

The Assam Rising

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Anganwadi centres

Guwahati, May 29 : Assam chief minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday chaired a meeting with social welfare department to take stock of various ongoing schemes. In the meeting, Dr Sarma asked the department to rebuild all the Anganwadi centres and transform them into demonstrative child care centres. "The CM directed to rebuild all Anganwadi Centres & transform them into demonstrative child care centres," said chief minister's office in a tweet. Dr Sarma also set a target for the department to provide nutritious food for 300 days in 12 months to each beneficiary child in 0-6 years category. The meeting was attended by social welfare minister Ajanta Neog and top officials of the department. The chief minister also asked the minister and officials to ensure transparency by acting against unscrupulous contractors.

Two arrested

Guwahati, May 29 : Assam Police on Saturday arrested two persons along with suspected heroin in Sivasagar. Police arrested 74.96 grams suspected heroin, a Royal Enfield motorcycle, two mobile phones and cash Rs 18,820. "Remain committed against drugs: In an ops today seized 74.96 gms suspected heroin, 2 persons arrested, 1 bike, 2 mobile phones & Rs.18820 recovered. Legal action initiated," Sivasagar Police tweeted. Assam Police has been carrying out continuous crackdowns in other parts of the state also.

Batadrava beautification project

Guwahati, May 29 : Assam chief minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday visited historic Batadrava Than in Nagaon district to review its ongoing beautification project. The project inaugurated by union home minister Amit Shah will be completed soon, said Sarma. The chief minister said the government has taken initiatives to expedite the project. "This project will expedite and we will be able to complete it at the designated time," said Dr Sarma. The project of Rs 188 crore covers land of 165 bighas. Along with the chief minister, health minister Keshab Mahanta, Batadrava MLA Sibamoni Bora and former MLA Angoorlata Deka also visited the than.

Tamulpur MLA Leho Ram Boro dies of Covid-19



Guwahati, May 29 : Leho Ram Boro, an MLA in Assam belonging to the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), an ally of the BJP in the state government, died on Saturday after testing positive for Covid. He was 63. "I deeply mourn the untimely demise of Tamulpur MLA Leho Ram Boro. He was a dedicated politician and his going away is a big loss for the state. I pray to the Almighty for eternal peace of the departed soul," tweeted Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma. Boro is the second

legislator in Assam to die due to reason related to Covid. On Wednesday, Majendra Narzary (68), a Bodoland People's Front (BPF) politician representing Gossaigaon assembly constituency since 2006, died of post-Covid complications. On Boro's death, Pramod Boro, who leads the UPPL and is the Chief Executive Member of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), wrote on Facebook, "His sudden demise is a significant loss to the Tamulpur region *Contd...Page 6*

Provide rations to Covid19-hit sex workers in Silchar : Gauhati High Court

Guwahati, May 29 : The Gauhati High Court has directed the Cachar deputy commissioner and the secretary of the District Legal Services Authority of Cachar to provide rations to the sex workers of Silchar during the Covid19 pandemic. According to media reports, a bench of the Gauhati High Court, led by Chief Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia and Justice MR Pathak, issued the directive



while hearing a plea to provide relief to the sex workers of Silchar, who have been severely hit by Covid19 pandemic. The PIL was filed by Debajit Gupta of Srikona

in Silchar. It has been reported that the Cachar deputy commissioner, informed the High Court bench that the district administration has *Contd...Page 6*

'Ready to touch PM's feet.. but I should not be insulted': Mamata Banerjee on meeting row

New Delhi, May 29 : In an escalation of the ongoing face-off between the Centre and the West Bengal government, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

government accusing PMO of spreading "fake and one-sided news" in the media. The blowout was a result of tussle over a review meeting on Cyclone Yaas where the CM purportedly kept the Prime Minister waiting. Banerjee, in a virtual press conference in the state capital, claimed that the PM's office was being used to tarnish her image. "They humiliated me by running one-sided information circulated by PMO. Please don't humiliate me," she said. On the issue of her decision to skip review meeting with Modi *Contd...Page 6*



Nature of war changing, need to engage adversary in all domains: Navy Chief

Pune, May 29 : Naval Chief Admiral Karambir Singh said the nature of war is changing where there is a need to engage adversaries in all domains and stressed on the increased importance of "jointness" among country's three services - land, sea, air. "The nature of war is changing and it is important to engage adversaries in all domains, like land, sea, air, space and cyber. It is for this reason that the jointness among the three services is far more important than in the past," he said. Singh was reviewing the Passing Out Parade of the 140th course at the Na-

tional Defence Academy (NDA) at Khadakwasla. Calling NDA a symbol of jointness for 72 years, he remarked that the academy's existence enforces the core values of jointmanship, which are the founding principles of the academy. "Traditions, identity, uniforms and customs of each service matter as do the requirements generated by the distinctive role of the three services. But jointness in the armed forces is paramount for more synergised and effective

application of force in today's complex battlefield," Admiral Singh said. The armed forces are seeing landmark defence reforms with the establishment of the Department of



Military Affairs, institution of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) *Contd...Page 6*

Students should be catalyst for social and economic change in 21st century, says Nitin Gadkari

