

The Assam Rising

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Williamson Sangma Technological University

Shillong, May 22 : Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K. Sangma on Friday said that the Captain Williamson Sangma Technological University, which is in the final stage of completion will be inaugurated on January 21 coinciding with the celebration of the 50th year of Statehood. Inspecting the ongoing construction of the State University, the chief minister expressed satisfaction with the progress of the works. He said, "Almost 80 percent of the construction work is complete and we are hopeful that by October this year, the campus will be ready." He informed that the PWD department has also been directed to ensure the completion of the approach road to the campus. The University which is located at Balalgre, near Damalgre in South West Garo Hills is being constructed at an estimated cost of Rs. 16.96 cr.

Woman gives birth to twins

Guwahati, May 22 : A Covid-19 positive woman gave birth to twin babies at the Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) in upper Assam's Dibrugarh on Friday. Speaking to Northeast Now on Friday, Principal and chief superintendent of Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) Dr. Sanjeeb Kakati said, "It's a good news for us that a Covid positive woman gave birth to twin babies. I congratulate the family and the medical staff for their successful operation. The twins, a baby boy and a baby girl are healthy and both are Covid negative. The 34-year-old woman who belongs to Moran area of Dibrugarh and had undergone IVF technology after being childless for 14 years after her marriage," Kakati said.

6,066 new cases

Guwahati, May 22 : Assam reported 81 deaths due to COVID-19 on Friday pushing the death toll in the state to 2,588. A total of 6,066 Covid-19 positive patients were detected on Friday with 907 people testing positive for the virus in Kamrup (M) district. With the detection of 6,066 patients against the testing of 1,03,158 samples on Friday, Assam has reported a positivity rate of 5.88 per cent for the day. A total of 6,573 people tested positive for the virus on Thursday, while 74 deaths were reported. Meanwhile, days after a COVID-19 recovered patient died of mucormycosis or black fungus at a hospital, the Assam Health and Family Welfare Department on Friday released a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to contain the possible spread of the disease. The order issued by the principal secretary to the Health Department said, a large number of similar cases have been reported from other parts of the country, and there is a likelihood of an increase in the number of such cases in the future.

ONGC Employee Released A Month After Kidnapping In Assam

Jorhat resident Ritul Saikia was kidnapped from ONGC's Sivasagar site in April.



Guwahati: A week after its chief Paresh Baruah announced a unilateral ceasefire, banned Assam outfit United Liberation Front of Asom - Independent (ULFA-I) today released Ritul Saikia, an ONGC employee it had kidnapped last month. A resident of Titabor in Upper Assam's Jorhat district, Mr

Saikia was stationed at ONGC's Sivasagar site when he and two others were taken away in April. The other two, Mohini Mohan Gogoi and Alakesh Saikia, were rescued a few days later by the Indian Army and the Nagaland Police during a joint operation at a village in Mon district. Mr Saikia was today released near the India-Myanmar border in Nagaland. He reached a post of the Assam Rifles in Mon district of Nagaland. **Contd...Page 6**

IPS officer charge sheeted for sexually assaulting colleague's daughter in Assam

Guwahati, May 22 : The Assam police have charge-sheeted an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer for allegedly sexually harassing and assaulting a colleague's 14-year-old daughter. "The charge sheet was filed after investigation and evidence revealed [Gaurav] Upadhyay's involvement in the case. The allegations against him have been established," said criminal investigation department (CID) deputy superintendent Pradip Kumar Das. The charge sheet, under Indian Penal Code's Sections 354, 354 A (assault or criminal force to out-

rage modesty, sexual harassment) and the Protection of Children **Contd...Page 6**



COVID-19 : India will be in position to vaccinate at least all of its adult population by end of 2021

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan

New Delhi, May 22 : Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare Harsh Vardhan on Friday (May 21, 2021) said that India will be in a position to administer COVID-19 vaccines to at least all of its adult popu-



lation by the end of 2021. While reviewing the public health response to COVID-19 and the progress of vaccination with nine states and UTs, Vardhan stated that the government is in the active process of supporting the manufacturer of vaccines for ramping up vaccine availability in the country. He expressed hope that in the subsequent months, there will be an exponential rise in the production of vaccines in the country. The Union Health Minister added that by July this year, 51 crore coronavirus vaccine doses will be procured, while between August and December 2021, India will have procured 216 crore doses. He also emphasised the need to step up vaccination and **Contd...Page 6**

Cyclone Yaas: Odisha gears up for cyclonic storm, 14 districts on high alert

New Delhi, May 22 : The Odisha government has put all coastal and adjoining districts on high alert in view of the cyclonic storm in the Bay of Bengal. At least 14 districts have been put on high alert in the state. Meanwhile, the Odisha government has also asked Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard to be prepared for the emerging situation, PTI reported. After meeting senior offic-



ers, Odisha Chief Secretary S C Mohapatra said that the state administration is

ready if cyclone 'Yaas' has any impact on the state. IMD has predicted a cyclonic storm will cross

Odisha-West Bengal coast by May 26 morning which has been termed Cyclone Yaas. IMD has yet to forecast the possible path of the system, its speed and landfall location. Nonetheless, the state has been gearing up for the challenge beforehand, Mohapatra informed. Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) P K Jena told the news agency, "The DIG of Indian Coast Guard has informed us that two of their **Contd...Page 6**

SBI donates 120 ICU beds to GMCH

Dalmia Cement commits to install an oxygen generation plant at Hojai CM appreciates SBI and Dalmia Cement for the noble gestures

Guwahati, May 22 : Giving a major push to COVID treatment facilities in the state, the State Bank of India, NE circle in collaboration with SBI Foundation has donated 120 ICU beds to Guwahati Medical & Hospital to use the beds in the extended COVID ICU. The Chief General Manager of SBI NE Circle RS Ramesh today handed over the sanction letter of the ICU beds to Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma at his office chamber at Janata Bhawan in presence of the Principal of Guwahati Medical College Dr. Achyut Baishya and SBI General Man-



ager Suranjana Dutta. Appreciating the step, Chief Minister Sarma said that the support extended by SBI would be a great help to the COVID affected people of the State. On the otherhand, in a significant development **Contd...Page 6**

Nepal President dissolves parliament, fresh elections in November

Kathmandu, May 22 : The decision was made on the recommendation of the Cabinet headed by caretaker Prime Minister KP Oli. According to official sources, the elections will take place between November 12 and 18. The dissolution of the parliament comes after Oli's claim to form the government had to be dropped by the President on legal advice. Oli was recently appointed as Prime Minister after the opposition parties, led by Nepali congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuja, were unable to put together a coalition government. Oli had submitted his list of 153 supporters - four

more than Deuja's - in which he had included several names of rivals as well. The opposition parties, including Nepali Congress, Maoist Party, a section of the Samajbadi Janata party,



and dissidents from the Oli's Communist Party of Nepal - unified Marxist/Leninist, had warned that they would launch widespread protests if the President violated the constitution and retained Oli. Oli, who had taken over as Prime Minister 39 months ago for a five-year term with two-thirds majority in the parliament, was reduced to a minority following squabbles in his own party, and coalition partner Maoist party leaving the alliance. President Bhandari was also facing an impeachment threat from the opposition. However, the dissolution of the **Contd...Page 6**

COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V production in India to begin in August this year



New Delhi, May 22 : Indian envoy to Russia DB Venkatesh Varma on Saturday (May 21, 2021) announced that the COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V's

production in India will begin in August this year. Venkatesh Varma stated that 850 million doses of the Sputnik V vaccine will be produced in India by about September-October. "Almost 65 to 70% of Sputnik V vaccine produced anywhere in the world will be from India," Envoy Varma added. He further stated that once the Indian demand is met, Russia will export it to other parts. Sputnik V, along with COVISHIELD and

COVAXIN, are the only three COVID-19 vaccines that have been allowed for use in India. The envoy also commented on the current situation in India and said that it is coming under control. On the black fungus crisis, he informed that India is in touch with the Russian authorities if they can supply some medicines related to the treatment of the illness. This is to be noted that the Russian sovereign wealth fund **Contd...Page 6**



Sri Shankar Gohain, Editor, Dainandini Barta, met Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and contributed Rs 50,001 towards CMRF for Covid vaccination campaign. While appreciating the gesture, the CM said that these contributions would turn vaccination drive into a mass movement.

"Two-State Solution Is Only Answer": Biden Amid Israel-Palestine Tension

Washington, May 22 : US President Joe Biden on Friday pledged to help organize efforts to rebuild Gaza and said creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel is the "only answer" to the conflict.



Biden also said he had told the Israelis to stop "intercommunal fighting" in the flashpoint city of Jerusalem. However he stressed "there is no shift in my commitment, commitment to the security of Israel" and added that until the region "unequivocally" acknowledges Israel's existence "there will be no peace." The idea of a two-state solution -- with a sovereign Palestinian state alongside **Contd...Page 6**

Does India need to vaccinate kids before COVID-19 third wave? What experts say

New Delhi, May 22 : A section of the medical community in Bengaluru as in other parts of the country are asking for safe and efficient vaccines for children to be made available ahead of the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This, as they are expecting children to be the most vulnerable section of the population in the third wave. It should be noted that schools, especially for junior classes, have largely remained closed since the onset of the pan-



demic in March 2020. Currently in India, ZyCoV-D and Covaxin (in use for adults) is under trial for children above the age of 12. In certain nations like in the US, Canada, and Singapore, vaccines like Pfizer have already been approved for use for children above the age of 12. "The third wave of the virus will affect children of all ages, but has the potential to cause significant concern in infants and adolescent age groups respectively," **Contd...Page 6**

Manavendra Pratap Singh (IAS) assumes charge as Deputy Commissioner of Golaghat

Visits Golaghat Covid Hospital soon after taking charge

Golaghat, May 22: Indian Administrative Service Officer Manavendra Pratap Singh took over as the Deputy Commissioner of Golaghat District yesterday night. Mr. Singh assumes charge from District Development Commissioner Orpah Baglary (ACS). Soon after taking over the charge, he reviewed the current Covid-19 situation in the district with the District Administration and District Health Department officials in the conference hall of office of the Deputy Commissioner. He expressed concern over the increase in the cases of Covid-19 in the tea garden areas of the district and stressed the need to increase the number of population-based tests in such areas. He said that many people suffer from fever but they do not get tested and become carriers of the disease. Early detection of Covid-19 patients is essential to curb the rising cases in the district, he said. He instructed the health department to increase the number of daily test to 4,000 instead of the current target of 3,500 per day. He also directed the Circle Officers and other concerned to take firm measures for regular sanitization of tea gardens and rural areas in consultation with

the garden authorities and so on. Shri Singh appeals to donot consider the current crisis as a medical issue but as a disaster situation and called upon every department to work actively from the grassroots level. He also emphasized on creating mass awareness among the tea garden people in different way of mass media. He also discussed various issues related to Covid management including the current immunization program in the district, rate of positivity, death rate, cremation of the bodies of Covid patients and so on. After the meeting, he visited Golaghat Covid Hospital and took stock of the situation and facilities available for the Covid patients at the hospital. The meeting was attended by District Development Commissioner Orpah Baglary, Chief Executive Officer of Zila Parishad Abhijit Baruah, Additional Deputy Commissioner Moon Gogoi, Raktim Barua, Kuldeep Hazarika, Pallavi Gogoi, Joint Director of Health Services, Golaghat Arun Chandra Mahanata and many key officials of district administration and health department. District Information and Public Relations Officer, Golaghat

Mask and Handwash Distributed by Marwari Organization

Golaghat, May 22: The activists of Maheswari Sabha and Maheswari Yuva Sangathan under Marwari Sammelan Golaghat today visited District Jail, Golaghat and distributed four hundred masks and hand wash for jail inmates as well as jail staff. Superintendent of Golaghat District Jail Munindra Sharma and Jailor J.

P. Deka have appreciated this noble work of Marwari Organisations and stated that these masks and hand wash will be very useful in this Covid pandemic situation. In the Mask and Handwash distribution program Pawan Baheti, Pankaj Chandak, Krishna Lakhotia, Gauri Shankar Rath and Amit Nagori represented the organizations

First Professional Lady Homeopath Doctor From Golaghat Syeda Wahida Khatun Passed Away

Golaghat, May 22: The first professional lady Doctor of Homeopathic Medicine from Golaghat Dr Syeda Wahida Khatun passed away last night. She was 87. Dr Khatun was a very popular lady doctor in Golaghat and its neighbouring areas. She took her degree in Homeopathic medicine from

Homeo College, Cinnatoli and served the society for around five decades. Dr Syeda Wahida Khatun was mostly popular for treatment of children through homeopathy. She left behind her three sons, three daughter in laws, grandchildren and several other relatives.

Illegal saw mill busted at Missamukh in Nagaon district

NAGAON, May 22: Forest personnel from Salna range office led by range officer Nepal Mandal busted an illegal saw mill at Missamukh area under the range office this morning.

Sources claimed that the mill was allegedly running by one Suriya Chetry for over a year. Forest personnel brought all machinery tools, generator sets and other equipments to the range office after dismantling for further legal action, sources added.

BSF Seized 2000 Yaba Tablets And Apprehended 02 Drug Trafficker From Indo-Bangladesh Border



Guwahati, May 22 : Troops of Guwahati Frontier of Border Security Force, foiled the attempt of narcotics smuggling at Indo-Bangladesh border and seized 2000 Yaba

tabletson 21 May 2021, from bordering area of village Diara, PS- Mankachar, Distt-South Salmara (Assam). 2. On 21st May 2021 at about 2030 hrs, acting on tip off regarding trans-shipment of huge quantity of Yaba/R-7 tablets in general AOR of village Diara. The Joint Special Operation team of 06 BSF and Police Station South Salmara identified the suspected men on Bike near village Diara and showing highest degree of professionalism, managed to apprehend 02 drug traffickers. While searching the suspected persons improvised sealed packets were recovered from their possession in which R-7/WY 2000 tablets were found. Further all the seized items along with apprehended persons were handed over to the PS Mankachar for further legal action. 3. Details of seized items are as under:- i. Yaba Tablet- 2000 pieces X 500 (Market Price Per Tablet) Value Rs = 10,00,000/- ii. Pulsar bike bearing No- AS 17 K 3613, Value Rs = 1,00,000/- 4. Details of apprehended person are as under:- i. Alhasan Sheikh S/O Late Anwarul Islam, Vill - South Bhurakata, PS- Mankachar, Distt-South Salmara (Assam). ii. Ajad Ali S/O Late Punruddin, Vill - Tangaon, PS- Mankachar, Distt-South Salmara (Assam). 5. 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 including drug trafficking & illegal infiltration and are making all out efforts to prevent commission of such crimes. BSF troops are always alert towards the issues of trans-border crimes and illegal infiltration and are making all endeavours to contain such trans-border crimes.

