mentioning that it was of an executive magistrate. Also read: It's time to increase testing and upgrade health infrastructure in Northeast: Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan. He was detained after he went to the Cinnamara Police Outpost and claimed to be a magistrate and allegedly tried to find fault with the policemen on duty at the Outpost. The source said that later during his conversation with the in-charge of the Outpost it was found that Dutta was an imposter.

## Biswajit Daimary to be next Assam Assembly Speaker, Bokajan MLA Nomal Momin to be Deputy Speaker



Guwahati, May 20 : Paneri MLA Biswajit Daimary to be next Assam Assembly Speaker, Bokajan MLA Nomal Momin to be Deputy Speaker. Assam Legislative Assembly. BJP leader Biswajit Daimary, who won from the Paneri seat in the recently concluded Assam Assembly elections, is also a former Rajya Sabha MP. The name of Biswajit Daimary as the next Assam Assembly Speaker was announced by Assam BJP president Ranjit Kumar Dass. Today I have filed my nomination for the 21st speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly. Heartfelt gratitude to the respected @narendramodi Ji @AmitShah Ji @JPNadda Ji @PandaJay Ji @bsanthosh Ji @himantabiswa ji @DilipSaikia4Bjp ji @RanjitkrDass Ji Paneri MLA Biswajit Daimary to be next Assam

Assembly Speaker, Bokajan MLA Nomal Momin to be Deputy Speaker. 1 Biswajit Daimary's name was at the top of the list of probables for the post of Assam Assembly Speaker. In November 2020, Daimary left BPF to join Bharatiya Janata Party before the Bodoland Territorial Council elections. On the other hand, MLA from the Bokajan constituency - Dr Nomal Momin will be the next Deputy Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly. "The meeting of BJP state committee has nominated former MP and senior MLA Biswajit Daimary as the next speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly," Assam BJP said in a statement.

Assam BJP said in a statement.

## Assam Accord minister Atul Bora visits AASU office, assures implementation of Clause 6

Guwahati, May 20 : Assam Accord minister Atul Bora paid a visit to the AASU (All Assam Students' Union) office - Swahid Nyas in Guwahati on Thursday. Atul Bora, who himself was associated with the AASU before entering active politics, interacted with the leaders of the students' body. He assured the AASU leaders of early implementation of the Assam Accord including the provisions of the Clause 6 of the Accord. Assam Accord minister Atul Bora, who is also the president of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) - ally of the BJP, is the first minister of the portfolio to visit the AASU office. "Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is very serious about implementation of the Assam Accord. The



Assam Government will work closely with the AASU for the implementation of the Accord," said Assam Accord Minister Atul Bora. Meanwhile, the AASU leaders have expressed optimism over the implementation of the Assam Accord after the visit of Atul Bora to the office of the students' body. Briefing the media, Contd...Page 6

## After video of singer, down with Covid, goes viral, Assam govt steps in

Guwahati, May 20 : A day after a video of popular Assamese singer, Arun Das, saying he was left to fend for himself while down with Covid-19, went viral on social media, the Assam

government presented the artiste an aid of Rs 1 lakh. After testing positive for the novel coronavirus, Das, 68, and his wife, Pinky, were admitted to the Gauhati Medical College

and Hospital. In the video, which went viral, a helpless Das can be heard saying that no one was attending to them in the hospital. On discovering the video, the members Contd...Page 6



## Sonia Gandhi writes to PM Narendra Modi, seeks free education for kids orphaned by COVID

New Delhi, May 20 : Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday (May 20) wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi request-

ing him to provide free education at Navodaya Vidyalayas to children who have lost either parents or an earning parent to COVID-19. "Amidst the devastation caused by the pandemic and the heart-wrenching tragedies being faced by affected families, news of young children losing one or both parents to COVID-19 are the most poignant. These children are left Contd...Page 6



## Navigable Brahmaputra is a must for NE Secutity

### PK Dutta

Since 1962, behind China's Sikkim aggression, a plan to isolate North-east from rest of India and China are currently engaged in a face-off in the area close to Sikkim—the trijunction between India, Bhutan and China. The face-off followed Indian troops opposing construction of a road by the Chinese in the Doklam plateau in the beginning of this month. Also known as Donglang or Dolam, the plateau belongs to Bhutan. This road is a cause of concern for India. If completed, it will shorten the distance for the Chinese army towards India's strategically vulnerable 'Chicken's Neck' area—the Siliguri Corridor. What is the importance

of this corridor? How would the road impact India during a conflict with China? Economictimes.com explains it here: The Siliguri Corridor, through the rail and road networks passing through it, feeds the primary military formations located in the North East which will counter China during a conflict. They also include the newly raised mountain strike corps. Experts think the road which China 2 started building in the Doklam plateau will give it the capability to launch an overwhelming offensive during a conflict with India. This could strangle the corridor and cut off the North East from the rest of India. This would also lead to isolation of crucial military formations,

cutting off supplies and reinforcements to them. Proposed Anti-aircraft (Missile) Career Parking (10kmX5km) by the side of navigable Brahmaputra As an offensive measure, Ministry of Home and

Ministry of Defence, Government of India, redeveloping of International waterway through Dhuburi and an anti-aircraft career parking at Tezpur for offensive military base.



## CM Sarma visits FAAMCH and reviews the COVID situation

A 15 bedded ICU along with 50 nos. of oxygen concentrators to be put in to service to arrest COVID surges in Barpeta district: CM



Guwahati, May 20 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma said that to ramp up COVID fighting infrastructure in Barpeta district, State government is setting up a 15 bedded COVID ICU in Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Medical College & Hospital in Barpeta along with providing 50 num-

bers of oxygen concentrators. Visiting Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Medical College & Hospital today to take stock of the COVID-19 situation prevailing in Barpeta district, Chief Minister Sarma said that the 15 bedded COVID Care ICU along with 50 numbers of oxygen Contd...Page 6

## Assam has reported its first death due to black fungus

Guwahati, May 20 : Assam has reported its first death due to black fungus after a 27-year-old Covid-19 recovered patient died of rhinocerebral mucormycosis at a private hospital in Guwahati. The 27-year-old man from Assam's Nagaon district died at Apollo hospitals in Guwahati on Wednesday. The deceased was also diabetic and tested positive for Covid-19 on May 6. He was admitted to a Covid center in Nagaon. On May 12, he tested negative for Covid and was discharged from the centre. Apollo hospitals, Guwahati in a statement said, "From May 15 he developed a decreased vision in both eyes and other post-Covid complications at his home and he was brought to emergency



of Apollo hospitals, Guwahati on May 16, in a very critical state where he was duly attended to by a team of physicians and admitted on May 16 for ICU care." "The necessary investigations Contd...Page 6

## CM Himanta Biswa Sarma Directs Officials To Convert Madrassas Into General Schools



Guwahati, May 20 : To implement the decision of the previous Sarbananda

Sonowal led government, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday (18 May) directed the officials to immediately initiate the process of transition of dissolved Madrassa to general schools. The Chief Minister while giving a direction to Contd...Page 6

## Ritul Saikia to released in 1-4 daya : Paresh Baruah

Guwahati, May 20 : After Assam chief minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma's appeal to the ULFA-I to release abducted ONGC employee Ritul Saikia, the outfit commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah said Saikia would be released in 1-4 days. Talking to News Live chief managing editor Syed Zarir Hussain, Baruah said he has responded to CM's appeal. "CM has made a responsible appeal...Ritul is with us now. I would like Contd...Page 6



## "Aerosols Can Travel 10 Metres" Government's New Pointers On Covid

New Delhi, May 20 : Smaller aerosol particles can be carried in the air for 10 metres, the government warned today as it shared a set of "easy to follow" guidelines on fighting Covid, which includes double masks, social distancing and well-ventilated spaces. Use of proper ventilation can prevent the spread of coronavirus, the Union government's principal scientific adviser K VijayRaghavan's office said in the new advisory which also warns against running air conditioners while keeping windows and doors shut. "Running ACs traps in-

fects air inside the room and increases risk of transmission from an infected carrier to others," it said. "Always Remember: People who show no symptoms can also spread



the virus," the document, titled "Stop the Transmission, Crush the Pandemic" said, urging people to rigorously follow Covid appropriate behaviour. While droplets fall within two meters from an infected person, smaller aerosol particles are carried in the air up to 10 metres, it said. Saliva and nasal discharged in the form of droplets and aerosols by an infected person is the primary mode of virus transmissions, the document said, adding that an infected person without symptoms also transmit the virus. Just as Contd...Page 6



## BSF Apprehended 05 Indian Smugglers (Including 02 Women) Along With Narcotics Items From Indo- Bangladesh Border



**Guwahati, May 20 :** In yet another success in its crusade against smuggling activities, 06 Bnand 129 BnBSF under the aegis of Guwahati Frontier of Border Security Force apprehended 05 Indian smugglers (including 02 women) along with liquor and Cannabis on 19th May 2021 from bordering area of village-Kalerlaga, PS-Kharuwabanda, Distt- South Salmara (Assam) and

### 475 fresh cases recorded, two more die of COVID 19 at Nagaon

**NAGAON, May 20 :** As many as 475 COVID positive cases were recorded today too, taking the total cumulative active COVID cases in the district to 3074 while two more people died of COVID 19 today. Including these two death cases, a total of 36 people have died of COVID 19 in the district till date, sources said. Meanwhile 306 COVID positive patients who were undergoing treatment in hospital as well as at home have been recovered from infection of the virus today. It is pertinent to mention that a total of 3731 COVID 19 patients have been recovered from the virus in the district till filing of this report, sources added. Sources claimed that among those who tested positive today, 99 patients were admitted to COVID hospital as well as COVID Care Centres while the rest were put in home quarantine. Rapid Antigen Test was conducted on 5440 people today in the district while RT-PCR test was conducted on 65 swab samples, sources further added. Meanwhile Deputy Commissioner Kavitha Padmanabhan today talked to Transport Commis-

sioner of Kerala in connection with the safe return of those bus drivers as well as helpers who were being stranded here at Nagaon for over a month due to COVID situation after carrying the Assam origin labourers from Kerala to Nagaon just ahead of the last assembly polls held in the state last March and April month, through video conference. Transport Commissioner from Kerala also took the matter seriously and also expressed his concern over the issue, a release issued by district information and public relations office added. On the other hand, the local MLA Rupak Sama along with the members of BJP Yuva Morcha today launched a massive sanitization drives in Nagaon Borbazaar, Dhacapaty area. Sama said the drive will be continued as on a daily basis and will cover the entire town. Besides, the same also will be conducted even in every wards in rural areas under Nagaon Sadar constituency within a week, he said.

village-Digaltari, PS-Sahebganj, Distt-Coochbehar (West Bengal) 02. Acting on tip off, on 19th May 2021, BSF troops of Border outpost (BOP) Boralgaof 06Bn BSF carried out a special operation in the general area of village Kalerlaga Indo-Bangladesh border. Alert BSF troops apprehended three Indian smugglers along with contraband items while these were being smuggled from India to

Bangladesh. 03. Details of apprehended Indian smugglers are as under:- i) Mizanur Rahman Mondol (16 Yrs), S/O Nurul Islam Mondol, ii) Mofizur Mondol (17 Yrs), S/O Motin Mondol iii) Habibullah Mondol (17) S/O Noor Jamal Mondol. All three are residence of vill. Kokradanga, PS. Kharuwabanda Distt- South Salmara (Assam) 04. Apprehended Indian smugglers and seized items have

been handed over to PS-Kharuwabanda, Distt.-South Salmara (Assam) for further legal action. 05. In second operation, acting on tip off, on 19th May 2021, BSF Mahila Praharis of Border outpost (BOP) Digaltari of 129Bn BSF carried out a special operation in the general area of village Digaltari Indo-Bangladesh border. Alert BSF Mahila Praharis apprehended two Indian Women smugglers along with 4.6 Kgs Cannabis, while the consignment were tried to be smuggled from India to Bangladesh. 6. Details of apprehended Indian Women are as under:-

i) Monomoti Sarkar (26 Yrs), W/o Niranjana Sarkar, r/o Vill- Digaltari (Sarkarpara), PS- Sahebganj, Distt-Coochbehar (West Bengal). ii) Momota Sarkar (23 Yrs), W/o Bhubotas Sarkar, R/o Village-Digaltari (Sarkarpara), PS- Sahebganj, Distt- Coochbehar (West Bengal). 7. Apprehended Indian Women and seized Cannabis are being handed over to PS-Sahebganj, Distt.-Coochbehar (West Bengal) for further legal action. 08. Keeping in view of the vulnerability of border, heightened activities of the smugglers and anti-national elements on the border, BSF troops are always alert towards the issues of trans-border crimes & illegal infiltration and are making all out efforts to prevent commission of such crimes.

## NFR takes several steps for better customer interface Resulting into easier and increased freight transportation and boost to local economy

**Guwahati, May 20 :** In order to improve transportation of freight traffic, NFR has been opening new stations for handling inward and outward goods traffic. Few more railway stations have been opened for freight traffic during last month enabling easier transportation of various goods by customers. To boost outward freight traffic Lalabazar railway station under Lumding division has been opened for loading of cement traffic from 8th April, 2021. Gauripur station under Alipurduar Division has also been opened for handling inward and outward goods traffic except Coal, POL, Explosive, and Livestock Consignment with effect from 16th April, 2021. Round the clock working has been put into operation in the Purnea station under Katihar division and Dekargaon station under Rangiya division for enhancing economic activities and generating income for labourers engaged in load-



ing and unloading. Apart from being helpful to local economy and business, this will also help in quick turnaround of wagons. With this 24x7 working has been introduced in 23 goods terminals of N.F. Railway. It may be mentioned here that, despite Covid-19 challenges, Northeast Frontier Railway has managed to maintain high momentum of goods transportation to keep the economy moving and meet the requirement of essential and other commodities. During April this year, Northeast Frontier Railway has unloaded 1186

freight carrying trains as against 622 in corresponding period of last year with an increase of 90.68% and unloaded them in different goods sheds in its jurisdiction. It is worth mentioning that Northeast Frontier Railway released 11659 freight rakes during the year 2020-21 against 9731 rakes previous year which is a growth of 20%. Goods like FCI rice, sugar, salt, edible oil, POL, food grains, pulses, fertilizer, cement, stone chips, iron/steel, potato, onion, maize, auto, container and other items have been transported during the month.