Amravati, May 29 : Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Saturday (May 29) appealed to students to be the catalyst for the social and economic change in the 21st Century. "As the 21st Century belongs to India, all-out

efforts should be made to bring about the social and economic change in the lives of the people," Gadkari said in his online address on the occasion of the 37th convocation ceremony of the Sant Gadge Baba Amravati Uni-



versity. He asked the varsity to use technological innovations to make all villages ideal. "The university should take up projects that would address the problems of the community around it. The varsity, its *Contd...Page 6*



Twitter maintaining double standards, should not teach India about fundamental rights: G Kishan Reddy

New Delhi, May 29 : Union Minister G Kishan Reddy on Saturday (May 29) accused Twitter of maintaining double standards in India and said that Twitter and other foreign companies

should not teach the largest democratic country about fundamental rights and human rights. When asked re-

garding Telegram, Facebook and Google are ready to comply with India's new IT Rules but Twitter is yet to

respond, MoS Home Affairs told ANI, "Twitter has been following the Rule of Law in the other countries but is maintaining double standards for India. Twitter is trying to teach India about fundamental rights. It does not need to teach us." "We need not learn about the fundamental rights and human rights from Twitter and other foreign companies. India is the largest democratic country. Our Constitution is our asset," Reddy *Contd...Page 6*



Assam Government hikes wages of tea garden workers by Rs 38

Guwahati, May 29 : The Assam Government has hiked the daily wages of tea garden workers in Assam by Rs 38. The hike in daily wages would get implemented in both the valleys of the State: the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley. The hike would ensure that the tea garden workers in Brahmaputra Valley from now on would get

Rs 205, instead of Rs 167, as daily wage. On the other hand, the tea garden workers in Barak Valley will get Rs 183 as daily wage instead of Rs 145 earlier. Assam Government hikes wages of tea garden workers by Rs 38. Also read: Youth arrested for Facebook post against Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma *Contd...Page 6*

PM Modi announces measures to support children orphaned due to COVID-19

New Delhi, May 29 : Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday announced that all children who have been rendered orphan due to COVID-19 pandemic will be supported under the 'PM-CARES for Chil-



dren' scheme. The measures were announced after a high-level review meeting chaired by PM Modi to discuss and deliberate the steps which can be taken to support children who have lost their *Contd...Page 6*

Covishield vaccination centres in Guwahati are in these centres

Guwahati, May 29 : If you are above 18 years and have valid documents, you can get Covid19 vaccination dose in various vaccination centres set up in Guwahati. There are both paid and free Covid19 vaccination centres in Kamrup Metro district. According to the CoWIN App, following are the Covid19 vaccination centres spread across the Kamrup Metro district where a person, above 18 years, can get Covishield vaccine shot to get protected from Covid19.



CHOONSALI UPHC, Chandmari BIRKUCHI UPHC, Chandmari FERRYGHAT UPHC; FERRYGHATSERABHAI UPHC, Dhirenpara EAST GHY State Dispensary, ChandmariLOKHRA State Dispensary, LohraGARIGAON State Dispensary, Garigaon PANDUNATH UPHC, PHC Pandu, MaligaonULUBARI UHC, UHC Ulubari, Opposite Prag News Channel officeMAHENDRA MOHAN CHOUDHURY HOSPITAL, Panbazar MATHGHARIA UPHC,

MathghariaWEST GUWAHATI State Dispensary, Shantipur Hill Side, Bharalu NOTBOMA MPH, NotbomaGMCH, Bhangagarh KHARGHULI PHC, Kharghuli, KharghuliGANDHIBASTI UPHC, ChandmariCAPITAL State Dispensary, Lastgate BASISTHA UPHCSONAPUR BPHC, Sonapur SATGAON USD, SatgaonThe people also can get paid Covishield Covid19 vaccine shot at Apollo Hospitals at GS Road. The people, who fall in the *Contd...Page 6*

"Step up vaccination, awareness to contain COVID-19 pandemic": Minister Suklabaidya to Karimganj administration

Karimganj, May 29: Minister for Environment and Forest, Fisheries and Excise, Parimal Suklabaidya reviewed the COVID-19 situation and the slew of steps initiated by the district administration to contain the pandemic. Reviewing the situation at a meeting with Deputy Commissioner, MP, MLAs, representatives of political parties and officials of concerned departments at DC's conference hall here on Saturday, Minister Suklabaidya said the first and foremost priority is to contain the COVID pandemic in the district and also to reach out to the affected people in home isolation and COVID Care Centres in the best manner possible. Minister Suklabaidya instructed the Deputy Commissioner to step up vaccination drive and to open more vaccination centres depending upon the availability of vaccines in the district. "More vaccination will automatically lead to containment of the disease", he quipped. The district has presently 23 vaccination centres. He underscored the need to set up COVID Care Centres within the tea garden areas and to open up more vaccination centres to contain the pandemic. Deputy Commissioner, Khageswar Pegu apprised the Minister that instructions have been already given to the tea garden management to set up COVID Care Centre with 10-15 bed capacity and at least two oxygen support beds in garden hospitals for the plantation workers afflicted with the disease. Pegu disclosed that out of 18 tea gardens, six gardens are yet to make COVID Care Centres functional. Taking stock of availability of oxygen in the district, Minister Suklabaidya directed the Deputy Commissioner to exert pressure on the contractor and the officials of PWD Building to expedite the civil work and for installation of machines to make it fully operational. In this context, Deputy Commissioner, Pegu informed the Minister that the civil work would be completed within two-three days and installation work of machines, for which technicians have arrived from Mumbai, in the next 25 days. Suklabaidya urged the MLAs to create