Guwahati Frontier Bsf Apprehended An Indian Cattle Smuggler And Rescued 09 Nos Cattle Heads

Guwahati, May 22 : Troops of Border Security Force under Guwahati Frontier apprehended an Indian cattle smuggler and rescued cattle heads from the bordering areas of village Kalairigar, PS Kharwabanda, District South Salmara (Assam) on 22nd May 2021. 2. Acting on tip off, on 22nd May 2021, the troops of Border Out Post Shishumara of 06Bn BSF under Guwahati Frontier carried out a special operation in general area of village Kalairigar, PS Kharwabanda, District South Salmara (Assam) and apprehended an Indian cattle smuggler & rescued cattle heads while being smuggled from India to Bangladesh. 3. Details of apprehended Indian smuggler is as under:- i) Md. Sajahan Mondal (26 Yrs), S/O Bahajuddin Mondal, R/o village Borerailga, PO. Kokradanga, PS - Sukchar, Distt South Salmara (Assam). 4. Apprehended Indian cattle smuggler and rescued cattle heads are being handed over to Police Station-Kharwabanda for further legal action. 5. 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 and making all out efforts to prevent commission of such crimes.

413 fresh cases recorded, two more die of COVID at Nagaon

NAGAON, May 22: Another 413 fresh COVID positive cases were recorded today, taking the total cumulative active COVID positive cases in the district to 3318 while two more people died of COVID 19 today. Including these two death cases, total 41 people have died of COVID 19 in the district till filing of this report, sources added.

Sources claimed that among those who tested positive today, 89 patients were immediately admitted to Nagaon COVID hospital as well as various COVID

Care Centres set up in the district while the rest were put in home isolation.

Meanwhile, 317 COVID positive patients who were undergoing treatment in hospital as well as in home isolation, were recovered from the virus. Significantly, a total of 4336 positive patients have been recovered from infection of the virus in the district till date, sources said adding further that Rapid Antigen Test was conducted on 4275 people on Saturday while RT-PCR test was conducted on 45 swab samples.

Online art competition

Biswanath Chari, May 22: To engage student' community busy in creative works, Kalaitika, a school of art here had organized an online drawing competition among the students of the greater Nagsankar-Soota area during the Covid pandemic on May 18. According to Putul Bora, the principal of the art school, a total of 45 students had participated in the online competition. Declaring the result, Mr. Bora said that Anneswa Bormudi

begged the first position while Priyanchi Kalita and Neelav mahanta begged second and third positions in category A. Similarly, Darshan Bora holds the first position and Barneel Barua and Raktim Ranjan Bora begged the second and third positions in category B respectively. Putul Bora further added that the organizers will hand over the prizes and certificates by visiting the door steps of the position holders.

On Mission Mode, Oxygen Expresses deliver nearly 14500 MT of Liquid Medical Oxygen in more than 884 tankers by 224 Oxygen Expresses to the Nation

Guwahati, May 22 : 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 14500 MT of LMO in more than 884 tankers to various states across the country. It may be noted that 224 Oxygen Expresses have completed their journey so far and brought relief to various States. Till the time of this release, 8 loaded Oxygen Expresses on run with more than 563 MT of LMO in 35 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, 614 MT of Oxygen has been offloaded in Maharashtra, nearly 3463 MT in Uttar Pradesh, 566 MT in Madhya Pradesh, 4278 MT in Delhi, 1698 MT in Haryana, 98 MT in Rajasthan, 943 MT in Karnataka, 320 MT in Uttarakhand, 769 MT in Tamil Nadu, 571 MT in Andhra Pradesh, 153 MT in Punjab, 246 MT in Kerala and 772 MT in Telangana. 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. It may be noted that Oxygen Expresses started their deliveries 28 days back on 24th April in Maharashtra with a load of 126 MT. Criss crossing the country, Indian Railways is picking up oxygen from places like Hapa, Baroda, 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.

Covid Death toll Rises to 42 in Golaghat

Golaghat, May 22: Today 177 fresh cases of Covid positive were reported in Golaghat. Active Cases has increased to 1128 in Golaghat District at present. Today two persons succumbed to Covid. With these two deaths Covid death toll rises to 42. Among the deceased Preeti Das (62) of Bhagagaon, Pulibor and

Ashok Goswami (58) of Tapan Nagar, Golaghat. Meanwhile 146 patients got discharged today. However no Containment Zone was declared today. At present there are seven Active Containment Zones in the district.

Follow Covid appropriate behaviour: Lakhimpur DC

North Lakhimpur, May 22 : In a press meet held at the Conference Hall, Office of the Lakhimpur District Deputy Commissioner yesterday, the new Lakhimpur District Deputy Commissioner Sumit Sattawan who assumed the charge of the district on Thursday, appealed the people of Lakhimpur district to maintain the Covid appropriate behaviour to the letter for a secured life. He also appealed the people to come out for Covid test without hesitation to arrest the Covid -19 pandemic. In the press meet, the DC informed about the preparation for the imminent flood situation in the district. He expected that situations like COVID-19 pandemic and flood problem and implementation of developmental works and schemes in the district could effectively be handled and implemented with the support and co-operation of the journalists in the forthcoming days. He was keenly interested and looking forward for the development of people of Lakhimpur district, the DC expressed in the meet.

A delegation of central committee of ATTSA meets CM CM assures solution of all problems of tea communities



Guwahati, May 22: Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today held a meeting with the representatives of the Central Committee of Assam Tea Tribe Association at the conference room of his office in Janata Bhawan and discussed several issues confronting the tea tribe community including intensifying vaccination drives in tea garden areas. Taking views on the number of COVID cases in the tea garden areas, Chief Minister Sarma said that steps will be taken to step up for testing and vaccinations. He said that Health Department would take step to address the COVID cases in the tea garden areas so that operations in the tea gardens do not suffer. He also stated that State government has already initiated measures to help the people confined in the containment zones in the tea garden areas. He also said that his government has issued instructions to all the DCs to stand by the people in the containment zones and help them. The meeting also discussed issues related to enhancement of wages of tea workers. Sarma also assured the delegation that his government will take steps to solve all problems related to the people belonging to tea community in general and students in particular. The meeting also discussed reservation of seats in medical colleges for tea tribe students. Minister for tea tribe welfare Sanjay Kisan, President ATTSA Dhiraj Gowala, secretary in-charge Ananta Sona and other members of ATTSA were present during the meeting. The delegation also donated a cheque worth Rs. 50,000 as contribution to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.



Chief General Manager of SBI NE Circle RS Ramesh handing over the sanction letter of the ICU beds to Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma at his office chamber at Janata Bhawan on Saturday

Animal rights protesters blockade four McDonald's distribution centres in UK



London, May 22: Animal Rebellion activists use trucks and bamboo structures to block sites, demanding company turns fully plant-based by 2025. Animal rights protesters have set up blockades at four McDonald's distribution centres across Britain which they say will impact roughly 1,300 restaurants. Activists from Animal Rebellion used trucks and bamboo structures to blockade distribution sites at Hemel Hempstead, Basingstoke, Coventry and Heywood from around 4.30am on Saturday morning, the group said. Locked on for workers rights, animal justice & to end the climate emergency. We take action to let global corporations know they have to change. The group demanded that McDonald's commit to becoming fully plant-based by 2025. Animal Rebellion said it would remain at the sites for at least 24 hours, causing "significant disruption" to the McDonald's supply chain. Animal Rebellion spokesman James Ozden said the action was aimed at calling out the animal agriculture industry for its part in the global climate crisis. "The meat and dairy industry is destroying our planet: causing huge amounts of rainforest deforestation, emitting immense quantities of greenhouse gases and killing billions of animals each year," he said. "The only sustainable and realistic way to feed ten billion people is with a plant-based food system. Organic, free-range and 'sustainable' animal-based options simply aren't good enough."

Palestinians return to devastated homes as UN calls for Gaza dialogue

Gaza, May 22: Tens of thousands of displaced Palestinians in Gaza have begun returning to their homes to inspect the devastation from 11 days of Israeli airstrikes in its war with Hamas. Gaza City, on the Mediterranean coast, had been warped by the intense attacks, with gaping holes in the skyline from where high-rise buildings had collapsed, their remains sprawling into the street. Cars mounted pavements to avoid craters. The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNWRA, said most of the 66,000 Palestinians who had sought refuge in its schools during the fighting were heading home, as it began assessing the huge scale of the damage. As families sought to retrieve possessions, civil defence teams pulled 10 survivors and five bodies from the rubble of the densely populated Palestinian enclave, taking the death toll to 243, including scores of Hamas fighters and 66 children, with more than 1,900 wounded. In Gaza City, teenagers dug amid the rubble for lost belongings and removed debris from roads, piling it into trucks or donkey carts. At a central roundabout, young boys ran into the road to peek inside a car that had been twisted by a strike. Others, trapped and petrified in their homes for days, went out with their families for ice-cream along the coast. At the main Shifa hospital, many of the wounded were receiving visitors for the first time in days, as previously it was too dangerous to venture out. In one recovery ward, several people crowded around a woman with fresh, red burns covering her entire face and a metal surgical rod protruding from just above her left ankle. Mona Amin, 47, had been at home in the northern town of Beit Lahia when she said an Israeli missile pierced straight through her apartment and detonated in her neighbour's building. "I was asleep," she wheezed quietly, barely moving her body except for her eyes and mouth. Her forearms were covered in white bandages, and a dressing on her head, mostly covered by her hijab, hid a shrapnel wound. Amin said the strike killed her husband and three of her six children. Their ages were 19, 22 and 25. The 25-year-old was pregnant, Amin added, her voice beginning to shake as relatives rushed to console her. On the Israeli side, a week and a half of rocket, mortar and anti-tank missile fire by Hamas and other militant groups killed one

soldier as well as 12 civilians. Hundreds more Israelis were treated for injuries after rocket salvos that caused panic and sent people rushing into shelters. But even as world leaders hailed a ceasefire that took hold in the early hours of Friday morning and vowed to help rebuild, many of the tensions that led to the fourth war in Gaza in almost 13 years remained starkly in evidence, even as Washington stepped up its diplomatic efforts. The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, planned to visit the region in the coming



days "to discuss recovery efforts and working together to build better futures for Israelis and Palestinians", his department said. But in comments made just hours after the ceasefire came into effect, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, warned Israel would respond forcefully in the event of any attack on Israel, as Hamas's political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, said the fight against Israel would continue until al-Aqsa mosque in East Jerusalem was "liberated." "If Hamas thinks that we will tolerate a trickle of rockets, it is mistaken," said Netanyahu.

"We will respond with a different kind of force to any firing on Gaza border commutes. What was is not what will be." The Israeli leader, who has faced domestic criticism from hawks for ending the offensive too soon, added that Israel had done "daring and new things" and caused "maximum damage to Hamas with a minimum of casualties in Israel". Haniyeh was equally belligerent. "Israel's defeat in the Gaza war will have major consequences for its future," he said. In a further warning of the dangerous frictions ahead, Israeli



police once again clashed with stone-throwing protesters around al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem's Old City, barely two weeks after similar events led to the violent escalation between both sides. Police fired stun grenades and teargas, and Palestinians hurled rocks and at least one firebomb, after hundreds took part in a celebratory demonstration in which they waved Palestinian and Hamas flags and cheered the militant group. Palestinians and Israeli police clash at Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque hours after Gaza truce - video The trading of threats came as the UN

Taiwan accuses China of spreading fake news about Covid outbreak

Beijing, May 22: A Taiwanese official has accused China of spreading fake news about the Covid-19 outbreak on the island, saying this was why the government was publicising and refuting instances of false information circulating online. After months of keeping the pandemic under control, Taiwan is dealing with a surge in domestic infections, and the whole island is under a heightened state of alert with people asked to stay at home and many venues shut. Taiwan has repeatedly warned that China, which claims the democratically governed island as its own, is trying to use "cognitive warfare" to try and undermine trust in the government and its response to the pandemic. Speaking to reporters on Saturday, deputy minister of the interior Chen Tsung-yen said they had "clearly felt" the danger represented by

Chinese propaganda and misinformation against Taiwan. "The reason we are continuing to explain the contents of the fake information to everyone is to call attention to it. We must immediately intercept this, and not let cognitive warfare affect Taiwan's society," he added. Chen listed examples of what he said was fake news circulating online, including that Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen had been infected and it was being covered up. "I want to say to everyone that this is really vile fake news," he said. Tsai tested negative this week after a worker at her residence was confirmed to be infected. A security official watching Chinese activity in Taiwan said this week the Taipei government believed Beijing was engaged in cognitive warfare to "create chaos" and undermine public trust in how the pandemic is being handled.

New ID law aims to help reduce 'digital shyness' in Germany



Berlin, May 22: Germany's infamously unwieldy and old-fashioned bureaucracy is to be given a welcome digital boost with a new law to make electronic identification easier and more efficient. Whether registering a new residency, a baby or a car, or applying for child support or a driving licence, German citizens will in future be able to do so by mobile phone in combination with an existing identity card. The government has promised that about 575 services will be digitised under the new system, which was passed into law by the Bundestag on Thursday night. The expectation is for less bureaucracy and greater efficiency in a country that lags far behind neighbours such as Denmark or Estonia in digitising government bodies. Advocates hope the new law will help Germany move away from its reputation for being digitaltscheu - digitally shy - expressed best in its heavy dependence on cash, pen and paper, and even fax machines. Eleven years ago Germany's identity card system, which requires every citizen to own either a card or a passport, was overhauled with the introduction of plastic, credit-card style electronic chip cards. The card was supposed to make identification more efficient and to cut down the need for people to book time slots, take time off work and queue to see a civil servant to fulfil even the most basic of administrative tasks. But a lack of joined-up technology, together with bureaucrats' own reluctance and a general mistrust of identity cards - often due to the experience of the Nazi and GDR dictatorships - led to the so-called eID hardly being used in the way it was intended. "Germany is an analogue village of opening times, time slots, form-filling, rubber stamps and photo booths," Der Spiegel said in an article bemoaning the country's digital hesitancy. Under the new legislation the card, available from the age of 16 and valid for 10 years, will be useable in combination with a six-digit code and a mobile device such as a phone or a tablet. The identification process will be similar to that used in online banking or shopping, which have shot up in popularity during the pandemic. Some data protection experts have weighed in, insisting Germans are being forced to digitise their lives against their will and arguing that the eID will give law enforcement agencies and tax officials too much access to citizens' information and photo IDs. With an election looming in September, digitisation is top of the agenda. Poor broadband access in rural areas and schools, and the lack of an electronic patient database, are seen to have hampered Germany's response to coronavirus pandemic. Germany's track and trace programme epitomised the concerns over an analogue culture, with officials often resorting to making hand-written checklists. But nothing came to better symbolise Germany's digital shortcomings than the fax machine, which was the go-to method to ferry crucial data between health authorities and the government's disease control agency, the Robert Koch Institute. Despite the introduction of digital programmes in January, faxing is still the favourite form of communicating data for many test laboratories. Last year a parliamentary inquiry by the pro-business Free Democrats revealed that the federal government was still using more than 900 fax machines. Up to two-thirds of German companies say they regularly use them. Breaking the habit it likely to be hard. Justification for their use is more often than not the security they provide compared with digital systems which - as Germany has too often found out - can be hacked. More urgently Germany now faces the pressing challenge as to how it will issue digital vaccine passes to ensure its citizens, where eligible, can partake in the European Union's "digital green certificate" programme to allow travel within the bloc this summer. The health minister, Jens Spahn, has promised it will be introduced by the end of June but one challenge is how to digitise vaccine data that has not been centrally collated. Ariane Schenk, from the Bitkom association that represents a large part of Germany's digital economy, said she believed what hindered Germany most was not a lack of technological know-how, but a lack of flexibility. "At the end of the day it's a question of mentality," she told the broadcaster MDR. "Before we develop something technical, we often have endless debates about it, instead of just getting on with it. The advantage of digital products is that they can be customised later ... but we're lacking this flexibility somewhat."