## Vaccination Drive At Central Jain Guwahati By Marwari Yuva Manch, Guwahati Branch

**Guwahati, May 20 :** Marwari Yuva Manch, Guwahati Branch on the request of The Government of Assam arranged a Vaccination Camp for all the inmates at the Guwahati Central Jail situated at Lokhra, Guwahati here today. "We have vaccinated almost 250 inmates on the first day itself here at the Central jail in accordance with the existing guidelines of Covid-19 Protocol" informed Suraj Jain, the Secretary of MYM, Guwahati Branch. This is the 3rd camp organized by the Marwari Yuva Manch, Guwahati Branch under the able leadership of President Shri Mohit Malu, and Project Chairman Shri Mitesh Surana along with the plethora of Volunteers who have been working tirelessly to ensure the vaccination drive is undertaken smoothly and in accordance with guidelines as issued by the Government with respect to COVID-19 vaccination. MYM, Guwahati Branch along with West Guwahati Club started their 1st camp on 12th of May 2021 at Premises of Durga Mandir Situated in Bharalumukh, Guwahati. They started their 2nd Camp under their



Vaccination Drive in association with Readymade Garments' Dealers Association of Assam on 19th of May 2021 at Sarvodaya Healthcare Hospital situated here at Panbazar. "Till 19th of May 2021 we have administered 2251 doses", the President of the renowned NGO informed. It started the 3rd Camp at the Central Jail, Guwahati on the request of the Government for all the inmates under the policy devised by the State Government to vaccinate all its inmates in a safe and timely manner. The Superintendent of Jail, Guwahati Shri Ranjit Chandra Baishya was impressed by the selfless service of the volunteers of leading NGO Marwari Yuva Manch, Guwahati Branch.

## Husband-wives quarrel: 1 dead in Kokrajhar

**Kokrajhar 20 May :** Last night at around 11.00 pm one information received that some quarrel took place at Kokrajhar basti and one unidentified person assaulted two persons with

sharp weapon. Accordingly, as per instruction from S.P. Kokrajhar, A team led by Addl. Superintendent of Police (HQ), Kokrajhar, O/C, Kokrajhar, TSI & Cyber Cell team rushed to the P.O. and came to know that accused, Sri Dipu Narzary of Kadamtola assaulted two persons namely Sibuprasad Brahma and Ashok Boro as both of them interfered in husband-wives quarrel. The family members of injured persons shifted them to MRM Hospital, Kokrajhar but later, injured Sibuprasad Brahma (48 yrs) S/o- Lt. Harendra Nath Brahma of W/No. 10 (Kokrajhar Basti), PS-Kokrajhar succumbed to his injuries at MRM Hospital, Kokrajhar. Injured Sri Ashok Boro (44 yrs) S/o- Lt. Sabeswar Boro of Vill- No. 1 Habrubar, PS- Dotma is under treatment. Kokrajhar Police Team immediately started investigation and managed to apprehend Accused person Sri Dipu Narzary (19 yrs) S/o- Ansaigra Narzary of Vill-Kadamtola, PS- Kokrajhar from Runikhata, North Salbari, PS- Runikhata, Dist- Chirang, BTR, Assam in early morning hours. Further legal action is going on. In this connection, Kokrajhar PS Case No. 380/2021, U/S- 120(B)/326/302 IPC has been registered.

### Appeal to the Government

**Golaghat, May 20:** Probin Das, Central Committee Secretary of newly formed regional political party Rajior Dal and social activist from Golaghat today has appealed the Government regarding various ongoing issues. Probin Das has appealed the new Government to Ensure Covid Testing of every citizen, Free and Mass Vaccination Drive for three crore thirty lacs people of Assam and Compensation of five thousand rupees per month to every worker and labourers who works on daily wage basis.

### Hand Sanitizers and Face Masks for Police Personnel

**Golaghat, May 20:** United Chamber of Commerce Golaghat today handed over Hand Sanitizers and Face Masks for police personnel who are performing their duties in ongoing COVID 19 pandemic situation at the Office of the Superintendent of Police Golaghat. A team led by United Chamber of Commerce President Kishore Kumar Dutta and General Secretary Pawan Baheti along with Dip Kalita and Tanuj Mahanta first met newly appointed Superintendent of Police Golaghat Dr Robin Kumar, IPS in his office and felicitated him with traditional phulam gamosa and then handed over the necessary materials which will help the police personnel. The UCC Golaghat has promised to extend all possible help in future also.

### Covid Surge in Golaghat : Active Cases Again Crossed Thousand : Death Toll Rises to 34

**Golaghat, May 20:** Today 215 fresh cases of Covid positive were reported in Golaghat. Also one lady from Dergaon succumbed to Covid. A couple of days ago Active Cases of Covid crossed thousand but later it got decreased when more than two hundred Covid patients got discharged in a single day. But today again Covid Active Cases crossed thousand. At present the number of Covid Active Cases in Golaghat is 1076. Today a lady named Indira Devi (56) from Dergaon succumbed to Covid at Jorhat Medical College and Hospital. With this Covid death toll rises to 34 in the district.

### One House Guttled Completely at Kombo Tarsu Mobuk

**Aalo, May 20 :** One dwelling house belonging to one Shri Yajom Diyum of Kombo Tarsu Mobuk was completely gutted on 19 May last. The cause of fire accident could not be ascertained and no causality has been reported. Huge properties are reported to be lost in the fire as it happened in day time and village people are always away from house for their preoccupations in such time



## Organizes a series of informative and engaging virtual sessions with nutrition experts and doctors encouraging living a healthier life

**Guwahati, May 20 :** Consistently promoting healthy living with a clear focus on supporting immunity through nutrition, Amway India, one of the country's leading FMCG Direct Selling Companies, kick started the awareness campaign to encourage 'Health and Hygiene' practices. Launched on Amway's 23rd anniversary in India, the campaign aims at spreading awareness on how the right nutrition can help in building a

healthy lifestyle. The campaign is being supported through a series of virtual sessions with panels of doctors and nutrition experts. Commenting on the launch Anshu Budhraj, CEO, Amway India, said - "Today, health and wellbeing have taken precedence over everything else with a rise in awareness for taking nutritional supplements to support one's overall health, has also become age agnostic. As per a recent survey, 50% of consumers

overall health in 2020 and the trend is here to remain for a longer period of time. Given Amway's formidable presence in the vitamin and dietary supplements market, we are well poised to meet the evolving consumer demands. Selfcare with nutrition, immunity and hygiene will continue to be the focus for us this year and in line with these we announced the 'health and hygiene' awareness campaign on our 23rd anniversary in India to helping people live better, healthier lives. With this we are working towards, staying true to our brand's promise to the consumers by way of providing innovative, world-class quality products in line with the evolving consumer needs and consumer lifestyle. We are hosting multiple digital initiatives to spread awareness around the importance of nutrition and developing hygiene

practices for optimal health apart from conducted over 1000 sessions reaching our 5.5 Lakh Direct Sellers/Retailers and their customers. " Talking about the importance of the campaign, Chandra Bhushan Chakraborty, Senior Vice President, East and West, Amway India, said, "Given the current health scenario, it is important for each one of us to safeguard ourselves in the best way possible. Preventive healthcare and seeking personalized nutrition solutions have become a major part of self-care among consumers today. We are grateful to the doctors and other health experts for joining us to spread awareness, demystify common misconceptions and simplify a healthy lifestyle with a focus on eating right. Through these initiatives, we are encouraging our Amway Direct Sellers/retailers and their customers to

lead a fitter, healthier and hygienic life." Under the campaign, the doctors and nutrition experts are joining in to provide pertinent information relevant to the current times and elucidated the growing importance of leading a balanced life and the role of preventive healthcare and supplementation. These health experts shared the importance of living a healthy and hygienic lifestyle. Some of these initiatives in the East region include the World Health Day, World Asthma Day and World Laughter Day with focus on Oral Health, Immunity Campaign, Mother's Day celebration and Home, Health and Hygiene campaign, among others. Our Amway Direct Sellers/retailers and their customers joined to learn more about healthy and hygienic living along with its short- and long-term benefits.





# Climate activist shareholders to target US oil giant Chevron



**London, May 20 :** The climate activist shareholder group that has led investor rebellions at Shell and BP will next week target the US oil major Chevron, with demands to set carbon emissions reduction targets. The vote will be the final stage in a flurry of shareholder rebellions coordinated by Follow This, a Dutch organisation that has rallied investor support for calls for the world's biggest publicly owned oil companies to cut back production. The group expects investors to pass a shareholder resolution calling for emissions cuts at Chevron's annual meeting on 26 May, capping a breakthrough year for the campaigners. Oil companies are facing a growing scientific and political consensus that fossil fuel production must fall to prevent catastrophic global heating. The International Energy Agency said on Tuesday that new oil, gas or coal developments must stop this year if the world is to reach net zero emissions by 2050, a goal enshrined in the 2015 Paris climate agreement. However, that consensus has not translated to meaningful action by oil companies. Mark van Baal founded Follow This in 2015 to start pressuring them from the inside, gathering the support of Shell shareholders. Over the past six years the campaign group has become a fixture at the annual meetings of Shell and some of its biggest oil producing rivals, including the UK's BP, Norway's Equinor, and France's Total. The Amsterdam-based Van Baal first attended Shell's annual meeting in 2015, and introduced a first shareholder resolution calling on emissions cuts in 2016. That resolution gained only 2.8% of votes, but since then support has snowballed, and the latest resolution - which went to a vote at the Shell annual meeting on Tuesday - gained 30% of votes, a significant rebellion against the oil company by large investors. The initial reaction to Van Baal's activism was "dream on", he told the Guardian on Wednesday. But the "patronising" tone of Shell's early response has developed rapidly into serious engagement, from the chief executive down. Shell has now gained investor support for a plan to hit net zero by 2050 - but still wants to increase gas production in the short term. Follow This wants more concrete plans. Last week it managed to marshal 21% of votes in favour of short-term carbon emissions targets at BP, and support for the Shell resolution at Tuesday's annual meeting was double its 2020 result. The size of the rebellions means both companies will have to report back to investors on why they rejected the proposals. In the US, Follow This resolutions calling for emissions reductions targets gained majority approval at the large oil producers ConocoPhillips and Phillips 66. Chevron's attempt to dismiss its resolution was thwarted by US regulators. Van Baal, 52, who trained as a mechanical

engineer and previously worked selling refrigerated shipping containers but after watching Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, a landmark film about the climate crisis by the former US vice-president, he decided to dedicate himself to climate journalism. However, the lack of response from the industry persuaded him he needed to become an activist investor to force oil executives to make the change. "I felt - like everybody - pretty powerless about climate change," he said. "I didn't think anything I could do could make any difference. The people who can make a difference are the CEOs of the fossil fuel industry." Follow This now has four paid employees and about 6,000 supportive shareholders across the investor base of the fossil fuel companies that it targets. It is funded in part by the Laudes Foundation, a philanthropic organisation founded by the wealthy German-Dutch Brenninkmeijer family. Van Baal does not believe oil executives will have an epiphany and voluntarily wind down fossil fuel extraction, but he argues that investor pressure is moving in only one direction as shareholders realise the financial risks of ignoring the climate crisis. "Financial markets don't wait for epiphanies," said Van Baal: "The big institutional investors and shareholders now realise what's at stake."

## 'We have our differences': Blinken and Lavrov polite but firm in first face-to-face encounter

**Washington, May 20 :** The US secretary of state and Russia's foreign minister have sparred politely in Iceland in their first face-to-face encounter, which came as ties between the nations have deteriorated sharply in recent months. Antony Blinken and Sergey Lavrov spoke



frankly but calmly of their differences as they held talks on the sidelines of an Arctic Council meeting in the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik, a city with deep history in US-Russian relations. "We seek a predictable, stable relationship with Russia," Blinken told Lavrov, echoing comments made by the US president, Joe Biden, who has proposed a

summit with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, next month. "We think that's good for our people, good for Russian people and indeed good for the world," Blinken said. "It's also no secret that we have our differences and when it comes to those differences, as President Biden has also shared with President Putin, if Russia acts aggressively against us, our partners, and our allies, we'll respond - and President Biden has demonstrated that in both word and deed, not for purposes of

escalation, not to seek out conflict, but to defend our interests." The meeting took place just as the Biden administration notified Congress of new sanctions on Russia over a controversial European pipeline. The administration hit eight Russian companies and vessels with penalties for their involvement in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, while sparing two German entities from similar penalties, which would have a more significant effect on the project. Lavrov said: "We have serious differences in the assessment of the international situation, we have serious differences in the approaches to the tasks which have to be solved for its normalisation." Our position is very simple: we are ready to discuss all the issues without exception, but under perception that the discussion will be honest, with the facts on the table, and of course on the basis of mutual respect. "Even before Wednesday's talks the two diplomats had laid down near-diametrically opposed positions for the meeting, previewing what was likely to be a difficult and contentious exchange over myriad issues including Ukraine, the Arctic, Russia's treatment of the opposition figure Alexei Navalny and accusations of cyber malfeasance, including claims that Russia-based hackers were responsible for a ransomware attack on a key US pipeline. The meeting also followed a spate of tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions as US-Russian relations threaten a return to cold war lows. After the meeting, which ran for a longer than expected hour and 45 minutes, the state department said Blinken had called for Russia

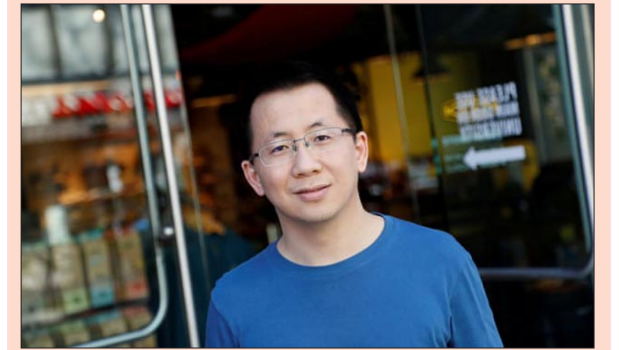
to release two Americans it holds, Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed. He also raised "deep concerns" about Russia's military buildup on the Ukrainian border and its actions against the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the department said. Perhaps anticipating Blinken's position and the expected sanctions announcement, Lavrov had offered a pre-emptive rebuttal on Monday in Moscow. "Apparently, a [US] decision was made to promote stable, predictable relations with Russia," he said. "However, if this includes constant and predictable sanctions, that's not what we need." Blinken noted that despite some vitriol, the US and Russia had agreed early in the Biden administration to a five-year extension of a key arms control pact that Donald Trump had declined to renew. Trump left a decidedly mixed legacy on Russia that included a friendly personal relationship with Putin, while his administration still imposed sanctions and other punitive measures. Another, more immediate area of disagreement in Reykjavik, the site of the famous 1986 summit between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, is the Arctic. Blinken expressed concerns about Russia's increasing military activity in the region known as the "high north". On Wednesday, in successive meetings with foreign ministers from other Nordic Council members, Blinken repeatedly referred to the importance of "continuing to maintain this region as one of peaceful cooperation". "We have concerns about some of the recent military activities in the Arctic," he said. "That increases the dangers of accidents and miscalculations and undermines the shared goal of a peaceful and sustainable future for the region." Blinken also took Russia to task for proposing new navigational regulations for the region and decried Lavrov for comments in which he dismissed such criticism by claiming that the Arctic "is our territory, our land". Blinken said: "We have to proceed all of us, including Russia, based on the rules, based on norms, based on the commitments that we've each made and also avoid statements that undercut those." In his comments on Monday, Lavrov noted the grievances about Russia's military activities in the Arctic. "It has long been common knowledge that this is our territory, our land. We are in charge of keeping the Arctic coast safe."



