

The Assam Rising

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Earthquake hits Ukhrul

Guwahati, May 23 : An earthquake of magnitude 4.3 on the Richter scale hit Manipur's Ukhrul on Sunday morning, said the National Centre for Seismology (NCS). "Earthquake of Magnitude: 4.3. Occurred on 23-05-2021, 06:56:42 IST. Lat: 24.79 & Long: 94.94, Depth: 109 Km. Location: 49km ESE of Ukhrul, Manipur, India," the NCS tweeted. On May 15, an earthquake of the same magnitude on the Richter scale hit Ukhrul. No incident of damage of properties or loss of life has been reported so far.

Classroom webinars on wildlife

Guwahati, May 23 : To mark the celebration of International Day for Biological Diversity 202 and to continue their work in generating awareness among the younger generation on wildlife conservation and crime, Aaranyak conducted a series of classroom webinars in some schools of Guwahati. The classroom webinar started at the Sanskriti-The Gurukul School on May 15, 2021, followed by a webinar in Sarala Birla Gyan Jyoti school on May 22, 2021. A total of around 60 students benefited from the webinar which was hosted by the school administration. Aaranyak said in a statement. From Aaranyak, the resource persons included Dr. Jimmy Borah, senior manager in legal and advocacy division and Ivy Farheen Hussain, project officer in tiger research and conservation division. Aaranyak conducts classroom webinars on wildlife conservation, crime for school students of Guwahati.

6 DNLA killed in encounter

Guwahati, May 23 : Six cadres of Dimas National Liberation Army (DNLA), a rebel outfit in Assam, were killed by security forces in an encounter on Sunday. According to police officials, the cadres were killed in Karbi Anglong district early on Sunday and a large cache of arms and ammunition was recovered from their possession. "In an early morning operation by Assam Police and Assam Rifles, 6 DNLA terrorists were neutralized in Dhansiri area of Karbi Anglong. Large cache of arms and ammunition was also recovered," special director general of police, Assam Police, GP Singh tweeted. Teams from Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao district police were involved in the operation. Further details on the identity of the DNLA cadres and the circumstances around the encounter were awaited. Formed two years ago, DNLA aims to form a sovereign and independent nation for people from the Dimas tribe. Naisodao Dimas is the chairman of the outfit and Kharindao Dimas is the home secretary.

Assam to introduce cow protection bill



Guwahati, May 23 : Governor Jagdish Mukhi also underlined the government's commitment to protecting satras from encroachment. Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi said the State government would introduce a cow

protection bill in the next Assembly session. Addressing the inaugural session of the 15th Assam Assembly, he said the government would adopt a zero-tolerance policy for protecting the cow that gives "life-sustaining milk"

and is considered a sacred animal. "I am happy to inform you that my government plans to introduce the cow protection bill in the next Assembly session. The proposed bill envisages imposition of complete ban on transport of cattle outside the State," he said. The zero-tolerance policy would entail stringent punishment for those found transporting cattle outside Assam, the Governor said. "Once passed, Assam will join other States which have passed similar bills," he said. The Governor also underlined the Himanta Biswa Sarma government's commitment to recover the lands of the satras (Vaishnav monasteries) and places of worship from illegal encroachments. "My government will remain committed to strengthening the namghars (prayer halls) and protecting the rights of the satras. A task force will be constituted to recover the lands of the satras and places of worship from illegal encroachments," he said. "We will

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Chief Minister Sarma reviews COVID situation with DCs and SPs

Asks DC to create community surveillance system to
stop spread of COVID from urban to rural areas

Guwahati, May 23 : In view of the increasing number of COVID positive cases, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma asked all the Deputy Commissioners to put in place a community surveillance system to avert the pandemic spreading from urban to rural areas. Talking to the Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police via video conference to take stock of the COVID situation in the state, Chief Minister Sarma said that in the wake of surging number of positive cases, there must be concerted efforts to stop the spread of the pandemic in rural areas. Therefore, all the DCs must use their machinery to put in place community surveillance system to avert the surge of the pandemic in the rural areas. During the review, Chief Minister Sarma ob-



served that though most of the districts are witnessing decline in COVID positive cases, where as others stabilised the curve of positive cases,

Sarma asked the SPs to be strict in enforcing the curfew and total ban on inter-district movement to arrest positive cases. Contd...Page 6

Olympic Wrestler Sushil Kumar Arrested By Delhi Police In Murder Case

New Delhi, May 23 : Police were on the lookout for Sushil Kumar for his alleged involvement in the death of a 23-year-old wrestler at a stadium in Delhi. All

Murder Case Delhi Police had announced a cash reward of ₹ 1 lakh for information on Sushil Kumar. New Delhi: Wrestler Sushil Kumar, India's two-time Olympic medalist winner, who was on the run for alleged involvement in the murder of a fellow wrestler, was arrested by the Delhi Police this morning. Sushil Kumar was arrested along with a co-accused from northwest Delhi's Mundka, police officials said. Contd...Page 6



India Reported by Mukesh Singh Sengar. Edited by Arun Nair. Updated: May 23, 2021 11:13 am IST. Olympic Wrestler Sushil Kumar Arrested By Delhi Police In

CM visits Basistha cremation ground, takes stock of beautification project

Guwahati, May 23 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today visited Basistha cremation ground and took stock of progress of the beautification project imple-

mented there under the aegis of Basistha Ashram management committee, cremation ground management committee and CMD of Prag News channel. The Contd...Page 6



CM thanks PM after receiving Oxygen Express

Oxygen Express would greatly help in
meeting increasing demand : CM

Guwahati, May 23 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today formally received the Oxygen Express, carrying 4 containers of total 80 metric tonnes (MT) of medical oxygen at Inland Container Depot at Amingaon in the city. The Oxygen Express, which started from

the state, primarily for the treatment of COVID19 patients. The Chief Minister also thanked Union Railway Minister Piyush Goyal for taking steps to bring the train. He also informed that from now onwards, Oxygen Express would come twice per week to

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HSLC, High Madrasa Exams in Assam will be held as soon as Covid19 situation turns normal

Guwahati, May 23 : The High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) and Assam High Madrasa Examinations 2021 will be held in Assam as soon as the Covid19 situation in the state becomes normal. The decision was taken during an important meeting held at the board's office in Guwahati on Saturday between the Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA) and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). Keeping in view of the rising cases of Covid19 in the state, the HSLC/AHM examinations have been halted in Assam. However,

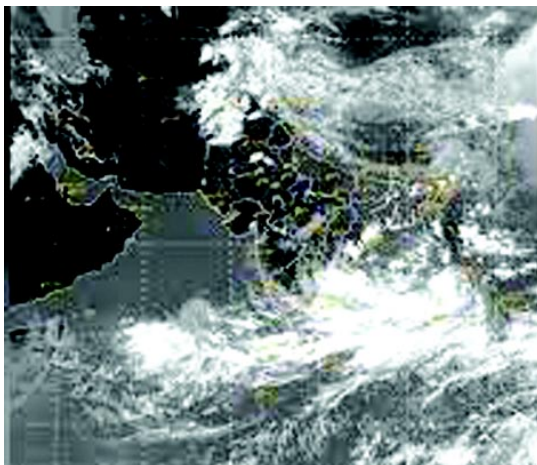
on Saturday, it was decided to hold the HSLC/AHM examinations as soon as Covid19 situation becomes normal during a meeting of the AASU leadership and SEBA authority. AASU president Dipanka Kumar Nath and general secretary Sankar Jyoti Barua. The AASU Contd...Page 6



Cyclone Yaas May Intensify Into "Very Severe Cyclonic Storm", Cross Odisha, Bengal: Report

New Delhi, May 23 : A low-pressure area formed over east-central Bay of Bengal today, which is likely to intensify into a very severe cyclonic storm and move towards West Bengal, adjoining north Odisha and Bangladesh coasts around May 26 morning, the regional met department said. The system is very likely to cross the coasts of the two states and the neighbouring country on May 26 evening, said Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) Director GK Das. Wind speed is expected to reach 90-100 km per hour gusting to 110 kmph from May 26 forenoon along and off West Bengal, north Odisha and Bangladesh coasts, and increase thereafter till evening, he said. "The low pressure area is very likely to concentrate into a depression over east-central Bay of Bengal by tomorrow, the 23rd May morning. It is very likely to move north-northwestwards, intensify into a Cyclonic Storm by 24th May and further into a very se-

vere cyclonic storm during the subsequent 24 hours," the India Meteorological Department told news agency Press Trust of India. The Indian Navy has kept on standby ships and aircraft to render assistance in the



most-affected areas, a Defence spokesperson said. Mr Das said light to moderate rainfall at most places of Gangetic West Bengal with heavy rain

at isolated places is very likely to commence over coastal districts from May 25 with significant increase in intensity and area subsequently. "Light to moderate rainfall at most places with heavy to very heavy rainfall at a few places, and extremely heavy rainfall at isolated places very likely on May 26," he said. Owing to the weather system, sub-Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim are also expected to experience light to moderate rain at most places with heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places on May 26. Very heavy rainfall is forecast for a few areas on

May 24 evening with wind speed reaching 40 to 50 kmph gusting to 60 kmph, the Met department said. Sea condition will be high to very high over major parts of central Bay of Bengal and Odisha, West Bengal and Bangladesh coasts from May 24 to May 26, it said. Fishermen have been advised not to venture into the sea from May 23 till further information. Four naval ships are on standby with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, diving and medical teams, the spokesperson added. "Eight flood relief teams and four diving teams are prepositioned at Odisha and West Bengal to augment the existing resources," the official said. Aircraft have been kept ready at naval air stations INS Dega in Visakhapatnam and INS Rajali near Chennai to undertake aerial survey, casualty evacuation and air-drop of relief material as required, the spokesperson said.

Assam scientist Jubilee Purkayastha helped DRDO develop anti-Covid drug 2-DG

Guwahati, May 23 : A scientist from Assam helped the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) Delhi team to develop the Anti-Covid Drug 2-DG. The scientist, Dr Jubilee Purkayastha is a resident of Mahishashan in Assam's Karimganj district. According to reports, Dr Purkayastha currently works as a scientist at Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), Defence Research and Development Organi-

zation (DRDO), Delhi. Jubilee Purkayastha, who studied at Karimganj College, did her PhD from North East Institute of Science and Technology in Jorhat. Assam scientist Jubilee Purkayastha helped DRDO develop anti-Covid drug 2-DG. In 2008, she joined the Defence Research Laboratory of DRDO in Tezpur as a scientist and was posted in Delhi in 2014. Daughter of Lt. Sudarshan Purkayastha and Binoy Kumari Contd...Page 6



From Edward VIII to James Dyson : the yacht that tells a tale of British wealth

In the early years of this century, soon after he began moving production of his bagless vacuum cleaner from Wiltshire to south-east Asia, James Dyson bought a superb yacht. The Nahlin is exemplary in the beauty of its lines and instructive in its history, though how much of this history Dyson understands or relishes is hard to know. Despite spending a fortune (at least £25m) on its restoration, Dyson has never talked publicly about his yacht, no more than he has about his purchase of Singapore's most expensive flat (£43m) and its sale soon after, at a loss. For a time, a kind of omertà prevailed about the vessel's ownership among its team of restorers, though to own and care for such an elegant piece of naval architecture would surely be no shame. What Dyson certainly knows is that it was on the Nahlin that King Edward VIII and Mrs Wallis Simpson shed any discretion and "came out" as a couple - a relationship reported across the world, though not at the time in Britain - precipitating the crisis that ended with the king's abdication a few months later, in December 1936. "The cruise of the Nahlin" became an inevitable chapter in any telling of the event, though how the king came to be aboard such a mysteriously named vessel tended to be overlooked. In fact, the name is said to have Native American origins, and reportedly means "fleet of foot" - the yacht's figurehead wears a chieftain's headdress - and the king was aboard because the Foreign Office, worried by social unrest in France, had warned against his original plan to rent a villa there. So instead he rented the Nahlin, to avoid the fuss that a voyage in the royal yacht, the Victoria and Albert, would create and perhaps also because the Nahlin, commissioned only six years earlier, appealed to his appetite for cocktail modernity. Fuss, however, was unavoidable. At Šibenik, the Dalmatian port where the king and Mrs Simpson boarded the yacht, an exuberant crowd of 20,000 turned up and (thanks to reports in the American press) showed as much interest in her as in him; at sea, two Royal Navy destroyers, the Grafton and the Glowworm, accompanied the Nahlin wherever she went - a leisurely August progress down

the Adriatic, through the Corinth canal to the Greek islands, and eventually to Istanbul. The "nanny-boats", as Lady Diana Cooper called them; she and a few other prominent society figures were also aboard, as well as a crew around 60-strong. Of course, the term yacht is misleading. No sails have ever been involved. The Nahlin, like its bland



modern equivalents, was a yacht only in the sense that its sole purpose was its owner's pleasure, the owner being in this case a Lady Yule. Launched in 1930 from the Clydebank shipyard of John Brown & Co - builder of celebrated liners such as Cunard's two Queens - it measures 300ft in length and was originally powered by four steam turbines. Characteristically of the steam yacht, of which the Nahlin was among the very last examples, its hull preserves elements of the sailing ship, with a curved clipper bow and a counter stern, each stretching well beyond the waterline. The shape and colour of steam yachts - white hull, cream funnel - made people think of swans. Their costs and months of idleness meant they were an indulgence that only the richest magnates on either side of the Atlantic could afford: JP Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Sir Thomas Lipton. And Lady Yule? She was thought to be the richest widow in England. How had she come by her money? Jute, was the short answer. A longer one involves a story

of British innovation and industrial expansion overseas that Dyson might recognise, beginning in the 1820s when Dundee manufacturers began to look for an alternative to hemp in the making of sacking, rope and sailcloth. Jute was cheap and reliably available from Bengal in British India, but it was tough and brittle and broke easily when it was spun or wo-



ven. After years of experiment, it was successfully made pliable by the application of whale oil, of which Dundee as a whaling port had no shortage. The demand for jute fabric and jute rope boomed, and Dundee enjoyed a near monopoly until the 1870s, when British industrialists began to open jute mills in Bengal itself because, as economic historian Morris D Morris has pointed out, "jute manufacturing was not a complicated process [and] cheap labour was a very great advantage". Bengal had five jute mills in 1870 and 69 jute mills in 1914, as cheaper Indian-made jute conquered foreign markets previously served by Dundee, and exports of jute cloth from India grew 272 times over the same period; even better was to come with the first world war, when the word "sandbag" must have sounded like a ringing cash register in the inner ear of every Indian jute trader. The Yule family benefited enormously. Annie Henrietta (Lady) Yule was the daughter of Andrew Yule, the son of a small-town draper in Scotland who arrived in Kolkata

(then Calcutta) in 1863 as an agent representing several British firms, and whose family eventually owned tea estates, coalmines, cotton and flour mills, railways, and 2,400 square miles of productive land - as well as the jute mills that Andrew Yule's nephew and successor, Sir David Yule, had taken an especial interest in expanding. Sir David was a shy workaholic who rarely left Kolkata. Aged 42, he married another Yule, his cousin Annie Henrietta. When he died in 1928, soon after ordering his steam yacht, the Times described him as "one of the wealthiest men, if not the wealthiest man, in the country". Where did it all go? Lady Yule and her daughter Gladys made a long and expensive world cruise in the Nahlin in the early 1930s. She invested heavily and sometimes unwisely in the British film industry; she opened a stud farm. She had, in the words of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, "strong religious opinions, a sharp tongue, and imperious habits". Her attempt to force teetotalism on the Nahlin's crew was probably not a success. At any rate she sold the ship to King Carol II of Romania in 1937, after which the Nahlin disappeared from the map of British interests - missing, presumed dead - until an English yacht broker, Nicholas Edmiston, discovered it moored in the Danube as a floating restaurant in the 1990s. It passed briefly through the ownership of another Brexit-supporting tycoon, Sir Anthony Bamford, before Dyson bought it in 2006. This week, thanks to the wonder of digital ship location, I traced the yacht's present whereabouts to the Blohm+Voss shipyard in Hamburg; it had reached there from the Caribbean via Gibraltar and Falmouth. Blohm+Voss spent millions of Dyson's money when the yacht was first restored and re-engined, and it may be there now for its annual overhaul. The shipyard is old and distinguished, and still fills the harbour with the sounds of building and repair work. They even build luxury yachts there; the clients include Roman Abramovich and Vladimir Putin. Nothing remains of the Nahlin's birthplace at Clydebank, apart from a large crane that stands useless at the river's edge. Ships, like bagless vacuum cleaners and jute, are made elsewhere.