Trump bills Secret Service \$40,000 at Mar-a-Lago since leaving office

Washington, May 22: Donald Trump has billed the Secret Service more than \$40,000 for a room for his own security detail, which has been guarding him at his Mar-a-Lago resort since he left office in January. Spending records obtained by the Washington Post through a public records request show that Trump's resort in Palm Beach charged the Secret Service \$396.15 every night starting on 20 January, the day he left the White House and relocated to Mar-a-Lago full-time. The charges continued until at least 30 April, costing taxpayers a total of \$40,011.15. A source familiar with the transactions told the Post the charges were for a single room that functioned as a workspace for Secret Service agents. Compared with protection provided at Mar-a-Lago during Trump's tenure as president, Secret Service agents rented fewer rooms during their stay this year. The agency would previously rent four to five rooms for every night Trump was there. His security detail only rented out one room this spring. However, costs for the single room over the past few months have exceeded previous stays because Trump has stayed at Mar-a-Lago every night, and not just on weekends or during vacations.

Fears of 'feeding frenzy' against BBC after Diana interview backlash

London, May 22: A former chair of the BBC Trust has warned against the "feeding frenzy" engulfing the corporation as ministers said they would look at how it is governed in the wake of damning findings about its 1995 interview with Diana, Princess of Wales. As the broadcaster faced further searching questions over its handling of the crisis, Sir Michael Lyons, who chaired its then governing body from 2007 until 2011, said there was a danger of destroying something that "would be impossible to recreate". His remarks on Friday night came as the media regulator Ofcom announced it would examine whether any action was needed following a report into the Panorama episode, saying the conclusions "raise important questions about the BBC's transparency and accountability". The Metropolitan police also said they would assess the contents of Lord Dyson's report "to ensure there is no

significant new evidence", after previously deciding not to begin a criminal investigation. On Friday night, the Mail reported that Diana's brother, Earl Spencer, had written to the Met commissioner, Cressida Dick, demanding the force investigate the BBC and saying his sister was the victim of blackmail and fraud. The intensity of criticism about the revelations that Martin Bashir used "deceitful behaviour" to secure the interview, and that this was then covered up, are seen as a possible catalyst for ministers to trim the independence and scope of the national broadcaster. The culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, said he would "consider whether further governance reforms at the BBC are needed", while the justice secretary, Robert Buckland, said the government would have to consider the report's findings "very carefully and comprehensively indeed". The scheduled mid-term review of the BBC's current 10-year charter, which sets out the

corporation's governance, is due to begin early next year. Sources said one option being looked at was the idea of accelerating this review, although no formal work is expected to begin before 2022. Lyons said critics had to accept that the corporation "is not the same organisation it was 25 years ago". "There may be some lessons to learn but the BBC remains important to the quality of life in the UK and it is critical that any changes are measured and we don't destroy something it would be impossible to recreate," he said. Tim Davie, who took over as BBC director general last year, was correct to accept the findings of the report by the former supreme court judge John Dyson, Lyons said, adding: "But this can't be time for a feeding frenzy on the BBC." Michael Grade, the former BBC chairman who is now a member of a government panel looking into the future of public service broadcasting, warned the Dyson report was "bound to be grist to the mill of the BBC's enemies", while saying it was clear the corporation needed some reform. Grade has called for the creation of a BBC editorial board of independent journalists, although it is understood there are no immediate government plans for this. In his report released on Thursday, Dyson found Bashir had commissioned fake bank statements which falsely suggested people were being paid to monitor Diana so as to gain access to her. He called this a

"serious breach" of the BBC's editorial guidelines. Responding to the report, princes William and Harry condemned what they called a deception which had heightened the paranoia of their mother and played a role in her death two years after the interview. Speaking on Friday, Boris Johnson said he was "obviously very concerned" about the Dyson report. He said: "I can only imagine the feelings of the royal family and I hope very much that the BBC will be taking every possible step to make sure nothing like this ever happens again." Davie wrote to staff at the corporation on Friday, acknowledging that "people across the organisation feel deeply let down". He said: "I know that we now have significantly stronger processes and governance in place to ensure that an event like this doesn't happen again. However we must also learn lessons and keep improving." BBC executives are under particular pressure to explain how Bashir, who left the BBC in 1999, was then rehired in 2016 as religion editor, quitting the corporation days before the Dyson report was published, and why it took so long to uncover the wrongdoing. Tim Suter, a former BBC executive who was part of a 1996 internal investigation into the interview, stepped down from his board role with Ofcom on Friday. Separately, Julian Knight, the Conservative MP who chairs the Commons culture and media committee, said he had written to Davie to ask why Bashir had been

hired again. James Harding, who was head of BBC News at the time Bashir returned, said that while he did not know at the time the circumstances behind the Diana interview, the "responsibility for that sits with me". As well as the charter review, a key factor in repercussions from the Dyson report will be any action potentially taken by Ofcom, which took over from the BBC Trust in 2017 to become the corporation's first external regulator. Ofcom was "considering the report, and will be discussing with the BBC what further actions may be needed to ensure that this situation can never be repeated", said the regulator's chief executive, Melanie Dawes. With a separate report by MPs warning this week that the BBC had been "complacent" over the numbers of people ignoring its output to watch rivals such as Netflix, and some ministers publicly mulling the future viability of a mandatory licence fee, the broadcaster is facing one of the most turbulent times in its near-century of existence. However, government sources played down the idea of immediate and drastic action, saying one key test would be whether the BBC's much-changed structure was seen as less at risk of such failings, both in terms of the initial deception and time it took to emerge. "This happened in the 1990s, and the BBC's governance has changed a lot since then," one source said. "We want to be satisfied that something like this would not take place now."



THE ASSAM RISING

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The pro-Palestine movement

It's not over, because it's never over. But there is at least the hope of a pause. After less than a fortnight in which nearly 250 people have been killed, both Hamas and Israel agreed late on Thursday to hold their fire, each crafting a victory story to tell the world and themselves. The pro-Palestine movement For Hamas, the narrative is simple enough. Despite being caged in a tiny terrain, and with a fraction of their foe's resources, they managed to surprise the enemy and strike at its civilian heart. They unleashed a torrent of missiles, more sophisticated than before, some of them breaching Israel's Iron Dome defence system and landing not only on Israel's peripheral towns but also its central city of Tel Aviv. It can claim, ahead of its Fatah rivals in the West Bank, to be the guardian of the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem. What's more, it watched with satisfaction as a hole was ripped in Israel's social fabric, with the country's Jewish and Arab citizens attacking each other on streets they once shared. For Israel, the generals are briefing that Operation Guardian of the Walls degraded Hamas's military capacity, that most of those it killed were Hamas fighters, and that more has been done in the last 10 days than the equivalent offensives of 2009, 2012 and 2014 combined. But they're not fooling anyone. Israel knows that it has endured a strategic disaster, the "most failed and pointless border war" in its history, according to Haaretz's editor, Aluf Benn. It did not see the Hamas attack coming and its vulnerability under fire will have been noted by Hezbollah to the north, which holds a much more powerful arsenal than Hamas's, and by Hezbollah's patron in Tehran. Still, the bigger failings predate and go beyond this latest eruption. Israel told itself all was quiet on the Gaza front. More than that, it thought it had stilled the Palestinian issue altogether, convinced that its "Abraham accords" with Gulf states and others had made the Palestinians all but irrelevant. It has now seen the folly of that delusion. Which points to the other strategic danger for Israel. It could yet prove ephemeral; the international attention span is short, people might soon scroll on to the next big thing. But plenty of credible observers wonder if a turning point was reached this last fortnight in the way the Israel/Palestine conflict is seen around the world and especially in the west. For a loud and influential segment of opinion, it is being reframed not as a national conflict of competing claims, but as a straightforward matter of racial justice. Note the placards at last weekend's demonstration in London: Palestine Can't Breathe and Palestinian Lives Matter. Framed that way, Free Palestine could be on its way to joining MeToo or Black Lives Matter as an issue that a global generation regards as of paramount importance, championed not just by politicians but by the leading lights of popular culture, from footballers to singers to fashion influencers with millions of followers. The intercommunal clashes between Jews and Arabs inside Israel reinforce that reading, with incidents of police brutality or discrimination in the criminal justice system that seem to map neatly on to the BLM template. Those with a strong connection to Israel scratch their heads at this, wondering why, of all the appalling things going on in the world, this is the one that cuts through - bringing huge crowds on to the streets of European capitals, filling up social media timelines. They note that people who have barely stirred at the detention of a million Uyghur Muslims in China; who have not so much as "liked" a tweet about the tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims murdered by Myanmar; who rarely get agitated by the 200,000 civilians butchered by the Assad regime in Syria or by the 130,000 killed in Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen; and who might be wholly unaware of the 52,000 estimated to have been killed in the Ethiopian-Tigray conflict since November, have nevertheless been filled with fury by events in Gaza. Much of the explanation is that Israel/Palestine is simply more visible, with media coverage on a scale unmatched by any of those other catastrophes. When 6,700 Rohingya Muslims were killed in a single month, the major broadcasters did not fly out their presenters to anchor coverage on the spot or nearby. There are no hourly updates of the death toll in Ethiopia, and few interviews with or photographs of the grieving relatives of Yemen. A former Associated Press reporter in Jerusalem has written that he was one of more than 40 staff journalists covering Israel/Palestine, which was then "significantly more news staff than the AP had in China, Russia, or India, or in all of the 50 countries of sub-Saharan Africa combined". The effect, he wrote, is to signal to readers that Israel/Palestine is "the most important story on Earth" - and, by implication, that the wrongdoing there is worse than anything else on the planet. You could fill many doctoral dissertations asking what explains this intensity of focus. It can't be the number of deaths, because many, many more have been killed in those other places.

Covid has led to record levels of antidepressant use-but withdrawal can be difficult



One of the impacts of the Covid lockdowns since March 2020 has been a widespread worsening of mental health, with anxiety and depression the most common symptoms reported. Running parallel to this, the prescription of antidepressants in England has climbed to record levels, according to the NHS Business Services Authority. In the final three months of 2020, there was a reported 6% increase in prescription rates. According to the government, 17% of the population were taking an antidepressant in 2017-18, the last year for which figures are available. This rise probably reflects both the increase in diagnosis of depression and anxiety because of the pandemic, and the restricted availability of talking therapies during lockdowns. While antidepressants play an important role in treating depression and anxiety, it's essential at this time of increasing usage rates to address how people will ultimately stop treatment. There are no reliable figures

for the proportion of people suffering with withdrawal reactions after stopping antidepressants, or for the fraction who have severe problems. Discontinuation problems vary according to dose, treatment duration and the individual antidepressant. From my experience, both personal and vicarious, I would estimate that most people - a small majority - have only mild symptoms when stopping, and some, albeit very few, may have no symptoms. A good percentage of people will have noticeable symptoms that are at best disturbing and unpleasant, and a small minority will have severe and even disabling symptoms that may linger for many months or even longer. In my professional life I speak to many patients considering antidepressants about their potential benefits and shortcomings. I also help develop guidelines on their optimal use and on how best to stop treatment with them. Perhaps more importantly, I have also taken antidepressants myself and have gone

through the process of stopping them. My personal experience broadly reflects what I hear from patients: sometimes stopping is easy, sometimes it's awful. In 2019, I co-authored a paper in the Lancet Psychiatry that recommended some patients may need to reduce their prescriptions over the course of many months, down to as little as one-fortieth of their original dose, before giving them up entirely. Previously, standard advice was to stop taking antidepressants over the course of up to four weeks. Some official guidelines introduced in the past few years now reflect the findings of our paper and recommend what is known as "hyperbolic tapering". If taken at low doses or for a few weeks or months, antidepressants seldom cause any significant problems when patients stop. However, most current guidelines suggest continuing antidepressant treatment for six to nine months after getting better to reduce the risk of a relapse into the original condition. This advice means more people may suffer some kind of withdrawal when they finally try to reduce their dose. In medical textbooks and official guidelines, I am informed that stopping antidepressants can lead to a "discontinuation reaction". This reaction is usually described as "mild and short-lived". I know from personal experience that, if you don't do it right, stopping antidepressants can be a pretty horrible experience. Dizziness, nausea, anxiety, panic, mood changes, sweating, agitation, insomnia, nightmares and electric shock sensations are all common symptoms. None are physically dangerous or life-threatening, but neither are they pleasant. This withdrawal syndrome is readily distinguishable from a return of the original depression or anxiety because dizziness, nausea and electric shocks (known as "zaps") are not symptoms of either condition. As well as a prolonged reduction schedule, the dose of antide-

pressant needs to be lowered in a way that gradually and evenly decreases its pharmacological effects. It may seem logical to reduce from, say, 20mg a day to 15mg, to 10mg and then to 5mg, and then stop. However, for complex reasons related to something called the law of mass action, such a reduction schedule will produce ever larger reductions in the effect of the antidepressant. Withdrawal symptoms may then get progressively worse with each step down and some people will find it very difficult to stop if using this method. A dose reduction schedule that looks something like this - 20mg a day, 10mg, 7.5mg, 5mg, and then 2.5mg and even down to 1.25mg and then to 0.625mg - is an example of hyperbolic tapering. It is thought to be the most effective way to reduce the severity of discontinuation symptoms or even avoid them altogether. The difficulty, though, is that it may sometimes be practically difficult to measure the small doses needed at the end of the taper. Patients have been doing their own hyperbolic tapering for many years, having discovered, often by trial and error, that it is the best method. I have read online accounts of people breaking open their antidepressant capsules and reducing the amount of medication inside by one grain each day. Needless to say, it is important to always talk to your prescriber before making any decisions about treatment, and the dosing schedules I give here are for illustrative purposes only. Antidepressants do work for most people and they remain important treatments for depression and anxiety, alongside behavioural and psychological interventions. Nonetheless, anyone thinking of starting an antidepressant should do so in the knowledge that they can sometimes be difficult to stop, and that slow, hyperbolic tapering may be required to minimise any withdrawal symptoms.