awareness in their respective constituencies on the government SoPs to help curb the disease. The Deputy Commissioner requested the Minister to take up the matter with Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Keshab Mahanta for sanctioning of funds for setting up of an oxygen plant in the district. The Minister also asked the Deputy Commissioner to ensure ration provided by the government for May and June to the BPL families in home isolation. He also instructed the Deputy Commissioner to work out modalities in consultation with line departments for providing ration to non-NFSA beneficiaries out of the 10% awarded by Finance Commission for COVID expenditure. Suklabaidya urged the officials of concerned departments to work in tandem to make Karimganj district and the state as a whole COVID-free. Earlier, the Deputy Commissioner while giving an overview of the COVID pandemic situation through power point presentation said more positive cases have been detected in Badarpur area and the administration has decided to set up micro containment zones to arrest the spread of the disease. He revealed that the district has registered 31 COVID deaths with overall positivity rate of 3%. Pegu apprised the Minister that the positivity rate has gone up from 3% to 5.3% in the past 10 days with death toll on the rise in the past couple of days. He said the focus of the administration is on stepping up vaccination in tea gardens and in urban areas. The review meeting was attended by MP, Kripanath Mallah, MLAs Abdul Aziz, Kamalakhya Dev Purkayastha, Bijoy Malabar and Krishnendu Paul, Chairman, AIDC, Mission Rajan Das, SP, Mayank Kumar, DDC, ADCs, COs, President and CEO, Zilla Parishad and officials of Health and other line departments. At the end of the meeting, a one-minute silence was observed for eternal peace of deceased MLAs, Majendra Narzary and Leho Ram Boro who passed away due to COVID-19 complications and all those who succumbed to the disease.

Windows for grievance redressal being set up in Income Tax offices

Guwahati, May 29: Windows for the purpose of grievance redressal are being set up in the Income Tax offices at the following stations under the jurisdiction of the Pr. Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, NER, Guwahati. Phone numbers are also provided against every station: 1. Guwahati: 9401991223 [for CIT(TDS)] and 9401991829 (for PCIT, Guwahati) , 2. Jorhat: 9401991357, 3. Imphal: 9401991902 , 4. Silchar: 9401991334 , 5. Shillong: 9436100843 , 6. Dibrugarh: 8902199719. All taxpayers who have filed CPGRAMS, e-nivaran and other grievances on the Income Tax portal, may avail of these windows for information of their grievances, every Wednesday, from 11.00 A.M. to 12.30 P.M. at the above stations, as long as the pandemic related lock down/other restrictions are in place. Any eligible taxpayer, who is unable to reach the Income Tax Office due to COVID related restrictions, can contact and narrate their problems at the numbers provided above, within the allotted time. Post lock down, the window facility will be made available on all working days, a press note by the Income Tax office, NER, Guwahati stated.

Golaghat Police Anti Drugs Operation

Golaghat, May 29: Along with the entire state, the Golaghat police intensified campaign against drugs these days in the district. The police arrested Abhishek Das, a drug dealer from Golaghat's Kumarpatty. Acting on a tip off a police team led by Officer in Charge of Golaghat Police Station Dipak Bora arrested one person named Abhishek Das and also seized 2.5 gram of Heroin and his scooter. Dipak Bora said Abhishek was involved in the dealing since long time and had been arrested earlier also. It is known that recently, the Chief Minister of the state had also instructed the Assam Police to intensify the campaign against drugs in order to save the youth of the state.

Governor inaugurates park and Surya Namaskaram model statues in Raj Bhavan



CM reviews Food & Civil Supplies Dept

Guwahati, May 28: Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today held a review meeting with Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department and discussed various aspects regarding augmenting paddy procurement and ensuring MSP to state's farmers for their produce. In the meeting, the Chief Minister directed the department to explore ways to increase paddy procurement from the state farmers and he said the matter of providing a working capital to Assam State Agricultural Marketing Board (ASAMB) for augmenting paddy procurement, so that the state can fill the gap of nearly 2 lakh metric tonnes in paddy requirement from its own production, would be considered. Chief Minister Dr. Sarma also discussed various issues regarding setting up mills in the districts with paddy yield and incentivising local entrepreneurs to set up mills in their areas so that farmers can find mills for their paddy without travelling too much distance. FCI officials present at the meeting informed that the organisation follows strict guideline regarding moisture content in purchasing paddy and the Chief Minister directed the F&CS department to explore ways for placing dryers near Paddy Procurement Centres (PCCs) to reduce paddy's moisture level. Food and Civil Supplies Minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Samir Kumar Sinha, Principal Secretary of Food and Civil Supplies Department B.R. Samal, senior FCI officials were also present in the meeting.

Minister Suklabaidya mourns death of MLA Leho Ram Boro

Guwahati, May 29: Minister for Environment and Forest, Fisheries and Excise, Parimal Suklabaidya mourned the death of Tamulpur MLA Leho Ram Boro on Saturday. The UPPL MLA passed away at the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital due to COVID-19 on Saturday morning. In a condolence message, Minister Suklabaidya condoled the death of MLA Boro and prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul. The Minister conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the members of the bereaved family and prayed to the Almighty to give them strength and fortitude to bear the great loss. Before this, four-time Gossaigaon MLA from BPF, Majendra Narzary died to post COVID-19 complications at GMC&H on Wednesday.