A protester uses a slingshot to hurl a stone at Israeli soldiers during a protest against the ongoing Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip

## Bytedance CEO stands aside to do more 'daydreaming' about the future

**London, May 20 :** The Chinese boss of TikTok's parent company has said he is leaving the role because he lacks managerial skills and preferred "reading and daydreaming" to running the tech giant. Zhang Yiming, the co-founder of Bytedance - which created the popular short video TikTok app - said on Thursday that he will step down as chief executive and transition to a new role by the end of the year focusing on "long-term strategy". Liang Rubo, with whom he set up the firm, will take over the role. Beijing has tightened the screws on China's booming tech sector, levying fines - including on Bytedance last month - for allegedly flouting monopoly rules, and issuing stark warnings to the coterie



of billionaire digital bosses about their responsibilities to society. But in an unusually candid open memo by one of Asia's new tech rich, Zhang said: "The truth is, I lack some of the skills that make an ideal manager." "I'm more interested in analysing organisational and market principles... than actually managing people." The 38-year-old added that he is also "not very social, preferring solitary activities like being online, reading, listening to music, and daydreaming about what may be possible". Zhang has also been under enormous pressure to convince the world that TikTok will not hand data over to China's ruling Communist party, while also protecting his image at home by not appearing to give in to demands from the west. News of his departure comes as Beijing clamps down on the unprecedented influence of some of China's biggest technology firms. E-commerce giant Alibaba was fined 18.2bn yuan (\$2.78bn) last month as part of a push by regulators to rein in dominant digital platforms. As Alibaba's problems mounted, its founder Jack Ma has been unusually absent from the spotlight after speculation that brash comments by him to regulators brought the hammer down on his firm. Bytedance was among 34 tech companies summoned by regulators in April that were told to undergo "complete rectification" and "heed the warning" of Alibaba. TikTok is believed to have around 1 billion users worldwide including more than 100 million in the United States. While he was US president, Donald Trump made a series of demands on the Chinese company over security concerns, including calls for the US operations of TikTok to be sold to an American company or it would be shut down. The firm has insisted it would never provide user data to the Chinese government. ByteDance now has more than 60,000 staff in 30 countries and last year Zhang said they were looking to recruit around 40,000 more. The company also runs a series of popular products including Douyin - the Chinese version of TikTok - as well as news aggregation app Jinri Toutiao and productivity app Lark, which features cloud storage, chat and calendar functions.

## Everyone Is Awesome: Lego to launch first LGBTQ+ set

**Paris, May 20 :** In the "spraying room" at Lego HQ, tiny figurines are layered with bright, glossy paint before being placed on a rainbow-esque arch. The result, a waterfall of colour with 11 brand new minifigures striding purposefully towards an imagined brighter future, is the Danish toymaker's inaugural LGBTQIA+ set, titled *Everyone Is Awesome*. The colours of the stripes were chosen to reflect the original rainbow flag, along with pale blue, white and pink representing the trans community, and black and brown to acknowledge the diversity of skin tones and backgrounds within the LGBTQIA+ community. In all but one case no specific gender has been assigned to the figures, who are intended to "express individuality, while remaining ambiguous". The exception, a purple minifigure with a highly stylised beehive wig, "is a clear nod to all the fabulous drag queens out there", said the designer, Matthew Ashton, who initially created the set for his own desk. "I'd moved offices, so wanted to make the space feel like home with something that reflected me and the LGBTQIA+ community I'm so proud to be a part of," Ashton said. But the set attracted attention and was soon in demand. "Other members of Lego's LGBTQ+ community came by to tell me they loved it," Ashton said. "So I thought, 'maybe it's something we should share.'" He also

wanted to be more vocal in support of inclusivity. "Growing up as an LGBTQ+ kid - being told what I should play with, how I should walk, how I should talk, what I should wear - the message I always got was that somehow I was 'wrong'," he said. "Trying to be someone I wasn't was exhausting. I wish, as a kid, I had looked at the world and thought: 'This is going to be OK, there's a place for me'. I wish I'd seen an inclusive statement that said 'everyone is awesome'." Ashton said he was really happy to work for a company that wants to be outspoken over such matters. Jane Burdett, a fellow LGBTQIA+ employee at Lego who works in supply chain operations, agreed. "I've been at Lego for six years and I've never hesitated to be myself here, which isn't the case everywhere," Burdett said. "When I joined Lego, I hoped it would be an inclusive place - but I didn't know. People like me wonder, 'will I be welcome here?' And the answer is yes - but this set means that, now, everyone knows it." The set goes on sale on 1 June, the start of Pride month, but a few Afolls (adult fans of Lego) and Gayfols have been given a preview. "This set means a lot," said Flynn DeMarco, a member of the LGBTQIA+ Afoll community and a contestant on the television show *Lego Masters US*.



Palestinians inspect a destroyed house after an Israeli air strike in Gaza

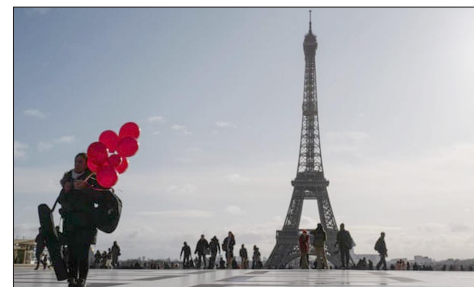
## UK travellers to France may be asked proof of accommodation as part of post-Brexit changes

**London, May 20 :** Post-Brexit British visitors to France may be asked to show proof of their accommodation, including an official certificate obtained in advance if they are staying with friends or family, once Covid-related travel restrictions are lifted. The rule, which has applied to British travellers since the UK left the EU, requires anyone in France hosting non-EU nationals to complete an attestation d'accueil form and submit it for approval to their town hall, a process that can take up to a month. Once stamped and returned, the form, which costs €0 (£26) and requires supporting documents such as proof of

address, income and right of residence, must then be forwarded to the guest so they can show it at the border if asked to do so. Second homeowners and holidaymakers staying in hotels or rented accommodation will not need the attestation, but may equally be asked to provide evidence of where they will be staying in France, such as a utility bill or confirmation of their booking. It is not clear to what extent the rule, which is consistent with Schengen zone border requirements for third-country nationals and has

long applied to visitors to France from countries such as the US, will be implemented for British travellers in practice. But accounts of mistreatment of EU citizens in the UK suggest the chance of tougher border checks in the future cannot be excluded and the British

government has advised travellers, including those staying with friends or family, to follow the rules. "British nationals visiting France should be prepared to show proof of accommodation at the border such as a hotel booking confirmation or an attestation d'accueil certificate, if staying with a host," a government spokesperson said. They added that travellers should check Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office advice for details of Covid-related requirements and restrictions, and noted that the FCDO currently advised against all but essential travel to France.





## THE ASSAM RISING

VOL. NO. VI, ISSUE NO. 95 FRIDAY, MAY 21, 2021

## world turned upside down

Since the pandemic stopped British citizens moving freely across Europe, the sacrifice of that same freedom to Brexit has not been felt much. It isn't even a cost in Eurosceptic lore, where the right to live and work in 27 other countries was never treated as a reciprocal benefit. It was resented as a licence for them to come over here. Revoking it was priority number one for the UK in talks with Brussels. The referendum result was interpreted as a duty to satisfy people who saw no value in freedom of movement at the expense of people who had built their lives around it. That included plenty of UK citizens at work or in retirement in mainland Europe. The price of a dark blue passport was someone else's world turned upside down. That particular argument is over, but Brexit is only "done" in the sense that Boris Johnson is done thinking about it. Moving on is hardly an option for millions of EU nationals who had the welcome mat pulled from under their feet. The total number is unknown. They were not counted on the way in because they arrived as citizens, not aliens. That is what freedom of movement meant. Rights conferred by EU membership must now be traded for conditional status, achieved by navigation of a bureaucratic labyrinth – the Home Office's "EU settlement scheme". At least 5.4 million people have applied. Not all of them will be valid candidates, but the volume suggests that previous counts, putting the number of EU nationals in the UK at about 3.6 million, fell short. The deadline for applications, when a "grace period" expires, is 30 June 2021. The current backlog of unprocessed cases is about 320,000. No one knows how many more are entitled to stay but have not yet applied. Some will be unaware of the obligation; some need help with the process. There are at least 3,660 children currently or recently in care who qualify, but who are relying on local authorities to do the paperwork on their behalf and on time. Probably more. The pandemic has drowned the sound of the clock ticking down to the deadline. People have been trapped abroad by travel restrictions. That can blemish a record of days spent on UK soil, spoiling an application by changing the calculation regarding "settled" and "pre-settled" status. (This is just one hellish sub-chamber in the bureaucratic maze.) It is safe to presume a heap of cases will be bungled by the Home Office. Add those to deserving cases that won't even be considered in time, and there could easily be hundreds of thousands of EU nationals falling into a legal void on 1 July. Some will get residency permission reinstated, but it will not be backdated. A stretch of unlawful migrant status will then haunt their record. In theory, the grace period could easily be extended. In other areas where the timetable for Brexit implementation has felt tight – chiefly the Northern Ireland protocol – the UK is all for flexibility and cutting itself some slack. But the domestic political incentives there are different. Johnson is under pressure from his own side to ease the passage of agricultural goods crossing the Irish Sea. No Tory is demanding equivalent compassion for Polish care workers. The settlement scheme is a machine that issues permissions to stay in Britain, but with suspicion as a byproduct. Any slips and it becomes a conveyor, whisking people into the Home Office's "hostile environment", churning out a caseload of trauma and injustice; a sequel to the Windrush scandal. Confidence is hardly boosted by reports that officials recently misdirected a mailshot urging the wrong people to sort out their immigration status. Dual nationals with British passports were among the recipients of the letter warning that, among other threats, NHS access could be lost if prompt action was not taken. Those who have been granted settled or pre-settled status find it is no guarantee against discrimination and exclusion. Private landlords, who are legally obliged to verify a tenant's immigration status, are unfamiliar with the new categories and often unwilling to take a chance. The same goes for some employers and mortgage lenders. Any period of legal limbo can result in a loss of benefits, or bills for NHS services. What will happen to EU nationals at border crossings is also unknown. Travel volumes are low right now but the signs are not great. Visitors have been barred from entering the country; some have been held in detention centres. Most of those cases appear to be breaches of new visa requirements that should not, in theory, affect "settled" EU nationals. But some of them will have no paperwork to prove their privileged status, having been trapped overseas by the pandemic. Who would bet on them getting discretionary leniency from a Border Force officer at Heathrow? None of this is intended as relitigation of the Brexit argument. Nor is it a claim that migration policy on the continent is a rolling showcase of Enlightenment values.

# Why the suspicion on China's Wuhan lab virus is growing. Read these new analyses



It's been nearly eighteen months since the coronavirus brought the world on its knees, with India in the middle of a deadly second wave that is claiming 4,000 lives daily on an average. No one can tell when this will end. But it is possible to probe how this catastrophe began, and China's role in it. Fortunately, even as cover ups go on. Several reports are out in the public domain and anybody who isn't afraid of speaking the truth should be able to connect the dots. One report out is that of the Independent Panel, set up by a resolution of the 73rd World Health Assembly. The specific mission of the committee was to review the response of the World Health Organization (WHO) to the Covid outbreak and the timelines relevant. In other words, it was never meant to be an inquisition on China. And it wasn't. Not by a long chalk. It went around the core question of the origin of the virus, even while indulging in what seems to be pure speculation. Then there are two recent publications investigating the origin of the virus, which are worthy of note. Neither are written by sage scientists, but by analysts viewing the whole sequence of events through the prism of intelligence. Which means that these efforts skip the big words, and get to the facts. Collate all these different sources, add a little more of the background colour, and you start to get the big picture. The need to find out the truth becomes urgent as the situation worsens, for instance with dangerously high death rates in Aligarh Muslim University, where there is now speculation whether the deaths could be linked to a separate strain. There are arguments that India's second wave could be a deliberate one, especially since the 'double mutant' has not hit any of its neighbours. Such speculation is likely to rise, given that China has now effectively closed any possibility of withdrawal from Ladakh, and the Chinese economy goes from strength to strength, growing a record 18.3 per cent in the first quarter of the new financial year. Unsurprisingly, even world leaders, like Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, have linked the pandemic to biological warfare. Arising from this is the biggest potential danger: someone may decide to respond in kind in a bid to fix Beijing. That's how intelligence operations work. After all, major countries haven't been funding their top secret labs for nothing. In any scenario, there's some serious trouble ahead, especially since the Narendra Modi government seems to be more intent on playing down the crisis than addressing it. The panel's mandate is set out clearly in the May 2020 resolu-

tion, which calls for "a stepwise process of impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation...to review experience gained and lessons learned from the WHO-coordinated international health response to COVID-19..." and thereafter provide recommendations. This the panel undoubtedly did. The 13-member panel included former Prime Minister of New Zealand Helen Clark, former President of Liberia who has core expertise in setting up health care after Ebola, an award-winning feminist, a former WHO bureaucrat, and a former Indian health secretary, who had six months experience in handling the first Covid wave, was on innumerable panels on health, and in the manner of civil servants in this country, also did a stint in the Ministry of Defence, not to mention the World Bank. The Indian representative certainly gives the whole exercise the imprimatur of legality, given hostile India-China relations. And finally, Zhong Nanshan who was advisor to the Chinese government during the Wuhan outbreak, and who received the highest State honour of the Medal of the Republic from his President-Xinhua describes him as a "brave and outspoken" doctor. The WHO also lists Peng Liyuan as a Goodwill Ambassador, describing her as a famous opera singer. She is the wife of President Xi Jinping. It's, therefore, entirely unsurprising that while the panel diligently shows WHO the sources of early warning, it makes a vague case on the origins of the virus, noting that while a species of bat was "probably" the host, the intermediate cycle is unknown. Most astonishingly, the committee states that the virus "may already have been in circulation outside China in the last months of 2019". No evidence for that either. The overall tenor of the report is that it would take years to sort all this out. There is only one paragraph of note from the point of view of those seeking the truth. The panel's report states that less than 55-60 per cent of early cases had been exposed to the wet markets, and that the area merely "amplified" the virus. In other words, the market, with its hundreds of exotic wildlife, could not have been the source. It, however, carefully notes that the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) sequenced the entire genome of the virus almost within weeks, and later provided this to a public access source. The report praises the diligence of clinicians who managed to isolate the virus within a short time. That's wonderful all right. No question. But it doesn't at all address the question whether those diligent researchers were also experimenting on the