UK could avoid a third wave and another national lockdown.

Just when it felt like we could begin to relax again, Covid-19 has thrown us yet another curveball. While we've been debating in the UK where to go for a holiday and booking long-overdue nights out with friends, the virus has been causing havoc across the world. The Kent variant, B.1.1.7, found its way into countries such as Taiwan and Singapore; P.1 is causing another wave in Brazil; and most devastatingly, the highly transmissible variant B.1.617 (which has three subtypes) is causing a public health crisis in India. The country has seen cases surging with estimated deaths to be several times greater than that being reported by the government, which continues to downplay the epidemic. The UK has done well, largely through strong public compliance, in bringing its case numbers down, but Boris Johnson has repeated his mistake from last summer and left the borders open. The Sunday Times estimates that at least 20,000 passengers from India were allowed to enter the UK while Johnson delayed imposing a travel ban because he didn't want to upset the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, while negotiating a trade deal. This is at a time when other countries such as New Zealand and Hong Kong completely



stopped all flights. This puts us now in a precarious situation. The World Health Organization has identified B.1.617 as a "variant of concern" because it is at least as transmissible as the Kent variant, potentially even more so. This means that the virus can jump faster among those susceptible and accelerate out of control. The UK has not fully vaccinated enough of the population to avoid a third wave among younger people that could still strain the NHS. We're now in a race

between the spread of the virus (especially as we begin to mix more freely) and getting jabs into arms. Open up too quickly and we face a third wave like Chile and the Seychelles did, and yet another period of lockdown. Open up too slowly and we face continued economic costs and a frustrated public. Such decisions are incredibly difficult, and taken with considerable scientific uncertainty. There is still not enough data to know whether the Indian variant could

undermine vaccine effectiveness; initial reports are encouraging that vaccines will offer protection, but nothing conclusive yet. Still, it is far better to have full or partial protection from a vaccine than to get Covid-19 and gamble with your health. The vaccines even seem to reduce transmission, as a study in Scotland among healthcare workers indicated, and reduce long-term health effects associated with long Covid. What is absolutely clear is that we have it in our power to prevent another lockdown by speeding up vaccinations, and in particular targeting areas in which an outbreak is occurring. Surge testing (both PCR and lateral flow rapid tests) can locate infectious individuals and support them to isolate. Up to a third of cases may show no symptoms, which means relying purely on signs such as fever or cough, or feeling unwell, just isn't enough. Those who are unvaccinated are still susceptible and should continue to meet people outdoors, wear masks indoors and wait until getting vaccinated before engaging in riskier indoor activities. The plan is still for all adults in the UK to be offered their first dose by mid-July, so the end is in sight, but patience is needed for the coming weeks. Vaccines will eventually do the heavy lifting and allow us to stop using face coverings, end physical distancing and get back to somewhat normal life. Instead of an incoherent travel traffic light system, the UK should align with the US and EU to only allow visitors who have proof of full vaccination and a negative PCR test prior to arriving. This is a much safer way to open up international travel, and a system that has been used for other diseases such as yellow fever. The virus (including variants) moves when infectious people move; vaccines reduce the likelihood of someone being infectious. Finally, richer countries through the G7 need to continue to offer vaccines and support low- and middle-income countries that are struggling. This is a global problem requiring a global solution. If the right policy steps are taken, and the public are provided with a clear message about the current state of the pandemic, the UK could avoid a third wave and another national lockdown. No one wants longer restrictions, especially given the massive harms including unemployment, loneliness and increased poverty. But the solution required needs to contain the spread of the virus and hospitalisations until the bulk of the population is fully vaccinated. The finish line is in sight, let's not put obstacles in our way.

Two IAF pilots were privy to India's top secret when Buddha smiled on 18 May 1974

Buddha smiled for the first time on 18 May 1974 in the deserts of Pokhran. I was a fourth-term cadet at the National Defence Academy and the news galvanised us all. Someone heard it on his (illegally held) transistor and then I remember running to Gol Market, our shopping centre, to buy a newspaper to read about it. But the import, other than the euphoria, that we had 'joined' the nuclear club and that no one could mess with India now, soon receded in the background; for us cadets, it was back to the ragda, or grind, of Academy life while the nation went about fighting the crippling embargoes that were applied by the West thereafter. The smaller-than-Hiroshima device that was used in that peaceful nuclear explosion resulted in huge tremors in Western capitals, but what galled them most was the fact that all their preying satellites and CIA agents in India did not see it coming. Even in India, only a few scientists and some Army top brass were privy to the test - news reports of those days say that even the defence minister came to know after the earth shook in Pokhran. Except that, aerial reces of the test site before and after the nuclear test were necessary and hence this

information could not be held back from a select Indian Air Force helicopter crew. Flt Lt KDS Sambyal and Flt Lt Mike Chater were posted in 107 Helicopter Unit based at Jodhpur and were tasked for a mission to Pokhran range on 17 May 1974. As Wing Commander Sambyal reminisces now, they flew their piston-engine Mi-4 and landed at Pokhran to take a few persons in civil clothes on board for a recce of a desolate area in the ranges. He remembers a conical iron structure jutting out in the skyline and some tin barracks over which they flew; in fact, he and the other pilots of the unit had been seeing this for almost a year but took it to be some jigs and infrastructure for oil exploration being carried out there. As his logbook shows, the crew returned that night to Jodhpur, oblivious of what they were in for the next day. The two young pilots took off early next morning, 18 May 1974, in Mi-4 cowl number Z 584 and landed at Pokhran. This time, as WingCo Sambyal remembers now, a person came up and introduced himself as Dr Homi Sethna, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission; he had a bottle of Coke in his hand, which he

offered to the pilots! Taking them aside, he said that he was going to let them in on top secret information that had national security implications. A nuclear blast was going to be conducted, and that they were "hereafter, not free to go back to Jodhpur unless specifically cleared." WingCo Sambyal remembers being confined to a tent when there was a huge blast in the distance and the ground shook beneath their feet. The blast and the tremors petrified the mess staff and others who were not in the know. Then, two scientists, grinning from ear to ear, came to the helicopter - one was Dr

AVM Manmohan Bahadur (retd)

and the other was Dr Raja Ramanna, the father of the nuclear device. The helicopter took off with some instruments, which WingCo Sambyal says must have been Geiger counters to measure any radioactive fallout that may have escaped from the underground blast site. On reaching close to the site, WingCo Sambyal remembers seeing a dust cloud, around 300-metres in diameter, moving away from the crater that had formed. They 'chased' the dust cloud, staying clear of it by 200 metres or so. In a Mi-4, the cockpit is perched higher than the

passenger cabin. The scientists would climb up the ladder leading to the cockpit and take photographs and readings on their instruments. Was any special clothing given to them to shield them from any radiation, I asked him. "What special clothing? We were in our normal flying overalls and sweating like mad in the searing May heat of Pokhran as the cockpit windows were kept closed. But there are a hundred places from where air entered a Mi-4 and had there been any radiation that had escaped, we would have surely been exposed." WingCo Sambyal replied. In the event there was none; the Army Engineer regiment tasked for the drilling had done a fine job. Wg Cdr Michael Glen Chater, the other pilot, is not around to recount what he remembers of that historic mission. Many years back, he emigrated to the UK and passed away in 2015. Wg Cdr Sambyal stays in the NCR. "But for this Covid, I would be on the golf course every morning," he told me. Life throws up very interesting tid-bits for helicopter pilots, especially if one has donned the blues of the Indian Air Force. Surely, when the Buddha smiled the second time on 11 May 1998, there would have been some IAF chopper jocks who were in on the secret. Tell us your story, guys!

Paul Romer: Once tech's favorite economist, now a thorn in its side

Mumbai, May 22 : The Nobel Laureate has become a fierce critic of the tech industry's largest companies, saying that they stifle the flow of new ideas. He has also championed new US state taxes on the digital ads sold by companies like Facebook and Google. Paul Romer was once Silicon Valley's favorite economist. The theory that helped him win a Nobel Prize—that ideas are the turbocharged fuel of the modern economy—resonated deeply in the global capital of wealth-generating ideas. In the 1990s, Wired magazine called him "an economist for the technological age." The Wall Street Journal said the tech industry treated him "like a rock star." Today, Romer, 65, remains a believer in science and technology as engines of progress. But he has also become a fierce critic of the tech industry's largest companies, saying that they stifle the flow of new ideas. He has championed new state taxes on the digital ads sold by companies like Facebook and Google, an idea that Maryland adopted this year. And he is hard on economists, including himself, for long supplying the intellectual cover for hands-off policies and court rulings that have led to what he calls the "collapse of competition" in tech and other industries. "Economists ought. It's the market. There's nothing we can do," Romer said. "That's really just so wrong." Romer's current call for government activism, he said, reflects "a profound change in my thinking" in recent years. It also fits into a broader re-evaluation about the tech industry and government regulation among prominent economists. They see markets—search, social networks, online advertising, e-commerce—not behaving according to free-market theory. Monopoly or oligopoly seems to be the order of the day. The relentless rise of the digital giants, they say, requires new thinking and new rules. Some were members of the tech-friendly Obama administration. In congressional testimony and research reports, they are contributing ideas and credibility to policymakers who want to rein in the Big Tech companies. Some economists are now recommending a new regulatory authority to enforce a code of conduct on Big Tech companies that would include fair access to their platforms for rivals. Their policy recommendations vary. They include stronger enforcement, giving people more con-

trol over their data and new legislation. Many economists support the bill introduced this year by Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., that would tighten curbs on mergers. The bill would effectively "overrule a number of faulty, pro-defendant



Supreme Court cases," Carl Shapiro, an economist at the University of California, Berkeley, and a member of the Council of Economic Advisers in the Obama administration, wrote in a recent presentation to the American Bar Association. Some economists, notably Jason Furman, a Harvard professor, chair of the Council of Economic Advisers in the Obama administration and adviser to the British government on digital markets, recommend a new regulatory authority to enforce a code of conduct on Big Tech companies that would include fair access to their platforms for rivals, open technical standards and data mobility. Thomas Philippon, an economist at New York University's Stern School of Business, has estimated that monopolies in industries across the economy cost American households \$300 a month apiece. "We've all changed because what's really happened is an expansion of the evidence," said Fiona Scott Morton, an official in the Justice Department's antitrust division in the Obama administration, who is an economist at the Yale University School of Management. Of all the economists now taking on Big Tech, though, Romer is perhaps the most unlikely. He earned his undergraduate and doctoral degrees from the University of Chicago, long the high church of free-market absolutism, whose ideology has guided antitrust court decisions for years. Romer spent 21 years in the Bay Area, mostly as a professor first at Berkeley and then Stanford. While in California, he founded and sold an educational software company. In his research, Romer uses

software as a tool for data exploration and discovery, and he has become an adept Python programmer. "I enjoy the solitary exercise of building things with code," he said. His son, Geoffrey, is a software engineer at Google. His

wife, Caroline Weber, author of "Proust's Duchess," a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in biography, and a professor at Barnard College, is a friend of her Harvard classmate Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's chief operating officer. Romer has never consulted for the Big Tech companies, but he has friends and former professional colleagues there. "People I like are frequently unhappy with me," he said. Romer, who joined the faculty of New York University a decade ago, said that preparing for his Nobel lecture in 2018 prompted him to think about the "progress gap" in America. Progress, he explained, is not just a matter of economic growth but should also be seen in measures of individual and social well-being. In the United States, Romer saw worrying trends: a decline in life expectancy; rising "deaths of despair" from suicides and drug overdoses; falling rates of labor participation for adults in their prime working years, from 25 to 54; a growing wealth gap and increasing inequality. Such problems, to be sure, have many causes, but Romer believes that one contributing cause has been an economics profession that belittled the importance of government. His new growth theory recognized that the government played a vital part in scientific and technological progress, but mainly by funding basic research. Looking back, Romer admits that he was caught up in the "small government bubble" of the time. "I substantially underestimated the role of the government in sustaining progress," he said. "For real progress, you need both science and government - a

government that can say no to things that are bad." To Romer, economics is a vehicle for applying the independent rigor of scientific thinking to social challenges. Urban planning, for example. For years, Romer pushed the idea that new cities of the developing world should be a blend of government design for basics like roads and sanitation, and mostly let markets take care of the rest. During a short stint as chief economist of the World Bank, he had hoped to persuade the bank to back a new city, without success. Paul Romer's proposal to tax digital ads would apply mainly to the biggest Internet companies supported by ads. In the Big Tech debate, Romer notes the influence of progressives like Lina Khan, an antitrust scholar at Columbia Law School and a Democratic nominee to the Federal Trade Commission, who see market power itself as a danger and look at its impact on workers, suppliers and communities. That social welfare perspective is a wider lens that appeals to Romer and others. "I'm totally on board with Paul on this," said Rebecca Henderson, an economist and professor at the Harvard Business School. "We have a much broader problem than one that falls within the confines of current antitrust law." Romer's specific contribution is a proposal for a progressive tax on digital ads that would apply mainly to the largest internet companies supported by advertising. Its premise is that social networks like Facebook and Google's YouTube rely on keeping people on their sites as long as possible by targeting them with attention-grabbing ads and content—a business model that inherently amplifies disinformation, hate speech and polarizing political messages. So that digital ad revenue, Romer insists, is fair game for taxation. He would like to see the tax nudge the companies away from targeted ads toward a subscription model. But at the least, he said, it would give governments needed tax revenue. In February, Maryland became the first state to pass legislation that embodies Romer's digital ad tax concept. Other states including Connecticut and Indiana are considering similar proposals. Industry groups have filed a court challenge to the Maryland law asserting it is an illegal overreach by the state. Romer says the tax is an economic tool with a political goal.

Job change: How many companies should you apply for?