Believers Eastern Church Satgaon distributes essential food items



Hojai, May 29: The Believers Eastern Church Satgaon Mission Diocese, Lanka distributed essential food commodities to twenty families at Bithung area under Karbianglong District on Saturday, who have been affected due to the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. Following the government protocol the team led by Father Thanghao D and Father Andrew Langneh along with the workers visited the families and distributed the relief packets. Speaking to the Correspondent, Father Thanghao D said, "As a

One more Covid death at Sootea

Biswanath Chariali, MAY 29: Thuleswar Thapa, a resident of Gosain Chapor under Sootea PS died of Covid at Tezpur Medical College & Hospital in the early hours of Friday. He was 30. Thuleswar was admitted to TMCH on May 27 due to some lung related ailments but later on tested Covid positive. It is to be quoted here that a marriage ceremony took place on May 21 in the deceased's family that played a role as a super spreader of the deadly infection in that area. A medical team undertook a RAT test for 85 people, out of these 48 tested Covid positive on Saturday. The Biswanath district administration had declared the area as a containment zone and sanitized the area.

Guwahati, May 29: Assam Governor Prof. Jagdish Mukhi along with the First Lady of Assam Smt. Prem Mukhi inaugurated a recreational park and model statues representing Surya Namaskaram positions in Raj Bhavan today. It may be mentioned that the recreational park named Brahmaputra Park and Surya Namaskaram statues have been constructed by the Public Works Department, Govt. of Assam. Commissioner and Secretary to the Governor S.S. Meenakshi Sundaram, along with the officers and staff of the Raj Bhavan and PWD were also present during the inaugural function.



To Fight Covid Effectively, Biswanath District Constitutes Grievance Redressal Cell To Receive Complaints

Biswanath Chariali, 29 May: With the objective to engage the people in this Covid battle effectively, the Biswanath district administration has constituted a Grievance Redressal Cell with immediate effect where people can bring to the notice of the cell any lacuna they observe with regards to the effort of the administration. All complaints received through the Toll Free number 104 as well as through Covid Control Room numbers 6001958106, 03715-222086, or through written communication or social media posts will henceforth be addressed by this Cell. The Grievance Redressal Cell will have two Additional Deputy Commissioners (ADCs) as members, in addition to Joint Director of Health Services. The Deputy Media and Extension Officer of Biswanath has been assigned as the Nodal Officer of the Cell. "Though we are giving our best in this fight against Covid-19, yet we have observed that shortcomings do remain and many a time

people have brought that to our notice. This Grievance Redressal Cell has been constituted with the sole objective to address those complaints and concerns of the people promptly and in a systematic way. We want the masses to become equal stakeholders so that we can fight this Covid battle more effectively," said Pranab Kumar Sarmah, Deputy Commissioner of Biswanath. The Cell has been instructed to address grievances related to Covid treatment, cremation and last rites with top priority. The Nodal Officer of the Cell has been instructed to submit daily report, both soft and hard copies, by 6 PM to National Health Mission's state headquarter as well as to the Deputy Commissioner. The Nodal Officer has also been instructed to maintain database of all grievances received by the Cell. The Cell has also been instructed to make follow up calls to confirm the status of grievances redressed and the satisfaction level of the complainer.

Swarnalipi organizes National Webinar on "Public policy, administration & CM's dream Assam" on 6 June

Guwahati, 29 May: To deliver effective suggestions from the educated and intellectual community to the new government of the state the literary & socio-cultural research magazine Swarnalipi, in association with Asia Foundation, has organized a National webinar on "Public policy, administration & CM's dream Assam" at 3-5 pm on 6 June next. The special highlights of the webinar will be the priorities, policies and implementation procedures of the government for the realistic and concrete development of the state in various fields. Professor Dr. Jyoti Prasad Saikia, eminent educationist, litterateur and the first Vice Chancellor of the newly established Birangana Sati Sadhani Rajyik Vishwavidyalaya, Golaghat will inaugurate the webinar. Eminent educationists Dr. Jayanta Krishna Sarma, Professor of Political Science, Gauhati University, Jayanta Madhab Bora, Sahitya Akademi award winning writer, Dr. Neeva Rani Phukan, Associate Professor of Assamese, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Dr. Ankuran Dutta, Head, Department of Communication & Journalism, Gauhati University and Dr. Abhijit Bhuyan, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University will

deliver talks and also outline various relevant aspects of the subject. Other participants can also submit their suggestions in the webinar. After successful completion of the webinar the suggestions and outcome will be submitted to the government for necessary concern and further action. The bi-lingual webinar is open to all individual, scholars, researchers and they can participate through filling out the form in the registration link: <https://forms.gle/g1CJJ6NeNjFvNeP7> for Google meet and Whats-App link: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/EPo5ekCuhnLPyMvtPjyp>, respectively. Interested participants should also send their suggestions briefly in advance in the registration form itself to enable presentation in the webinar. The last date for joining the webinar is June 5th. The webinar will be moderated by Hridayananda Gogoi, Editor of Swarnalipi while renowned intellectual Sahityacharya Professor Dr. Parag Kumar Bhattacharyya will chair. The subject of the forum "Public policy, administration & CM's dream Assam" will also be extensively discussed all over the state in offline mode in September next, stated Dhoritry Goswami Deka, publicity secretary in a release today.