Is Boris Johnson really going to sacrifice arts degrees for the Conservative cause?

Imagining the future is never easy. But for teenagers in a pandemic, struggling to get a feel for university life from "virtual open days" now being conducted strictly via Zoom, it's perhaps uniquely tough. This year's lower sixth, only too aware of a harsh jobs market out there, are more anxious than ever about getting their decisions right. Is university even worth it? Should they follow their hearts and study what they love, or buckle down to something boring but more likely to lead to a job? Enter the education secretary Gavin Williamson, scoffing, just as students return to campus, at "dead-end courses that leave young people with nothing but debt" - increasingly taken to mean almost anything but the government's approved priorities of science, technology, maths and engineering. Reading classics hardly held Boris Johnson back, and nor did his fiancée Carrie Symonds's degree in art history and theatre studies stop her enjoying a successful career in PR. But their baby son's future choices may be narrower. Williamson has already suggested halving subsidies for creative subjects such as drama, art and music, whose graduates may enrich lives but usually earn less than those heading into banking. Even this week's promised consultation on cutting tuition fees to £7,500 carries a possible sting in the tail. Lower fees imply lower budgets for all but Stem departments, which will get extra funding to reflect the greater cost of running these

courses. Some fear that liberal arts and humanities courses could become increasingly unviable in all but elite universities, unhappily for the child with a passion for history or flair for languages. There seems little room in Williamson's vision for considering what teenagers actually like and are good at, or what society values more than money, or the fact that if every 18-year-old chose to read maths tomorrow then the earnings premium attached to that subject might not survive a market suddenly flooded with mathematicians. The lingering suspicion, meanwhile, is that all this heralds a reduction in student numbers by the back door. Margaret Thatcher was so loathed in academia that her alma mater



Oxford refused her an honorary degree, but even she presided over rising student numbers. Her successor, John Major, opened up higher education by turning the old polytechnics into universities, and Tony Blair went further, promising degrees

for up to half of all 18-year-olds, equipping them to compete for high-skilled jobs. Countless kids duly became the first in their families to go to university, watching our parents sob through our graduation ceremonies at the sight of sons and daughters miraculously acquiring opportunities they'd never had. But that quantum leap came at a cost, which the introduction of tuition fees has only ever partly shifted on to students themselves. In England, graduates don't start repaying student loans until they earn over £27,295 a year, and on current trends the Department for Education estimates that fewer than a third will ever earn enough to pay off the lot. Ministers have eyed the resulting black hole nervously for years but a recent change in government accounting rules, forcing ministers to include future loan losses on balance sheets, has concentrated minds. Reducing fees and scrapping courses liable to produce lower earners - not just creative subjects, but perhaps also those that are willing to take kids with very poor A-level grades - could obviously help limit those losses. That, in turn, frees up money for further education and more vocational courses, following promises made to "red wall" voters that their children should be able to train for decent jobs without leaving their home towns. If so, we could be looking at a surprisingly radical redistribution of funding from a higher education sector still dominated by middle-class kids to a long-underfunded FE

sector serving more working-class ones - and one that crucially consolidates a historic shift in the Conservative base. The new dividing line in politics isn't class, but education and its role in perpetuating liberal values, with leftwing parties across Europe and the US increasingly attracting graduates, while people who only ever finished high school lean to the right. The new squeeze on academia and the arts at university, together with threats to purge museum and gallery boards of supposedly "woke" trustees or make the BBC reflect more "red wall" sensibilities, suggests a broader and more audacious attack on liberal institutions. A prime minister with a mandate to remake the country for Conservative ends may finally have a strategy for doing so. What if Johnson actually means it? That question is too rarely asked of a man whose talk of "levelling up" is still seen as empty rhetoric on the left, and taken barely more seriously by some traditional Tory voters. They just can't imagine him threatening their own children's chances of trotting off to read art history, and they may yet be right. Perhaps it's really all a mirage, encouraging kids in Hartlepool to wait at home for a glittering future that never quite comes, while others still reap the timeless rewards of going to university. But a Conservative party seemingly willing to sacrifice the union for Brexit, or throw farmers to the wolves in return for a free trade deal with Australia, isn't necessarily the one they know.

lateness was 59.1% Network Rail's fault. The then transport secretary, Chris Grayling, was reduced to standing at the dispatch box apologising for train cancellations as if he were the platform announcer at Crewe. I strongly believe that had the old regionals been reborn as normal companies controlling their own assets they would have been a success. That is how hospitals and universities work. The nationalised railway operated best under the public corporation model invented by Labour's Herbert Morrison in the 1940s. It was run at arm's-length outside Whitehall control under an explicit remit. BR's much-abused Dr Beeching was given a clear instruction - to end subsidy, switch from steam and slash capacity - and left to get on with it in the 1960s. He actually produced the most up-to-date railway in Europe. The reality is that structure in government may be boring but it matters. Britain's new GBR railway faces two titanic headaches: managing a possibly long-term slump in passengers, and watching its investment eaten alive by HS2. As for its structure, we are told it is to retain privately franchised "delivery companies" to operate the actual trains. This sounds ominously like the same split that lies at the root of the present chaos. The issue is not profit but structure. Individual lines of route must be separately managed and in complete control of their fixed and running assets. That is the key to efficiency and corporate morale. As for Shapps, he should be restricted to one railway utterance per year, and his entire directorate should be hived off to the admirable Railway Museum at York.

Nurses know exactly why Boris Johnson's nurse quit - we are running on empty

I've never treated anybody famous. But then, as a nurse, you treat everybody the same - without fear or favour. Jenny McGee might have looked after Boris Johnson when he was gravely ill with Covid-19, but that's the only difference I can see between her and nearly every nurse I know. Do your job, give your all, come back again tomorrow. Until you can't. The past 14 months have seen highs and lows - personally and professionally - that nobody could have prepared for. But perhaps the greatest surprise of all came one full year into the pandemic. After so many rounds of applause, the warmest of words and the highest of accolades, McGee's famous patient showed it had all been hollow.

A decade of real-terms pay cuts - worth thousands of pounds - are to be followed by yet another. We'd been lulled into believing that, at long last, we were going to get the full recognition our work deserves. The derisory 1% pay rise the government offered nurses in March shows how wrong we were. McGee has now quit her job over the government's poor treatment of healthcare workers. Working as a nurse requires a certain sense of humour but not a single nurse or NHS worker I know had anything but personal anguish and professional despair on display that day. We are graduates. We run clinics and services. We are the difference between life and death. But many nurses and care work-

ers are now leaving their jobs. Why? McGee has pulled back the curtain on behalf of so many of us. When you see the difference you make to the lives of countless individuals and their families, the reward is immense. But I cannot spend that at the supermarket. And the memory of that feeling is harder to hold on to when each understaffed shift feels more brutal than the last. In January last year, we could see a crisis brewing with coronavirus. We had been watching what was happening in China, and then Italy, and we were concerned about what was coming our way. Some of us were used to working in intensive care but even those who had worked with a ward full of pa-

tients needing critical care weren't prepared for the wave that hit us. We pulled together as a team. People were redeployed from other areas and we did everything we could for each of our patients. But where was the PPE to keep us safe? My colleagues started to fall ill, and one even lost their life to the virus. When your colleague becomes your patient, everybody fears they could be next. How does it feel now? Thankfully, the wards are starting to empty and the figures are improving. But we are running on empty. A debt of gratitude is owed, not just to nursing colleagues but to so many in healthcare and other key workers.

There's nothing 'great' about this new British Railways revamp

No enemy of Tory policy is as savage as a Johnson Tory. Enter Grant Shapps, transport secretary. His proposed reincarnation of British Railways (ridiculously with "Great" attached) ends one of the major failures of modern British government. He accuses the botched Conservative privatisation of British Rail in 1993 of leading to "fragmentation, confusion and overcomplication". In truth what killed it was not Tory doctrine but a far more lethal ideology: Treasury control. The principle of a privatised railway was sound. Private companies had given Victorian Britain the finest train service in the world. By the 20th century it was atrophying through duplication and monopoly, and was effectively nationalised in the second world war. In public ownership, British Rail seemed

phones and telecommunications were all run by state corporations. Few complain that they are now private. The problem lay where privatisation was bungled. By the time of the 2018 timetable fiasco that sparked the current crisis, each corner of the rail industry was able to blame another when anything went wrong. The rail regulator had time to calculate that



overtaken by the motor car and starved of investment for electrification. By the 1990s, privatisation seemed the best answer. A battle royal took place over how. Should the railway revive the old private regional companies such as Great Western and LMS, or should it be split vertically between a track owner/operator and train service companies on short-term franchises, the latter much favoured by the Treasury. The Treasury won and in 1993 the railway was divided up. The result was early commercial success - journeys boomed - but operational disaster. Within six years the infrastructure company, Railtrack, was bankrupt and had to be renationalised. But the private franchisees were left with no managerial control of their stations, track and signalling, control that was critical to running a co-ordinated service. Trains need instantaneous lines of decision and accountability, not legal contracts - and dependent profits - befuddling every line of command. Rumour had it that the user contract on Paddington station ran to 50 pages. Running costs per mile doubled and then trebled under privatisation, measured by the so-called Ford factor of the doyen of rail journalists, Roger Ford. The joke was that the nationalised railway took 40 civil servants to oversee, the privatised one took 400. As demand rose with the post-2000 mobility boom, so did costs, fares and subsidies. Worse, the 2002 nationalisation of Network Rail subjected investment to constant political distortion. Total rail subsidy in 2019 was £6.5bn, with £5bn a year planned for future

We don't recognise our own city : Israeli barrage redraws the map of Gaza

London, May 23 : As they emerge from hiding, people living in Gaza City have had to adapt their memories. So deformed is this small place on the coast that a mental map of its roads and landmarks from two weeks ago is largely useless today. Shortcuts to avoid traffic may no longer work, as craters dot back streets and rubble blocks roads. Locally famous high-rises no longer exist. Eleven days of bombardment have buckled the city. Air attacks shook the ground so violently that some bomb sites appear as if buildings have been pulled into the earth rather than hit from above. On one street, the bent walls of a kindergarten descend downwards at an angle until they disappear completely. Israel's latest war with Hamas, which ended in a ceasefire on



Friday, killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children as well as scores of fighters, and left more than 1,900 wounded in Gaza. In Israel, 12 people, including one soldier and two children, were killed by militants firing rockets, mortars and anti-tank missiles. The country's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said his forces had done "everything possible" to keep their own citizens safe, but also to make sure Palestinian civilians were not in harm's way. Statements like those would lead to scoffs along al-Wehda Street, a main road in the centre of Gaza City. The boulevard has been rocked by several strikes during the past week, including the deadliest single attack of the latest round, which killed 42 people. Amjed Murtaja, 40, lay in a hospital bed, his legs dotted with scratches. He was in his fourth-floor rented apartment on al-Wehda when he said a missile hit his balcony. "The building was shaking. My only thought was to get to my wife and son," he said. Murtaja ran to the other room just in time to embrace his family before a second strike hit, causing the entire

structure to collapse. "We fell together," he said. When they landed, Murtaja had his arms pinned, although his wife, Suzan, and his two-year-old boy were next to him. As he spoke of being trapped, other patients, visitors and a hospital cleaner stopped what they were doing and listened intently. Murtaja and his wife, who doctors would later confirm had broken her back, would be trapped for four hours until neighbours and rescuers dug down and dragged them out. In the same strike, several members of the al-Auf family, including one of Gaza's most prominent doctors who worked as the head of Shifa's coronavirus response, would be pulled out dead. Murtaja said that while he was trapped, he could hear neighbours from inside other parts of the debris. "They were screaming," he said. His wife was now

in the same hospital, but two floors down in a women's ward. A drip fed liquid into her hand, and a plastic water bottle and yoghurt pot sat on a shelf by her bed. Under heavy pain killers, her eyes rolled as she spoke. Suzan Murtaja, 36, said that when the building fell in on itself, she was so disorientated that she first thought only a cupboard had fallen on them. But, with one free arm, she was able to reach her phone. "I turned on the phone light and we realised the building had collapsed." For those four hours, even before she knew they would be found and would live, she tried to calm her son to sleep, but bits of rubble and dust kept falling and waking him up. Palestinians run from sound grenades thrown by Israeli police in front of the Dome of the Rock in the al-Aqsa mosque complex in Jerusalem, on 21 May. Israel said the aim of its attack on al-Wehda last Sunday was to destroy an extensive network of tunnels it called the "Metro". The military said it had not intended to make the building collapse. What Hamas was hiding in those underground passageways, if they existed,