virus. These assessments by the Independent Panel are now, however, being questioned, leading to bits of intelligence being pieced together from within a country that would put the term 'Iron curtain' to shame. An earlier WHO study on the virus' origin was roundly condemned by a group of countries, including the US, Australia, Canada and others (not India) as being duplicitous in the extreme. In January 2021, the US Department of State released a Fact Sheet on activity of WIV, which is entirely based on intelligence. That factsheet is damning, indicating that several researchers at the institute had fallen ill with characteristics of the Covid virus, thus showing up senior Chinese researcher Shi Zhengli's claim that there was "zero infection" in the lab. The lab was the centre of research of the SARS virus since its first outbreak, including on 'RaTG13' virus found in bats, and which is 96 per cent similar to the present virus SARS-CoV-2. Worst, it also pointed out that "the United States has determined that the WIV has collaborated on publications and secret projects with China's military. The WIV has engaged in classified research, including laboratory animal experiments, on behalf of the Chinese military since at least 2017". One analytical article is published in the prestigious Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Another is a paper by the equally reputed Begin Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies. Both are a careful collation of facts, and establish the following. The paper by Begin Sadat Centre brings out additional information that bolsters the US Fact Sheet. It appears that the US had been able to get a 'source' from WIV directly, and that another Chinese scientist had defected to an unknown European country. That led directly to information on the military side of the programme. The study also quotes David Asher, who led the Department of State investigation. Asher observes that the WIV had two campuses, not one, as popularly believed. This was known by the Indian authorities for years, but does not seem to have been put about. Asher also adds that all mention of the SARS virus was dropped from the institute's publicly admitted biological "defence programmes" by 2017 at the same time when the Level 4 lab kicked off operations. Even more surprising was that an adjacent facility had already administered vaccines to its senior faculty in March 2020 itself. That doesn't suggest an accident. That suggests a program that was designed to kill, and for which vaccines were already under research. Then there damning studies stated: "There are plenty of indications in the sequence itself that [the initial pandemic virus] may have been synthetically altered. It has the backbone of a bat [coronavirus], combined with a pangolin receptor binder, combined with some sort of humanized mice transceptor. These things don't actually make sense (and) ....the odds this could be natural are very low... [but this is attainable] through deliberate scientific gain of function research" that was going on at the WIV. There is no doubt that 'gain of function' research is practised in biological research labs world over, resulting in, sometimes, dangerous incidents. This type of research involves in-crossing viruses, ostensibly to gain knowledge on

how to battle the disease from within. In these cases, it's almost impossible to decide where the 'defence' aspect leeches into an offensive capability. That these findings were from US scientists who were 'fearful' of being quoted shows not just the extent of Beijing's clout in university research and funding, but also a high degree of restraint. Biological research is almost never talked about. Biological research and the secrecy around it is the aspect of focus in Nicholas Wade's article published in Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. As he writes, from the beginning, there was denial at the highest levels from some unexpected quarters. The first was in The Lancet- one of the oldest journals of medical research- by a group of authors in March 2020, when the pandemic had just broken out. Even to a layman, it would have seemed that it was far too early for the group of authors to contemptuously dismiss 'conspiracy theories' that the virus was not of a natural origin. It turns out that The Lancet letter was drafted by Peter Daszak, President of the EcoHealth Alliance of New York, who's organisation funded corona virus research at the Wuhan lab. As is pointed out in Wade's article, any revelation of such a connection would have been criminal to say the least, if it was proved that the virus did escape from the lab. Unsurprisingly, Daszak was also part of the WHO team investigating the origins of the virus. Another burst of outrage came from a group of professors who also hurried to disprove, in an article, the 'lab created' theory on the grounds - simply put - that it was not of the most probably calculated design. The lead author Kristian G Anderson is from the Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, which specialises in biomedical research. It also has partnerships with Chinese labs and pharma companies. None of that is criminal. Especially when Scripps is already in financial distress at the time. Besides, such collaborations are not restricted to just US labs. See, for instance, an account of Australian doctor Dominic Dwyer, who was part of the first WHO study, and who dismissed without any evidence presented that the virus had leaked from a lab. Dwyer's claim that the Wuhan lab seems to have been run well, and that nobody from the facility seemed to have fallen sick has now been disprove. Evidence of a dangerous virus escaping a lab - as it has in the past on what he calls "rare" occasions - would mean a death blow to labs everywhere. Funding is, after all, hard to come by. Then there is the nice hard cash involved. The Harvard professor Dr Charles Leiber who was arrested, together with two other Chinese, for collaborating quietly with the Wuhan University of Technology (WUT), was being paid roughly \$50,000 per month, living expenses of up to 1,000,000 Chinese Yuan (approximately \$158,000) and awarded \$1.5 million to establish a research lab at WUT. He was also asked to 'cultivate' young teachers and Ph.D. students by organising international conferences. It's all very pally and friendly, and a lot of money is involved. The end result? A virus out of hell, that seems not to affect the Chinese as its economy powers ahead and shifts its weight more comfortably into its rising position in the global order.

## Keir Starmer must lean right to win? History suggests otherwise



Keir Starmer approaches his first electoral test since becoming Labour leader - the local and devolved elections on Thursday - with no shortage of advice on how to restore the party's fortunes. One view is that Starmer must dissociate himself from Jeremy Corbyn's policy platform and take the party rightwards, back to the moderate centre ground. This argument fits with the standard academic account of Labour's history since the second world war. Labour's membership always wants to push the party

to the left, but elections are won on the centre ground. So the party faces a constant dilemma, doomed to choose between ideology and electability. Labour's history therefore follows a familiar zigzag pattern: to win, it must move to the right, but when it does so the membership gets disillusioned with the compromises of office and pushes it back to the left. At that point, it loses and the cycle starts again. This time round, it seems, it is Starmer's task to push Labour back to the right after the catastrophe of

the 2019 election defeat. But this is not the only way of reading Labour's history. There is another interpretation, which better fits the actual story of the postwar period - and which suggests an alternative way forward. In this interpretation of Labour's policy shifts, the party's oscillations between left and right have been a response not to the competing pressures of ideology and electability, but to the economic conditions the UK has faced in different periods. Labour's moves to its right (the terms are of course relative, and such a shift would mark a move towards the centre ground of politics as a whole) have always occurred

**Michael Jacobs**

when the British economy has been doing well: when growth has been steady and living standards rising. In these circumstances it seems rational for Labour to eschew a programme of socialist reform in favour of a more centrist economic policy, in which it focuses on trying to reduce inequality through higher public spending and a more generous welfare state. This "revisionist" position (so called because it revised the traditional socialist approach which focused on reforming capitalism) was most famously articu-

lated by the future Labour cabinet minister Anthony Crosland in the mid-1950s, when the UK had emerged from postwar austerity and economic growth was running at 4% a year. Crosland's revisionism was revived by Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley in the late 1980s, when the economy was buoyant again after the recession of the early Thatcher years. By the mid-1990s and 2000s, the UK was experiencing its longest economic boom in more than a hundred years. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown saw no need for socialist reform when capitalism was generating huge tax revenues, which could be spent on health, education, pensions, child benefits and overseas aid. But if Labour's rightward shifts have occurred in periods when solid growth allowed them, so its leftward turns have been responses to economic crisis. In 1945, Clement Attlee's government faced an economy in ruins: loaded with debt, its private industrial companies weak and badly managed. In such conditions Labour's structural economic reforms - nationalisation, industrial planning, financial and trade controls - were widely regarded as economically necessary. By the end of the 1970s Brit-

ish capitalism was again in profound difficulty, beset by the "British disease" of poor management and overmighty trade unions, and suffering from simultaneous high unemployment and inflation. So it was no surprise that Labour again turned to a more socialist policy stance, the so-called alternative economic strategy of nationalisation, planning agreements and import controls. Fast-forward to the 2010s, and the economy was once again in crisis. The 2008 financial crash had exposed the fragile foundations of the economic boom years: soaring inequalities of wealth and income, low investment, poor productivity, stagnant wages and trade deficits. Once again Labour turned left, first tentatively under Ed Miliband, then more radically under Corbyn. New Labour's purely redistributive stance was no use now: the economy needed structural reform. Keen-eyed readers may have noticed the missing years of this story, when Labour was led by Harold Wilson. Wilson today is often seen as a rightwinger, so one might be forgiven for thinking that his electoral victories followed the Crosland-Blair blueprint. But they didn't. Wilson was on the left when he became leader in 1963, and Labour's winning manifestos in 1964,

1966 and 1974 were all leftwing platforms promising further nationalisations, industrial intervention and economic planning. And all were written when the British economy was in crisis and structural reform was therefore seen as necessary. Contrary to the standard account of Labour's history that the party wins only when it adopts a centrist position, Wilson - like Attlee - won by offering the voters a radical and credible platform to repair a broken British economy. Both leaders were able to make an ostensibly leftwing position the common sense of their day. It's not hard to draw a lesson for Starmer. None of the British economy's problems exposed after the financial crisis have been solved; on the contrary, Covid has caused further damage. And new challenges demand radical responses: the climate and environmental emergency, the growth of precarious work, regional disparities, automation, an ageing society. In these circumstances a moderately redistributive economic policy on the New Labour model is clearly not sufficient. History suggests that Labour must again embrace its winning tradition of structural reform to a broken economic system.



## FAANG Stocks: Facebook, Google steal the show in the year so far - Full comparison here

**Mumbai, May 20 :** FAANG stocks have been major contributors to the returns generated by the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq indices over the years. If you are an investor in the stock markets or are looking to test the water by investing for the first time, it is highly likely that you would have heard of FAANG stocks. Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google, together form the formidable bunch of stocks called FAANG. All five companies have been highly successful in their line of business and have global exposure to their operations. Taken together, FAANG represents the bellwether stocks for global investors. Holding FAANG stocks in the long-term portfolio of investors is something that most global investors focus on. Over the ten-year period, these stocks have given spectacular returns of over 500 per cent to the investors. FAANG stocks have been major contributors to the returns generated by the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq indices over the years. Importantly, stocks of Microsoft, Tesla are not there in the FAANG group, yet are investors' favorites worldwide. Before buying stocks,

apart from fundamental strengths and the technical factors, you may also consider having a look at the Analysts ratings which may indi-



cate a strong buy or strong sell or sometimes a moderate buy signal. Further, there is the average 12-month price target of the FAANG stocks that most analysts come out with. Wall Street S&P 500 upside capped from current levels; Morgan Stanley says valuations remain high. Elon Musk, Tesla Michael Burry of 'Big Short' fame takes on Elon Musk; bets half a billion dollars against Tesla. A look at the recent performance of the FAANG stocks may throw up some opportunities

to the long-term investors. Here are 12-months and year-to-date (YTD) return comparisons. Facebook stock price is currently around \$305

negative of 0.76 per cent. Netflix stock price is currently around \$483 and the stock has given a return of about 8 per cent over the last 12 months while the YTD return has been nearly negative 10 per cent. Google stock price is currently around \$2277 and the stock has given a return of about 63 per cent over the last 12 months while the YTD return has been nearly 31 per cent. If you wish to hold 1 share of each of the FAANG stock, you will need approximately Rs 4.73 lakh. However, if you still want to own a portion of all the FAANG stocks, Fractional Investing is there to help you. The international trading firms through their platforms allow investors to own fractional shares in the portfolio. So, with as little as Rs 5,000, you can start accumulating FAANG stocks for your long-term goals.

and the stock has given a return of about 34 per cent over the last 12 months while the YTD return has been nearly 13.47 per cent. Apple stock price is currently around \$123 and the stock has given a return of about 56 per cent over the last 12 months while the YTD return has been nearly a negative of 6 per cent. Amazon stock price is currently around \$3196 and the stock has given a return of about 29 per cent over the last 12 months while the YTD return has been nearly