Mumbai, May 22 : May and June are the usual seasons. You get your annual hike (and/or promotion) and are very upset about it. Negotiations for a pay hike haven't worked out and quitting the job is the only option. Now what? How many jobs should you apply for? Isn't it better to wait for one job application to complete its course instead of applying for multiple roles? This is where you are mistaken. If you mentally prepared to quit the job and have started looking for other options, applying for a single job does no good. Companies take a minimum of 4-6 weeks from the time you apply to the interviews and the final selection. Nitish Karande, a Mumbai-based banker learnt it the hard way. Karande felt that his career trajectory was going downhill and his employer was insensitive to the workers' needs. But the last time Karande applied for a job was in 2003. Things have significantly changed since then. Interviews are virtual, video resumes are in demand and younger people with technology skills are the hot new favourites. "My 80s upbringing had taught me that it was unfair for me to interview at multiple companies at the same time. It was almost like cheating. What I didn't realise is that the hiring market has undergone a sea-change. Initially, I applied to just a single company and kept waiting for weeks for the process to at least begin. Only when I contacted a hiring consultant did I realise what I was doing wrong," says Karande. Within three weeks, he had applied for 11 jobs and after a wait of two months he received two job offers. Karande opted for a fintech company. So, what is the perfect number? It depends purely on your skills and the sector you work for. For niche skills like R programming or actuarial sciences, demand always outstrips supply. In these cases, applying for four to five companies could be sufficient. On the other hand, for generic skills like digital marketing or transactional banking, there could be up to 700 applicants for a single job. In such cases, it is necessary to diversify the application



process. Hiring consultants would say that the more number of jobs you apply for, the better are your chances of landing a job. Considering that there are close to 5.5 million Indians suddenly unemployed after the COVID-19 lockdown led to job cuts, that would be a wise decision. But this does not mean that you should blindly apply for any and every company you can land your sight on. On professional networking sites like LinkedIn, job-seekers often make the mistake of tagging all the companies in the sector asking for vacant positions. This is a strategy that will never help you get an alternate role. Instead, sit and strategise. What are your strong skill sets and which are the companies that will value them? List out five to six companies that would like to work for and start working on your application. The resume stays the same but the cover letter has to be different for each company, even if it is the same sector doing the exact same business. A job switch can be tiring but the good part is that you have the bargaining power to negotiate salaries. Keep track of the companies that you have applied for, the interview dates. Ensure that two interview time slots are not right next to each other. So, if an X bank interview is at 11 am, the next interview slot cannot be 12 pm. Ask the recruiter for an alternate time, say 2 pm or 3 pm so that you have adequate time to prepare for the probable questions. The phrase 'the more, the merrier' would fit well for your job switch plans. It all boils down to how you perform in those 20-30 minutes of the interview. Even if you don't make it to the next round, it is still a lesson learnt.

Bangladesh outpaces India on per capita income

New Delhi, May 22 : Moody rating, Moody India India rating, credit rating agencies, Reserve Bank of India, Sensex, Indian economy, Modi government, Arun Jaitley, India news. India's per capita income stands at \$1,947 which is \$280 less than that of Bangladesh, with the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown causing a contraction in economic growth. India has fallen behind its neighbour Bangladesh in terms of per capita income with the latter reporting its per capita income at \$2,227 in the financial year 2020-21, according to reports. India's per capita income stands at \$1,947 which is \$280 less than that of

Bangladesh, with the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown causing a contraction in economic growth. According to reports, during a virtual cabinet meeting held under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the new figures were presented by Planning Minister of Bangladesh MA Mannan. Bangladesh had reported a per capita income of \$2,064 in the previous fiscal year. In 2007, the per capita income of Bangladesh was half of that of India. In October last year, the International Monetary Fund had estimated that the per capita income of an average Bangladeshi citizen would be more than the per capita income of an average Indian citizen.

Silver prices continue downward slides on firm rupee, gold weakness; softer dollar, ETF inflows capped downside

Mumbai, May 22 : Silver prices traded in the red on Friday afternoon trade, tracking weak gold prices and sharp appreciation in the rupee. The white metal turned choppy along with gold as market participants assess the possibility of monetary tightening by the Fed and other central banks. The ETF inflows, weakness in dollar and Treasury yields lent support and capped downside. The semi-precious metal has been trading higher than 20, 50, 100 and 200 days' moving averages but lower than the 5-day moving average on the daily chart. The momentum indicator Relative Strength Index (RSI) is at 57.80, which indicates positive sentiment in the price. Silver holdings in iShares ETF jumped by 40.4 tonnes to 17,821.15 tonnes, the highest since April 16. The fund NAV is trading at a premium of 0.18 percent. The US dollar index traded lower at 89.65, down 0.15 against its rivals and was headed for a weekly loss; whereas US 10-year Treasury yields fell to 1.63 percent. The spot gold/silver ratio currently stands at 67.53 to 1 indicating that silver has outperformed gold. MCX Bulldesk slumped 48 points or 0.31 percent, at 15,199 at 15:56. The index tracks the real-time performance of MCX Gold and MCX Silver futures. Sriram Iyer, Senior Research at Reliance Securities said, "Technically, LBMA Silver is holding well above \$27.00 level could trade on bullish momentum up to

\$28.20-\$28.90 levels. Support is at \$27.25-\$26.77 levels." Technically, MCX Silver July has given a breakout at Rs 72000 can take prices up to 73200-74000 levels. Support is at 71500-70400 levels", Iyer added. In the futures market, silver for July delivery touched an intraday high of Rs 72,030 and a low of Rs 71,544 per kg on the MCX. So far in the current series, the precious metal has touched a low of Rs 63,456 and a high of Rs 74,222. Silver delivery for the July contract slipped Rs 358, or 0.50 percent to Rs 71,946 per kg at 16:00 hours with a business turnover of 10,751 lots. The same for the September contract dropped Rs 334, or 0.46 percent, to Rs 73,030 per kg with a turnover of 366 lots. The value of July and September's contracts traded so far is Rs 1,054.19 crore and Rs 32.79 crore, respectively. Similarly, the Silver Mini contract for June declined by Rs 377, or 0.52 percent at Rs 71,946 on a business turnover of 14,947 lots. Silver may witness choppy trade unless there is a clear trend in gold and industrial metals however price may remain under pressure if economic data confirm a slowdown in manufacturing activity globally, said Kotak Securities. Kshitij Purohit, Product Manager, Currency & Commodities, CapitalVia Global Research Limited said, "Silver is trading in sideways mode below the resistance of 15-SMA of intraday chart placed at Rs 72,050. Gold/silver ratio has recently

tried to settle above the resistance at the 50 EMA at 67.80 but lost momentum and pulled back towards the 20 EMA at 67.30." At 1037 (GMT), the precious metal was down 0.48 percent quoting at \$27.93 an ounce in New York.



Gold trades flat at Rs 48,553/10 gm on rupee appreciation, rises 1.67% for the week, silver declines



Mumbai, May 22 : Gold prices were steady at Rs 48,553 per 10 gram in the Mumbai retail market on continuing appreciation in rupee and rally in equity markets. The optimism around a swift US economic recovery lifted appeal for riskier assets although precious metal recovered due to a weaker dollar and growing inflationary pressure limited losses and is on track for a third straight weekly rise. The precious metal ended the week with a gain of Rs 796 or 1.67 percent in the domestic market. The rate of 10 gram 22-carat gold in Mumbai was Rs 44,475 plus 3 percent GST, while 24-carat 10 gram was Rs 48,553 plus GST. The 18-carat gold quoted at Rs 38,415 plus GST in the retail market. US Labour Department reported that the number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits fell below 450,000 last week; however a Philadelphia Fed gauge of regional factory activity declined to 31.5 in May from April's 50.2. The outlook for the United States and European economies have improved amid progress on coronavirus re-

lated situation also weighed on bullion metal. The safe-haven appeal also subsided as Egypt brokered peace ceasefire came into force in Gaza Strip to halt 11 days of the conflict. Market players will keep an eye on the preliminary US Manufacturing and Service PMI data scheduled later in the day. The US dollar modestly rose to 89.90, up 0.13 percent against a basket of six rival currencies after hitting the low of 89.63, the lowest level since January 8. The dollar index and gold share inverse co-relation and the fall in the value of dollar in the recent weeks have had a fair share of optimism in gold prices. Gold holdings in SPDR Gold Trust, the world's largest gold-backed exchange-traded fund soared by 5.8 tonnes to 1,037.09 tonnes. Spot gold was slightly up by \$3.18 to \$1,880.28 an ounce at 12:08 GMT in London trading. MCX Bulldesk dropped 47 points or 0.31 percent, at 15,200 at 17:39. The index tracks the real-time performance of MCX Gold and MCX Silver futures. "Gold continues to trade in a range, as

optimism around a swift economic recovery and Fed officials' comments in the FOMC minutes lifted appeal for riskier assets, growing inflationary pressure and rising concern regarding the pandemic limited losses and kept bullion on track for a third straight weekly rise," Navneet Damani, VP-Commodities Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services said. The broader range on COMEX could be between \$1,855-1,905 and on the domestic front, prices could hover in the range of Rs 48,250-48,850. "COMEX gold trades marginally lower near \$1,878/oz recovering from early session losses. Capping the gains in gold is stability in the equity market, easing Israel-Palestine tensions, the prospect of monetary tightening discussion by Fed and concerns about Indian consumer demand. However, supporting price is ETF inflows, rising virus cases in Asia and mixed economic data from major economies and dovish comments from central bank officials. Gold may remain choppy with US dollar and equities as market players assess Fed's monetary policy stance however failure to break past the \$1900/oz level and prospect of tapering of bond purchases by Fed may make it vulnerable to profit-taking," said Ravindra Rao, CMT, EPATVP-Head Commodity Research, Kotak Securities Ltd. The gold/silver ratio currently stands at 68.14 to 1, which means 68.14 ounces of silver is required to buy an ounce of gold. Silver prices eased by Rs 296 to Rs 71,245 per kg against its closing price on May 20. In the futures market, the

gold rate touched an intraday high of Rs 48,538 and an intraday low of Rs 48,336 on the Multi-Commodity Exchange (MCX). For the June series, the yellow metal touched a low of Rs 44,108 and a high of Rs 51,924. Gold futures for June delivery dropped Rs 61, or 0.13 percent, to Rs 48,483 per 10 gram in evening trade on a business turnover of 6,125 lots. The same for August slides Rs 109, or 0.22 percent, to Rs 48,951 on a business turnover of 8,733 lots. The value of June and August's contracts traded so far is Rs 1,100.97 crore and Rs 358.96 crore, respectively. Similarly, Gold Mini contract for June slipped by Rs 34, or 0.07 percent at Rs 48,485 on a business turnover of 12,312 lots. Trading Strategy Tapan Patel, Senior Analyst (Commodities), HDFC Securities Gold prices shed some previous gains on profit-taking and are still heading for a third weekly gain. The higher inflation worries from major central banks have raised speculation over hawkish FED stance triggering some correction in the yellow metal. We expect gold prices to trade sideways to up for the day with COMEX gold support at \$1860 and resistance at \$1900 per ounce. MCX Gold June support lies at Rs. 48100 and resistance at Rs. 48900 per 10 gram. MCX Gold price is trading under symmetrical triangle pattern, the price remains to trade higher. Any breakout above Rs 48,600 would push the price higher towards Rs 48,900/49,000 levels in intraday. The price is trading above 60 and 100 hourly EMA which is a bullish indicator.

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SBI donates 120 ICU beds

towards augmenting COVID treatment facilities, Dalmia Cement Bharat Limited pledged their commitment to install an Oxygen generation plant of 30 Mtr Cube/per hr capacity at Hojai Govt. Hospital. The Chief Minister thanked the gesture and termed it a true example of social responsibility. Sagarika Dutta, Deputy General Manager, Corporate Affairs, North East of Dalmia Cement Bharat Limited communicated the industry's commitment while calling on Chief Minister Dr. Sarma on Friday. Further, in response to Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma's call for transforming the COVID vaccination drive into a mass movement, contributions have been regularly received towards Chief Minister's Relief Fund and Assam Arogya Nidhi which are expected to give a significant boost to the fight against the pandemic.

ONGC Employee Released

this morning.Mr Baruah had on Thursday said that the ONGC employee would be released "in a day or two" in good faith.Mr Saikia's release also comes days after the newly elected Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, welcomed ULFA-I's decision to declare a unilateral ceasefire. Mr Sarma had also hinted at initiating wide-ranging talks with the ULFA faction led by Mr Baruah.I hope a discussion proposal may come from ULFA(I). We consider the ceasefire as a positive step. The next step should be discussion considering the limitations of the government. If that happens, our community will get a new lease of life," the Chief Minister had said on Tuesday.Intel sources had said that Mr Saikia was kept at a ULFA-I camp in Myanmar.Mr Sarma had met Mr Saikia's family earlier this week and "humbly requested" the ULFA-I chief to release his hostage, promising that his release would "initiate common ground for discussion".

Nepal President dissolves

House saves her from that.Nepal President Bidya Devi Bhandari on Saturday dissolved the House of Representatives and announced mid-term polls on November 12 and 19.President Bhandari decided to dissolve the house after she determined that both the embattled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and the Opposition alliance were not in a position to form a government.Bhandari's announcement came after Prime Minister Oli recommended the dissolution of the 275-member House following an emergency midnight Cabinet meeting.The Parliament was dissolved and dates of mid-term polls were announced in line with Article 76 (7) of the Constitution of Nepal, said a statement issued by the Office of President.Nepal's political crisis deepens; President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolves Parliament | The council of ministers has recommended conducting the first phase of the poll on November 12 and the second phase on November 19.The move followed a notice from the Office of the President which said that it could appoint neither KP Sharma Oli, the incumbent Prime Minister, nor Sher Bahadur Deuba, Nepali Congress president, as claims made by both to form a new government was insufficient.With four lawmakers in the 275-member House of Representatives dismissed by their party after they chose to be part of another party, a prime ministerial candidate requires the support of at least 136 lawmakers in Parliament to form a new government.Interestingly, both Oli and Deuba had claimed the support of some lawmakers, whose names were included in the list of both of them, according to Nepalese media reports.This is the second time President Bhandari has dissolved Parliament on the recommendation of Prime Minister Oli following a political crisis.Last year on December 20, President Bhandari had dissolved Parliament but later it was reinstated by the Supreme Court in February.

COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik

Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which has funded the vaccine, has signed a pact with five Indian companies for production in India.India has already got 2,10,000 doses of Sputnik V vaccine earlier this month and by the end of May, it will get 3 million doses in form of bulk for fill and finish. By June, this number will increase to 5 million. The Russian side has also announced that the one dose 'Sputnik lite' COVID-19 vaccine will soon be available in India. Amid the first and second of COVID-19, India and Russia have cooperated with each other with New Delhi sending hydroxychloroquine to the country in 2020, while Moscow sent two planes full of aid in 2021.More Russian Aid is expected to reach India in the next few days. Russia has also requested India to give samples of the B.1.617 COVID-19 virus variant found in the country, with New Delhi working on it. Asked about the S400 Missile system, envoy Venkatesh Varma said that it will be delivered in the last quarter of this year. India had signed the contract for the deal during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit in 2018. Currently, the Indian military specialists are being trained in Russia to operate the missile defence system.Dismissing delays in contracts in military space, envoy Varma said, "What contracts have already been concluded are proceeding according to schedule, there is no delay in any of the contracts."?