Sellers warned on price front in Lakhimpur district

North Lakhimpur, May 29: As per the instructions of the Principal Secretary of Food and Civil Supply Department, Government of Assam, an emergency meeting of the said department was held in the Conference Hall, Lakhimpur District Deputy Commissioner Office on Thursday under the chairmanship of Kulen Sharma, Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC), Food and Civil Supply Department, Lakhimpur district. The ADC reviewed on the stocks of food commodities from the delegates of sellers (wholesalers and retailers), coming from different parts of Lakhimpur district, attended in the meeting. He instructed the sellers to sell food commodities at the price rate fixed by the district administration and not to sell commodities at a high price. If any dishonest seller found involved in selling

food commodities at a high price, the district administration would have taken strict legal action upon him, he cautioned. The ADC also urged the sellers to hang the price list fixed by the district administration at their commercial institutions so that customers might know the actual prices food commodities, and to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour at their commercial institutions. Lakhimpur District Food and Civil Supply Department Deputy Chairman Prabhat Konwar, in his speech, asked the sellers not to harass general people by increasing prices of food commodities during the present Covid situation. Everyone should help each other to make a Covid-free society, he added. In the meeting, Lakhimpur district Food and Civil Supply Department Inspector Haladhar Mili, Pranjit Sharma, Lakhi Mohan, Chambers of Commerce Secretary NK Rath and Lakhimpur DIPRO Mandira Chayengia were also present.

CM Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma reviews ongoing construction work of proposed Batadroba Cultural Complex Project

NAGAON, May 29: Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma visited the site of proposed Batadroba Cultural Complex Project at evicted area near Batadroba Than, the birthplace of the great Saint of the soil Srimanta Sankardeva this morning. During his first trip to Batadroba Than after being the chief minister of the state, Dr. Sarma held a meeting with Deputy Commissioner Kavitha Padmanabhan, Superintendent of Police and other heads of several departments including Public Works Department at the temporary conference hall at the site and reviewed the ongoing construction work of the project. In the meeting, Dr. Sarma expressed his discontentment over the slow progress of the construction work of the proposed Batadroba project so far. Dr. Sarma directed the concerned department as well as the construction agency to complete the entire project - work within just eighteen months and asked not to neglect anything else in construction of the project as it is being related to the memory of the great Saint Srimanta Sankardeva. During his visit to Batadroba Than, Dr. Sarma was accompanied by state health minister Keshab Mahanta, MLAs Rupak Sarma, Jitu Goswami, Congress MLA of Batadroba LAC Sibamoni Bora and former BJP MLA of Batadroba Angoorlata Deka.

Two More quarantine Centres in Hojai District

Hojai, May 29: On the other hand, Seeing the surge in Covid 19 positive cases, Deputy Commissioner Dr. Sadnek Singh, IAS have notified two more quarantine centres in the district. Notably, Hojai Abdul Hasib High School, Hojai and Lanka High School, Lanka has been notified as Quarantine Centres.

Sasha Johnson: 18-year-old charged with conspiracy to murder

London, May 29 : Black Lives Matter activist, 27, remains in critical condition after shooting in early hours of Sunday. An 18-year-old has been charged with conspiracy to murder over the shooting of Black Lives Matter activist Sasha Johnson. The 27-year-old remains in a critical condition in hospital after being injured at a party in Peckham, south-east London in the early hours of Sunday. On Wednesday five males were arrested in connection with the

incident, and on Friday four of them were released on bail until a date in late June. The fifth, Cameron Deriggs, 18, of Bromley Hill, Lewisham, has been charged with conspiracy to murder, the Metropolitan police said. He has been remanded in custody and will appear at Westminster magistrates court on Saturday. Johnson was at a party in the back garden of a home in Consort Road when four men in dark clothing burst in and shots were fired. Detectives continue to appeal

for anyone with information to come forward by calling police on 101 or Crimestoppers, anonymously, on 0800 555 111 and providing the reference 1172/23MAY. Johnson, a graduate of Ruskin College, in Oxford, who has two children, was a leading figure in last summer's anti-racism protests and is a prominent member of the Taking the Initiative party, which she helped found last year and which has been described as "Britain's first black-led political party".

Amitabh Bachchan buys a whopping Rs 31 cr worth duplex with six car parks, Sunny Leone to be his neighbour!



New Delhi, May 29 : Megastar Amitabh Bachchan has reportedly purchased a plush new duplex apartment worth Rs 31 crore in Mumbai. It is a 5,184 sq ft property with six car parks, which was bought way back in December 2020 but registered in April 2021. According to a report published in Moneycontrol.com, project Atlantis is by a Tier-2 builder, Crystal Group, as per registration documents originally accessed by Zapkey.com. The legendary star's swanky new property has as many as six-car parkings and is on the 27th and 28th floor respectively. And guess what? Bachchans are not the only celebs in that apartment. According to the report, Sunny Leone too has registered her flat on the 12th floor of the same project. She bought it for Rs 16 crore on March 28, 2021, as per registration documents accessed by Zapkey.com. Also, 'Zero' filmmaker Aanand L Rai has a duplex flat in the same project. On the work front, Big B's famous quiz show 'Kaun Banega Crorepati 13' will be rolling out soon. He has Chehre with Emraan Hashmi and Brahmastra starring Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt lined up for the big release.