## Vestige Marketing drives employee-centric initiatives to Educate, Motivate, and Inspire

**New Delhi, May 20 :** Vestige, the only Indian-origin direct selling company to be ranked #36 in the world, has announced a variety of engagement initiatives to keep employees and stakeholders motivated during the pandemic. These range from offering a 24/7 helpline for Covid and post Covid consultations with qualified doctors, a Vaccination-for-All program along with Mediclaim with Covid cover and life insurance for all employees, to virtually maintaining connections between the management, employees, and distributors. In line with this, the company also launched its own on-demand radio channel called "Vestige Radio". Vestige Radio is designed as a platform to thank everyone for putting in their best efforts, to listen to people's challenges, and to interact with them to create solutions. It was launched to meet the expectations of the employees shared via webinars, and has episodes on motivation, 'Sochne ki Himmat', 'Muskurahatein', and the Vestige Helpline, to keep everyone's spirits up. Senior management, employees and guest speakers share motivational speeches, followed by live performances to de-stress. 'Sochne ki Himmat' (Philosophy of our Founder) saw employees share their story of courage and excitement to serve distributors and society in these tough times. These stories reach out to over 1 crore 35 lakh distributors across India to keep them motivated and engaged. Commenting on Vestige's engagement initiatives during the pandemic Mr. Gautam Bali, Managing Director, Vestige Marketing Pvt Ltd. said, "Our country is facing an unprecedented healthcare crisis which demands a united fight against the spread of the novel Coronavirus. Our engagement initiatives have reached out to Vestigians across the network to build trust, belief, and a safe environment, by providing support, resources, and knowledge to help

during this time of distress. Starting from a vaccination drive for all employees, to installing platforms for regular conversations with COVID affected members, to creating a COVID helpdesk, we are doing it all and plan to do much more. The need of the hour right now is ensuring personal health and safety. We steadfastly stand by our employees, distributors and stakeholders in their hour of need." Vestige plans to vaccinate all the employees under its 'Vaccination-for-All' campaign. It has also set up a COVID helpline to collect information regarding any requirement/support employees need during the pandemic. It has provided family Mediclaim for employees and dependents with Covid Cover, Life Insurance for all employees, facilitating critical care equipment such as oxygen concentrators /or cylinders for the ailing and 24/7 Tele-Consultation Support from qualified doctors, for all their 616 employees and their family members. Their employees are spread across 43 branches and 17 warehouses across India. The health and wellness brand has also put in place a COVID support initiative called SAMVAAD which sees regular interactions with COVID positives, those recovered and affected people to share their stories of inspiration, information, and encouragement. Its V-Learn advocates COVID Appropriate Behaviours in the form of a series of videos which help employees adopt healthy habits to deter COVID-19 infection and transmission. These clips serve as a reminder to sensitise employees about the appropriate habits required to fight COVID-19. Reflecting on the importance of positive engagement during the pandemic, Aseem Nath Tripathi, Vice President -HR said, "These are highly distressing times both at work and home. Having on-going sensitive engagement with our people gives them much-needed assurance and provides timely help. This is aimed at

letting everyone know that they are not alone in this battle. Under our SAMVAAD initiative, we have been in constant contact with those afflicted, ailing and those who have suffered loss. With this thoughtful outreach, we have been able to make our employees feel more secure and connected during these tough times. It has also brought in positivity and motivation amongst employees." Along with these, mindfulness, breathing, and pranayama exercise sessions are also being held to reduce stress, enhance immunity, and induce greater self-awareness. A fun Kids Carnival was hosted virtually for children of employees to participate with singing, instruments, poems, dancing, painting, drawing, art & craft, etc. The children brought positivity and energy for all the adults in the program. To ensure corporate connectivity during work-from-home period, initiatives such as "Team Huddles" are being conducted at all levels to discuss, strategize, and learn new ways to effectively deal with the lockdown and ensure business continuity. All these initiatives have resulted in a motivated work force during this difficult period and employees have felt inspired to help maintain and strengthen the bond across teams. About Vestige Marketing Pvt. Ltd. Founded in 2004, Vestige is one of the leading direct selling company in India. Offering a portfolio of 300+ products across wellness, health, hygiene, home, and beauty segments through 3500+ distribution points across India, and a business presence in six international markets including India, i.e., Bahrain, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UAE. Vestige is ranked number 36 in the 2021 DSN Global 100 List, the prestigious global ranking for direct selling companies. The company is run by veteran leaders who have pioneered an indigenous and unique business model which is revolutionising the direct selling industry.

## Auto stocks to resume up-trend soon; ICICI Direct says buy these two shares for strong returns

**Mumbai, May 20 :** Auto sector stocks have been under pressure since February this year, receding after having gained significantly in 2020. Although the second wave of covid-19 continues to remain an overhang on the sector, most stocks have held key supports, according to ICICI Direct. Going ahead, the brokerage expects the automobiles space to resume its



uptrend, it said in a recent note. "The Auto Index has also generated a breakout above a falling channel containing last three months' corrective decline indicating resumption of up move," the report said. Demand for personal vehicles and commercial vehicles are expected to rise in the coming years. If stocks to buy Buy these two stocks for near-term gains; Nifty en route to test life-time highs soon. Sensex target Morgan Stanley Morgan Stanley maintains 61,000 year-end target for Sensex; suggests these investing strategies. On the technical side, the stock has gone through a healthy retracement over the last

three months. "The stock is seen resuming its primary up trend as it has registered a breakout above its falling channel containing its entire last three months' corrective decline signalling resilience and offers fresh entry opportunity," the report said. Ashok Leyland has now given a breakout above its last five weeks' range of Rs 106-119, which ICICI Direct believes indicates the conclusion of the corrective phase. Support for the stock lies at Rs 111, which would act as a stop-loss. Ashok Leyland is a purely commercial vehicle play, commanding a 16.3% market share. "Ashok Leyland is a prime candidate for the upcoming CV cycle upswing," ICICI Direct said. "We build ~35% volume CAGR, 38.5% revenue CAGR for ALL over FY21E-23E along with re-

turn to profitability by that time," they added. The stock is trading at Rs 125 per share, implying an upside of 10%. ICICI Direct recommends buying the range of Rs 118-122 for a three-month time frame. The stock has remained an outperformer in the auto space. "Key highlight during the entire rally since March 2020 low of Rs 199, is that each correction has held rising 10-week EMA. During the past three months' corrective phase, the share price maintained its rhythm and formed a higher base at key average that coincides with multi-year breakout area around Rs 460," ICICI Direct said. Immediate support for the stock is at Rs 500. Minda Industries is a leading auto ancillary with a diversified presence across segments, products and clients.

## JK Tyre shares jump over 6 percent after March quarter earnings

**NEW DELHI, May 20 :**

Shares of JK Tyre and Industries on Thursday jumped over 6 per cent after the company reported a consolidated profit after tax of Rs 194.96 crore for the March quarter of the previous fiscal. The stock rose by 6.18 per cent to Rs 131.25 on BSE. On NSE, it jumped 6.26 per cent to Rs 131.50. JK Tyre and Industries on Wednesday reported a consolidated profit after tax of Rs 194.96 crore for the March quarter of the previous fiscal against a consolidated loss of Rs 52.78 crore in the year-ago period. Revenue from operations in the quarter under review rose by 63.21 per cent to Rs 2,927.28 crore compared to Rs 1,792.56 crore in Q4FY20, the company said. For the fiscal 2020-21, profit after tax grew more than two folds to Rs 330.93 crore over Rs 141.31 crore in FY20. The revenue from operations in the previous fiscal



grew 4.35 per cent to Rs 9,102.20 crore against Rs 8,722.70 crore logged in the year ended March 31, 2020. The year began with India in lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic and the economy grinding to a halt with Q1FY21 almost a washout, said Raghupati Singhania, Chairman and Managing Director, JK Tyre and Industries. The economy started opening up gradually from mid-May. As a result of several initiatives taken, JK Tyre recovered fast and achieved the highest sales in Q3FY21 and Q4FY21 increasing its market presence, he added.

## Infosys, Indian Oil, Adani Green, Bosch, HPCL, Biocon, JK Lakshmi Cement, Relaxo stocks in focus



**Mumbai, May 20 :** Domestic equity market benchmarks BSE Sensex and Nifty 50 were eyeing a positive start on Thursday after markets took a breather in the previous session. S&P BSE Sensex ended at 49,902 while the broader NSE Nifty closed at 15,030. Nifty futures were trading 30.50 points or 0.20 per cent up at 15,065.50 on Singaporean Exchange. Technically, the Nifty 50 index has faced resistance from the upper band of Bollinger, which indicates downside movement for the upcoming session, said an analyst. "Moreover, the recent candle also formed like a Shooting Star Candlestick on the daily chart, which is a sign of some correction. Hourly Oscillator Stochastic has indicated negative crossover, which supports the short-term correction in the near term. At present, the nifty index is

holding support at 14940 levels while an upside resistance seems at 15200 levels," said Sumeet Bagadia, Executive Director, Choice Broking. Bosch, HPCL, Havells India, JK Lakshmi Cement: BSE-listed companies such as Zee Entertainment Enterprises, HPCL, Brookfield India Real Estate Trust REIT, Torrent Power, JK Lakshmi Cement, KNR Constructions, Relaxo Footwears, Response Informatics, Sterling Webnet, The Investment Trust Of India, Disa India, Electrosteel Castings, Ultramarine & Pigments, Usha Martin, and Virat Industries, among others will announce quarterly earnings on May 20. Share Market Today, Share Market LiveShare Market LIVE: Sensex, Nifty stare at gap-up start; Bitcoin, Ethereum, other cryptos record massive fall. Stocks to buy, Nifty, L&T, ICICI Bank Nifty looks

set to hit all-time high of 15,450 in near-term; ICICI Bank, L&T among top stocks to buy. Infosys: Infosys co-founder S D Shibulal on Wednesday purchased Infosys shares to the tune of Rs 100 crore through an open market transaction. Shibulal bought over 7.53 lakh shares at an average price of Rs 1,327 per share, valuing the transaction at Rs 100 crore, BSE block deal data showed. In a separate transaction, Shibulal's wife Kumari sold over 7.53 lakh Infosys shares at the same price of Rs 1,327 apiece. Adani Green Energy: AGEL on Wednesday acquired 100 per cent interest in SB Energy India at an enterprise valuation of \$3.5 billion (approximately Rs 26,000 crore). SB Energy is an 80:20 joint venture between Japan's SoftBank Group and India's Bharti Enterprises, and houses 4,954 megawatt (MW) of renewable energy projects across the country. Indian Oil Corporation: IOC on Wednesday reported a net profit of Rs 21,836 crore on a standalone basis for the fiscal ended March 31, which is nearly 17 times higher from the Rs 1,313 crore profit posted a year ago. This is the highest annual profit ever reported by the state-run oil refining and marketing company. Biocon: Capital markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday imposed a total fine of Rs 14 lakh on Biocon and its designated person for violation of market norms. Designated person of the firm, Narendra Chirmule, who was employed with the company as senior vice president-R&D is facing a fine of Rs 5 lakh for trading in the company's securities when the trading window was closed.

## Nearing retirement? You may have to re-plan finances amidst Covid-19 before you hang up boots

**Mumbai, May 20 :** If the retirement is only a few years away, it's time to shift a major chunk of your accumulated funds from equities into debt assets. Nearing retirement, asset allocation, checklist, provident fund, investments, Do not contemplate taking money out of your provident fund to meet short-term financial needs. Retirement is a goal that takes several years to achieve. To have a comfortable amount on retirement and retire peacefully is what most of us dream of. But, those who are nearing retirement amidst the Covid-19 pandemic may have to give a hard

look at their plans. Covid-19 has thrown up unprecedented challenges and may have derailed the retirement plans of many. For those who are nearing retirement, the asset allocation pattern may need some level of modification. Given the rapid and drastic change in the economic environment that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about, it has become all the more



important to give a re-look at the financial position before you get ready to hang up the boots. equity, equity investment, mutual fund, MF, direct equities, Mutual Fund, MF, Exchange Traded Fund, ETF, risk, diversification, capital requirement, taxation, Gold Mutual Fund, Gold ETF, Gold Mutual Fund vs Gold ETF, better investment option, gold, SIP, mutual fund investment. Are ETFs good for long-term buy-and-hold investing? PFRDA Central govt sector: NPS subscriber addition remains low in April. Your investments, over the years, that are directed towards retirement may have included equity mutual funds, Ulips, NPS amongst others. You would have accumulated a sizeable corpus by now. This wealth needs to be protected and put to good use so that a regular income starts flowing during the retirement years. The first thing that you should do is take stock of the number of years to retirement. If the retirement is only a few years away, it's time to shift a major chunk of your accumulated funds from equities into debt assets. This you need to do to protect your capital as debt is less volatile than equities. Consider this - In 2020, the market crashed by over 30 per cent in a span of three months when Nifty 50 touched a Covid-

19 low of about 7500 level in March that year. The fund value of your investments would have come down drastically but have rebounded to higher levels by now. The idea is not to leave things to chances and start shifting funds from equities to debt assets at least three years away from retirement. Secondly, if you are facing a cash crunch in these times, do not contemplate taking money out of your provident fund to meet short-term financial needs. In doing so, you are jeopardizing your retirement savings and may even have to look for a secondary source of income after retiring. Thirdly, do not take unnecessary risks with your money at the age end of your earning period. Even if you are falling short of your retirement target amount, you need to carefully plan your investments over the next few years to retire comfortably. A mix of hybrid funds with a bit of equity may help you but over-exposure to volatile assets, such as equities may not be the right approach. "If you are nearing retirement, you need to devise a plan for 100-years of comfortable living, as life expectancy is increasing and rising inflation is eroding the purchasing power of money," says Vishwajeet Parashar, EVP & Chief Marketing Officer, Bajaj Capital.



Contd. From Page 1

## CM Sarma visits FAAMCH

concentrators would empower the district a great deal to provide treatment to critically ill COVID patients. Taking stock of the COVID situation of Barpeta district in FAAMCH with Principal of the college Dr. Ramen Talukdar, Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police, Joint Director of Health Services of the district, Chief Minister Sarma said that through the positivity rate in the district is not alarming the death rate of the district is a cause of concern. He, therefore, asked the district administration to intensify RTPCR test to ascertain the COVID status of the people. This would help the Health Department to take proactive steps in giving the right kind of medical intervention to the patients. He also asked the district administration to provide oxy meter to the positive patients belonging to economically weaker section who opted for home isolation. He however, categorically stated that home isolation for the positive cases above 50 years of age would be completely stopped. Chief Minister Sarma asked the Principal FAAMCH to intensify the services of all the doctors in the hospital so that an advanced and accountable treatment facilities can be provided to the patients on 24x7 basis. He also asked the principal to ensure duty of the senior doctors at the COVID unit during late hours at night. With regard to oxygen availability, Sarma said that though at present there is no scarcity of medical oxygen in FAAMCH, plans are always in the pipeline to provide extra oxygen if there is any short fall of it. The Chief Minister also said that if all the districts astutely adhere to the preventive measures prescribed by the government, within 15 days the COVID situation in the state would improve. He, therefore, asked the district administrations, district health authorities and other stakeholders to put their best foot forward and aid to the government's efforts to contain the COVID situation in the state. Chief Minister Sarma also asked Joint Directors of Health Services, Barpeta to undertake visit to all parts of Barpeta district to assess the situation and prepare a strategy to deal with the rising numbers of COVID cases. He also asked DC to visit FAAMCH during night hours and ensure presence of senior doctors in the COVID wards. MLA Barpeta Abdur Rahim Ahmed, Sarbhog Monoranjan Talukdar, Chenga Ashraful Hussain, Sarukhetri Jakir Hussain Sikdar, Jania Rafikul Hussain and other senior government officers of the district were present during Chief Minister's visit to the district.

## Assam has reported its first death

along clinical lines were sent and treatment was started under the team of intensivists and consultants from other super specialties. The patient was diagnosed with Covid related rhino-cerebral mucormycosis, diabetic ketoacidosis and complications leading to multi-organ failure. In spite of the best efforts by the clinical team, the patient expired on May 19," the statement read. Meanwhile, Assam Health Minister Keshab Mahanta said the state government has engaged health experts to study the case. "The state health department has taken the issue very seriously. I urge the people of the state that don't panic about it," Keshab Mahanta said.