IPS officer charge sheeted

from Sexual Offences Act, was filed in March but its details were earlier unavailable. The trial in the case is yet to begin.Upadhyay, a 2012 batch IPS officer from Uttar Pradesh, was Karbi Anglong police superintendent when he allegedly sexually assaulted the girl in December 2019. He was transferred to Chirang last week as part of mass transfers of police officers after the new government took office this month.According to the charge sheet, the girl's mother, a senior police officer, had gone to Diphu, headquarters of Karbi Anglong, along with her daughter and nine-year-old son in December 2019 to attend the birthday party of Upadhyay's son. After the party, Upadhyay took the senior officer and her children to show them his office building near his official residence. Upadhyay allegedly forcibly kissed the girl on her lips twice in presence of her brother when their mother excused herself to go to the washroom.For India, current bilateral purchases of vaccine plus coverage from COVAX will cover about 25 per cent of its population by the first half of 2022, the IMF report said.Around .30am, Upadhyay dropped the three at a hotel where he had booked a suite for them. Upadhyay allegedly touched the girl inappropriately on the pretext of showing her a video on his mobile phone in the sitting room of the suite while her brother and mother were in the bedroom. Upadhyay tried to kiss the girl, but she rushed to the bedroom and closed the door. He apologised for his behaviour when the mother confronted him over it the following day after coming to know about it.The mother filed a case on January 3, 2020, at a women police station in Guwahati before the case was transferred to the CID. "During the investigation, sufficient evidence has been found to prove that the accused police officer...committed aggravated sexual assault. The accused person used criminal force on the minor victim girl to outrage her modesty, sexually harassed her...", said the charge sheet, a copy of which HT has seen. It has cited a psychiatrist's report saying the girl suffered from depression and anxiety as a result of the "mentally traumatic experience".

Cyclone Yaas: Odisha gears

flights and two ships are making rounds of the Bay of Bengal. They will rescue the fishermen if trapped anywhere in the sea."Further, he said the authorities of Indian Naval Ship Chilika and Indian Navy have been alerted, who are in touch with the state government. While suitable pucca buildings have been identified in districts to keep people in safe shelter, he added. The cyclonic storm is predicted to move north-westwards and reach Odisha-West Bengal coast around May 26 morning, the IMD said. Fishermen have been advised not to venture into the deep sea area of central Bay of Bengal between May 23 and May 25 and into north Bay of Bengal along and off the Odisha coast from May 24 to May 27.Apart from the impact of Cyclone Yaas in Odisha and West Bengal, there is likely to be widespread rains in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and districts of the east coast.

COVID-19 : India will be

reiterated the need to dedicate 70% of vaccines provided by the central government for the second dose. As of Saturday morning (May 22), a total of 19.73 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered across the country. During the meeting, Harsh Vardhan also presented a snapshot of the COVID-19 situation in all the states and UTs. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in Chhattisgarh, intense transmission has been observed since March 2021. The state was observing a near positivity rate of 30% at the start of May. In Himachal Pradesh, there are more than 35,000 active cases, while the fatality rate (1.44%) is much higher than the national average.Harsh Vardhan underlined the issues like complacency, marriages, super spreader events etc, for the steep rise in cases in Himachal Pradesh. He informed that Goa is witnessing a rising trend with 22,000 active cases. Daman and Diu has 366 active cases and a declining trend is being observed. Similarly, Ladakh is also showing a declining trend with 1,500 active cases at present.Harsh Vardhan cautioned towards the new emerging trend in the country and highlighted that now the smaller states are showing an upward trend and there is a dire need to be extremely cautious. He asked the states to follow the basic principles of COVID Appropriate Behaviour along with testing, tracking, tracing, treating and now vaccinating to fight against the pandemic.

Does India need to vaccinate kids

Dr Srikanta JT, Consultant - Paediatric Pulmonology, Aster CMI Hospital, said. Similarly, Dr Mayuri Yeole, Associate Consultant, Paediatrics, Apollo Hospitals, said vaccination is important not only for immunity but overall wellbeing of children too. "Vaccination will not only help boost their immunity, but also make attending schools and outings stress-free. It will help them live their childhood, and not be confined within four walls," she said. "Like the flu vaccine, it seems essential to have a COVID-19 vaccine for children too - while it may not prevent children from contracting the novel coronavirus, it will help reduce the morbidity and mortality which we are anticipating with the third wave," she added. But some experts are of the belief that the government should currently focus on vaccinating the 18 and above population at first in wake of large-scale vaccine shortage, as they see children as less likely to have severe disease. Dr Anand Lakshman, CEO of Address Health (a company focussed on paediatric healthcare and ties up with schools) said there is no evidence to suggest that the third phase will affect children more. While consolidated pan-India data on children's mortality due to COVID-19 is not available, according to Karnataka government data, 105 persons of the age group 1-19 (including 18+) years have died due to COVID-19. The case fatality rate is less than 0.1% in the said age group till April 18, as per the latest Karnataka War Room report. In Mumbai, according to official records till May 19, the number of deaths between 0-19 years of age was 52, compared to the total COVID-19 death toll of 14,409. In the US, till March 27, 238 children had died due to COVID-19 accounting for 0.04% of all COVID-19 deaths in the country. "Usually, the children who pass away have had chronic illnesses and were already vulnerable. Across the globe, the rate of death and even hospitalisation among children is significantly lower," he said. He argued that the presumption that the children are currently safe from infections due to schools being shut may not be accurate at all. "We need serological evidence. So far, Delhi is the only state to do a serosurvey (in August 2020) including children above 12. It found that the infections in children were slightly higher but statistically insignificant compared to adults." It is to be noted that serosurvey detects presence of antibodies and not the virus. "So, it means that children were exposed to the virus at a similar degree but they were highly asymptomatic," Dr Anand explained.Dr Anand said that the prevalent variants of the virus in the second wave are more infectious and less deadly which is the natural progression of any virus. He pointed out that it is natural that the number of children getting infected and diagnosed has increased. However, that has not led to significant increase in hospitalisation. Instead of prioritising children's vaccination over population over 18, Dr Anand suggested that the government should focus on pressing areas of malnutrition, immunisation against basic diseases in children. "We cannot compare ourselves with the West where many places even have surplus vaccines while our children are dying due to lack of access to basic nutrition and immunisation," Dr Anand argued.Similarly, Dr Asha Benakappa, a paediatrician, said, At this point, we are having too much unnecessary panic [regarding children] when we have vaccinated only 3% of the population fully. We should focus on frontline workers, the over 60 age group, and then people with comorbidities should be prioritised." She added, "There is no urgency to vaccinate children as they are less prone to severe disease. One reason is that their immune system is under development. And they are given live vaccines for other diseases like MMR, chicken pox and H1N1 and others. So, unlike older people, their immune systems are much more active."Instead, she said that the idea of 'cocooning' should be followed. "If we don't vaccinate the parents first, there will be difficulty in managing the children. So, if we can protect the parents, to a large extent, we can naturally prevent infection among children," she explained.Another community physician, Dr Edmond Fernandes, said, "The government must consider vaccinating citizens in the age group of 18-70 on priority, and also complete the vaccination in metro and tier II cities on priority before November. The focus on children can wait as trails progress, but the focus must now be on geographies beyond metros and tier-II cities to avoid further devastation by the pandemic."

"Two-State Solution Is Only

Israel and Jerusalem as their shared capital -- has been the cornerstone of decades of international diplomacy aimed at ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. US policy under Donald Trump was criticized as being blatantly pro-Israel and ignoring the Palestinians.A Mideast peace plan devised by Trump's adviser and son in law Jared Kushner was billed as providing for a two-state solution. But that blueprint envisioned a Palestinian state with only limited sovereignty and Israel maintaining security over that state.The plan was rejected out of hand by Palestinian leaders.Biden on Friday insisted on a full-blown two state remedy."There is no shift in my commitment to the security of Israel, period, no shift, not at all," he said. "But I tell you what there is a shift in. The shift is that we still need a two-state solution. It is the only answer, the only answer," Biden stated.

Bengaluru's 'doctor on wheels' works 20 hours a day, has treated 250 patients since Covid

Bengaluru, May 22 : A day in the life of Sunil Kumar Hebhi is slightly different to those of other doctors. Unmindful of the Covid-19 situation, Dr Hebhi goes around Bengaluru with his mobile clinic to treat patients, Covid afflicted or not, and works close to 20 hours a day.After completing his night shift (8 pm to 8 am) at a Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Covid clinic, where he works on a contractual basis, the 37-year-old Hebhi, a former resident doctor at BGS Global Hospitals, takes a two-hour break, and by 10 am, he is ready to zip across Bengaluru to help patients who those stay alone or cannot travel to hospitals — senior citizens or those with mild Covid symptoms.Hebhi had started the mobile clinic service 11 years ago, but before the pandemic, he would run it on weekends to help people in need of medical care. But after the lockdown, the calls to his number went up exponentially, which made him step up his efforts to those without immediate access to medical care.Within a month of extending the clinic's work hours, he has been able to treat close to 250 patients, he told. "In the last 13 years, there have been more than 90,000 patients that we have treated across Bengaluru. I always carry medicines, a glucometer, oxygen tank, BP monitor, ECG machine among other essential equipment in my car at all times," he said.Patients approach Dr Hebhi over WhatsApp or Facebook. He plans his trips based on their messages, and tells each patient his approximate time of arrival, so they can rest assured that help is on its way.

Pinarayi Vijayan takes oath as Kerala Chief Minister for 2nd time

NEW DELHI, May 22 : Pinarayi Vijayan was on Thursday sworn as Kerala's Chief Minister for the second time in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic in the state.The oath ceremony took place with Covid protocols in place at the Central Stadium in Thiruvananthapuram. The CPI(M) veteran had led the Left Democratic Front (LDF) to an unprecedented consecutive victory in the April 6 assembly polls.Governor Arif Mohammed Khan administered the oath of office to 76-year-old Pinarayi Vijayan in a low-key function at the Central Stadium here, which was held completely in adherence with the COVID protocol.Opposition Congress-UDF leaders kept away from the function in view of the COVID-19 spread. The Kerala High Court had on Wednesday directed the government to restrict the number of participants in the ceremony in view of the pandemic.Vijayan took the oath-breaking the decades-old alternate shift of power between the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the state.Vijayan also became the only third Chief Minister in the state to be re-elected and the first to continue in office after completing a full term. The 76-year-old, who joined the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPM) in 1964 was elected as the 12th chief minister of Kerala after LDF came to power in 2016.In his first term, he had a tumultuous journey faced with opposition within the party as well as having to work really hard to gain popularity among the masses.In November 2017 when Cyclone Ockhi hit Kerala, the Vijayan government was criticised for mishandling the disaster, which killed dozens of people, devastated fishing villages in Thiruvananthapuram, flooded farmlands and damaged houses. But during the floods in the state in 2018, Vijayan emerged as a great manager. During the crisis, he remained in the state capital to coordinate and oversee the rescue activities and relief measures personally, which increased his popularity among the masses.Over the past five years, Vijayan has managed to cement his position in the state. Sabarimala Temple controversyDuring the Sabarimala Temple controversy -- which erupted following the state government's efforts to implement the Supreme Court's order on lifting a centuries-old ban on entry of women of menstruating age to the temple -- Vijayan stood steadfast in his decision of implementing the apex court's order despite massive protest by opposition parties in the state.The Sabarimala controversy has been ferociously raised by the Opposition, including the Bharatiya Janata Party, during the campaign for the assembly elections. Vijayan has also been the target of the Opposition in the infamous gold-smuggling case. The gold-smuggling case relates to the seizure of about 30-kilogram gold worth Rs 14.82 crore from diplomatic baggage at Thiruvananthapuram International Airport in July 2020, which is being probed by the Enforcement Directorate, Customs and the National Investigation Agency. M Sivasankar, former principal secretary to the chief minister who is currently suspended, was arrested in connection with the case. The case is being probed by various central agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate.Vijayan, a Polit Bureau member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) served as the secretary of the Kerala State Committee of CPI(M) from 1998 to 2015. He also served as Minister of Electricity and Co-operatives from 1996 to 1998 during E K Nayanar's tenure as chief minister of Kerala. Three times Vijayan was elected to the state Legislative Assembly in 1977, 1991 and 1996. Vijayan won from Dharmadam constituency in the 2016 assembly elections and was sworn in as the 12th Chief Minister of Kerala on May 25, 2016.Born in May 1945 into a poor toddy tapper's family in Pinarayi in Kannur district is the youngest son of his parents. His wife is Kamala Vijayan and they have a daughter and a son. During his days at Government Brennen College, where he read economics, Vijayan participated in student union activities and joined the Communist Party in 1964.He became Kannur district secretary of Kerala Students' Federation (KSF), which became the Students Federation of India (SFI). He was state secretary and state president of the party. He moved to Kerala State Youth Federation (KSYF) which later became the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI). He was chosen as the president of the state committee. He has also been the president of the Kerala state cooperative bank. Vijayan was arrested when the Emergency was imposed in the country in 1975. After MV Raghavan left the party, he became Kannur district secretary of CPI(M). He became a member of the state secretariat within three years and was elected to the CPI(M) politburo in 2002.The state went to polls in a single phase on April 6 which witnessed contest, between the ruling LDF, which comprises CPI(M), CPI, Kerala Congress (M) and other smaller parties, and the UDF comprising of the Indian National Congress, Indian Union Muslim League, Kerala Congress, Revolutionary Socialist Party and other smaller parties.