is unclear. Al-Wehda is deep within the city and far from the frontier with Israel. Nearly a week after the attack, large mounds of concrete still lined the road. A seven-storey building that survived stood at an ominous angle, as men quickly removed wooden furniture from the ground floor. Further up al-Wehda stood a giant pile of debris that once housed the Murtajas' apartment. Amid the dust were twisted plastic water tanks, a washing liquid bottle, pillows and a frying pan. All that remained was a three-storey-high internal staircase at the back. A sign has been erected with the names of the dead and "Al-Wehda massacre" written on it in Arabic. A yellow taxi pulled up, and a woman got out with her teenage son. She said her name was Zakia Abu Dayer, 44, and she lived in the next building. It was the first time she had been back, she said, to collect some belongings. On the night of the bombing, as the Murtajas were trapped under the rubble, Abu Dayer, her husband and her son moved further up the street to a relative's home. They thought they would be more secure there as it was on the ground floor, possibly allowing them to rush outside quickly. But two days later, she and other family members were eating rice and lentils outside when another strike hit. "There is no safe space," she said, her leg still wrapped in bandages. "The whole place went black." Abu Dayer remembers smoke and then rushing water as the tanks on the building above exploded in the blast. Her husband, who was a few metres away from her, was killed after shrapnel hit his head. An 11-year-old relative was also killed. The building that was hit still stands, although its windows were blown out. The ground floor was a bank with two ATMs covered in dust. A dental clinic sits on the first floor. Several local charities operated there. Higher up, a box with "US AID" written on it is visible through the smashed glass. Across the road stands the damaged shell of another building. "It's a very old primary health clinic, maybe the oldest in Gaza," said Abdel-Latif al-Hajj, director-general of international cooperation at the ministry of health in Gaza, who stood by the gate. At first glance, the clinic appears to have been bombed, with large pockmarks across its walls and football-sized bits of debris covering the ground. However, it was not hit directly. Instead, when the Israeli missile struck the building across the road, it ripped off the top two floors, which then slammed into the clinic. Al-Hajj said the building was Gaza's main testing centre for Covid. Staff had been working inside during the explosion, and several were wounded. Gaza was

already suffering a dangerous spread in infections, and another outbreak is expected, he said. "Anyone can imagine what will happen if we stop doing tests," said al-Hajj. In addition, the war had meant thousands of displaced people were now crowded together, which could speed up transmission. According to the United Nations, the violence on Gaza has destroyed nearly 260 buildings. Fifty-three schools, six hospitals and 11 primary healthcare centres have been damaged. Nearly 80,000 people were internally displaced, and 10 times that number have little access to piped water. As well as Israeli strikes, armed groups have launched faulty rockets that landed short, with reports of extensive damage and even fatalities within Gaza. The strip's two million inhabitants already live inside what they call the "world's largest prison", with more than 50% unemployment, a collapsed healthcare system, sometimes-poisonous water, and relentless power cuts. Israel and Egypt, Gaza's other neighbour, have maintained a crippling blockade, locals say "siege", for 14 years. Israel, which recalled its forces occupying the area in 2005, says the restrictions are for its security. But the UN says the blockade constitutes collective punishment. At the damaged clinic on al-Wehda Street on Saturday, Lynn Hastings, the UN's deputy special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, had come to assess the impact. Flanked by aides and bodyguards, she was asked by a television reporter if this round of violence might, unlike the previous three wars, spur significant political change. "Everyone is saying it should not be business as usual," she responded. "You know what the definition of insanity is," she added rhetorically. She was referring to a quote usually attributed to Einstein, that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Friday's ceasefire brought some Palestinians and Israelis hope that the violence would spur a renewed push to resolve the crisis. Hamas kicked off this round of fighting when it launched rockets at Jerusalem on 10 May, but it followed weeks of growing frustrations over the treatment of Palestinians by Israel, which has for decades dictated how millions live their lives. The head of Oxfam in Israel and the Palestinian territories, Shane Stevenson, said the truce should not be celebrated as a solution. Israel should be held to account "for the atrocities it has committed over the last 12 days", as should armed factions in Gaza for their indiscriminate targeting of Israeli towns and cities. The truce, he added, "will not change the illegal occupation and denial of human rights which Palestinians are subjected to daily. This inhumane and brutal status quo has to change, once and for all." Lying in Shifa hospital, Amjed Murtaja had less ambitious reasons to be happy. Despite his exhaustion and injuries, he had stayed up late on Thursday as rumours of a ceasefire circulated. He had been waiting for the ceasefire announcement, he said, "because I don't want to lose the rest of my family".

DRC orders evacuation of Goma after Nyiragongo volcano erupts

London, May 23 : The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has ordered the evacuation of Goma after the eruption of the Mount Nyiragongo volcano overlooking the eastern city of nearly 2 million people. Even before the official announcement on Saturday, thousands of people had started filling the streets and carrying what they could as they headed out of the border city. Nyiragongo's last eruption, in 2002, killed 250 people and left 120,000 homeless. It is one of the world's most active volcanoes and is considered among the most dangerous. Officials said the lava had reached Goma city airport - located on the outskirts of the metropolis on the shores of Lake Kivu - although residents said it had stopped at the edge of the facility. "The situation is deteriorating," an official from Virunga National Park, where the volcano is located, told his staff in a memo. The communications minister, Patrick Muyaya, had earlier tweeted: "The evacuation plan for the city of Goma has been activated ... The government is discussing the urgent measures to take at present." Muyaya added that the plan was activated after an emergency meeting of the government. Congolese president Felix Tshisekedi said he would be returning home from Europe on Sunday to help coordinate relief efforts. There was no immediate word on any casualties, but witnesses said

that lava already had engulfed one highway that connects Goma with the city of Beni in North Kivu province. New fractures were opening in the volcano, letting lava flow south toward the city after initially flowing east toward Rwanda, said Dario Tedesco, a volcanologist based in Goma. "Now Goma is the target," Tedesco told Reuters. "It's similar to 2002. I think that the lava is going towards the city centre. It might stop before or go on. It's difficult to forecast." The exodus from the city began earlier on Saturday even before the Nyiragongo volcano erupted, spewing red fumes into the night sky. Power was cut in large parts of the city and hundreds of residents began leaving their homes and heading towards the nearby border with Rwanda. Rwandan immigration authorities reported that some 3,000 people already had officially crossed over from Congo to escape the volcano's eruption, according to the national broadcaster. The UN peacekeeping mission known as Monusco tweeted dramatic footage of the city, saying it was conducting reconnaissance flights over Goma, where it maintains a large base. "The sky has turned red," said one resident, Carine Mbala. "There is a smell of sulphur. In the distance you can see giant flames coming out of the mountain. But there has not been any earthquake." "People are leaving or preparing to leave," another Goma resident

said, as the streets began filling up, some people carrying as many of their belongings as they could. "I am taking the children and getting into the car. There is a risk that the lava will flow on Goma," another said. "We are already in a total psychosis," resident Zacharie Paluku told the Associated Press. "Everyone is afraid; people are running away. We really don't know what to do." Some sought refuge aboard boats on Lake Kivu, while others fled to Mount Goma, the highest point in the metropolitan area. Dorcas Mbulayi left her home about an hour after the volcano



first showed signs of erupting. "We were eating when a friend of dad's called him on the phone and told him to go and look outside," said Mbulayi, who was still a child the last time the volcano erupted. "Dad told us that the volcano was erupting and that we were going to go to Mount Goma to escape the lava of the volcano." Goma residents leave the city after the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano on May

22. The lack of immediate announcements from authorities and conflicting accounts circulating on social media only added to the sense of chaos in Goma. Authorities at the Goma Volcano Observatory initially said it was the nearby Nyamulagira volcano that had erupted. The two volcanoes are located about 13km (8.1 miles) apart. Volcanologist Charles Balagizi said the observatory's report was based on the direction in which the lava appeared to be flowing, which was toward Rwanda rather than Goma. Goma sits along the border between

New York, May 23 : CNN has dropped former Republican US senator Rick Santorum as a senior political commentator after racist remarks he made about Native Americans at an event in April. News of Santorum's termination was first reported by HuffPost. A CNN spokesperson confirmed to the Guardian that the network has parted ways with Santorum. No further comment on the firing was provided, though an anonymous CNN executive told HuffPost that "leadership wasn't particularly satisfied with that appearance. None of the anchors wanted to book him." Speaking at an event for the Young Americans Foundation, a conservative youth group, Santorum said that there was "nothing" in the US before Europeans colonizers arrived. "We came here and created a blank slate," he said. "We birthed a nation from nothing. I mean, there was nothing here. I mean, yes we have Native Americans, but candidly there isn't much Native American culture in American culture." The comments sparked outrage among indigenous groups, including the National Congress of American

Indians, which specifically called on CNN to fire Santorum over the remarks. "Televising someone with [Santorum's] views on Native American genocide is fundamentally no different than putting an outright Nazi on television to justify the Holocaust," said Fawn Sharp, the group's president, in a statement from last month. "Any mainstream media organization should fire him or face a boycott from more than 500 Tribal Nations and our allies from across the country and



worldwide. "Following the backlash, Santorum was invited to speak to Chris Cuomo to explain his comments. Santorum said he "misspoke" and denied that he

was "trying to dismiss what happened to Native Americans". "Far from it. The way we treated Native Americans was horrific. It goes against every bone and everything I've ever fought for as a leader in the Congress," he told Cuomo. CNN anchor Don Lemon, who follows Cuomo's show on the network's primetime schedule, said Santorum's non-apology was infuriating. "I can't believe the first words out of his mouth weren't I'm sorry, I said something ignorant, I need to learn about the history of this country," he said. "Did he actually think it was a good idea for him to come on television and try to whitewash the whitewash that he whitewashed?"

Centre must take action against Ramdev for making unscientific statements against allopathy: IMA

New Delhi, May 23 : The Union health ministry should take action against yoga guru Ramdev as he has misled people by making "unlearned" statements against allopathy and defamed scientific medicine, the Indian Medical Association said on Saturday. Ramdev should

medical system or charge Ramdev against the epidemic act. It alleged that Ramdev is trying to take advantage of the situation and create a sense of fear and frustration among the people at large. He is doing this "so that he can sell his illegal and unapproved so-called medicines and make



be prosecuted under the Epidemic Diseases Act as "untutored" statements are "a threat to the literate society of the country as well as to the poor people falling prey to him", the apex doctors' body said in a statement. Citing a video circulating on social media, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) said Ramdev is seen saying that "allopathy ek aisi stupid aur diwalilya science hai" (allopathy is such a stupid science). He also says that "lakhs of people have died after taking allopathic medicines", the association said, adding that Ramdev claimed Remdesivir, Faviflu, and all other drugs, which were approved by the Drugs Controller General of India, have failed in treatment of COVID-19 patients. "The Union health minister (Harsh Vardhan) who himself is a practicing modern medicine allopathic postgraduate and head of this (health) ministry, should either accept the challenge and accusation of this gentleman and dissolve the modern medical facility or boldly face and prosecute the person for his words of arson on the sovereignty of the country and book him under the Epidemic Act to save millions of people from such unscientific utterances," the IMA said. Indian medical association IMA demands that either the health minister @drharshvardhan accepts the accusation of Ramdev & dissolve the evidence-based

money at the cost of the public at large", the association said. The IMA said Ramdev deserves to be prosecuted for disobeying and causing danger to the life of many by making them believe to "not to take the advice of allopathy" doctors. "The IMA demands and resolves if the minister (Harsh Vardhan) is not taking suo moto action we will be forced to resort to democratic means of struggle to propagate the truth to the common man and knock the doors of the judiciary to get due to justice," it said. Taking people for ransom and winning business by defaming scientific medicine are unpardonable offenses, the IMA said. Citing Ramdev's remarks it said such "untutored and unlearned" statements are a threat to society. Ramdev's comments irresponsible: Maharashtra COVID task force member Maharashtra COVID-19 task force member and senior doctor Shashank Joshi on Saturday termed yoga guru Ramdev's comments on allopathy as wrong and irresponsible. "It is wrong to make such irresponsible statements. Ramdev helps in clinical recovery, but it is not a life-saving drug. It also does not affect any person (adversely). It is wrong to make such statements about allopathy," Dr Joshi said, speaking to a Marathi news channel. "I respect Ayurveda or Unani systems of medicine," he added.

Rick Santorum axed by CNN over racist remarks on Native Americans

THE ASSAM RISING

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International community must ensure innocent civilians

Islam and Judaism have a long shared and complex history. The Qu'ran and the Tanakh speak of our common patriarch, Abraham/Ibrahim, whose sons Ishmael and Isaac forged separate paths to the establishment of each faith. This neat, if simplistic, analogy of two siblings parting ways is at the heart of our collective past. All over the world, we have lived together for more than a thousand years. And today, we find Muslim and Jewish communities living harmoniously side by side in Manchester, Leeds and right across the UK. Our shared history binds us together and yet sometimes it appears to drive us apart. It is in Jerusalem that our histories converge most abruptly and together, we have looked on in horror and heartbreak as the recent events in Jerusalem and across Israel and Palestine have unfolded. The forced eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah, protests by the extremist Kahanists and the shocking scenes at Al-Aqsa mosque have rocked Jerusalem and its residents. Hamas has fired an indiscriminate and continuous hail of rockets at Israel, while retaliatory airstrikes by Benjamin Netanyahu's government have. But as always, it is innocent civilians who paid the price, with the death toll now well rained down on Gaza over 200, including countless children. While the majority of those killed were Palestinian, we mourn every death as a tragedy and recognise the toll this conflict has wreaked on all citizens in Israel and Palestine. Any ceasefire must herald a renewed international effort for meaningful and lasting peace. To achieve this, the international community must ensure innocent civilians, be they Israeli or Palestinian, are protected and supported to rebuild their lives and embrace a new era of reconciliation and unity. This latest escalation follows decades of violence, occupation and settlement, of mistrust and religious hate. Britain's Muslims and Jews look back at Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat shaking hands on the White House lawn in 1993 as a moment of hope, but this hope was snatched away by those benefiting from division and war. This conflict is acutely painful for our communities and the feelings and sentiments evoked are as complicated as the geopolitical realities that underpin the violence. Our message to Britain's Muslims and Jews – our friends, our neighbours – is simple: despite our emotional turmoil, we cannot and should not hold each other responsible for the events in the Middle East. Just as the Jewish communities in Prestwich or Alwoodley are not responsible for the actions of Netanyahu's government, neither are Muslims in Longsight or Harehills responsible for the actions of Hamas. This may appear to be common sense – something that should not need to be said. But each time violence escalates in the Middle East we see a rise in antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents in the UK. Last week, the Community Security Trust recorded a fivefold increase in the number of antisemitic incidents reported over the past few weeks, while in the same period Tell Mama recorded a 430% in reports of anti-Muslim hate. Social media has – characteristically – become a cesspit of antisemitic and Islamophobic abuse. Beyond the borders of our communities, a sophisticated far-right online campaign based on tropes and conspiracies tries to pit us against each other, but let's be clear: being an adherent of any religion does not make you personally responsible for the actions of those who also profess your faith, abroad or at home. There is no place for antisemitism or Islamophobia in our society and we must not allow the poison of such hate to grow in our country as result of the conflict raging in the Middle East. Muslims and Jews are all too often subject to racism and conspiracy, together and apart. We cannot afford to turn on each other. We must stand together as communities for peace, justice and reconciliation in Israel and Palestine. For while the sons of Abraham/Ibrahim never had an easy relationship, family, after all, is family.