## Assam Accord minister Atul Bora

AASU Chief Advisor Samujjal Bhattacharya expressed optimism and said that it's a big development considering the fact that since the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, for the first time an Assam Accord minister has visited the AASU office and assured implementation of the Accord. Also read: COVID-19 crisis: Assam MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa calls for sealing of all entry-exit points of tea gardens in Jorhat Samujjal Bhattacharya further informed that the Assam Government would soon invite the AASU leaders for discussions on implementation of Assam Accord. "Today is a historic day as for the first time an Assam Accord minister has visited the AASU office and assured implementation of the Accord. We are happy, but we would be much happier if these assurances see the light on the day soon," said AASU Chief Advisor Samujjal Bhattacharya.

## Ritul Saikia to released in 1-4

to assure Ritul's parents that he would reach his home in 1-4 days," Baruah said. Addressing a press meet, CM Dr Sarma appealed to the insurgent outfit to release the ONGC staff on the grounds of humanity. Ritul Saikia, along with two other employees of the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited, Mohini Mohan Gogoi and Alakesh Saikia, were on April 21 kidnapped by suspected militants of the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) from the Lakwa oilfield in Sivasagar district along the Assam-Nagaland border. Mohini Mohan Gogoi and Alakesh Saikia were rescued by security forces on April 24 after an encounter with the abductors near the India-Myanmar border in Mon district of Nagaland.

## After video of singer, down

of the Film Fraternity of Assam (FFA) took to social media to highlight Das's distress. "Someone sent the video on our Whatsapp group — we called up government officials, and put it on Twitter as well," said Manas Barua, a Guwahati-based filmmaker. Singer Zubeen Garg and actor Pabitra Rabha have also stepped in with aid. "He did not even have a proper shirt, or sandals — the FFA has provided him with aid, and rations now," said Barua. Actor Adil Hussain Wednesday tweeted out the video, tagging the official handle of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Government of Assam: "Please look after this fantastic singer who sang for all of Assam and established our idea of romance in loss and Tragedy! Who sang his grief away to glory." In the eighties and nineties, Das was among the state's most popular singers but gradually disappeared from the scene in the years that followed. "He was a household name and known for his romantic songs...often melancholic," said filmmaker Utpal Borpujari. His famous songs include Tumi Janu Jana, Atori Atori, Mur Ei Morom. Das is known to have lived most of his life in penury. "He had applied for the 'Silpi Pension' (artist's pension) and even received it in 2019. However, he did not physically turn up to claim it again and thus, the pension was stopped," said Barua. The Silpi pension scheme sanctions a financial grant of Rs 8,000 a month to artists to recognise their "outstanding contribution in the field of Art & Culture". After testing negative for the virus, Das and his wife have been discharged from the hospital and are now reportedly back home — a single room in the basement of an apartment complex in Guwahati. Barua said that it was the security guard's quarters. On Wednesday, Bimal Borah, Assam Cultural Affairs Minister visited Das at his home and presented him a cheque of Rs 1 lakh. "We heard about his plight and the Chief Minister directed that we give him Rs 1 lakh from the CM Relief Fund," said Borah, adding that Das and his wife were better, but still "weak". "He will continue receiving the Silpi pension," he added. Barua said they appreciated the government's gesture but hoped for a more "permanent solution" especially regarding the singer's living conditions. "He should be able to lead a life of dignity," he said.

## Sonia Gandhi writes to PM

with the trauma of loss and no support towards a stable education or future," the letter said. The Congress chief also recalled how creation of Navodaya Vidyalayas across the country was her husband and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's most significant legacies. "As you are aware, one of my husband Rajiv Gandhi's most significant legacies is the network of Navodaya Vidyalayas. It was his dream to make high-quality modern education accessible and affordable to talented youth, predominantly from rural areas. There are now, as you know, 661 such schools across the country," it further said. Gandhi said there are currently around 661 such schools across the country. "I am writing to request you to consider providing free education at the Navodaya Vidyalayas to children who have lost either both parents or an earning parent on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. I feel that as a nation, we owe it to them to give them hope for a robust future after the unimaginable tragedy that has befallen them," the Congress leader wrote. There have been reports of children losing either an earning parent or both parents during the pandemic that has so far claimed over 2 lakh lives in the country.

## CM Himanta Biswa Sarma

immediately initiate the process of transition of dissolved Madrasa to general schools while taking a comprehensive review of the functioning of the Education Department in presence of Education Minister Ranaj Pegu and Finance Minister Ajanta Neog. He also asked the officials to ensure recruitment of teachers on priority basis particularly in provincialised and government schools and to meet the periodic gap. In December 2020, amid protests by the Opposition legislators, the Assam Assembly passed the Assam Repealing Bill 2020, that abolishes the Assam Madrasa Education (Provincialisation) Act, 1995 and the Assam Madrasa Education (Provincialisation of Services of Employees and Re-Organisation of Madrasa Educational Institutions) Act, 2018. The bill was enacted to scrap government funding for madrasas, and mentioned that the existing over 620 madrasas would be converted to general schools by 1 April 2021. The then Education and Finance Minister of Assam and present CM of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, who introduced the bill said that bill was brought to make the academic environment of the state as "secular". He also said that the state government had been spending Rs 260 crore annually for running the madrasas and "the government cannot spend public money for religious teaching".

## "Aerosols Can Travel 10 Metres"

smells can be diluted by ventilation, the dangerous concentration of the virus can be reduced by ensuring that outdoor air flows in," it said. Droplets emitted by an infected person land on various surfaces (where they can survive for a long time), the advisory said, calling for frequent cleaning of high contact points such as door handles, light switches, tables, chairs and the floor with disinfectants like bleach and phenyl. People should wear a double layer mask or an N95 mask, which offers maximum protection, the new guidelines said. For double masking, wear a surgical mask, then wear another tight fitting cloth mask over it, the advisory said, adding that those who do not have a surgical mask can wear two cotton masks together. "Ideally, surgical mask should be used only once, but when pairing, you can use it up to 5 times by leaving it in a dry place for 7 days after one use (ideally give it some sun exposure)," it said. The document also highlighted the important role well-ventilated spaces play in diluting the risk of transmission from one infected person to the other. "Just as smells can be diluted from the air through opening windows and doors and using exhaust systems, ventilating spaces with improved directional air flow decreases the accumulated viral load in the air, reducing the risk of transmission," the document, titled "Stop the Transmission, Crush the Pandemic" says. Simple strategic placement of fans, open windows and doors, even slightly open windows can introduce outdoor air and improve the air quality inside, it added. "In buildings with central air-management systems, improving central air filtration /increased filtration efficiency is especially helpful when enhanced outdoor air delivery options are limited. In offices, auditoriums, shopping malls etc. use of gable fan systems and roof ventilators are recommended. Frequent cleaning and replacement of filters is highly recommended," the advisory noted. People entering rural/semi-urban areas should undertake Rapid Antigen Test, the document said. "ASHA/Anganwadi/health workers must be trained and protected for conducting the Rapid Antigen Test. These health workers must be given a certified N95 mask even if they are vaccinated. ASHA/Anganwadi/Health Workers to also be provided oximeters to monitor infected person," it said. The support and cooperation of individuals, communities, local bodies and authorities was necessary to stop the transmission of the virus and decrease the infection rate to a level where it can eventually die, the guidelines said, adding, that "with the use of masks, ventilation, distancing, and sanitation, the battle against the virus can be won". Comments At least 2.57 crore people in India have been infected with Covid, which has also led to death of 2.87 lakh people since the pandemic began early last year.

## Debabrata Saikia calls for grand

Nazira MLA Debabrata Saikia as the leader of Congress legislature party. Saikia was also the leader of opposition in the last assembly. On the other hand, Rakibul Hussain has been elected as the deputy leader of Congress legislature party.

## New DC takes charge in Lakhimpur

**North Lakhimpur, May 20:** Sumit Sattawan, IAS, on Thursday assumed charge as the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur, reports DIPRO. Sattawan earlier served as the Additional Deputy Commissioner and Settlement Officer in Cachar. After taking over charge, the new Deputy Commissioner held discussing with the District Development Commissioner, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner, Circle Officer and Health Department Officers and was briefed about the present scenario of Covid-19 and the flood situation in Lakhimpur district. He asked all the Officers to carry out their own responsibilities appropriately.

## All IBs under PWD

**Aalo, May 20 :** Keeping in view of surging Covid-19 cases everywhere and to accommodate released patients from Covid Care Centres, all IBs in the district, subdivisions and circles will be requisitioned and utilized for Paid Self Isolation Centres. The District Magistrate and Chairman DDMA, Shri Moki Loyi issued the order today after observing the instances of certain people who were released from the Covid Care Centre but did not find place to isolate themselves as per the Covid-19 protocols. The concerned MOs of the area shall monitor the health status and report to the concerned administrative officers on regular basis, fix the rate and forward such feedbacks to the District Control Room. This arrangement is exclusively for the patients who do not have Home Quarantine Facility

## India creates new global record, conducts 20 lakh COVID-19 tests in single day

**New Delhi, May 20 :** Amid the ongoing battle against the deadly coronavirus, the country set another landmark by conducting the highest ever - 20 lakh - COVID-19 tests in a single day - a new global record, the Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday. The achievement was registered at a time when the daily COVID recoveries outnumbered daily new cases for the sixth consecutive day. "More than 20 lakh tests were conducted in the last 24 hours (the highest ever conducted in a single day in India), while the daily positivity rate has declined to 13.31 per cent," the Health Ministry said. "20.08 lakh tests conducted in the last 24 hours in the country is also a global record," the ministry said. Over 32 crore tests have been conducted so far across the country since the COVID pandemic began. Meanwhile, India's daily recoveries outnumbered daily new cases for the sixth consecutive day with 3,89,851 recoveries registered in the last 24 hours. India's cumulative recoveries have reached 2,19,86,363 on Wednesday, and the National Recovery Rate has grown further to touch 86.23 per cent. Ten states account for 74.94 per cent of the new recoveries with Karnataka on top with 58,395 cases followed by Maharashtra (52,898), Kerala (45,926), Rajasthan (25,160), Tamil Nadu (21,362), Andhra Pradesh (21,274), Uttar Pradesh (21,108), West Bengal (19,050), Haryana (14,897) and Chandigarh (12,098). Continuing the positive trend, India recorded less than 3 lakh new cases for three consecutive days, and 2,67,334 new cases were registered in the last 24 hours. Ten states reported 74.46 per cent of the new cases in the last 24 hours. Tamil Nadu has reported the highest daily new cases at 33,059, followed by Kerala with 31,337 new cases. On the other front, India's total Active Caseload has decreased to 32,26,719 on Wednesday.

## On Mission Mode, Around 200 Oxygen Expresses have completed their journey so far Oxygen Expresses deliver nearly 12630 MT of Liquid Medical Oxygen in more than 775 tankers to the Nation

Maligaon, May 20 : Overcoming all hurdles and finding new solutions, Indian Railways is continuing its journey of bringing relief by delivering Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) to various states across the country. So far, Indian Railways has delivered nearly 12630 MT of LMO in more than 775 tankers to various states across the country. It may be noted that around 200 Oxygen Expresses have completed their journey so far and brought relief to various States. Till the time of this release, 10 loaded Oxygen Expresses on run with more than 784 MT of LMO in 45 tankers. Oxygen Expresses have been delivering more than 800 MT of LMO to the Nation each day now. It is Indian Railways endeavour to deliver as much LMO as possible in the shortest time possible to the requesting states. Oxygen relief by Oxygen Expresses reached out to 13 states namely Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Telangana, Punjab, Kerala, Delhi & Uttar Pradesh. Till the time of this release, So far So far 521 MT of Oxygen has been offloaded in Maharashtra, nearly 3189 MT in UP, 521 MT in MP, 1549 MT in Haryana, 772 MT in Telangana, 98 MT in Rajasthan, 641 MT in Karnataka, 320 MT in Uttarakhand, 584 MT in Tamil Nadu, 292 MT in Andhra Pradesh, 111 MT in Punjab, 118 MT in Kerala and more than 3915 MT in Delhi. Criss crossing the country, Indian Railways is picking up oxygen from places like Hapa & Mundra in the West and Rourkela, Durgapur, Tatanagar, Angul in the East and then delivering it to States of Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Telangana, Punjab, Kerala, Delhi & Uttar Pradesh in complex operational route planning scenarios. In order to ensure that Oxygen relief reaches in the fastest time possible, Railways is creating new standards and unprecedented benchmarks in running of Oxygen Express Freight Trains. The average speed of these critical Freight trains is way above 55 in most cases over long distances. Running on high priority Green Corridor, with a highest sense of urgency, operational teams of various zones are working round the clock in most challenging circumstances to ensure that Oxygen reaches in fastest possible time frame. Technical Stoppages have been reduced to 1 minute for crew changes over different sections. Tracks are kept open and high alertness is maintained to ensure that Oxygen Express keeps zipping through. All this is done in a manner that speed of other Freight Operation doesn't get reduced as well. Running of new Oxygen is a very dynamic exercise and figures keep getting updated all the time. More loaded Oxygen Expresses are expected to start their journeys later in the night. Railways has mapped different routes with Oxygen supply locations and keeps itself ready with any emerging need of the States. States provide tankers to the Indian Railways for bringing LMO.

## Child dies in suspected gas explosion in Lancashire

**Lancashire, May 20 :** A young child has died and four other people have been injured in a suspected gas explosion in Heysham, Lancashire which destroyed two homes. A major incident was declared after the explosion on Mallowdale Avenue at around 2.30am on Sunday morning, which also left a third house badly damaged. Four people, two men and two women, had been taken to hospital with serious injuries, the force said. "We remain at scene of a suspected gas explosion on Mallowdale Avenue, Heysham which has caused two houses to collapse and badly damaged another," Lancashire police said. "Sadly, we can now confirm a young child has died and four other people have been injured, two seriously. Our thoughts are with all those affected." Lancashire fire service said 10 fire engines attended the scene in the coastal town north of Blackpool and a search of the site is still ongoing. A safety cordon has been put in place and nearby residents have been evacuated, and Lancashire police is working with gas service engineers to make the area safe. "We are asking people to please avoid the entire area while we deal with this ongoing incident," the force said, adding a number of roads remain closed. The North West ambulance service tweeted that it had also sent units to the scene, with a priority to "ensure people receive the medical help they need as quickly as possible". Electricity North West said it had paused electricity supplies to the area for safety reasons while the blast was being investigated.