India's first home kit for Covid test to hit stores next week. Here is how you can use it

New Delhi, May 22 : A home Covid testing kit will be available in India, for the first time ever, from next week onwards at a nominal price of Rs 250.In an advisory issued Wednesday, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) allowed the use of CoviSelf, the home testing kit manufactured by Mylab Discovery Solutions. The Pune-based molecular diagnostic firm was also the first to launch RT-PCR tests locally, a year ago.The Covid-19 home testing uses rapid antigen tests (RATs) — a portable device that gives results within 15 minutes, similar to a home pregnancy test.The kit detects protein antigen from SARS-CoV-2 in nasal swab samples from individuals with or without symptoms of Covid-19, and will be available at the retail chemists across India."For the last three months, our team of 25 scientists was working on the making of this product. It was very clear that sooner or later, we will need home testing kits for Covid-19 for early detection," said Dr Gautam Wankhede, director of medical affairs at Mylab, who led the development of CoviSelf."The kits will be available in the market, most likely, from the early next week," Dr Wankhede told .The company's current production capacity is 70 lakh tests per week and this is expected to expand to upto 1 crore tests per week in the next two weeks.This home testing kit is expected to ease the pressure on overburdened test labs and also reduce the gap in testing and results, which is more than 72 hours in some parts of the country. Samples don't have to be collected by a healthcare professional for CoviSelf.Mylabs has been working on CoviSelf since January this year, attempting to perfect every aspect of the kit such as the design, ensuring safety of other family members and increasing the sensitivity of the product in diagnosing the virus in non-hospital settings."While we had received the marketing approvals for professional RAT kits last year, it took several months to fix the gaps for the test that has to be conducted by non-professionals in the home setting," Wankhede said.He added that the company specifically worked on increasing the sensitivity of the kit to ensure an accurate diagnosis. Sensitivity indicates the ability of the test to identify the virus and specificity indicates the ability to identify the correct kind of coronavirus.However, the company did not disclose any details of the sensitivity and specificity data for the test kit. "It is as per the ICMR standards. Please note that positive means positive with this test," said Wankhede.The primary concern while designing the kit, he further noted, was that the sample will be collected by lay people and not healthcare workers. "We solved it as our kit won't require people to go very deep inside their nose to collect the nasal swab unlike the professional testing.""Moreover, by mixing chemicals in the tube (in which the nasal swab will be diluted), the virus' infectivity will be destroyed so that it doesn't become hazardous for other family members," explained Wankhede, who has earlier worked with the National Health Service (NHS), the publicly-funded healthcare system in the UK.This test is authorised for non-prescription home use with self-collected nasal swab specimens for individuals aged 18 years and older or with adult-collected nasal swab samples for individuals aged 2 years or older.The test kit comes with an instruction manual along with a pre-filled extraction tube, sterile nasal swab, a test card and a biohazard bag.

Cricket Australia should have opened sandpaper wound and flushed it out

London, May 22 : It was telling that it took so little. A few vague words, a verbal half-shuffle that wasn't evasive enough, and the whole story lit up like bonfire night. As part of a wider-ranging interview with the Guardian, Australian batter Cameron Bancroft called it "self-explanatory" that tampering with a cricket ball benefits bowlers, in the context of him being caught with sandpaper during a 2018 Test match. The comments were received as newly damning of his former teammates, even though each implication has been sitting in the open since that match in Cape Town. There was metaphorising about skeletons emerging from cupboards and ghosts returning to haunt. But skeletons or ghosts require something to be dead first, and Australia's cricket establishment never laid this story to rest. When images of Bancroft's hardware work first reached Australia more than three years ago, the public response was dramatic. Cricket Australia sniffed a redolent wind and dispatched to South Africa the organisation's integrity officer, Iain Roy, along with high-performance manager Pat Howard and chief executive James Sutherland, responding to an offence that match regulations said was with three demerit points: not enough to be suspended for a single Test. But back home the cheating was a source of national shame, and CA's response also had to account for an immediate cover-up attempt, when Bancroft and his captain Steve Smith lied at a press conference about how the tampering plan came about. This was to protect vice-captain David Warner, who CA would later name as the instigator. In the end, blame was quarantined to those three players. The rest of the team, the squad and support staff, were said to have known nothing. Many of them were not even

questioned in the supposed investigation that lasted all of two days. Central to the response was this contradiction: while CA showed off how seriously it took the matter, exiling those three players from all cricket for up to a year, it also refused to address the possibility of any prior offending.



It was content with a story that no Australian cricketer had considered tampering until Warner had a brainwave at lunch on day three of a match, at which point he taught Bancroft how to do it despite never having done it himself, only to be caught immediately on bringing it onto the field. Sutherland's dead-bat was that CA could investigate previous matches "if there are credible allegations, and there is evidence to come to light". This was midway through a series in which Australia sent the ball around corners in the first Test at Durban, and had it reversing all day long during the second at Port Elizabeth. Warner was publicly accused of tampering in that match, which was why he roped in the lower-profile Bancroft in Cape Town. But apparently it was not CA's remit to

look at any of this. There was no TV sting to force the issue. The unavoidable conclusion is that enough CA people did not want to ask questions to which they might not like the answers, so answers haven't come. None of the players has given any detail, which is why Bancroft's one small comment,

method used in one match. Bancroft's "self-explanatory" comment could be read more broadly, about the fact that tampering was and is a tacit but prevalent part of the game. Pre-Covid, teams used sugar-spit and skin lotions. They can still soak substances into their

when answering a question about whether any of his bowlers knew about the plan, had such an effect. The bowlers in that match - Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins, and spinner Nathan Lyon - have, to an extent, got a rough deal. The focus is on them rather than other teammates due to the question of how they could have bowled with a tampered ball without knowing. The four put their names to a statement this week defending their integrity. "We did not know a foreign substance was taken onto the field to alter the condition of the ball until we saw the images on the big screen at Newlands". Plausible, given that Bancroft had barely started before he was caught. Umpires saw no damage to the ball and declined to change it. Yet it is also worth observing how specific that statement was: about the exact

uniforms. There are far more zips on pockets than strictly necessary given the lack of loose change or car keys. Perhaps Bancroft's perception is that there was a general understanding of work being done on the ball, and that the specifics of how don't matter. And perhaps tampering should be prevalent, or call it having more options in managing the most important piece of equipment on the field. Players do not scuff the ball for reverse when it is spinning or swinging conventionally. They do so when there is little else on offer. A game that helps bowlers is a better game. Reverse swing creates so many of the great moments and still requires great skill. Cricket is long overdue for a reasoned discussion about what could be acceptable, rather than a reflexive response from a 19th-century

Thomas Tuchel throws Chelsea's hat into the ring in Harry Kane fight

London, May 22 : Thomas Tuchel has signalled Chelsea's interest in Harry Kane, admitting any manager in the world would jump at the chance to work with the Tottenham striker. Kane has been open about his desire to leave Tottenham and his representatives have been contacted by Chelsea, Manchester City and Manchester United. The race is likely to be intense and Tuchel, who wants his side to become more ruthless, did not hesitate to make it clear that he is an admirer of the England captain. "If you find any coach around the world who would not like to have Harry Kane in his team, call me again," Chelsea's manager said. "I would like to speak with the guy and hear about his ideas of scoring and attacking. Everybody loves Harry Kane but let's be very, very clear, he is a player for Tottenham. He has a long-term contract and we will not get involved in any press conference with any disrespectful comments about that." Chelsea, who are also interested in Borussia Dortmund's Erling Haaland and Internazionale's Romelu Lukaku, have the financial means to buy Kane. However, they are likely to find it difficult to entice Daniel Levy, the Tottenham chairman, to the negotiating table. Levy knows that selling his best player to Spurs's London rivals would go down badly with the club's fanbase, which could leave the door open for City. Kane has named Kevin De Bruyne as the Premier League player he would most like to link up with in comments that have intensified the impression he sees City as his destination of choice. The 27-year-old also told Gary Neville on the The Overlap podcast that he is not interested in a move abroad at this stage of his career. City hold an interest in Haaland as well, but it is unclear whether he will be available. Kane did not hesitate when asked by Neville to reveal



the player who would help him to score even more goals. "De Bruyne for sure," he said. "When I watch De Bruyne play, he's a special, special player and some of the balls I see him put in for City are just a striker's dream. He's an outstanding player with the ball, off the ball, pressing, but his delivery is as good as I've ever seen." In preview clips released from the Neville interview on Thursday, Kane had suggested that Levy might be wise to sell him in the upcoming window because his value is at its peak. Levy, though, does not want to sell Kane. In the full interview, Kane discusses his ambition to overtake Alan Shearer as the Premier League's all-time top scorer.

Shearer retired with 260 goals in the competition; Kane has 165. It was in this context that Kane said he wanted to stay in England. "I guess injuries would be the biggest thing stopping me [from getting Shearer's record]," Kane said. "Of course, there's always the option of maybe moving abroad one day but I don't think that really interests me in the near future. I'm 27 so I've still got, hopefully, a long way to go so, yeah, it's definitely there. I've consistently scored 20-plus in my injury-free seasons in the Premier League so if I can do that for the next four or five years then it'll be there. I'd be lying if I said I didn't [want the Premier League record]. If I get to the end and I haven't broken that record

and the Wayne Rooney England record [of 53 goals; Kane has 34] then I'd probably be a little disappointed in myself." Kane wants to leave in order to win the biggest trophies, which he has been unable to do at Spurs, although he has gone close with title challenges in 2016 and 2017 and defeat in the 2019 Champions League final. The club made no signings in the summer of 2018 or January 2019 and the forward expressed frustration at their failure to build upon strong foundations. "We were in a real good place with the team. For one reason or another we didn't quite do what we needed to do and where we're at now, I feel like we're at a rebuild stage again. It's disappointing... I feel like it was an opportunity missed for the club to do something special." Chelsea's need for extra firepower is underlined by the fact that Jorginho is their top scorer in the Premier League with seven. "Is that what we want?" Tuchel said. "Jorginho our top scorer? No. Not because we don't like Jorgi; he deserves all the fame and all the praise. But of course we don't want him to be our top scorer. We try to improve our statistics offensively. First of all we do that with the guys who are here."

Talking Horses: Wembley can win the cup for O'Brien in Irish 2,000 Guineas



London, May 22 : The track at the Curragh was untraceable yesterday after torrential rain and if the course passes the planned inspection on Saturday morning the going will be as tough as it gets in Ireland for the 2,000 Guineas. This will be a completely different test to the one on fast ground when Poetic Flare and Lucky Vega were first and third in the English Guineas at Newmarket this month and the winner has to be opposed, turning up here quickly after a disappointing attempt to follow up in the French equivalent last weekend. Lucky Vega is not so easily dismissed but concentrating on colts with proven form in the heavy conditions is the percentage call and the Aidan O'Brien-trained Wembley (3.20), who was eased considerably at Newmarket when his chance had gone, is one of those who will appreciate the stiff test at the mile trip. Goodwood 1.40 An each-way punt on outsider Nuits St Georges, who should be very well suited by the idiosyncratic track and soft ground, is the way to go in a very open race on paper. Haydock 1.55 Dual heavy ground winner Molls Memory, back on a winning mark after hinting at a return to form last time, is the suggestion in an extremely tricky puzzle. Goodwood 2.10 Al Zaraqaan holds an entry in the Hardwicke Stakes at Royal Ascot and could outclass this lot if handling the conditions. Haydock 2.25 Green Book may not be able to confirm last-time-out Chester running with Postileo, who did not get the run of the race that day. York 2.40 Roger Varian is hopeful of a big run from Believe In Love, who is suited by distance and going in what is a tight Group Three contest. Haydock 3.00 Raadoborg is plenty short enough in what is always a competitive heat but is on the upgrade and proven on the soft. Haydock 3.35 Unbeaten classy prospect Dragon Symbol is the one to side with if allowed to take his chance in the desperate ground. Haydock 4.10 Keep Busy has winning form on a heavy surface and should give a good account.

Sergio Agüero agrees to join Barcelona on two-year contract

London, May 22 : Sergio Agüero has agreed to sign for Barcelona on a two-year contract when his Manchester City deal expires next month. The striker's preference was to move to the Camp Nou and he has accepted a lower salary than was available elsewhere but will receive a bonus if the team win the Champions League. Agüero, who will be 33 when next season starts, has been troubled during this campaign by injuries which have restricted him to 18 appearances and four goals. He hopes to make a farewell Etihad Stadium appearance against Everton on Sunday and to play in the Champions League final the following Saturday. Barcelona are also closing in on signing the former Manchester United forward Memphis Depay, whose contract at Lyon expires this summer. Depay has confirmed to his lawyers that he wants to join the Spanish club. On Friday Pep Guardiola paid tribute to Agüero, who is leaving City as their record goalscorer. Agüero played in Spain for



Atlético Madrid before moving to the Premier League club 10 years ago. "His performance when he fit was fit was incredible," Guardiola said. "I am pretty sure the 10,000 fans that will be in the stadium will show for the rest of the fans around the world, and will give him his tribute and gratitude for what he's done for this club in terms of titles, numbers, performance - incredible."

Giro d'Italia: Egan Bernal leaves rivals in the dust as Schmid wins stage 11

London, May 20 : Mauro Schmid secured his first Grand Tour win on stage 11 of the Giro d'Italia, a 162-kilometre ride from Perugia to Montalcino, while Egan Bernal extended his lead in the general classification. Switzerland's Schmid pulled clear of the peloton early on and battled it out with Alessandro Covi after a thrilling race, pipping the young Italian on the line to secure the stage win in the 21-year-old Swiss rider's debut season. Harm Vanhoucke finished third. Bernal remained at the head of the peloton for the majority of the stage through the Tuscan gravel roads, before the Colombian made his move at the end the final climb up Passo del Lume Spento. Remco Evenepoel came into the stage second and 14 seconds behind Bernal, but having kept pace early on he struggled and dropped off the

peloton, with visibility poor at the back of the main group. The day belonged to Ineos Grenadiers' Bernal, who pulled clear of the pack as the stage entered Montalcino to finish 11th and end the day 45sec clear of Aleksandr Vlasov in the general classification. "Today was a really hard day," said Bernal. "We expected some big gaps and actually there were a lot of GC riders who lost a lot of time. I'm happy to arrive at the front and we need to stay focused for the next days. We should be happy with this day." The home favourite Damiano Caruso rose to third overall after a solid ride through the dust, while the British duo Hugh Carthy and Simon Yates rode into the top five after staying, for the most part, with Bernal. Stage 12 on Thursday is a 212km ride from Siena to Bagno di Romagna.