China's Mars landing will be a greater feat with the release of more data

China has made it to Mars, becoming only the second country to put a rover to the red planet. It's a breakthrough – scientifically, economically and politically – for a country increasingly focused on technological self-reliance. Beijing's first such attempt, an orbiter launched by piggybacking on a Russian spacecraft in 2011, failed. A decade later, it has done a lot more – and achieved it alone. The propaganda value of a landing on another planet, as the Communist Party prepares to celebrate its centenary, is not lost on Beijing. Reaping the soft power benefits abroad, though, will require more than headlines. Timely, plentiful shared technical and scientific information from its Mars mission will go a long way toward building credibility – and toward defusing some of the tension around overlapping civil-

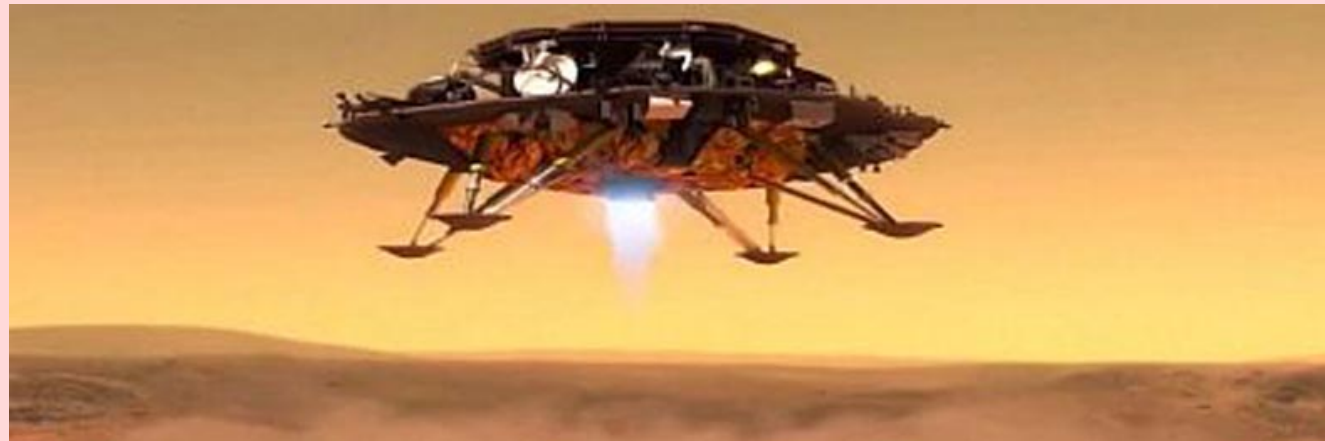
sort of openness that has impact. The lesson from Covid-19 vaccines was clear: Prestige and trust comes with transparency – and so too does scientific cooperation of the sort that China and the rest of the world badly need. After a series of major launches in 2020, Mars has been a hive of activity. The United Arab Emirates' Hope craft, aiming to study weather and climate systems, arrived in Mars orbit in early February, joining others already studying the planet. Tianwen-1, China's mission, followed. NASA's Perseverance rover landed on Mars' surface in mid-February, with the Ingenuity helicopter probe. It's not all about Elon Musk-style ambitions of colonization, though: Scientists hope the planet most similar to Earth can answer questions

about the evolution of our own home. Talk of a race is misleading, but China, with big ambitions and an annual budget estimated at around \$9 billion, the second-largest globally after NASA, is clear on the scientific benefit and economic necessity of space pro-

gress. It landed Chang'e-4 on the far side of the Moon in 2019 – a first – and saw the first seeds sprout. It's agreed to team up with Russia for a permanent lunar base and last month, it launched the first module of its planned space station. And now, Mars. Not everything has been perfect. April's launch of the module for its future space station had the world fretting after the rocket made an uncontrolled re-entry, eventually

Clara Ferreira Marques

splashing into the Indian Ocean. We don't know exactly how much of the technology is homegrown, even with China's push to avoid reliance on Western inputs. Yet Tianwen-1 is already an impressive mission, given the immense technical challenges of landing on



ian and military use that have made collaboration in space so fraught. So far, Beijing appears to have chosen not to release possibly imperfect early images from the actual landing. It may still be awaiting the deployment of the six-wheeled Zhurong rover. It's also just the

Mars, explains Katarina Miljkovic of Curtin University in Australia. That's because of the existence of an atmosphere and the need to use parachutes to slow the descent, unlike on the Moon – not to mention the fact that landings have to be done autonomously, be-

cause of the communications time lag with Earth. But the question is not so much whether Beijing, which has made huge strides since putting its first man in space in 2003, can succeed. Unquestionably, history points in China's favor, with its deep pockets, steadfast political commitment and a massive internal market for satellites and more. Already, the International Space Station is aging just as Beijing builds its own version, perhaps leaving China with the only sustained human presence in orbit. The question is whether that success can be shared and amplified for the common good, or whether China's inward-looking push for self-reliance, its opacity and Western worries about technological transfer dictate the opposite. David Flannery at Queensland University of Technology, who has been working with NASA's Mars 2020 team, says China's mission reflects the scientific goals of the wider community. He points out information from the Moon mission was shared, so there is an encouraging precedent – but there's room for more. That's true even if getting to NASA-levels of disclosure – say, live-streaming launches – will be challenging for Beijing to accept. China is certainly clear that there are benefits, offering up Moon samples and the ability to place experiments on its space station. It can go a lot further. There's the room for the West to act, too. The U.S. can provide encouragement by reconsidering tight limits on collaboration. Excluding China hasn't worked. The rules were intended to counter espionage, but have dented multilateralism, fueled Beijing's ambitions and not aided Washington's.

Progressive economic policies are back on the agenda - time for Starmer to catch up

Sometimes political parties hit a sweet spot and their opponents struggle to lay a glove on them. Rapid non-inflationary growth meant Margaret Thatcher was invulnerable at the 1987 election. Tony Blair was unbeatable in the mid-1990s when Britain was bored with a tired, discredited and sleazy Tory government. Boris Johnson has arrived at his own political state of grace this spring. Everything has come together: the NHS has played a blinder with the vaccine programme; record peacetime spending has anaesthetised the pain of lockdown; a weary population is grateful to be allowed to hug and go to the pub again. These sweet spots don't last for ever and can often be brief. It is possible that the variant of the coronavirus first detected in India will pose no significant threat to the UK and a blossoming economy will continue to give Johnson a non-stick quality. If the new variant takes hold and causes a delay in lifting restrictions, or even the re-imposition of tougher controls, the day the prime minister ambled round Hartlepool on his post-election victory march may go down as peak Johnson. The thought that periods of untouchability are rare and generally fleeting should come as some comfort to the Labour party, although so deep is the current gloom that it probably won't. The fear is not just a fifth straight general election defeat but that Labour could be following the French socialist party into political irrelevance. But this may be pushing the panic button too soon. As some commentators have pointed out, Labour did fine in the recent elections in Wales and Manchester, where it enjoyed the same incumbency factor that delivered for Johnson elsewhere. It's also worth pointing out that, despite the travails of the Labour party,

progressive politics seems to be in pretty good health. The idea of a self-regulating, self-stabilising free market received a fatal wound in the financial crisis of 2008, but somehow lived on for another miserable, wasted decade. Obsessing about the budget deficit was on its way out even before the pandemic struck and the current crisis has moved the dial further to the left. In part, that's because governments have adopted a spend, spend, spend approach. In part, too, it's because – as shown by this week's National Audit Office report – the pandemic has exposed how threadbare the state has become. But it's also the case that once unfashionable ideas have become part of the mainstream. Activist tax-and-spending policies by fi-

for the US budget deficit. The deglobalisation that began with Donald Trump's trade wars has accelerated as countries have tried to make themselves less vulnerable to long supply chains. Robert Skidelsky, in a chapter of a new book, *The Return of the State*, sketched out some ideas for what the UK government should do, including taking responsibility for all procurement affecting the health of the nation; a public sector job guarantee for the unemployed; ensuring sufficient demand through redistribution rather than relying on personal debt; and capital controls to reduce government dependence on international credit markets. In the current climate, none sound nearly as unfeasible as

School of Economics this week identified five big challenges over the next decade: Covid, Brexit, net zero, automation and an ageing population. The UK, it said, was neither prepared nor used to the change that would be necessary to meet these challenges. The government has plenty of slogans, such as "build back better" and "levelling up"; what it doesn't have is a workable plan. The sting in the tail was the Resolution Foundation and the LSE don't think any other party has either. Writing in the *New Statesman* this month, Tony Blair said: "Everything about the world we live in, and still more the one we are about to live in, cries out for a progressive response," and he was right. One of Labour's frustrations is that a party of the right has been entrusted to do the things that a party of the left would feel more comfortable doing. To an extent, Starmer has brought that on himself by getting sidetracked by social and cultural issues. There was, perhaps, a rationale for this while free-market ideas were pre-eminent, because, having lost the economic argument, the left sought to move the debate into areas where it felt more comfortable. There is no such excuse today. The economic argument is there to be won, and Labour can take some comfort from the fact it has done so before. It is almost eight decades since the Beveridge report identified five giants barring the way to progress: want, ignorance, disease, idleness, squalor. Labour turned the giants into five policy objectives: tackling poverty, improving schools, creating the NHS, ensuring full employment, building houses. The world has changed and the fourth industrial revolution is upon us, but those are still things voters want. Labour could do worse than to return to first principles and to the sentiment that carried it to victory in 1945: never again.



nance ministries are back in vogue, with independent central banks taking a back seat. Furlough schemes are a form of basic income. Joe Biden has showered money on American citizens with no heed

they would have done five years ago. Nor is there any real likelihood of a return to a world of minimal state interference in the running of the economy. A report by the Resolution Foundation and the London

The 'no mask' rules in US just follow science

The vaccinated can now go maskless. (Mostly.) Some people are looking with horror at this new recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control, while others are reacting with relief. The scientific evidence is pretty clear: There's powerful data showing that vaccines prevent not just symptomatic Covid-19, but also curb the spread of the virus. Some of the fearful reactions might be driven by people getting stuck on earlier reports that the clinical trials didn't do enough to test whether the vaccines cut down on transmission. But a lot has changed

since then. Pfizer gathered all kinds of real-world data from much larger groups than they studied in the clinical trials, including U.S. healthcare workers and the country of Israel. Those data show that the Pfizer vaccine is preventing transmission. Israel's infection wave – with thousands of cases a day – has now been reduced to a trickle, even though children and some fraction of adults remain unvaccinated. It's reasonable to assume that the nearly identical Moderna vaccine will perform as well. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine,

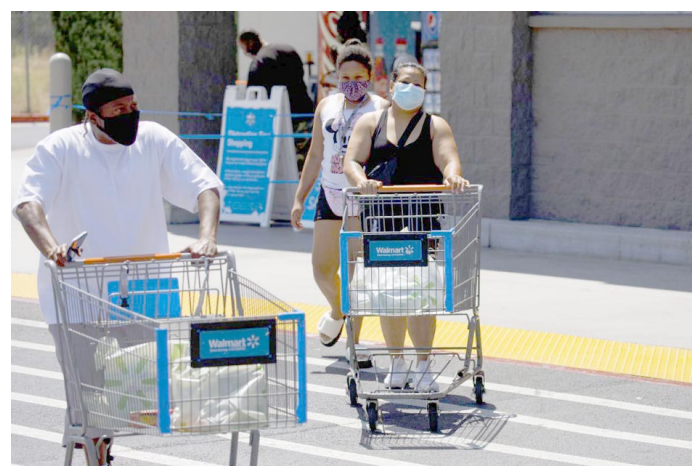
which hasn't been used as extensively in the U.S., wasn't demonstrated to reduce asymptomatic cases the same way, and scientists are still trying to understand the implications of an outbreak among the

Faye Flam

New York Yankees after most of the players got the single-dose vaccine. So far, there was one mild case and seven without symptoms. The bottom line: the evidence that vaccines protect others is of a stronger and more direct kind than the evidence that masks do. So if you want to protect others, getting vaccinated

is more likely to help than wearing a mask – and of course people are still welcome to do both. The burden of proof is higher with vaccines than with masks. With masks, there was an abrupt turnaround last spring when experts began recommending masking without any new, definitive study. Experts I interviewed back

den of proof is on the vaccine makers to demonstrate they work and won't cause harm. The clinical data that Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson have gathered are high quality studies that show vaccines protect against symptomatic disease. There was also limited data from the Moderna



then cited the recognition that masks were relatively safe, cheap and harmless, and therefore, if there's some chance they might help, they should be adopted. There were studies that offered indirect evidence, including ones done in medical facilities with health care workers adopting high quality, tight-fitting N95 masks. And there were simulations showing that cloth masks blocked some of the particles that carry the virus. Last fall the press touted a paper that projected 130,000 lives would be saved by universal masking – but the math was based on the assumption that medical masks and cloth ones would work equally well, preventing about 40% of cases. Another assumption – one that was probably wrong – concerned the half of Americans surveyed at the time who said they didn't wear a mask every time they left the house. The assumption was that these people were failing to wear them in situations where transmission was possible. But it's a lot more likely that many such people were just walking their dogs, jogging or hiking, and still masking in stores or taxis or at the doctor's office. Scientists have been saying for months that masking alone outdoors is not likely to save anyone – something mainstream media outlets like *New York Times* took much longer to admit to. Vaccines have faced a much more stringent level of scrutiny. As FDA requires for any new drug or vaccine, the bur-

den of proof is on the vaccine makers to demonstrate they work and won't cause harm. The clinical data that Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson have gathered are high quality studies that show vaccines protect against symptomatic disease. There was also limited data from the Moderna

SBI Q4 net profit jumps 80% YoY to Rs 6,451 crore on lower provisioning

New Delhi, May 23 : India's largest public sector bank State Bank of India (SBI) on Friday reported a standalone net profit of Rs 6,450.75 crore for quarter ended March 2021 (Q4FY21) aided by fewer provisions

the end of the fiscal year, SBI's Provision Coverage Ratio stood at 87.75 per cent relative to FY20's 83.62 per cent. Sequentially, it rose 6.8 per cent from Rs 10,342.39 crore earmarked in the December quarter of FY21



on bad loans. The lender's PAT was 80.14 per cent higher than previous year's profit of Rs 3,580.8 crore. On a quarterly basis, the bottom line expanded 24.14 per cent. SBI declared a dividend of Rs 4 per equity share for the financial year ended March 31, 2021. The date of payment of dividend is fixed on June 18, 2021. During the quarter under review, the Mumbai-based lender's provisions and contingency fund dropped 18.11 per cent year-on-year (YoY) to Rs 11,051 crore, of which provision for NPA was Rs 9,914.23 crore, from Rs 13,495 crore set aside in Q4FY20. At