## India has seen 1 million Covid deaths so far, The Economist's model estimates

**New Delhi, May 20 :** Around 1 million people have died of Covid-19 in India so far, The Economist has estimated in a modeling report to gauge excess deaths worldwide caused by the pandemic. "On the basis of the model it would appear that around 1 million people have died of Covid-19 in India so far," the report said. According to the report, India is witnessing between 6,000 and 31,000 excess deaths per day. This estimate is well above the daily official figures that are hovering around the 4,000-mark. Earlier this month, an editorial in the Lancet journal had said that India could potentially record 1 million deaths due to Covid by 1 August. The editorial had quoted projections made by The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, a global health research organisation. The Economist report published on 15 May tried to model "the level of excess mortality over the course of the pandemic in countries that do not report it". According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Excess deaths are typically defined as the difference between the observed number of deaths in specific time periods and expected number of deaths in the same time periods." The Economist's estimates suggest there is a 95 per cent probability that the Covid death toll worldwide is between 7.1 million and 12.1 million, with a central estimate of 10.2 million. "The official numbers represent at best, a bit less than the true toll, and at worst only about a quarter of it," the report said. For the purpose of the model, The Economist collected data from more than 200 countries and territories based on 121 indicators. Apart from taking into account official Covid cases and deaths reported by countries, it also used indicators such as reports on tests which were found to be positive since they provided an estimate into the magnitude of under-counted cases. Further, sero-prevalence surveys were also used to estimate the part of the population that had antibodies — this provided a measure of past infections. Other indicators used for the model included: steps taken by the government for pandemic control; extent to which citizens could move around; media freedom; geographic location; and systems of government. In certain scenarios where countries didn't publish relevant data, the absence of data was also taken into account. After this data was collected via several indicators, a machine-learning model was trained, which used a 'gradient boosting' process to "find relationships between these indicators and data on excess deaths in places where they were available". The model used these relationships to make estimates of excess mortality, especially for locations that didn't have this data available. According to the estimates, there was a 95 per cent probability that the coronavirus pandemic led to 2.4 million and 7.1 million excess deaths in Asia by 10 May. The official figure for Covid deaths in Asia is 0.6 million. The model suggests 1.5 million-1.8 million excess deaths were seen in Latin America and the Caribbean even as the official figure is 0.6 million. The toll in Africa is pegged at 2.1 million excess deaths as opposed to the official figure of 0.1 million. Around 1.5 million-1.6 million excess deaths were gauged in Europe while the official figure is 1 million.



# Nat Phillips flourishes at both ends in Liverpool's win at Burnley

# NBA play-in tournament: Grizzlies oust Spurs to stay alive for No 8 seed

**London, May 20 :** It is appropriate that in this strangest of seasons Liverpool are on the verge of Champions League qualification courtesy of the unlikelyst of leaders. After Alisson's heroics at West Bromwich Albion came Nat Phillips' commanding night at Burnley; and now only Roy Hodgson, taking charge of Crystal Palace for the final time, stands between them and a fifth successive season among the European elite. Phillips epitomised Liverpool's performance at Turf Moor along with the character that has hauled Jürgen Klopp's team into the top four with one game to play. There was a nervous start, a clinical goal, the defender's first in a Liverpool shirt, and a resolute display to preserve a valuable clean sheet. The 24-year-old may not have been near the Liverpool first team but for the injuries that holed their defence of the Premier League title. Here he steered the late rescue act that has taken Liverpool into the top four at the expense of Leicester on goal difference. One more win under a manager accustomed to his seasons doing down to the wire, and in front of 10,000 Liverpool fans at Anfield on Sunday, and Liverpool will find redemption in their exhausting campaign. Roberto Firmino and the substitute Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain sandwiched Phillips' header with fine strikes. The contest was closer than the scoreline might suggest, although the the latter did reflect the contrasting quality in the final third between the two teams. Burnley, without a home win since January and with a goalkeeper, Will Norris, making his Premier League debut

for the club, served up an uncomfortable night for the visitors. Chris Wood unsettled an uncertain Liverpool defence from the start but the visitors, Phillips and Rhys Williams chief among them, recovered to produce a mature and incisive display. Liverpool created enough clear-cut chances to have established a commanding lead by the



break. Burnley were sliced open from Liverpool's first attack when a fine ball from the influential Andy Robertson released Mohamed Salah. An excellent covering tackle by Ben Mee prevented the Egypt international capitalising. Mee's central defensive partner, James Tarkowski, produced a similar challenge to deny Sadio Mané when Salah found the striker unmarked inside the area. Mané had missed the game's first genuine opening when Trent Alexander-Arnold's cross deflected into his path in front of Norris's goal. The Senegal forward steered his shot wide at full stretch. Firmino turned a decent chance wide from Mané's back-heel, Thiago Alcântara

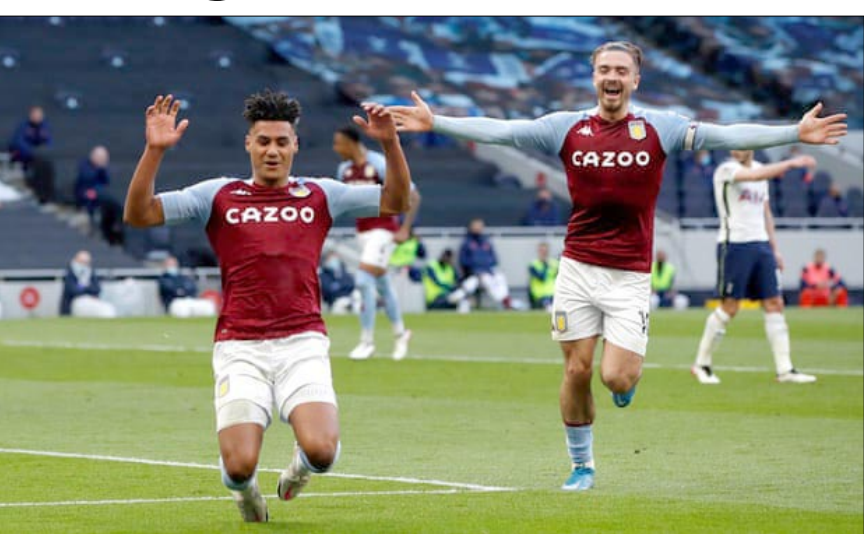
dragged a shot wide of the far post following a neat exchange with Salah and seconds later, after Robertson launched a long ball over the Burnley defence, Liverpool's leading goalscorer blazed over with only Norris to beat. When Phillips sent a half-volley high over from Williams' knock-down, the sense that Liverpool might be made to pay once again



for their profligacy was inescapable - but ultimately badly misplaced. Robertson combined with Mané down the left and, with Johann Gudmundsson failing to track the full-back's run, he pulled an inviting cross back from the by-line for Firmino to side-foot home from 12 yards. Norris should have done better with a shot that was close to his left leg and Turf Moor, for once, fell silent with the exception of a celebrating Klopp. Burnley had engineered, and missed, several opportunities of their own prior to Firmino's breakthrough. Matthew Lowton was unfortunate with a goal-bound drive that struck Williams' head and deflected over while Alisson saved

bravely at the feet of Wood following a goalmouth scramble and from Dwight McNeil's powerful drive. Liverpool's goalscoring goalkeeper should have been given no chance when Wood latched on to Lowton's ball into the area only to slice wide on the half-volley from close range. Liverpool were far more polished in attack, patient too, and doubled their lead early in the second half through Phillips' first goal for the club. The centre-half had grown into his duel with Wood and also shone at the opposite end of the pitch when Mané beat Lowton to the byline and lofted an inch-perfect cross into the area. Phillips, somehow escaping the attentions of the Burnley defence, rose to plant an unstoppable header beyond the exposed Norris. Phillips excelled again to head off the line from Mee when the Burnley captain met McNeil's corner with a towering back-post header. Burnley continued to battle but in the final minute Oxlade-Chamberlain, receiving Robertson's pass into the area, bamboozled Charlie Taylor with fine footwork before driving inside Norris' near post.

## Ollie Watkins punishes flat Tottenham to give Aston Villa deserved win



**London, May 20 :** At the end of a fraught game for Tottenham, when their collective fragility was laid bare, Harry Kane wandered around the pitch, although he did not stray too close to the edges. It felt for a moment as though he was leading a lap of appreciation after the final home game of the season, with 10,000 fans back in attendance, but it was a curious sight, with most of his teammates having sloped off. Kane was left alone and a penny for his thoughts at that point would have been worth the investment. The supporters applauded him and it was never going to be any different, despite the bombshell news of Monday night that he wants to leave the club in the summer. The fans' anger is not directed at their hero but rather the chairman, Daniel Levy, over his running of the club and after Kane, Gareth Bale and a few of the other players had disappeared down the tunnel came scenes that captured the frustration that is running through this club after a traumatic season. Some supporters stayed behind to demand that the players come out to properly show their appreciation and, for about 40 minutes while they stayed in the dressing room, there were boos and, above all, abuse

for Levy, demands for him to get out of the club. At last the players were coaxed out, led by Kane, and it temporarily placated the crowd. But when they eventually drifted off it was with anger in their veins, having watched most of this performance through their fingers. Did the Kane sideshow unnerve the team? No one can say and Ryan Mason made the point that had they started terribly, then the charge could have been levelled with some assurance. In fact, they scored early and it was a lovely finish by Steven Bergwijn for his first goal in 35 appearances this season. But, rather than settle, Spurs were overcome by the jitters and the home crowd were left to howl in disbelief during a shocking first-half performance, which featured Sergio Reguilón slicing a cross into his own goal from two yards in front of the penalty spot and plenty of other horrors. There was precious little pattern from Spurs and Aston Villa took full advantage, slicing through them time and again during that first period and scoring what proved to be the winner through Ollie Watkins. They remained comfortable in the second period and might have gilded the final scoreline when the 17-year-old midfield prodigy



possible in a pandemic in the biggest home game since the Grizzlies' last playoff appearance in 2017 against these very Spurs. Inside the FedExForum, capacity was doubled to 40% with a sellout of 7,019 fans, and a yellow towel proclaiming "NXT UP MEMPHIS" was on each seat. Rapper Al Kapone performed outside during halftime and was shown on the video board with fans joining in waving towels when he sang "Whoop That Trick." In five playoff series between these teams, the Spurs swept three of the four San Antonio won. Memphis' only series victory came in 2011 as the then-No 8 seed, the start of seven straight playoff seasons for the Grizzlies. Those players are long gone with Mike Conley now with the Jazz and Marc Gasol with the Lakers.

## Pépé and Martinelli sink Crystal Palace to keep Arsenal's European hopes alive



**London, May 20 :** A visibly emotional Roy Hodgson took the microphone on the turf he has venerated since childhood, said his thank yous and farewells, and a pin could be heard dropping high in one of the Selhurst Park stands. The stars could hardly have aligned any better in every aspect bar the result that had just passed: the long-awaited return of 6,500 supporters had coincided with a poignant departure and any sadness was offset by pleasure at the fact so many were there to herald Crystal Palace's storied manager. "It's been a real privilege to come back and work here for the last four years," Hodgson told the assembly. His sincerity was unquestionable and, no doubt, understated: the dream of managing his boyhood club came true late in life and the satisfaction of maintaining them among bigger names, budgets and reputations in the Premier League's mid-table is so much more than a footnote to a 45-year career. The only disappointment for Hodgson was that, having had Arsenal's number for so many years, he could not keep them at bay just once more for old times' sake. Palace had not lost their previous five games against these opponents and should have extended that run. It was the kind of performance they have often turned out on their better days under Hodgson, vigorous and redoubtable with flashes of game altering quality, but in the end those moments of magic came from an otherwise low-octane away side. As it happened, the one that really mattered was the scruffiest. Arsenal had hardly threatened in the second half, passing from side to side but failing to test Vicente

Guaity, and Palace looked the likelier winners at one apiece. Mikel Arteta's side knew a win would thrust them back European contention but looked woefully low on intensity; that was until the first minute of stoppage time when Martin Ødegaard, checking in from the right, spotted his fellow substitute Gabriel Martinelli ghosting in beyond the far post. Pass and run were in perfect sync: Martinelli took an awkward first touch but stabbed home with his next and, after surviving a VAR check for handball, could reflect that his second goal of the season may yet hold significant weight. "It was a crucial moment for us because we wanted to go into the final day having every chance of going into Europe next season," Arteta said. "We were running out of time: it looked difficult but we found a way to do it." There were still enough seconds left for Nicolas Pépé to weave through the Palace backline and convert his second fabulous goal of the night. Arsenal had scored from all three of their shots on target and, through all the feeling around the occasion, the football man in Hodgson could not resist lamenting in his post-match press conference that his team was "good value for at least a point in the game". They had lined up opposite Arsenal's players and staff before kick-off, forming a guard of honour and applauding as "one of our own" rang out from all four sides. Palace could have paid further tribute by going ahead in the first half-hour but Bernd Leno saved from James Tomkins and Jeffrey Schlupp while Christian Benteke headed over. That allowed Pépé, controlling a

waist-high volley perfectly after sparkling buildup play between Kieran Tierney and Bukayo Saka, to offer the first suggestion Arsenal would spoil the party. Benteke, who Arsenal felt should have been dismissed when he appeared to glance Mohamed Elneny's face with an elbow, eventually scored his fourth goal in four games with a diving header after the hour and came close to a winner. "We just lost it," said Arteta of Arsenal's display after the equaliser, but they found something extra and may earn the questionable honour of Europa Conference League football if they defeat Brighton on Sunday. If he wants, Hodgson can now enjoy a life without any prospect of grubbing around the continent's outposts. "I prefer to leave avenues open because who knows what the future will be?" he said, reluctant to entirely close the door on one last crack at things. "Am I going to be able to wean myself off something that is so good to me?" He has been just as positive an influence on his sport.