US draws up sanctions for 'ongoing abuses' after plane incident

Washington, May 29 : The Biden administration has said it is drawing up a list of targeted sanctions against key members of the Belarusian government which forced the landing of a passenger jet and had a journalist on board arrested. The White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Friday the United States was also suspending a 2019 agreement between Washington and Minsk that allowed carriers from each country to use the other's airspace, and taking other actions against the government of President Alexander Lukashenko. In a statement, she called on Lukashenko to allow a credible international investigation into the events of 23 May, when the Ryanair passenger jet flying from Greece to Lithuania was forced to land in Minsk. Belarusian authorities scrambled a fighter jet and flagged what turned out to be a false bomb alert to force the plane to land, then detained the opposition journalist who was on board, drawing condemnation from Europe and the United States. Psaki said the United States, with the EU and other allies, was developing a list of targeted sanctions against key members of Lukashenko's government "associated with ongoing abuses of human rights and corruption, the falsification of the 2020 election, and the events of May 23". The EU has said it will provide Belarus with €bn (£2.6bn) through grants and loans if the country "changes course" in an attempt to ramp up internal pressure on Lukashenko as he met Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Friday. Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, came close to an all-out call for regime change as she issued the pledge of funds in return for a "transition" to democracy. The offer was made shortly before Lukashenko had arrived in the Black Sea resort of Sochi for a summit with the Russian president, whose government has sought to distance itself from last Sunday's arrest of the opposition journalist Raman Pratasevich and his Russian girlfriend, Sofia Sapega. For some years the EU had hoped to wrestle Belarus out of Russia's sphere of influence but it appears that all hope has been lost with the current regime.



A pair of swans are seen with cygnets in the sea in Saint-Laurent-du-Var, southern France

Australian scientist discovers 'chocolate frog' in New Guinea swamps

Melbourn, May 29 : An Australian scientist has discovered a new species of frog, the "chocolate frog", in rainforest swamps of New Guinea. Steve Richards, a frog specialist at the South Australian Museum, first found the spotted the cocoa-coloured creature in 2016 in incredibly challenging habitat. "That could be why it took so long to find this frog," he said. "It's swampy, it's spiky, there are lots of malaria-carrying mozzies, it floods, there are crocodiles and not many roads. It's a really unpleasant place to work." Despite disturbing an overhanging nest of giant hornets and having "to run flat out" trying to escape them, Richards managed to bag some specimens and after years of painstaking research and genetic analysis he and his colleagues can say for certain that Litoria mira is a new species. To the untrained eye, Litoria mira looks almost identical to the Australian green tree frog - except for its glossy brown skin. It is the closest relative of the Australian green tree frog. But genetic analysis shows the Litoria mira has evolved to become genetically distinct to the point where the two species would not be able to breed. Paul Oliver, from the Queensland Museum and Griffith University, was in charge of the genetic work. One of the first questions he and his team had to answer was whether the chocolate frogs were Australian green tree frogs which can sometimes be brown and are known

to live in New Guinea. There were some other physical differences, including subtle patches of lavender behind the chocolate frog's eyes, and it is a little smaller than the Australian green tree frog, at between 7cm and 8cm when fully mature. "We named the new frog Litoria mira because the word 'mira' means surprised or strange in Latin," Oliver said. "It was a surprising discovery to find an overlooked relative of Australia's well-known and common green tree frog living in the lowland rainforests of New Guinea." Richards has discovered a few frog species before in Australia and about 200 in New Guinea. He said it was sometimes obvious when something was new, but in the case of the chocolate frog, it was a long wait for the science to stack up. He does not think there was much chance that chocolate frogs could be in Australia because it lacks the "nasty" lowland swampy rainforests of New Guinea. A research paper co-written by Richards and Oliver has been published in the Australian Journal of Zoology.

'More people could die': four killed in Colombia protests as talks with government stall