Premier League: 10 things to look out for on the final day of the season

Manchester , May 22 : If Harry Kane really is making his Tottenham swansong at the King Power Stadium, he will have wished it could come with stakes rather higher than a fought battle to cling on to seventh place. The emotions will be inescapable and the motivation to provide one last star turn presumably huge. Winning at such a difficult venue would be bittersweet for Kane and Spurs, given how costly the collapse of their away form has been to their campaign, with only two wins in their last nine. Such an outcome would also be deeply frustrating for Leicester, who are still in with a credible shout of Champions League qualification given Chelsea face a tricky assignment at Aston Villa. Kane and company may sense vulnerability with the Foxes emerging from two

intense, draining face-offs against Thomas Tuchel's side, but even a win will not clear the clouds of uncertainty over the club as summer approaches. With their excellent record of 11 wins and four draws in 17 games on the road this season, it's not beyond the realms of possibility that Europe-chasing Everton could poach Manchester City's title coronation party. Whatever the outcome on Sunday, the enthusiasm of the 10,000 fans allowed in to see their team lift the Premier League trophy will not be dimmed. Fitness permitting, the game will mark Sergio Agüero's final home appearance for Manchester City and Pep Guardiola is hopeful the Argentinian will have recovered sufficiently from an adductor strain to make an appearance. Whether he plays or not, after 10 years and 258 City goals he

is guaranteed an emotional send-off. We can but hope Noel Gallagher doesn't rock up at the Etihad Stadium in a bid to steal his thunder. Of the three teams vying for the last two Champions League spots, Chelsea have the toughest assignment on the final day. On the flip side, they are also the only side with a fall-back option, since they could still qualify for next season's tournament by winning this year's edition. N'Golo Kanté will be central to their attempt to beat Manchester City in the final, so Thomas Tuchel must think carefully about whether to risk him on Sunday against Aston Villa, just five days after he was forced off by hamstringing concerns against Leicester. Villa were energetic and robust in their midweek win at Tottenham and with Jack Grealish back in the groove and home fans back in

the stands, Dean Smith's men will make Chelsea fight for anything they can get. Arsenal are threatening to mock those who claimed, a mere three weeks ago, that their hopes of playing European football next season had gone up in smoke. They have a good chance of securing seventh place and a Europa Conference League berth if they beat Brighton on Sunday, but spending Thursdays in the continent's new third-tier competition would scupper any hopes of clearing the midweek diary for a Liverpool-style resurgence. Perhaps that need not be such an issue. A league table for the Premier League's last 23 rounds would put Arsenal second only to Manchester City, suggesting the club's comeback may be quietly under way after all - even if it has not always felt that way.

Golden State miss **NBA** playoffs as Ja Morant's 35 lift Memphis to play-in win

Toronto, May 22 : Ja Morant made consecutive jumpers in the final 48 seconds of overtime and scored 35 points, Memphis had an answer for every Stephen Curry flurry, and the Grizzlies are headed back to the playoffs for the first time in four

time against Golden State to win on the Warriors' home floor just five days after losing 113-101 in the regular-season finale. Curry, who became scoring champion against the Grizzlies on Sunday, finished with 39 points and six three-point-



years after holding off the Golden State Warriors 117-112 on Friday night in a thrilling play-in game. Jordan Poole hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 1:50 left in OT for Golden State only to see Xavier Tillman answer with a baseline three moments later. Poole lost the ball out of bounds leading to Morant's basket with four seconds left, then Poole made another improbable three with two seconds remaining. Morant shot 14 for 29 with five three-pointers as Memphis more than doubled its total from deep this

ers while dazzling in front of an animated, roaring crowd of 7,505 in the biggest game yet at second-year Chase Center. Memphis had an answer for every Stephen Curry flurry in Friday's play-in win over Golden State. Memphis earned the No 8 seed and advanced to face top-seeded Utah in the first round of the best-of-seven Western Conference playoffs. Game 1 is Sunday in Salt Lake City. "A fight. We played them earlier in the season, obviously came up short," Morant said. "The best team in the league right now.

We know what to expect. We have to lock in and play 48 minutes. "These teams needed every tick of the clock in the extra period to decide this one following a furious final minute-plus of regulation - and the NBA had to love it. Andrew Wiggins tied it on a layup with 33 seconds left in the fourth quarter on a pretty pass from new star Poole and Memphis committed a shot-clock violation on the other end. Kyle Anderson made a pair of free throws with 54.9 seconds left after being fouled by Curry, who had just converted two free throws to tie the game at 1:12. Curry drove through the paint and drew the sixth foul on Jonas Valanciunas. The Grizzlies came with aggression, determination and absolutely no fear, going at Golden State every which way - crashing the offensive glass to create extra chances, jumping in the passing lanes to force turnovers and getting far more production from the bench than in the previous two games. Then Curry let loose, just as he did all season in one of his best years yet. Curry's three-point play with 9:40 left got Golden State to 80-78, then he made a magnificent three the next time down while falling backward. Morant hit from deep moments later. Memphis had to get to the postseason the hard way: winning a pair of play-in games. The Grizzlies held off San Antonio 100-96 at home Wednesday night, then traveled back to the Bay Area. The Warriors lost a heart-breaker to LeBron James and the Lakers 103-100 at Staples Center on Wednesday. Memphis ended a three-year playoff drought since making seven straight appearances through 2016-17, and has lost in the first round in its previous two trips and four of those seven appearances in all. Down 24-14, Curry scored 10 straight points with a three-point play, four-point play and long 3-pointer to get Golden State within 26-24 late in the first. The Warriors wanted to be focused from the opening tip, expecting another hot start by the Grizzlies who delivered just that - making their first seven shots and three threes to jump ahead 18-6. Memphis went ahead early on Golden State last week and also against the Spurs. "We've got to be prepared for their quick start," said Steve Kerr, who called timeout at the 8:31 mark of the opening quarter. Every Golden State starter but Kent Bazemore had an early turnover. Golden State missed Curry Splash Brother Klay Thompson for the second straight season, this time as he nurses a torn right achilles tendon suffered just before training camp that required surgery. The Warriors fell short of returning to the playoffs for the first time since reaching five straight NBA finals in 2019 before losing in six games to Toronto.

legue titles and junior world records - even more impressive. In Gateshead on Sunday, she catapults into world class for the first time. Alongside will be two of her three biggest rivals for gold in Tokyo. Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, the world 100m champion, and Britain's Dina Asher-Smith, the world 200m champion. Richardson is clearly ready to make a statement. "I don't think I have been given the respect yet," she tells the British athletics press pack on what turns out to be a lively and often confrontational Zoom call. "When I run a time somebody's always trying to find something. It's 'I'm just fast for an American', or 'I'm just fast because I'm young'. I feel like there's always an excuse for my success. I can't allow myself to be starstruck on Sunday. "What does she make of the 34-year-old Fraser-Pryce being a super mum as well as a great sprinter, one journalist asks. "This interview is about Sha'Carri," she shoots back. "Do you have any questions for me?" When pressed, she softens. "I prefer not to talk about other athletes," she says. "But I'm actually very proud that she is a black woman who is continuing to have a career while having a family as well. She's a phenomenon. She has all the respect from me." As for Asher-Smith, Richardson says: "I honestly don't know a lot about her but she's a great runner. I'm not ever going to discredit her." Richardson smiles when it is suggested that her long nails, dyed hair, and tattoos - including a dragon on her left shoulder - give her a flamboyant streak. Her look has drawn comparisons with the controversial 100m world record holder Florence-Griffith Joyner. But she says it is Bolt's journey, from the confines of track and field to a global superstar, that she is most looking to emulate. "Absolutely," she says. "I want women to see they can be exactly who they are. You don't have to be all quiet and shy, unless you want to be. You don't have to shield yourself. I felt generations of women

Sha'Carri Richardson may be the most exciting sprint star since **Usain Bolt**

London, May 22 : Sha'Carri Richardson is the most exciting, compelling, and intriguing sprinter since Usain Bolt. The world just doesn't know it yet. It's not only that the 21-year-old has sonic boom speed - last month in Florida she ran 100m in 10.72 sec, the sixth quickest time in history - and mesmerising acceleration. It's everything else, too. The look. The backstory. The attitude. And, yes, the baggage - although more of that later. It is 25 years since an American woman won Olympic 100m gold. But while Richardson has not raced at world level, she is a below-the-radar favourite. It has been some journey. She was abandoned by her mother and tried to take her own life at high school. She has talked openly about her mental health struggles. It has made her many successes - including a string of col-

before us were like that. That's a very big message I would like to send. "It is powerful stuff. But some were alarmed that when Richardson turned professional two years ago, she chose the former US sprinter Dennis Mitchell as her coach even though he was banned for two years in 1998 after testing positive for testosterone. Mitchell's defence, that he had drunk five bottles of beer and had sex with his wife at least four times because "it was her birthday, the lady deserved a treat," was rejected by the IAAF. Eyebrows have also been raised by the fact that Mitchell coaches Justin Gatlin, who has been banned twice for doping offences. However, Richardson insists that Mitchell has been transparent about his past. "You'll don't have to worry about any doping situations coming from me," she



lege titles and junior world records - even more impressive. In Gateshead on Sunday, she catapults into world class for the first time. Alongside will be two of her three biggest rivals for gold in Tokyo. Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, the world 100m champion, and Britain's Dina Asher-Smith, the world 200m champion. Richardson is clearly ready to make a statement. "I don't think I have been given the respect yet," she tells the British athletics press pack on what turns out to be a lively and often confrontational Zoom call. "When I run a time somebody's always trying to find something. It's 'I'm just fast for an American', or 'I'm just fast because I'm young'. I feel like there's always an excuse for my success. I can't allow myself to be starstruck on Sunday. "What does she make of the 34-year-old Fraser-Pryce being a super mum as well as a great sprinter, one journalist asks. "This interview is about Sha'Carri," she shoots back. "Do you have any questions for me?" When pressed, she softens. "I prefer not to talk about other athletes," she says. "But I'm actually very proud that she is a black woman who is continuing to have a career while having a family as well. She's a phenomenon. She has all the respect from me." As for Asher-Smith, Richardson says: "I honestly don't know a lot about her but she's a great runner. I'm not ever going to discredit her." Richardson smiles when it is suggested that her long nails, dyed hair, and tattoos - including a dragon on her left shoulder - give her a flamboyant streak. Her look has drawn comparisons with the controversial 100m world record holder Florence-Griffith Joyner. But she says it is Bolt's journey, from the confines of track and field to a global superstar, that she is most looking to emulate. "Absolutely," she says. "I want women to see they can be exactly who they are. You don't have to be all quiet and shy, unless you want to be. You don't have to shield yourself. I felt generations of women

says. "I back him 1,000 per cent. "Could her reputation be tarnished by association? "No, not at all," she replies. "Because I know these men. I know what they are about. "To Richardson's credit, she doesn't shy away from answering these necessary questions - at least at first. "I'm a very transparent person," she says. "People on the outside asking questions and making comments don't know what work is being put in. They just believe anything they read on the internet. "Yet her mood turns sharp when she is asked about Mitchell's history. "Excuse me, this interview is about me; it's not about my coach," she replies. "I don't appreciate that question. "In a world of bland athlete soundbites, Richardson is refreshingly unfiltered and raw. It is unusual for a top sports star to say that top athletes "definitely have a target on our backs" when it comes to being drug tested. "I feel we are definitely targeted in a way that I wouldn't say is inappropriate, but I understand," she says. "I want people to know that I don't have to take a steroid, I don't have to take a drug. What I do when I perform is literally down to talent and hard work. I don't entirely always agree with how they invade our privacy. "There are more provocative words when the questioning moves to fellow sprinter Christian Coleman, who will miss the Olympics after a series of whereabouts failures. "Whereabouts is always important," says Richardson. "It just goes back to being a top athlete. They are after us. They are coming for us. You have to stay on guard. "Have you missed a test? "That's my information, not for you guys to know," she says, laughing. Shortly afterwards, the interview concludes. "Some of you all are interesting, and not in a good way," she says as a goodbye parting. It certainly seems unlikely that Richardson has been on a media training course - and if she did she'd probably rip up the textbook.

Manny Pacquiao and Errol Spence Jr announce 21 August fight in Las Vegas Pacquiao 42, to face unified welterweight champion in August

London, May 22 : Manny Pacquiao is ending his two-year absence from the prize ring in the same audacious fashion that marked his improbable ascent up boxing's divisional ladder during a legendary 26-year professional career: by picking out the most formidable challenge available and daring to be great. The eight-division world champion from the Philippines has signed on for a whale of a test in unbeaten unified welterweight titleholder Errol Spence Jr on 21 August in Las Vegas at a venue to be determined. Both fighters announced the bout on their social media feeds on Friday afternoon with a source close to the promotion independently confirming to the Guardian the fight was signed. "Done deal!" Spence wrote on Instagram. "See y'all in Vegas for the biggest fight of the year." Al Haymon's Premier Boxing Championships, which has promoted Spence since the company's 2015 inception and Pacquiao since 2018, also confirmed the fight later Friday in a joint social media post with Fox, the network that will broadcast the card via pay-per-view in the United States. This article includes content provided by Instagram. We ask for your permission before anything is loaded, as they may be using cookies and other technologies. To view this content, click 'Allow and continue'. The 42-year-old Pacquiao (62-7-2, 39 KO), the only man in

boxing history to capture world titles in eight different weight classes, from 112lbs to 154lbs, is coming off a signature win over then-undefeated Keith Thurman to win the World Boxing Association's version of the welterweight title in July 2019. The WBA later designated Pacquiao a champion-in-recess due to his inactivity, though not before he became the first boxer ever to hold a world championship in parts of four different decades. Spence (27-0, 21 KO), a 2012 US Olympian and native of the Dallas suburb of DeSoto, holds the International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Council championship belts at 147lbs and is widely regarded as one of the world's best pound-for-pound boxers today, if not

No 1 outright. The Texan first won the IBF title with an 11th-round knockout of Kell Brook at Bramall Lane in May 2017, before adding Keith Thurman to win the World Boxing Association's version of the welterweight title in September 2019. Spence's career was thrown in turmoil less than two weeks after the Porter fight, when he was involved in a frightening high-speed Ferrari crash that landed him in intensive care. But he was dominant in his first and only outing since the wreck, picking apart Danny Garcia over 12 rounds and winning a one-sided unanimous decision in December 2020. Among the possible venues for August's fight is Allegiant Stadium, the \$1.9bn, 72,000-seat home of the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders that opened

last year near the Strip. For Pacquiao, a first-term senator and head of the PDP-Laban party who has reportedly mulled a run for president in the country's 2022 elections, it could be the final fight of a panoramic career that began more than a quarter-century ago, when he stepped onto the scales for his pro debut aged 16 with rocks in his underwear to make the minimum weight of 105lbs. He's taken on the best of multiple eras in the decades since, often entering as the smaller man while scaling one division after another and scoring famous victories over a laundry list of current or future Hall of Famers including Marco Antonio Barrera (twice), Erik Morales (twice), Juan Manuel Márquez (twice), Oscar De La Hoya, Miguel Cotto and Shane Mosley. It won't be easy: Spence, who is viewed by many as the world's best boxer regardless of weight, will enjoy advantages of 4in in height and 5in in reach in addition to the 11-year age difference. Against a younger, primer, physically bigger champion, Pacquiao will almost certainly go off as an underdog with the oddsmakers for the first time since his money-spinning 2015 showdown with Floyd Mayweather Jr. Pacquiao will also have been inactive for more than 25 months by the night of the fight, representing the longest layoff of his career by a wide margin.



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