(Q3FY21). The numbers met Street expectation that had baked a jump in net profit anywhere between 65 per cent and 115 per cent. The lowest estimate by ICICI Securities, however, had pegged the profit at Rs 4,704.6 crore, up 31 per cent YoY. As regards provisions, analysts expected them to come in anywhere between Rs 7,302.6 crore and Rs 14,886 crore. It's pre-tax profit (or profit before tax), meanwhile, stood at Rs 8,649.12 crore compared with Rs 4,970.04 crore reported in the corresponding quarter of the previous fiscal. Operationally, the bank regis-

tered a pre-provision profit of Rs 19,700 crores in Q4FY21 as compared to Rs 18,465 crores in Q4FY20, an increase of 6.69 per cent YoY. Sequentially, operating profit increased by 13.66 per cent. Net interest income (NII) - the lender's main source of income - increased to Rs 27,067 crore during the quarter. SBI's NII in Q4FY20 was Rs 22,766.9 crore, and Rs 28,819.9 crore in Q3FY21. Domestic NIM for FY21 was at 3.26 per cent, up 7 bps YoY. "To ease the financial stress caused by Covid-19 disruptions on borrowers and relax the repayment pressures, the Supreme Court had directed that there shall not be any charge of interest on interest / compound interest / penal interest for the period during the moratorium from March 1, 2020 to August 31, 2020 and such interest shall be refunded to the concerned borrowers to be given credit / adjusted in the next instalment of the loan amount. Accordingly, the bank has reversed interest income by Rs 830 crore during the year ended March 31, 2021," it said in a statement. That said, denting the earnings report card was the lender's weakened asset quality on a quarterly basis. Its gross non-performing assets (GNPA) increased to Rs 1.26 trillion from Rs 1.17 trillion in Q3FY21. The same, however, was Rs 1.49 trillion in the year-ago period. As a percentage of loans, the GNPA ratio stood at 4.98 per cent, up from 4.77 per cent QoQ. Net NPA, on the other hand, stood at Rs 36,809.72 crore, up

from Rs 29,031.72 crore in Q3FY21. The same declined from Rs 51,871 crore reported in Q4FY20. NNPA for the quarter came in at 1.5 per cent, up from 1.23 per cent QoQ. The PSB's total loan book at the end of Q4FY21 swelled 5 per cent on year to Rs 25.39 trillion from Rs 24.22 trillion at the end of Q4FY20. On a quarterly basis, the loan book expanded 3.4 per cent from Rs 24.56 trillion. Of these, the lender saw a 3 per cent YoY decline in corporate loans while retail loans jumped 16.5 per cent YoY. Moreover, Home loan, which constitutes 23 per cent of the bank's domestic advances, has grown by 10.51 per cent YoY. Deposits, however, soared 13.5 per cent to Rs 36.81 trillion. Out this, Current Account Deposit grew by 27.36 per cent YoY, while Saving Bank Deposits grew by 14.79 per cent YoY, the lender's financial statements showed. The bank clocked improvement across key ratios to gauge financial stability. Cost to Income Ratio, for instance, increased marginally from 52.46 per cent in FY20 to 53.60 per cent in FY21 while Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) improved by 68 bps YoY to 13.74 per cent as on March 2021. Return on Assets (RoA) increased by 10 bps YoY to 0.48 per cent in FY21 against 0.38 per cent in FY20. Slippages Ratio for FY21 declined to 1.18 per cent from 2.16 per cent as at the end of FY20 while Credit Cost as at the end of FY21 has declined 75 bps YoY to 1.12 per cent.

Sugar stocks trade weak in a firm market on reduction in export subsidy



Mumbai, May 23 : Shares of sugar manufacturers were trading weak (down by up to 8 per cent) on the BSE in intra-day trade on Friday in an otherwise strong market after the government slashed subsidy on sugar exports from Rs 6,000 per tonne to Rs 4,000 per tonne with immediate effect in view of firm global prices. Dalmia Bharat Sugar and Industries, Bajaj Hindustan Sugar, Dhampur Sugar Mills, Dwarikesh Sugar Industries, Balarampur Chini Mills, Uttam Sugar Mills and Avadh Sugar Mills were down 3 per cent to 5 per cent on the BSE. Praj Industries, engaged in the business of process and project engineering, dipped 8 per cent to Rs 350 in intra-day trade today. In comparison, the S&P BSE Sensex was up 1.4 per cent at 50,263 points at 11:55 am. Most of these stocks had outperformed the market by a huge margin, after reporting a strong set of numbers for the quarter ended March 2021 amid rising sugar prices in global market. On Thursday, the government reduced the export subsidy from Rs 5.85 / kg to Rs 4.0 / kg on any sugar contracted for export on or after May 20, 2021. It is important to note that 5.7 million tonnes (MT) out of 6.0 MT has already been contracted for the 2020-21 season. "Current global white sugar prices are trading at Rs 33 / kg (Indian equivalent price). These prices are remunerative with-

out any sugar subsidy by the government. We believe the government's decision is an indication that it may reduce or eliminate sugar subsidy for the 2021-22 sugar season. This would keep global prices firm and ensure that sugar millers continue to export additional quantities under OGL (without subsidy) at remunerative prices," ICICI Securities said in a note. Some of the market indicators suggests that around 50,000 tonnes of exports that have already been contracted from Maharashtra under OGL & any price above US\$470/tonne would also attract exports from UP under OGL. We believe additional 1-2 MT of exports can be easily contracted under OGL in 2020-21 season itself. This would further rationalize inventories and keep domestic prices, the brokerage firm said. "We reiterate our positive stance on India's sugar industry as it is well poised to benefit from global and domestic factors. Lower output from countries like Brazil, Thailand and the EU would keep supplies tight and global prices firm, enabling India to increase exports. On the domestic front, favorable policies, rising ethanol demand (blending target of 20 per cent by CY25 from 8 per cent currently), aggressive ethanol capacity addition would drive an earnings of the sugar companies," analysts at Elara Capital in recent report.

Banks lift indices to 10-wk high; Sensex ends 976 pts up, Nifty at 15,175

New Delhi, May 23 : Stock market updates: Benchmark indices built on gains clocked through the day and ended nearly 2 per cent higher on Friday after India's largest public sector bank, State Bank of India, reported a healthy quarterly show. The lender's net profit zoomed over 80 per cent to Rs 6,451 crore in Q4FY21 as it set aside lower provisions and expected asset quality to improve going forward. Supported by rally in other financial stocks, the BSE barometer of 30-shares ended at 50,540 levels, up 976 points or 1.9 per cent. On NSE, the Nifty 50 index advanced 269 points to settle above the crucial level of 15,150-level at 15,175. Both the indices hit their respective highs of 50,591 and 15,190. SBI was the second best gainer on the Sensex, up 4 per cent, while IndusInd Bank, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, HDFC, and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the other top gainers, up between 3 per cent and 4.5 per cent. All these stocks contributed nearly 680 points towards the Sensex's total gains. On the downside, Dr Reddy's Labs and Power Grid on the Sensex, and Eicher Motors, Indian Oil Corporation, Grasim, and SBI Life on the Nifty were the only laggards on the indices, down up to 0.3 per cent. Financial indices -- Nifty Bank, Private Bank, PSU Bank, and Financial Services -- outper-

formed on the NSE today, and gained between 3-3.5 per cent. Meanwhile, all other sectoral indices settled up to 1 per cent higher. In the broader markets, the S&P BSE MidCap and SmallCap indices underperformed the benchmarks today and



ended 0.8 per cent and 0.65 per cent higher, respectively. European stocks held steady on Friday as Swiss luxury goods maker Richemont jumped after its results, but a slide in London-listed shares and worries about inflation dampened early enthusiasm. The pan-European STOXX 600 index was flat, with British stocks falling about half a per cent. In Asia, Japan's Nikkei was up 0.8 per cent and Australia's S&P/ASX200 gained 0.15 per cent. South Korea's Kospi and China CSI30 indices, however, slipped 0.2 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively.

Adani Transmission becomes the second most valuable Adani Group firm

Mumbai, May 23 : Adani Transmission surpassed the other group company Adani Port and Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to become the second most valuable of the Gautam Adani-led Adani Group companies. With Rs 1.60 trillion market capitalisation (market-cap), Adani Transmission replaced Adani Port & SEZ, which has market-cap of Rs 1.57 trillion, at 11:13 am; the BSE data shows. Adani Green Energy is the most valuable Adani Group

transmission network of around 17,200 ckt km, out of which around 12,350 ckt km is operational and around 4,850 ckt km is at various stages of construction. ATL also operates a distribution business serving about 3 million+ customers in Mumbai. With India's energy requirement set to quadruple in coming years, ATL is fully geared to create a strong and reliable power transmission network and work actively towards serving retail customers and achieving 'Power for All' by 2022. ATL shares hit a new high and locked in 5 per cent upper circuit at Rs 1,455.20 on the BSE, with only buyers were seen on the counter. The stock was trading higher for the fifth straight day and has rallied 27 per cent in the same period, as compared to 3 per cent gain in the S&P BSE Sensex. Till 11:19 am, a combined 2 million equity shares have changed hands on the NSE and BSE, so far. "On future growth, ATL well placed to capture future growth through multiple avenues. The company has robust under-construction pipeline worth Rs 15,000 crore (including Mumbai-HVDC project). It has strong growth potential through TBCB (tariff based competitive bidding) transmission projects. The acquisition, new license, franchise and public private partnership (PPP) opportunities in transmission and distribution (T&D) space," the company said in investor presentation.



company with market-cap of Rs 2.01 trillion, data shows. Adani Transmission Limited (ATL) is the transmission and distribution business arm of the Adani Group, one of India's largest business conglomerates. ATL is the country's largest private transmission company with a cumulative

HPCL rallies 8%, hits 52-week high on strong March quarter results

Mumbai, May 23 : Shares of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) rallied 8 per cent and hit a 52-week high of Rs 288.15 on the BSE in intra-day trade on Friday after reporting many-fold jump in its March quarter (Q4FY21) net profit to Rs 3,018 crore on the back of inventory gains and rise in refining margins. The state-owned oil marketing company had a net profit of Rs 27 crore in January-March 2020 (Q4FY20). The company announced final dividend of Rs 22.75 per share, translating to dividend yield of 9 per cent for FY21. It also completed its share buyback program on April 20, 2021. "HPCL's marketing sales volumes were 9 per cent above est. at 10.1mm (+6 per cent YoY). The marketing margin stood at Rs 6/lit (v/s our est. of Rs 5.2; +64 per cent YoY and +15 per cent QoQ)", Motilal Oswal Securities said. The company earned \$8.11 on turning every barrel of crude oil into fuel in the January-March period. This is compared with a negative gross refining margin (GRM) of \$1.23 per barrel (BBL). Average GRM during the year ended March 31, 2021 was \$3.86 per BBL as against US \$1.02 per BBL during the corresponding previous year. Inventory gains are booked when raw material (crude) prices rise by the time a company processes oil into fuel. Losses are booked when the reverse happens. "HPCL reported a significant EBITDA beat on much higher inventory gains in refining and marketing than we expected. Marketing volume growth was sharply ahead of industry growth. Marketing profitability is likely to be restored as crude cools and retail price hikes continue. Despite a 3.2x y/y jump in OCF, borrowings were flat due to a large increase in inventories and back-ended capex. We cut earnings 3 per cent/5 per cent for FY22/23E on ongoing restrictions, maintain Buy," analysts at Jefferies said in results update. At 09:34 am, HPCL was trading 5 per cent higher at Rs 280 on the BSE, as compared to 0.8 per

cent rise in the S&P BSE Sensex. The trading volumes on the counter nearly doubled with a combined around 15 million equity shares changing hands on the NSE and BSE.

JK Lakshmi Cement surges 7%, nears record high on healthy Q4 results

Mumbai, May 23 : Shares of JK Lakshmi Cement surged 7 per cent and hit a fresh 52-week high of Rs 499.70 on the BSE in intra-day trade

Rs 1,322 crore. Ebitda (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation) margin improved 130 basis points (bps) to 20.3 per cent in



on Friday after the company reported 37 per cent year-on-year (YoY) jump in March quarter (Q4FY21) standalone net profit at Rs 138.27 crore, on the back of healthy operational performance. It had a profit of Rs 101.21 crore in Q4FY20. The stock was trading close to its record high level of Rs 535, touched on May 17, 2017. The company's revenue from operations grew 24.6 per cent YoY at

Q4FY21 from 19 per cent in Q4FY20. Despite hike in the prices of inputs like petcoke, diesel, fly ash, gypsum, the company said it has improved its profitability on account of substantial higher volumes, higher realisations, improved efficiency, improved product mix etc. "At 99 per cent capacity utilisation, the company achieved its optimum capacity utilization during the quarter leading to

healthy margin expansion and profitability growth. To address the capacity constrain issue, the company has already announced further expansion of 2.5MT capacity at its subsidiary unit. This would help it to continue its growth momentum", ICICI Securities said in a note. "Volumes grew 18 per cent YoY to 2.90mt (in line with estimate) and EBITDA/t was 36 per cent above estimate at Rs 922 (+30 per cent QoQ, +13 per cent YoY). While realization was 4 per cent above estimate at Rs 4,552/t (+3 per cent QoQ, +6 per cent YoY), per ton cost was 2 per cent below estimate at Rs 3,630/t (+4 per cent YoY, -2 per cent QoQ) - on account of lower-than-expected power and fuel cost at Rs 782/t (-4 per cent YoY)," Motilal Oswal Securities said in results update. The brokerage firm assigned JK Lakshmi Cement a 'BUY' rating on an attractive valuation (\$56/t of EV/capacity) and strong exposure to the preferred North India market, which should drive earnings growth. It is also currently in the process of adding a 2.5mtpa brownfield capacity in North India through its subsidiary Udaipur Cement Works. At 10:00 am, the stock was trading 5 per cent higher at Rs 491 on the BSE, against 1.1 per cent gain in the S&P BSE Sensex. A combined 1.9 million equity shares have changed hands on the counter on the NSE and BSE, so far.

Gold eases, set for third weekly gain on weak dollar, inflation jitters

Mumbai, May 23 : Gold edged lower on Friday, as optimism around a swift economic recovery lifted appeal for riskier assets, although a weaker dollar and growing inflationary pressure limited losses and kept bullion on track for a third straight weekly rise. * Spot gold was down 0.2% at \$1,872.21 per ounce by 0126 GMT, but it has risen 1.6% this week. * U.S. gold futures fell 0.4% to \$1,873.70 per ounce. * The dollar was pinned near milestone lows against its rivals and was headed for a weekly loss. A weaker greenback makes gold more appealing for other currency holders. [USD/] * Benchmark 10-year Treasury yields fell to 1.6340% overnight. Lower bond yields reduce the opportunity cost of

holding non-interest bearing gold. * Risk sentiment in wider financial markets remained upbeat after strong U.S. jobs data lifted hopes around a quick economic recovery. [MKTS/GLOB] *



Data on Thursday showed the number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits dropped fur-

ther below 500,000 last week. * Japan's core consumer prices slid for the ninth straight month in April, as a record slump in cellphone fees offset rising energy prices. * Britain's economy will grow much faster than expected this year as a fast-moving coronavirus vaccine programme allows businesses to re-open and lifts confidence, a Reuters poll found. * SPDR Gold Trust, the world's largest gold-backed exchange-traded fund, said its holdings rose 0.6% to 1,037.09 tonnes on Thursday from 1,031.27 tonnes on Wednesday. [GOL/ETF] * Palladium gained 0.5% to \$2,865.73 per ounce, silver eased 0.1% to \$27.72, while platinum edged 0.4% higher to \$1,200.57.