London, May 29 : Four people have died in Colombia as tens of thousands of protesters marked a month of demonstrations across the country, while talks between the government and the national strike committee were stalled. In Cali, which has become an epicentre of the nationwide protests, the mayor, Jorge Ospina, confirmed three of the deaths during protests on Friday. Local media reported the fourth death occurred on the road between Cali and the town of Candelaria. Demonstrations elsewhere were mostly peaceful, although clashes between police and protesters were reported in some areas, such as the municipality of Madrid, near Bogotá. "There must be dialogue between those calling for strikes, the national government, and the whole of society. If there are no talks, the spiral of violence will continue and unfortunately more people could die," Ospina said. Two people in Cali were killed when an agent of the attorney general's investigative unit opened fire on civilians, before also being killed, said the attorney general, Francisco Barbosa, in a televised message. The agent was not on duty at the time, Barbosa said. Red Cross paramedics carry the body of an agent of the attorney general's investigative unit, who opened fire on civilians before being killed. The government has so far confirmed 17 civilian deaths as directly connected with protests, while human rights groups claim dozens more civilians have been killed by security forces. Two police officers were also earlier reported killed during the protests. Demonstrations began on 28 April, pressuring the government and lawmakers into shelving tax and health reforms and leading to the resignation of former finance minister Alberto Carrasquilla. Amid singing and music during demonstrations in capital Bogotá, protesters said they would keep marching even after a month of demonstrations. Since withdrawal of the tax reform at the start of the month, protester demands have expanded to include a basic income, opportunities for young people and an end to police violence. "Until the government listens to us, we have to stay in the streets," said Alejandro Franco, 23. Close to graduating, he said he was marching for better education and health, among other reasons. "If the people don't have peace then neither will the government," he added. Some said the long-running protests are putting them under financial pressure. "I have to close my shop every time there are protests," Laudice Ramirez, 62, said in the south of the city. "I'm going bankrupt, but the youth don't have any other options for opportunities." Despite the government and protest leaders reaching a "pre-agreement" for ending demonstrations this week, strike organisers on Thursday said the government had not signed the deal and accused it of stalling. "We have already reached the agreement, the only thing missing is the president's signature to start the negotiations," Francisco Maltes, president of the Central Union of Workers, said on Friday, accusing the government of delaying talks and disrupting operations in the country's main seaport as well as for hundreds of companies.



Patrick Byrne: pro-Trump millionaire pushing election conspiracy theories

Washington, May 29 : Weekend rallies with Roger Stone and Michael Flynn show key influence of libertarian helping to fund Arizona election audit Patrick Byrne in Florida in April. Byrne's America Project seems to aspire to play a key role in tandem with other conservative pro-Trump bastions in spreading election disinformation. This Memorial Day weekend, several prominent conservative allies of Donald Trump, who have promoted almost nonstop his false narratives about the 2020 election results, are slated to hold rallies in Florida and Texas endorsed by the wealthy libertarian Patrick Byrne. Billed as featuring the Trump confidant Roger Stone, the retired general Michael Flynn, Byrne and other pro-Trump stalwarts, the dual events underscore that Byrne - who has been leading private fundraising for the politically driven vote audit now under way in Arizona's largest county - seems intent on funding and pushing conspiracy theories about the 2020 elections. Byrne's influence and activities reveal him to be a rising figure on the Trumpist right and also show how fake narratives around the 2020 election - far from receding - are in fact still a powerful motivating force among Trump supporters. Just last month Byrne created a non-profit, dubbed the America Project, which has been instrumental in funding the Arizona audit, and is promoting the two weekend rallies on its website. The Byrne

non-profit quickly launched fundtheaudit.com in Arizona that has indicated it wants to raise \$2.8m. As of mid May, it had reportedly pulled in \$1.7m. Byrne, whose net worth has been pegged at about \$75m, has said he personally donated \$1m to the America Project and \$500,000 to fundtheaudit.com. Byrne's America Project seems to aspire to play a key role in tandem with other conservative pro-Trump bastions in spreading election disinformation: the America Project's website says it wants to "lead a new American renaissance by arming citizens with the tools to fight for their freedoms, building like minded pro-freedom networks and uniting pro-America organizations who want to fight together in support of our nation". Byrne's high-profile backing of pro-Trump conspiracies follows some bizarre contacts he had with Trump, post-election. In December, Byrne attended a White House meeting that also drew Flynn, who had publicly suggested Trump might invoke martial law to stay in power, and the rightwing lawyer Sidney Powell, who was helping Trump's legal team. Byrne is the founder and ex-chief of the company Overstock, and says he didn't vote for Trump, but this year wrote The Deep Rig, a self-published conspiracy-ridden look at the 2020 elections. Byrne's growing role on the far right comes after he publicly revealed he had an affair with Maria Butina, the convicted unregistered foreign agent for



Russia, which prompted his resignation from Overstock in 2019. The upcoming Florida rally on Sunday is set to feature Byrne, along with Flynn and Stone - both of whom Trump pardoned after they had been convicted as part of the inquiries into Russian influence in the 2016 elections. Advertised as a Patriots Day rally, it is slated to take place at a private ranch in Jupiter. The three-day Texas event is billed as a rally for "God and country" that started on Friday and is scheduled to include talks by various pro-Trump stalwarts including Flynn and lawyers Powell and Lin Wood. But Byrne's central role in funding the Arizona audit and how it is being run is attracting growing scrutiny. Byrne has acknowledged that he had some brief contacts last December with Doug Logan, the head of the little-known Florida-based cybersecurity firm Cyber Ninjas, which was selected by Arizona officials to lead the audit, even though it had no experience in doing one previously. "This is an audit like none that has ever been performed," Byrne boasted to the AP. "This audit is an audit check for all forms of mischief." Byrne's non-profit outfits, which won't have to disclose how the funds are spent or who is writing the checks, also have reportedly played a role in recruiting volunteers for the audit. In an email to local Arizona Republicans last week, a state official requested more volunteers and referred them to Byrne's website to apply, the Arizona Republic reported. Byrne told the AP his operation merely sends volunteers to Cyber Ninjas for "vetting". The private funding Byrne is spearheading comes