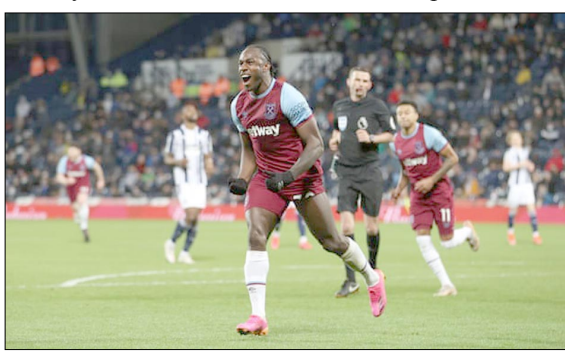
## West Ham one step from Europe as Michail Antonio seals win at West Brom

**London, May 20 :** West Ham strode closer to Europe thanks to a pair of late goals that ruined Sam Allardyce's farewell to West Brom. Angelo Ogbonna and Michail Antonio struck towards the end of an engrossing contest, after which Allardyce revealed he will leave the relegated club at the end of the season, unconvinced he would be able to guide them to promotion from the Championship next year. While West Ham know they will secure European qualification - and sixth place, their highest league finish this century - if they avoid defeat at home to Southampton on Sunday, West Brom must begin searching for a new manager, as Allardyce, who was hired in December in the hope he could rescue the club from relegation, declined overtures to carry on. "I believe the club now needs stability and continuity and this would, in my opinion, best be provided by a young and ambitious manager who can get us back to where we should be as an established Premier League club," he said in a club

statement. West Brom's sporting director, Luke Dowling, had tried to persuade Allardyce to stick around, revealing: "Sam, Ken (chief executive Xu Ke) and I have discussed at length our plans for the future and we very much hoped to have Sam in charge for next season and beyond. Sam has given his reasons for leaving and we respect the decision." The Hawthorns welcomed back fans for the first time in over 14 months but none could give their manager a send-off, as his departure was not announced until they, too, had left. Nor did the 6,000 home supporters get the result they wanted but they were, at least, treated to an entertaining spectacle, and that certainly counted for something. The night got off to an ominous start for West Ham when their goalkeeper, Lukasz Fabianski, suffered a knee injury in the warm-up. Darren Randolph was drafted in to replace him. Once the game began, the home goalkeeper found himself in a different kind of a bother, as Sam Johnstone conceded a penalty after

37 seconds, bringing down Antonio as he tried to retrieve a bad backpass by Semi Ajayi. Declan Rice failed to mete out punishment, ramming the penalty against the base of a post. Trivia fans may have been tickled to learn it was the earliest spot-kick miss since the formation of the Premier League; home supporters just rejoiced at the welcome change of fortune for their largely luckless team. Matheus Pereira set about giving them further cause for glee but Randolph saved his flicked header easily. Johnstone then tipped a swerving long-range shot by Said Benrahma over the bar. The players seemed to be enjoying themselves, with no trace of late-season fatigue as they hurtled from end to end. Pereira fired just wide from the edge of the area in the 21st minute. Then the Brazilian Pereira helped to give West Brom the

lead by curling a corner towards the near post. Tomas Soucek leapt to head clear but only glanced it past Randolph. Pereira would have doubled that lead if not for an excellent save by Randolph but then, in stoppage time at the end of the first half, Soucek drew his team level, tapping in at the back post after exquisite service from Benrahma. The tit-for-tat pattern continued in the second period. Aaron Cresswell took Johnstone by surprise in the 65th minute by going for goal with a free-kick from 35 yards but it struck the outside of the post.





# Didier Deschamps' decision to recall Karim Benzema is a calculated risk

**Paris, May 20** : The pursuit of harmony has been the cornerstone of Didier Deschamps' reign as France manager. The 1998 World Cup-winning captain sought to become a World Cup-winning coach not by repeatedly picking the best 23 players, but by moulding a squad de-

Deschamps' appointment in 2012, troublesome influences have been slowly phased out. His tactic of placing harmony above all else has unequivocally worked. France are world champions and were the width of a post away from winning Euro 2016. Benzema was absent



finied by togetherness and bereft of cliques and clashing egos. As such, the inclusion of Karim Benzema in his 26-man party for Euro 2020 after nearly six years out in the cold was more than surprising. Deschamps' unusually bold decision could destabilise all that he has worked so hard to achieve. Deschamps knows the value of an excellent atmosphere more than most. In recent decades, French society has regularly been divided along racial or religious lines. But the side he captained in 1998 - which was often referred to as "black, blanc, beur" or "black, white, Arab" - brought a fractious society together by representing all of France. "It was not about religion or the colour of your skin, we didn't care about that," Zinedine Zidane said later. "We were just together and enjoyed the moment." In contrast, Raymond Domenech found out at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa just how quickly a France squad could be destabilised by conflicting egos. The various scenes - Patrice Evra confronting assistant coach Robert Duverne; the squad hiding on the team bus in support of Nicolas Anelka following his row with Domenech; the forlorn-looking coach himself reading a squad statement denouncing the French authorities - amounted to a national disgrace as the team crashed out of the tournament without a win. Since

from both tournaments after the infamous Mathieu Valbuena "sex-tape" scandal engulfed the squad, further accentuating divisions among players. His return amounts to a stunning admission: that Deschamps and France need Benzema. And, perhaps more flabbergasting still, that Deschamps is willing to risk his camp's togetherness despite its success so far. "We met, we spoke at length, I then thought very hard and came to this decision," said Deschamps. "I needed this chat. He needed this chat. As national team boss, I have always looked beyond my personal case. My responsibility is important. It's bigger than me." Although one L'Équipe journalist reported that some players in the camp were "crazy excited" by Benzema's call-up, he will do well to avoid a collision course with incumbent centre-forward Olivier Giroud. When compared with Giroud last year, Benzema remarked: "You don't confuse Formula 1 with karting, and I am being nice." Meanwhile, the scandal of the sex tape still hangs over Benzema. If anything, his legal situation has worsened over time. He will stand trial in October for allegedly acting as an intermediary between a group of blackmailers and Valbuena, and for allegedly pressuring his former teammate to pay off the blackmailers. After being dropped from the France squad

after the scandal, Benzema accused Deschamps of "yielding under the pressure of a racist part of France" by not picking him. Just because he has returned to the squad does not necessarily mean he will start. The fact he will wear the No 19 shirt could be a sign that Giroud will remain first choice. Deschamps has remained coy on his team selection. "They have played together before," he mused. "They don't actually get in each other's way. Giroud has been in a difficult situation in his club since February. That is a fact." Although Giroud has been marginalised since Thomas Tuchel's arrival at Chelsea, a goal every 100 minutes in the Premier League and Champions League this season is stronger than Benzema's ratio of a goal every 130 minutes in La Liga and Europe. Giroud's international record is better too. However, Benzema's quality will be hard to ignore after perhaps the best season of his career. Leaving him out of the starting XI would be bizarre after the furore and risks taken in bringing him back. Yet Giroud embodies Deschamps' philosophy. A functional, malleable player who puts his team and his colleagues first, his relentless dummy-running and counter-pressing made time and space for Antoine Griezmann and Kylian Mbappé as France won the World Cup. Benzema admitted as much himself, saying: "His style of play suits the French national team well. It works because he is there, that is the only reason. He is good because there are players like Mbappé or Griezmann who are fast and who play in the channels and pivot around the centre-forward. Him, up top, he weighs on defences, which allows the two others to move a lot and show a lot. He blocks and it works. It won't be spectacular, he won't do something amazing, but he has his thing." Although Benzema has become Real Madrid's only reliable source of goals in recent seasons and something of a talisman for the club, the role he describes is similar to the one he perfected in support of Cristiano Ronaldo as Madrid won a hat-trick of Champions League titles. He could do the same for France. As Deschamps suggested, he could deploy both together in the asymmetric 4-2-3-1 he used in Russia. Benzema could even be used out wide as he was during the 2014 World Cup to such

devastating effect in partnership with Giroud in the 5-2 win over Switzerland. At 33, however, that seems unlikely. While a front three of Griezmann, Mbappé and Benzema is a thrilling proposition - a possible 4-3-3 would also free up Paul Pogba in midfield - Benzema may have to earn his place. With just two warmup friendlies his inclusion may only be cemented, assuming his club form persists, deeper into the tournament. Although Deschamps admitted "the list a year ago would not have been the one I have today" his squad remains perhaps the strongest and deepest at the tournament. While nine world champions missed out, only Samuel Umtiti and Blaise Matuidi are absent from Deschamps' first choice XI from 2018. Even though his performances have been shaky in recent months, Presnel Kimpembe will start as Raphaël Varane's partner in defence, with Sevilla defender Jules Koundé and Kurt Zouma in reserve. Manchester City's Aymeric Laporte was again overlooked but will almost certainly play in the tournament for Spain. Anthony Martial is also absent, as "his condition does not allow it" Deschamps explained, while Houssem Aouar and Eduardo Camavinga's recent poor club form meant both were omitted too. Adrien Rabiot, who dramatically refused to be on the reserve list in 2018, made the full squad this time and could be used on the left of Deschamps' lopsided 4-2-3-1, with Matuidi's international career now over after he joined MLS outfit Inter Miami. Moussa Sissoko, a Deschamps favourite and key figure in achieving squad unity, again made the squad despite his lack of recent game time for Tottenham. Benzema's return could be an inspired move from Deschamps. With most of the group embroiled in the 2010 incident and the blackmail scandal now fading from memory, old divisions may have simply melted away. Mbappé immediately tweeted his support for Benzema and it was reported that Giroud did not object. Fellow senior player and Madrid teammate Varane will be a ready-made confidant for Benzema too. It is a risk but in an open tournament, Benzema's F1 quality could be enough to ensure France convert their pole position as tournament favourites into victory come 11 July.

## IOC relies on Olympic athletes to win over Japanese public amid crisis

**London, May 20** : A quick look at the "playbook" for the Tokyo Games this summer invites a question about how many of the International Olympic Committee's own members will notice a significant difference between those four weeks and the 200 others in the Olympic cycle. So they'll be cut off from all contact with the outside world, confined to business hotels, chauffeur-driven cars and stadiums. This is an organisation, remember, whose list of "recommendations" for candidate cities does not just include the use of exclusive car lanes for IOC members, but guidance about the contents of their hotel mini-bars and the quality of the canapés they're served in the VIP lounge. What's another month in a bubble when you already live in one all year round? The crowds will likely be

likely begin with a larger part of the population preferring to sit out the dance and that strain of public opinion has only hardened since my October visit," Coe wrote. "The former politician in me says we in the Games ecosystem need to show empathy to those communities who are nervous about an influx of athletes, coaches and support staff. And I have to say that has not always been messaged as sympathetically as it might have been." Only he rather undermined his point when adding: "The world does need to keep moving, and the Games will bring optimism to the watching world." More "sympathetic messaging" might have been to lay off the platitudes about the power of sport. There's a time for the Olympic spirit, and a place for getting swept up in the joys of synchronised



smaller in Tokyo, but given the IOC is pressing ahead with all this even though polls show 80% of locals would rather it didn't it's touch and go whether it will notice what the wider public's up to. The Olympics rolls on, inexorable as a toppling boulder. The torch relay just reached Hiroshima, which is currently in a state of emergency. They've recorded twice as many new cases there in the past week as they have in any other seven-day stretch since the start of the pandemic. Thomas Bach, the IOC's president, was supposed to go, but was wisely advised to postpone the trip. Instead, he sent a video message, explaining he was "there in spirit". "I wanted to express my admiration for your perseverance, which made Hiroshima a city of peace, it is exactly this commitment to peace which binds you and us, the International Olympic Committee, closely together," Bach explained, from a wood-panelled set situated somewhere inside the IOC's new \$150m headquarters, which may or may not be concealed inside a hollowed-out volcano. "This contribution to peace by the Olympic Games was the guiding principle for Pierre de Coubertin when he created the International Olympic Committee in 1894," he continued, "this peace mission is at the heart of the Olympic Games." There you have it then, the bombing of Hiroshima turned into a backdrop to Bach's campaign to win the IOC a Nobel prize by bringing peace to the Middle East through the medium of Greco-Roman wrestling. Given how often it's been repeated in recent weeks that the only years in which the Games were ever actually cancelled were 1916, 1940, and 1944, you'd think he might have grasped that it's war that tends to stop the Olympics, rather than the other way round. As for the current crisis, Bach hardly mentioned it, except for a polite aside about "these challenging times". The Games will most

springboard diving and three-on-three basketball, only it's probably not Osaka this summer, where people are currently dying in their beds because the hospitals are all at maximum capacity. More "sympathetic messaging" might have grasped how local people would feel about the IOC's request for 500 spare nurses to volunteer to work at the Games, and its announcement that it has signed a deal with Pfizer to ensure all competing athletes get vaccinated when only 3% of the Japanese population has received a vaccine and the country has the slowest rollout of any member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Of course sport can play a role in the recovery. I've reported myself on the effect the Rugby World Cup had on the regeneration of Kamaishi after the 2011 tsunami, and the way the tournament organisers rallied after typhoon Hagabis. But there is a simple difference between doing it after a crisis, and doing it during one. Coe argued it would be odd to stop the Games when "football, rugby, tennis and athletics are all back functioning". But the Olympics are a global event. English TV viewers may be hungry for Olympic content; does anyone imagine people in India are? The real argument is the one Coe neglected to mention: the bottom line. Although given that most of the shortfall would land on Japan, and that the IOC has both a billion-dollar cash reserve and event insurance, you can forgive him for not using it to try to win over public opinion. The IOC is really banking on the idea that people will come around when the Games starts, which is the way it usually works (half of Brazilians polled objected to Rio 2016 three weeks out from those Games). Olympic researchers say the pattern of public opinion has three phases: pride at being selected, doubt and apathy as the Games grow closer, joy and euphoria when they finally arrive.

## Serena Williams' French Open preparations hit by defeat in Parma

**London, May 20** : Serena Williams' preparations for the French Open suffered another blow with defeat by Katerina Siniakova in the Emilia-Romagna Open in Parma. The former world No 1 took a wild card into the tournament to give her more matches on clay after defeat by Nadia Podoroska in her first match in the Italian Open in Rome last week. She managed her first win on clay this season in the opening round in Parma, against the teenager Lisa Pigato, but Siniakova proved too strong, winning 7-6 (4), 6-2 in the second round. Williams had a set point at



5-4 in the first set but it was well saved by Siniakova, who then

claimed the first break of serve only for the American to fight back. But it was 68th-ranked Siniakova who was the more consistent in the tie-break, winning four games in a row to finish the contest. Siniakova said: "I feel amazing. It was a fantastic match. I played so good. I'm so happy that I could finish it like this. It was really a pleasure to share with her the court." The third seed, Coco Gauff, let a 5-1 lead slip in the second set against Kaia Kanepi but recovered to win 7-6 (6), 7-6 (7) and continue her good form on clay after reaching the semi-finals in Rome. The second seed, Petra

Martić, was a 6-4, 6-2 winner over Varvara Gracheva while the former French Open finalist Sara Errani beat Ana Bogdan 7-5, 4-6, 6-1. At the Geneva Open, Roger Federer went down to a surprise defeat to Pablo Andújar, losing 4-6, 6-4, 4-6 in the last 16. Federer was leading 4-2 in the final set but his Spanish opponent won the next four games. At the WTA event in Belgrade, Croatia's Ana Konjuh continued her comeback from long-term elbow problems with a 6-2, 1-6, 7-5 victory over Alison Van Uytvanck. There were also wins for Ajla Tomljanovic and Rebecca Peterson.

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