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CM thanks PM after receiving Oxygen

Assam delivering total 160 MT of oxygen to the State every week. Apart from fulfilling State's own requirement, Assam would supply surplus Oxygen to neighbouring NE states of Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Tripura, he said. Chief Minister said that the state has medical oxygen storage capacity up to 800 litres. Reflecting on the ongoing COVID vaccination drive in the state, the Chief Minister informed that the State Government is making efforts to ramp up daily vaccination from present 50 thousand people to 1 lakh. Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Samir Kumar Sinha and other officials of NF Railway, Container Corporation of India Ltd. etc were also present at the programme.

Assam to introduce cow protection

also continue to strengthen the satras by providing them grants-in-aid," he added. Encroachment of land belonging to many of more than 800 satras allegedly by migrants had been a major election plank of the Bharatiya Janata Party and its regional allies. The government headed by former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal had splurged on the satras besides providing a grant of ₹2.5 lakh each to 8,756 community namghars. An average of 70 households are associated with a namghar. The BJP is believed to have reaped the votes from such "grateful" households.

Chief Minister Sarma reviews

Sarma also asked the DCs to activate the odd hour treatment management for the critical COVID care patients and asked the DCs to undertake visit to the hospitals during the odd hours. He also asked the DCs to use spacious complexes as COVID vaccination centres and create arrangement for seating, drinking water etc. He also asked them to give priority to the aged people as well as mothers to receive their doses at the vaccination centres. He also asked them to create model vaccination centres. Taking a serious look of the reported positive cases in tea garden areas, Sarma asked the DCs to take steps to tackle the spread of COVID in the tea garden and create communication channel with organisations in the tea garden areas to use their services. He also said that containment zones should be specifically earmarked and imposed. He also said that the ration should also be provided to the people confined to containment zones in the tea garden areas. He also asked them to ensure that doctors visit the tea garden hospitals on a regular basis. Chief Minister Sarma also asked the DCs to increase their ICUs beds, oxygen beds, oxygen concentrators and COVID Care Centres in their respective districts. He also asked them to increase RTPCR test to ascertain the COVID status of the people. With regards to responding a request, Chief Minister Sarma asked Chief Secretary to take appropriate steps for incorporating employees from Railway, Bank, LPG distribution network, petrol pumps, pharmacies and other sectors that are exempted from the purview of curfew as front line workers to enable them to receive COVID vaccination on priority basis. Chief Minister also asked the DCs to create a system to drop COVID positive patients who have opted for home isolation from testing centres to their respective homes. Health and Family Welfare Minister Keshab Mahanta, Minister for Revenue and Disaster Management Jogen Mohan, Chief Minister Political Secretary Jayanta Malla Baruah, Chief Secretary Jishnu Baruah, DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Samir Kumar Sinha, Principal Secretary to Health Anurag Goyal and other senior officers of the government were present during the meeting.

Olympic Wrestler Sushil Kumar

Police were on the lookout for Sushil Kumar for his alleged involvement in the death of a 23-year-old wrestler at a stadium in Delhi. "A team of Special Cell SR led by Inspector Shivkumar, Inspector Karambir and supervised by ACP Attar Singh has arrested Sushil Kumar and Ajay from Mundka area of Delhi in connection with the killing of 23-year-old Sagar Rana at Chhatrasal Stadium," Neeraj Thakur, Special CP-Special Cell, said. According to police, Sushil Kumar and his associates assaulted fellow wrestler Sagar Rana, 23, and his two friends on May 4 at the national capital's Chhatrasal Stadium. All three had to be hospitalised. Mr Rana later died of his injuries. Sushil Kumar and Ajay have been on the run after assault on a 23-year-old wrestler at a stadium in Delhi. The Delhi Police had announced a reward of ₹ one lakh for information leading to the arrest of Sushil Kumar, who had since been on the run. Another reward of ₹ 50,000 was announced for Ajay Kumar's arrest. Police have been raiding several places in Delhi and its surrounding cities, and neighbouring states, to arrest the champion wrestler. On May 18, Sushil Kumar had approached the Rohini court seeking protection from arrest, claiming that the probe against him was biased and that no injuries caused to the victim were attributable to him. The court, however, dismissed his anticipatory bail plea, saying he was prima facie the main conspirator and allegations against him were serious in nature. Non-bailable warrants were issued against him and six others. This came days after a lookout notice was issued against the wrestler. Sushil Kumar won a bronze medal in 2008 Beijing Olympics and a silver medal in 2012 London Olympics.

Assam scientist Jubilee

Purkayastha, Dr Jubilee Purkayastha said she was "blessed to be a part of a domain which is working for the services of the nation". Talking to the media, Dr Jubilee said, "I love my mother and she is my inspiration. I feel I have a lot to do for my country." Amidst such a crisis situation, the scientist urged the people to strictly maintain the COVID-appropriate behaviour. "We hope to get back to normalcy soon," the scientist expected. Assam scientist Jubilee Purkayastha helped DRDO develop anti-Covid drug 2-DG 2Patharkandi MLA Krishendu Paul has congratulated the scientist. "It is a matter of pride that she belong to a very small village namely #Mahisashan situated under #Karimganj Dist of #Assam. DR JUBILEE PURKAYASTHA D/O Lt. Sudarshan Purkayastha & Mrs. Binoy Kumari Purkayastha is the one who is actively involve in the process of discovering DRDO Anti Covid Drug 2-DG to save humanity from ferocious virus #Covid," the MLA wrote in a Facebook post. Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences (DIPAS), a laboratory of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), has developed an antibody detection-based kit 'DIPCOVAN', the DIPAS-V Dx COVID-19 IgG Antibody Microwell ELISA for sero-surveillance. The DIPCOVAN kit can detect both spikes as well as nucleocapsid (S&N) proteins of the SARS-CoV-2 virus with a high sensitivity of 97 per cent and specificity of 99 per cent. The kit has been developed in association with Vanguard Diagnostics Pvt Ltd, a development and manufacturing diagnostics company based in New Delhi. The DIPCOVAN kit was developed indigenously by the scientists, followed by extensive validation on more than 1,000 patient samples at various COVID designated hospitals in Delhi. DRDO develops COVID-19 antibody detection kit | Three batches of the product were validated during last one year. The antibody detection kit is approved by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in April 2021. In May 2021, the product received regulatory approval from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, to manufacture for sale and distribution. DIPCOVAN is intended for the qualitative detection of IgG antibodies in human serum or plasma, targeting SARS-CoV-2 related antigens. It offers a significantly faster turn-around time as it requires just 75 minutes to conduct the test without any cross-reactivity with other diseases. The kit has a shelf life of 18 months. Industry partner Vanguard Diagnostics Pvt. Ltd will commercially launch the product during the first week of June 2021. Readily available stock at the time of launch will be 100 kits (approx. 10,000 tests) with a production capacity of 500 kits/month after the launch. It is expected to be available at about Rs 75 per test. The kit will be very useful for understanding COVID-19 epidemiology and assessing an individual's previous SARS-CoV-2 exposure.

HSLC, High Madrassa Exams in

leaders informed that they will have another meeting with the SEBA authority after five days to discuss the issue of examinations. AASU president Nath said, "The AASU has requested the SEBA authority that it should inform the students regarding the conduct of the examination as soon as the Covid situation in the state becomes normal." "As soon as the Covid-19 situation turns normal, the SEBA will prepare a schedule of the examination and will let the students know about the papers that the students would have to write," he added.

CM visits Basistha cremation

Chief Minister visited the pond which has been developed at the ground as part of the project. He also took stock of the special arrangements put in place for cremation of bodies of the Covid-19 patients. Chief Minister Sarma was earlier felicitated by the management of Basistha Ashram on his arrival there. Later talking to media persons, the Chief Minister said that Basistha Ashram management committee, cremation ground management committee and CMD of Prag News channel Sanjiv Narain have taken special steps for beautification of Basistha cremation ground. He also informed that the State government would take steps in a planned way for regaining the natural beauty of Basistha Ashram. Kamrup (Metro) DC Biswajit Pegu and CMD of Prag News channel Sanjive Narain were also present during he visit of the Chief Minister.

Diabetes, cold oxygen, unwashed masks : AIIMS doctor lists reasons for rise in black fungus cases

New Delhi, May 23 : States like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka, Odisha, Telangana and Tamil Nadu have declared mucormycosis a 'notifiable' disease under the Epidemic Diseases Act after a letter from the Centre. A doctor expert has said that Covid-19 patients with uncontrolled diabetes who have been treated with steroids, tocilizumab, and put under ventilation have a high risk of contracting mucormycosis or black fungus infection. Dr P Sarat Chandra, senior neurosurgeon at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi said that patients within six weeks of Covid-19 treatment are at the highest risk of contracting black fungus. "One of the most important reasons is uncontrolled diabetes, systemic use of steroids along with tocilizumab, patients on ventilation and taking supplemental oxygen. Within six weeks of Covid treatment if people have any of these factors they are at the highest risk of black fungus," said Dr Chandra who also teaches neurosurgery at AIIMS. The doctor also said that administering cold oxygen is dangerous and anti-fungal drug Posaconazole has to be given to patients who are deemed particularly vulnerable to the disease. Chandra's cautionary words reiterate the concerns raised by many health experts. "Giving cold oxygen directly from the cylinder is very dangerous. Anti-fungal drug Posaconazole can be given to high-risk individuals to reduce incidents of black fungus," Dr Chandra said. He also cautioned against the long term use of face masks, advising N-95 masks be discarded after five uses and cloth masks to be washed daily. He also advised against storing masks in damp places, as after prolonged usage it runs the risk of catching fungus. "Prolonged use of masks to be discouraged as any cloth mask kept in a damp place with prolonged use may catch fungus. Cloth masks should be washed every day and N95 masks preferably discarded after five uses. "Rotatory use of masks is preferred, that is, keep one mask for every day of the week and rotate them again," he advised. States like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka, Odisha, Telangana and Tamil Nadu have declared mucormycosis a 'notifiable' disease under the Epidemic Diseases Act after a letter from the Centre. On Friday, AIIMS Delhi Director Dr Randeep Guleria said that Covid-19-linked infection has claimed more than 7,000 lives in the country.

Majority mark in Rajya Sabha to remain elusive for BJP in second term of Modi government

New Delhi, May 23 : The majority mark in the Rajya Sabha will remain elusive for the BJP in the second term of the Narendra Modi government, and its performance in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly poll slated for early next year is crucial for it to maintain its current tally in the Upper House. At 93, the BJP is 30 members short of the majority mark of 123 in a House of 245 MPs. In the second term, with more than half a dozen Opposition MPs changing loyalty to the BJP, the ruling party had managed to pass controversial Bills, beginning with the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights of Marriage) Bill, 2019 or Triple Talaq Act, along with J&K Re-organisation Bill and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. Three rounds of retirements in the year 2022 - April (18 members), June (20 members) and July (33 members) - will bring the last change in the political arithmetic of the Rajya Sabha in the second term of the Modi government. Major losses for the BJP will come from Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The BJP holds three out of the four seats that go to the polls in Andhra Pradesh after four TDP MPs joined the BJP in June 2019. These three seats will go to the ruling party YSR Congress. In Rajasthan, too, where the BJP holds all the four seats that fall vacant in July 2022, the Congress has an opportunity. Dissension is already brewing in the State, with Congress leader Sachin Pilot once again raising the flag of rebellion. If the Congress is able to maintain order in its House, it could gain three seats in the Rajya Sabha. In Chhattisgarh, the BJP will lose one seat in the Rajya Sabha elections slated for June next year. The BJP will gain one seat each in Assam and Himachal Pradesh next June. This makes Uttar Pradesh crucial for the BJP's strength in the Upper House. In July next year, 11 seats from Uttar Pradesh will fall vacant. As per the current tally, the BJP holds five of these, which includes two former Samajwadi Party MPs - Sanjay Seth and Surender Singh Nagar - who shifted their loyalties midway through their term. Without repeating its 2017 performance in the State, the BJP cannot hold on to these five seats. In Punjab, if the current anti-BJP sentiment because of the three controversial farm laws prevails till the polls, the BJP will lose one seat. The BJP allies will also be affected - the AIADMK strength is expected to be curtailed after its defeat in the recent Assembly poll in Tamil Nadu. Currently, the AIADMK has six members and its political adversary, the DMK, seven. The three RS seats from the State that are currently vacant are expected to go to the polls any time soon. The DMK will win two of these three. In June next year, four Upper House seats from the State go to the polls. Out of these four, currently the DMK and the AIADMK have two each. DMK insiders sounded confident that they will easily win three of these. On the balance, the DMK is expected to go into double digits, outstripping the AIADMK. There will be no significant change in the current Congress strength of 34, though it is expected to make gains in Rajasthan (3) and Chhattisgarh (1) on the basis of its current strength in the State Assemblies. It will lose one seat each from Assam, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. In Assam, two seats are falling vacant in April next year, including that of the current State unit President Ripun Bora. Out of these two, the Congress can hope to retain one, if its alliance with the AIUDF holds and they decide to support the Congress. "There is a very significant 'if' here. The AIUDF also could stake a claim for the seat," an Assam MP said. The party is hoping that the Punjab Assembly results would help even out the losses.

Oxford, Pfizer vaccines 80% effective against COVID-19 variant found in India: Study

London, May 23 : Two doses from either the Oxford/AstraZeneca or the Pfizer vaccine are over 80 per cent effective in preventing infection from the B.1.617.2 variant of COVID-19, first discovered in India, a new UK government study has reportedly found. The Oxford/AstraZeneca two-dose vaccine is also being produced by the Serum Institute of India as Covishield and being administered among the adult population in India to protect against the deadly virus. The UK findings are said to be based on data from Public Health England (PHE) and have also revealed that the two doses provide 87 per cent protection from the B.117 variant, first discovered in Kent region of England and also considered highly transmissible. According to "The Telegraph" newspaper, the latest study's findings were presented to a meeting of the government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) this week. The latest PHE statistics released earlier this week show that case numbers of the B.1.617.2 variant had risen by 2,111 over the past week to hit 3,424 cases across the country. "I think it's clearly growing, which anyone can see from the numbers as they are reported week by week," Dr Jeffrey Barrett, director of COVID-19 genomics at the Sanger Institute, told the BBC. "If I had to put a guess today it would be 20 or 30 per cent rather than 50 per cent (more infectious than the Kent variant). But there is still uncertainty, 50 per cent might be a reasonable worst case scenario," he said, in reference to the rate of transmissibility of the variant of concern (VOC) first detected in India. Meanwhile, PHE officials are also closely monitoring a variant under investigation (VUI) in the Yorkshire region of England, which is showing high transmissibility. It comes as the National Health Service (NHS) further expanded its vaccination programme and announced that it will open bookings for people aged 32 and 33, adding to the over-34s cohort, from Saturday. NHS England said that the third expansion of eligibility in just one week comes as over four in 10 adults have now had both jabs. "Only days after we extended the offer of a vaccine to 34 and 35 year olds, we are now rolling out the invite to 32 and 33 year olds - an incredible step forward in the biggest and most successful vaccination programme in NHS history," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock. "This is truly a testament to the heroic work of our amazing NHS and care staff, volunteers and local authorities across the country who have helped deliver over 50 million jabs at lightning speed across England, keeping us on track to offer a vaccine to everyone by July," he said. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has, meanwhile, said that it is ramping up testing and genome sequencing of sewage and waste water in the drive to track and trace all variants of COVID-19, including the B.1.617.2 variant. A new laboratory in Exeter, south-west England, opened last month dedicated to analysing wastewater, making it one of the biggest wastewater processing labs in the world. Increased genomic sequencing of sewage samples are expected to provide more clues to where variants of concern may be circulating undetected in communities. It can pick up evidence of variants from infected people and continue to monitor sewage after surge testing has ended in an area. "Sequencing wastewater samples provides an additional detection system for variants of concern, enabling us to respond more effectively to outbreaks and better protect citizens," said Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency Dr Jenny Harries. "This innovative programme supports the work of Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace to help us understand where the virus may be circulating undetected," she said. Wastewater samples are taken from around 500 locations in England and sent to the laboratory at Exeter Science Park. Environment Agency scientists analyse the samples to quantify the amount of COVID-19 present. "As infections fall and we head out of national restrictions, analysing wastewater to detect variants early on is important to help local authorities and NHS Test and Trace act quickly to stop variants from spreading in communities," said Programme Lead at the Joint Biosecurity Centre Dr Andrew Engeli. The experts said that without the need to rely on individuals coming forward for swab tests, this kind of monitoring in a catchment area is able to pinpoint outbreaks to smaller areas and neighbourhoods. There are also pilots analysing the wastewater from specific institutions, such as within the food supply chain and prisons.

HC judges' posts lying vacant, CJI writes to chief justices to expedite appointment process

New Delhi, May 23 : Chief Justice of India N. V. Ramana has written to the chief justices of all 25 High Courts, asking them to expedite the process of appointing judges to fill up the large number of vacancies. ThePrint has learnt. The letter, sent a week after he took over as the CJI on 24 April, draws the attention of chief justices to the vacancy crisis plaguing the higher judiciary and urges them to recommend names as soon as possible. ThePrint spoke to a few chief justices, who confirmed having received the letter. Although the communique does not fix any deadline to send the names, it does mention the time frame fixed in the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) for appointment of judges. This MoP clause was also reiterated in a Supreme Court judgment given last month in the judges appointment case by a bench then led by former CJI S. A. Bobde. The verdict fixed a time frame for the central government to clear names with inputs of the Intelligence Bureau. According to the MoP, chief justices of HCs must propose names for judgeship at least six months before a vacancy is about to arise. To fill up the 40 per cent vacancies in HCs is one of the key challenges CJI Ramana faces during his 16-month-long tenure as the head of the judiciary. Also, the top court at present has seven vacancies and six more are likely to arise before CJI Ramana's term ends on 25 August 2022. Justice Bobde's bench had in its judgment remarked that HCs were in "deep crisis," with many large HCs working with less than 50 per cent of the sanctioned strength. CJI Ramana's letter assumes significance because the central government had during the hearing of the judges appointment case flagged the issue of delay on the part of HCs who were yet to send names for around 53 per cent of their total vacancies. According to the central government's note submitted before the top court, there are 416 vacancies against the sanctioned strength of 1,080 HC judges. The top law officer claimed the government had received only 196 proposals from HCs, while no recommendations were there for the 220 vacancies. The central government's stand was in response to the criticism by the bench, which questioned it for sitting over proposals sent by various HCs as well as the ones that were cleared by the Supreme Court collegium. The MoP underlines that the government has to notify appointments once the appointing body comprising CJI and two senior-most judges of the top court approve them. Nudged by the top court, the Centre had finally forwarded 45 names as HC judges to the Supreme Court collegium for its scrutiny., chief justice of a HC said: "It is true that the MoP wants a chief justice to suggest candidates in advance. However, there is hesitation on the part of chief justices to send more names when the ones sent earlier remain in the pipeline for long, raising uncertainty and doubt over the proposals. Inordinate delay on the Centre's part is one of the reasons why it has now become difficult for chief justices to find good suitable candidates." Last month's SC judgment had also noted this reluctance and apprehension in the minds of chief justices. But it had still emphasised the "requirement and desirability of the chief justices of the HCs" to "make endeavour to recommend vacancies as early as possible." In a related judgment, the same bench had also approved appointment of ad-hoc judges according to Article 224A of the Constitution to overcome the vacancy crisis and a docket explosion in HCs where over 54 lakh cases are pending for final adjudication.

Charles Leclerc takes Monaco F1 pole despite crash, Hamilton starts seventh

London, May 23 : Charles Leclerc had to charge hard for his pole at the Monaco Grand Prix. So hard indeed, he claimed the top spot



despite crashing out on the streets of Monte Carlo. The Monégasque driver was a surprise winner in qualifying at his home race, after a gripping session that also has the potential to dramatically change the shape of this year's Formula One world championship after Lewis Hamilton was left languishing in seventh, disappointed in how his Mercedes team had handled his weekend. Leclerc took the pole having already set the quickest time before he hit the barriers ending the session on his final hot lap in Monaco. It drew to a close what had promised to be a nail-biting finale but much as it favoured the 23-year-old it had not been intentional. Indeed, he now faces a tense wait to assess the damage his Ferrari

sustained. If he has to take a gearbox replacement the pole will be lost to a five-place grid penalty. Behind him the results were equally dramatic. Max Verstappen was in second for Red Bull but Hamilton, who leads the Dutchman by 14 points in the championship, was uncompetitive, five places behind. With overtaking so hard on the streets of Monte Carlo, if the pair finish in the same positions Verstappen could move to within two points of Hamilton. Hamilton had struggled to put heat into his tyres throughout the session and not gone better than seventh throughout qualifying. He was not happy with how the car had progressed over the weekend, believing Mercedes had made setup changes to the car that had gone in completely the wrong direction. Hamilton is rarely openly critical of his team but he was clear there would

be a vigorous debriefing after qualifying. "There will be some tough discussions with my engineers tonight or maybe after the am just worried about the rear of the car. I hope it is OK, it doesn't look OK." Verstappen, who had been on course to go quicker than Leclerc when his final lap was brought to a halt by the red flags, also accepted that there was no premeditation on Leclerc's behalf. "If Charles had just parked it with broken front wing it's a different story," he said. "Charles had a misjudgment, it's just unfortunate. We are all trying so hard and it's not so easy round here, especially on the limit, it's easy to make a mistake." Verstappen laid down his marker on his first run in Q3 with a time of 1min 10.576sec but Leclerc followed him and promptly hit back, going a full two-tenths quicker, making gains in sector two with a time of 1min 10.346. With the track offering the most grip the final runs were vital but as they were under way the Monégasque driver entered the swimming pool chicane and clipped the barriers on the inside with his right front, damaging his suspension and causing him to bounce across the kerbs into the wall. Ferrari have said that initial checks of the gearbox did not reveal serious damage but further checks would have to be carried out on Sunday to ascertain whether it can be used in the race. For Mercedes the investigation and an exercise in damage limitation on Sunday is just beginning. While the celebrations for Ferrari are on hold as they hope to retain a remarkable result after their travails last season. In 2020 they suffered

Thomas Tuchel ready to risk key players to maintain Chelsea's momentum

London, May 23 : Thomas Tuchel admits the importance of Chelsea's game against Aston Villa on Sunday means he cannot rest players ahead of the Champions League final but he insists that is a good thing as it ensures the team will have momentum going into Saturday's encounter with Manchester City in Porto. Chelsea head to Villa Park as part of a fascinating final-day battle with Liverpool and Leicester City for third and fourth. A victory would guarantee they finish third while anything less would see them drop to fifth and miss out on Champions League

anxious going into his biggest week so far as Chelsea manager but he is not panicking and sees the positives of having no choice but to pick his best XI. "In a clear sense we want to have them [players] in the final and don't want to have any injuries like we have with Kai and N'Golo and almost with Mason and Chili, and you always have the risk in any match to have injuries," he said. "But if we would already be qualified [for the Champions League] you can lose the energy and overthink it - 'Who do we leave out?', 'Who needs a rest?' Suddenly you have this rest and you don't know if he [the player



qualification via the league should Liverpool and Leicester win their respective games against Crystal Palace and Tottenham. So the pressure is on, especially given Villa go into the match on the back of an impressive 2-1 victory at Spurs and buoyed by the return of supporters to Villa Park. So it is no surprise Tuchel will be putting out his strongest team and, along with all Chelsea supporters, will be hoping they not only win but that the likes of Antonio Rüdiger, Jorginho, Mason Mount and Timo Werner do not collect injuries that would rule them out of facing City next Saturday. Kai Havertz and N'Golo Kanté were recently injured and face late fitness tests, while Ben Chilwell and Mount both suffered scares during Tuesday's victory over Leicester. Little wonder Tuchel is somewhat

rested] catches the momentum again. "I prefer to keep on going and fight for it constantly and not have to deal with the situation where you don't try, you don't want to be injured, but you don't want to lose your rhythm. It's better just to be all in against Aston Villa and hope for a bit of luck." Tuchel insists he enjoys make-or-break games because they force him to be focused. "You get absolutely sharp if this pressure is on that we have now," he said. The German also gave an interesting answer when asked if he remembered where he was when Chelsea last played in a Champions League final - their 2012 victory over Bayern Munich. "I think I was in Munich at home and watched it on TV," he said. "Let's say it was not absolutely well deserved. It felt more like a burglary."

Atlético Madrid clinch La Liga title after Luis Suárez seals win at Real Valladolid

London, May 22 : Atlético Madrid's captain, Koke, says they are destined to suffer but they are champions. The 3,000 fans gathered in the car park outside the José Zorrilla stadium exploded as Diego Simeone's side offered another exhibition in survival. They came from behind to win 2-1 for the second time in a week and take

they overcome yet, Simeone admitting recently: "Anxiety exists." The best way to avoid that was to score quickly and after just 37 seconds Suárez was through, only to be caught by Jawad el Yamiq. And not only did that early momentum slow, soon the unthinkable happened - except that this has been a title race when the

that they couldn't expect this to stay that way. The problem was that the more they searched the more nervous and vulnerable they looked, Felipe having to slide in on Janko to prevent a second. Suárez bent a shot that Jordi Masip pushed wide, but fear hung heavily and at half-time everything they had worked towards was slipping from them. Never mind the last 90 minutes of the season, this was going to the last 45. It took just 30 seconds of the restart for Marcos Llorente to accelerate into the area and pull back for Suárez's diving header, which was blocked on the line. Llorente then had a shot blocked and, for the second time, José María Giménez headed over a corner from close range. There was an urgency about Atlético now. And then, on 57 minutes, came one of those moments that have defined this title race. At Valdebebas, Karim Benzema scored, or thought he had. While the VAR was checking that, Correa turned on the edge of the area and teeped a superb shot into the bottom corner. As Atlético celebrated their goal, Real's was disallowed. Soon, they were celebrating another, but not before Shon Weissman headed over from six yards. An awful mistake from Guardiola set Suárez through, alone. Time seemed to stand still as he ran, slowing to bend a superb left-foot shot low into the net. It was Suárez's 21 goal of the season, and although there was time to suffer still, nerves to the last moment of an extraordinary season, it took Atlético to the title.



the title at the end of a season of twists to the last. Top since week 12, Atlético hung on to a lead they had first taken in November. Their opponents, Valladolid, could not. They had fought here, but relegation proved unavoidable. In the last minute Sergio Guardiola flashed a shot over, fear still gripping everyone, but Atlético were ultimately carried over the line by second half goals from Ángel Correa and, appropriately, Luis Suárez. Pushed out by Barcelona, driven by vindication, Suárez has directly contributed 21 points, giving Atlético their second title in seven years. "We're entering into the Suárez Zone," Simeone said last week; now, they were there again, the Uruguayan steering in the winner 23 minutes from the end, disappearing under a pile of bodies for the second time in six days and ending the evening in tears. The task before Atlético on the final day had been simple - win - but this has been a season where nothing is straightforward. Valladolid were fighting against relegation; Atlético were fighting their own fears, the pressure they have lived with for months now. They had suffered but not yet succumbed and yet nor had

unthinkable kept happening, every moment seeming decisive. From an Atlético corner, Yannick Carrasco lost the ball and suddenly Simeone's side were exposed. Óscar Plano ran clean through and beat Jan Oblak at the near post, thudding at his chest in celebration. This, in the 18th minute, was when news came in that 195km away Villarreal had scored against Madrid, the season summed up in a second. Atlético were still top, still champions in waiting, but they knew

Fortunato claims maiden stage win in Giro d'Italia as Yates moves up to second

Milan, May 23 : Britain's Simon Yates climbed to second in the Giro d'Italia standings but lost more time to race leader Egan Bernal on the Monte Zoncolan. Yates, who had made winning the Giro his major goal for the year, attacked as the group containing all the major contenders reached the steep slopes of the climb and

pulled clear of everyone except Bernal. The Ineos Grenadiers rider clung to Yates's wheel before pulling away from his British rival over the final few hundred metres, extending his advantage by 11 seconds to 1min 33sec. Yates said: "It was good. Better legs than the first week and I'm slowly getting there, so happy with

wherever I'm at. Obviously Bernal is the man to beat. He obviously showed he had great legs again today." It'll be tough to beat him, but we'll keep on trying. I hope to have the same legs as today for the rest of race now and hopefully we can try something and try and take the jersey." The stage had a surprise winner in Italian

Grand Tour debutant Lorenzo Fortunato. The 25-year-old was part of the breakaway and made his move on the climb, pulling clear of Jan Tratnik and battling his way to a solo victory. Damiano Caruso is third overall, 18 seconds behind Yates, while Britain's Hugh Carthy is now fifth, 2mins 11sec adrift of 2019 Tour de France winner Bernal.

London, May 23 : We spent much of Saturday awaiting the moment whereby Phil Mickelson peeled back his sunglasses to reveal an alter ego. Or Phil Mickelson in his pomp. Just weeks short of his 51st birthday, 16 years after the one and only time he has lifted the Wanamaker Trophy, Mickelson was making a mockery of the US PGA Championship. In what is typically a tame and non-tribal environment, Mickelson was vociferously roared on from shot to shot. Victory in South Carolina would be the greatest of his career and render Mickelson the oldest major champion of all time. Phil brought the thrills and looked unstoppable. Mere mortals wilted as Mickelson stood firm. When holing out for a birdie at the 10th, the five-time major winner had completed an 18-hole stretch in nine under par. Mickelson was five clear. Kiawah Island's Ocean Course, remember, is depicted as among the most ferocious of major venues. How brittle the mutual affections between golfer and championship venue can be. Mickelson would have known to beware alligator-infested waters. The finding of precisely that from the 13th tee hauled him back towards a merciless pack. And yet, as the dust settled on an enthralling day three it was Mickelson who still sat atop the leaderboard. His 54 hole advantage is one, at seven under par, from Brooks Koepka. Louis Oosthuizen is five under. Mickelson's basic Saturday score, 70, barely depicts an afternoon

of high octane drama. Koepka's touch here is somewhat incredible in itself. The last time the double US PGA winner completed four tournament rounds was from 28 February, since which point he has undergone knee surgery and missed two cuts from as many starts. Koepka, though, will inevitably draw inspiration from the fact it is Mickelson he is seeking to swat aside. Those with more recent history of major glory present another level of challenge. For so long, it was easy to forget Mickelson had started day three in a share of the lead, at five under par, with Oosthuizen. Mickelson birdied the 2nd and 3rd - the latter

so little that had come before, followed the South African into the pond. After a Mickelson double bogey, his advantage was one; now over Koepka and Oosthuizen. Mickelson played a towering iron to within 8ft of the cup at the 14th but watched his birdie attempt stay agonisingly above ground. Mickelson's wild drive at the 16th, delivered into sand dunes as Koepka was joining him at seven under from the green, added fuel to the fire of a crumbling fairytale. Nonetheless, Mickelson played his closing three in level par; Koepka did likewise but bogeyed the last. It would be a stretch to claim momentum is Koepka's



came after an outrageous approach from a fairway bunker - and steadied himself from the unwanted attentions of a drone at the 4th to save par. Further shots were picked up at the 6th and 7th. Mickelson stood in the middle of the 9th fairway with 166 yards to the pin and a four stroke lead. His first properly loose shot of the day didn't result in damage as Mickelson rescued a four from a greenside sand trap. Mickelson's failure to take advantage of the par five 11th did not look altogether significant until he found sand from the tee at the next. A first dropped shot in 21 holes was the upshot, meaning Mickelson led Oosthuizen - who had just birdied two in a row - by two. Even then, Mickelson's ball was a half roll from toppling in for par. Oosthuizen's response to catching sight of Mickelson once more was to carve his subsequent tee shot into the hazard. Mickelson duly, and in keeping with

now. Bryson DeChambeau signed for a 71 as leaves him at minus two. The Californian may come to seriously rue a double bogey at this penultimate hole but he remains part of the US PGA discussion. So, too, Joaquín Niemann and Gary Woodland, who have matched DeChambeau's total. Branden Grace and Christiaan Bezuidenhout sit at minus three, one shy of Kevin Streelman. Paul Casey is one under, where he has Im Sung-jae for company. Jordan Spieth's 68 hauled him back to level par. The Texan's attention, though, was taken up by Mickelson's heroics. "It's Phil, right? It's theatre," said Spieth. "The guy's got four good rounds on any golf course in him and no one would bet against that. It's pretty incredible. He's one of the best to ever play the game." Few could dispute that; it is this sudden return to such prominence that has captivated the golf world. Eighteen holes stand between Mickelson and the making of history. He couldn't... could he?

Simone Biles makes history with Yurchenko double pike vault at US Classic

London, May 23 : Simone Biles and her ever-expanding array of signature skills sure look ready for the Tokyo Olympics. The reigning world and Olympic champion returned to competition for the first

on the US Olympic team this summer - was almost beside the point. The Yurchenko double pike vault has historically only been done by men. Not anymore. Biles sprinted down the runway, did a



time in more than 18 months by cruising to victory at the US Classic in Indianapolis on Saturday night. The 24-year-old continued her quest to push the boundaries of what's possible by a female gymnast in the process. 'I'm not a little girl anymore': Simone Biles on world domination, pandemic ennui and staying on for Paris 2024. Biles' all-around score of 58.400 - easily the best of the night in a crowded field of seniors trying to join Biles

roundoff onto the springboard followed by a back handspring onto the vault, finishing with two backflips with her legs ramrod straight and her hands seemingly magnetized to her hamstrings. Biles had so much momentum when she landed that she hopped back a step or two. No matter. Her score of 16.100 was higher than either of her gold medal-winning vaults at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. And that was with the

judges dinging her for the extra steps. The rest of her night was steady, if not spectacular. She sailed off the uneven bars on her final event on an element that she has struggled with in practice. The miscue was merely a speedbump on a night when she showcased what separates her from every other gymnast in the sport's long history. Wearing a white leotard with a rhinestone goat - a nod to her status as the Greatest of All-Time - on the back, Biles posted the highest scores of the night on balance beam, floor exercise and vault. So much for being rusty after the Covid-19 pandemic pushed the Olympics back a year. The miscue on bars will give Biles something to focus on before the national championships in Fort Worth, Texas, next month. Behind her, however, the picture for who will join her in Japan in July remains unclear. Jordan Chiles, a friend and teammate of Biles, is moving closer to being a favorite for one of the remaining spots available. The 20-year-old proved her victory in the Winter Cup in February was no fluke. Chiles finished second in the all-around (57.100) to Biles and ranked in the top four in each of the four events. Kayla DiCello came in third, buoyed by a victory on bars. Chellsie Memmel clenched her fists in joy after landing her vault in her first competitive meet

in more than nine years. The 2005 world all-around champion and 2008 Olympic silver medalist's score of 13.750 didn't matter. Neither did a nervous beam routine that finished with an 11.800. Saturday was about simply arriving at the moment itself. "I was just overwhelmingly happy that it went OK today," Memmel said. "Obviously, beam I would have to have it gone better, but I'm still happy with everything that I did and happy that I was out on the floor, that I put myself out there to even get to this point, to try this again, to, you know, to put on a and to register for a competition. "Mommel is petitioning for a spot in next month's national championships, one that women's national team coordinator Tom Forster said will be accepted. Two-time Olympic medalist Laurie Hernandez fell off beam - the event she won silver on in Rio de Janeiro - and scored just 13.250 on vault. Hernandez competed on a tender ankle after suffering an injury in training last month that limited her preparation. Like Memmel, Hernandez is petitioning for a bid to nationals. That hasn't been an issue for Biles since she won the first of her six national titles in 2013. She's poised to collect a seventh in two weeks, the next step of what will likely be a gold medal-laden farewell (for now at least) tour.

Faith in false nines makes for compelling poacher-free Champions League final

London, May 23 : Manchester City's leading Premier League goalscorer this season is Ilkay Gundogan with 13. Jorginho tops Chelsea's scoring chart with seven, followed by Tammy Abraham, Mason Mount and Timo Werner who are all on six. And yet these are the two sides who will contest next week's Champions League final. Among elite clubs over the past decade there has been a clear tension between those who focus on celebrity, the big-name goalscorers, and those who prioritise the collective. Neither is necessarily right nor wrong, but as the age of Lionel Messi (who has become increasingly a celebrity individual having been key to one of football's greatest collectives) and Cristiano Ronaldo draws to a close, the lack of an out-and-out goalscorer in the final feels a possible herald of things to come. For several years now the latter stages of the Champions League

of them fixed points either, all comfortable dropping deep or pulling wide. At Paris Saint-Germain, with Neymar and Kylian Mbappé, he had few options over what to do with his forward line, but it was always fluid. Werner and Havertz have emerged as Tuchel's two preferred options at centre-forward - and it may be that Werner would not seem such a false nine if only he could score some goals, a pursuit in which he is so persistently thwarted by improbable misfortune he should probably join a support group with Dick Dastardly and Wile E Coyote. If his luck were to turn - as it surely must at some point - Werner may come to seem, like Aubameyang in his pomp, a quick and mobile central striker who likes to come in from the left. Havertz, though, is more typical as a false nine. While he has the physique to play with his back to goal, he naturally gravitates towards



have produced ties of thrilling drama between clubs so used to dominating domestically they have forgotten how to defend. The grail became to find a way of pressing hard without the high line being vulnerable. With all due caveats about the oddity of this season, that is what City and, to a lesser degree, Chelsea seem close to achieving. Both are able to protect possession when they need to - in that regard Thomas Tuchel is by far the most Pep Guardiola-like of the modern German school - and both have carefully constructed midfields. But it is intriguing that both are likely to go into the final with a false nine - probably Kevin De Bruyne or Bernardo Silva for City and Kai Havertz for Chelsea. What felt an exciting avant garde development when Roma deployed the tactic with Francesco Totti, Barca with Messi and Manchester United with Ronaldo (in the days before he evolved into a more orthodox centre-forward) has become wholly mainstream. Yet for both, the use of a false nine has to an extent been forced by circumstance. Sergio Agüero's injuries and Gabriel Jesus's loss of form have meant Guardiola has not had a realistic option at centre-forward - other than perhaps Ferran Torres, who is inexperienced and, anyway, arrived at the club as a right-winger. Tuchel, meanwhile, seems not to rate Abraham. There is still Olivier Giroud who could perform a more traditional centre-forward's role; Tuchel is not the first to prefer to use him off the bench but there is a sense he prefers somebody more mobile. At Mainz, he used the likes of Andre Schürrle and Shinji Okazaki at centre-forward and at Borussia Dortmund he had Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, none of them perhaps classic false nines, but none

the midfield. The question then is whether Guardiola and Tuchel's use of a false nine over the past few months is evidence of them adapting to circumstance or a necessary part of the slightly more conservative variant of the pressing game both have adopted. That, though, is perhaps to frame the issue in the wrong way. What does Guardiola look for in a player who occupies the central area high up the pitch? He must be willing to lead the press and have the tactical capacity to do so. He must be able to tailor his movement to the demands of the team, capable of dropping deep so others can go beyond him. It is perhaps less that Guardiola prefers a false nine than he prioritises the positional qualities of his central forward over the more traditional virtues of pace, heading and scoring goals - just as he prioritises passing and positional qualities over shot-stopping and reflexes for his goalkeeper or over tackling and winning headers for his central defenders. Before injuries hit, Agüero had successfully adapted to thrive in a Guardiola side, yet against Real Madrid last season, Gabriel Jesus started on the left with Phil Foden as the withdrawn central forward. Jesus's pressing was vital in City's two goals and, then aged 23, he seemed ready to blossom as the ideal Guardiola centre-forward. The goals, though, have never quite arrived and he has become increasingly peripheral as his form has drifted. Harry Kane, linked with City last week after announcing his intention to leave Tottenham, can lead the press and naturally drops deep for runners beyond him, and as such is one of the few centre-forwards who would seem obviously to fit a Guardiola schema.

Mallia fires Toulouse past 14-man La Rochelle to win Champions Cup

London, May 23 : Past all-French European finals have failed to produce the finest foie gras and, until the latter stages, this one also struggled to deliver. In Toulouse, however, they will care little about the modest fare and rejoice instead in a final scoreline that makes them the most decorated champions in the tournament's history. For lengthy periods this was a niggly, ill-tempered slugging contest which only belatedly clicked up into a higher gear but for Toulouse all that counts is the fifth golden star they are now entitled to wear on their jerseys. For the first time since 1997, furthermore, French sides have lifted both European club rugby's major competitions, a further sign of the renaissance in standards across the Channel. On this occasion the game did not properly ignite until the final quarter, Toulouse having previously seized the initiative thanks to a try just before the hour by their 24-year-old Argentine outside centre Juan Cruz Mallia. Most influential of all, though, was the 28th-minute dismissal of La Rochelle's Levani Botia, which ultimately left the challengers too much to do. A late score for Tawera Kerr-Barlow did at least rouse his team's fans but his half-back partner Ihaia West missed three crucial kicks to revive distant memories of the similar woes suffered in this same arena by his head coach Ronan O'Gara when Munster narrowly lost to

Northampton in the 2000 final. "It was a slower game that didn't suit us, it was a wet game that didn't suit us," suggested O'Gara afterwards. "But losers make excuses; we needed to be better but we weren't good enough." On another day, his side might have had one last attacking launchpad with referee Luke Pearce not spotting a Toulouse player entering the game's concluding ruck from an offside position. While O'Gara certainly saw it -



"We're disappointed with that decision but Luke had a good game" - he clearly sensed that La Rochelle could not complain too loudly. With the brilliant Cheslin Kolbe not even touching the ball until the second half, it added up to a frequently underwhelming occasion all round. Like eating fish and chips with a plastic fork on the Champs Elyses or ordering a pint of best bitter in

Bordeaux, watching two French sides plodding around beneath weeping English skies felt culturally incongruous. So much for a pulsating final: the pace was so slow it was as if someone had activated the snooze button. Toulouse were also handicapped by the early loss of one of their towering Australian locks, Richie Arnold. With the experienced Joe Tekori replacing him it should not have been overly disruptive but, despite the disappearance

of the rain, neither side could locate their rhythm. The only scores in the first half hour were a brace of penalties apiece and O'Gara could be seen whirling his right arm in the coaching box, exhorting his troops to crank things up. Unfortunately Botia took him too literally, crunching into Maxime Medard and then blatantly taking out the lively Antoine Dupont after the European

player of the season had taken a quick tap. Botia saw yellow for the latter but the officials were not finished with him, rightly deciding the upright tackle which sent the muton-chopped Medard reeling backwards was dangerously high. Referee Pearce duly added red to his initial yellow to bring Botia's evening to a permanent conclusion. For a while playing with 14 men seemed to concentrate La Rochelle minds and, improbably, they went in 12-9 ahead at the interval courtesy of West's fourth penalty. All of Toulouse's six previous finals had been settled by seven points or fewer and the margins were increasingly tight all round. Pita Ahki escaped a card for another slightly high hit on a stooping Gregory Alldritt and Kolbe, finally invited to collect Dupont's cross-kick, was denied a try by a brilliant corner-flagging defensive tackle from Geoffrey Doumayrou which forced the flying Springbok to put a toe into touch. Mallia's nicely-taken try finally broke the stalemate but the finale was generally less compelling than anticipated. At least 10,000 spectators were present in the stadium, lending some welcome life to proceedings. Maybe, in the age of Covid, we should be grateful for small mercies and forgive the relative lack of on-field joie de vivre. Toulouse, either way, will be unburdened by such trivialities on Sunday.

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