on top of \$150,000 that the Arizona senate allocated to do the latest audit, a project which many Republican figures in Arizona and nationally have attacked as a waste of resources and dangerous since Biden's victory in Maricopa county has already been certified as accurate. Voting rights specialists are dismayed at the haphazard and private drive in Arizona that Byrne and his cohorts are mounting. "This is yet another piece of evidence that the whole effort in Arizona is more of a disinformation campaign than anything else," said Larry Norden, the director of the electoral reform program at the Brennan Center for Justice. "A good rule of thumb is that you should not take election's work out of the hands of the professionals who run them and outsource it to people with a clear political agenda. It's profoundly dangerous for our democracy." Some former Republican members of Congress say the privately run crusade by Byrne and his allies is hurting democracy in America as a whole. Jeff Flake, a Republican former Arizona senator, said in an interview that Byrne's "involvement in all this does not add credibility. It's damaging to the Republican party and our system of government." Byrne did not respond to requests for comment left with the America Project. But judging by his media appearances, Byrne isn't fazed by critics of the growing role he has been playing. Last month, Byrne in an interview with the New Tang Dynasty, an obscure television outlet whose website claims it was launched by Chinese-Americans who fled communism, flatly claimed: "It was a fraudulent election.



Palestinians enjoy themselves on a beach by the Mediterranean Sea off Gaza coast in Gaza City

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Pandemic may have started with a containment failure

US intelligence agencies to "redouble" their efforts to find exactly when and how the virus jumped into humans, and the two scenarios he suggested were an infected animal, or a laboratory accident. Just last year, that second utterance would have got a person dismissed as a kook and a conspiracist; but an increasing number of mainstream figures, from those in the press to influential scientists and government officials such as US chief medical adviser, Anthony Fauci, are at least open to the idea that the pandemic may have started with a containment failure in China, or a souped-up virus experiment gone wrong. If you're just tuning in, bleary-eyed and wondering how yet another thing you were told couldn't possibly happen appears to be on the verge of becoming reality, you're not alone. But there is a straightforward way to see what the possibilities are, what scientists currently think, and what information might resolve the dispute once and for all. First, in the early days of the pandemic, nearly every scientist and media figure with any sort of platform assured the world that the pandemic had a natural origin. A coronavirus that naturally infected bats gained the ability to infect humans through normal evolution in the wild or farmed captivity. This had historical precedent: both the original Sars virus in 2003 and the Mers outbreak in 2012 arose in this way. And the viral genome, shared by Chinese scientists early in the pandemic, and since sequenced around the world thousands of times, didn't show any obvious signs of manipulation: it didn't use any well-known viruses as a basic framework, or have the genetic equivalent of bore-holes and cut-marks. All of these are decent arguments, but not overwhelming. A matter of low attention bandwidth at the height of the first wave, an overall deference to authority, and a general wariness about conspiratorial-sounding theories, led the animal-leap case to be presented and repeated with airtight surety. And this left it open to attack. Something that should have been widely acknowledged back then is that scientists often do research with viruses that includes manipulating them to become more effective, or to infect other species - even humans. The justification for this is to learn about viral behaviour, and track how a pandemic threat might evolve. This is called "gain-of-function" research, and lots of people think it's a bad idea. What is also known for sure, is that the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), nearby to the first recorded outbreaks, is the world's premier collector of wild bat coronaviruses, has grown them in their in-house laboratories before, and had the expertise to conduct gain-of-function experiments. If you wanted to create a pandemic coronavirus in a lab, the WIV would be a hell of a place to do it. And so there are now several theories about the pandemic strain coming out of the WIV, ranging from one of their on-file natural coronaviruses infecting a lab member; an ill-advised gain-of-function strain doing the same; or a purposely human-targeted bioweapon strain being accidentally or intentionally unleashed. Given the lab's capabilities, that's the full range of careless, reckless, or purely evil possibilities. This means that some version of a lab-leak was always circumstantially and scientifically plausible. Each theory also neatly appeals to a certain sort of person, what you might call the fringes of both sides. If you're the radically credulous mainstream sort, the natural origin story fits the bill. A naturally emerging viral pandemic is a complex process that the experts say is likely to happen. It's the way things have happened before. People in positions of authority - say, running a biohazardous lab - are highly competent and probably trustworthy. Mystery solved by association. If you thrive on contingency and conspiracy, however, the lab-leak theory is catnip. A single, discrete event, perpetrated by individuals, and then - if true - surely covered up. Whether you think it was an accident or a doomsday device, access to the lab offers the possibility of a smoking gun, if only you could investigate. Given what we know, both sides are at a deadlock. The WIV had what arm-chair detectives would call motive, method and opportunity, but there's no proof that Sars-CoV-2 was ever in the lab. On the circumstantial side, the hole is as deep as you want to go - people have dug into irregularities in the institute's virus catalogue, there is an "anonymous intelligence report" about WIV members becoming sick with a pneumonia-like illness in November 2019. Do your own research, as the say. But parsing cold war-style intrigue from a desk chair a world away rarely makes anything clearer. When it comes to the science, there isn't a knockout blow either way. Viruses have multiple evolutionary avenues in front of them, from simple mutations to swapping entire genetic regions with closely related pathogens. Some of these can be worked around or re-constituted in a lab with little trace. Given that the major changes Sars-CoV-2 acquired to become pandemic-ready don't mirror those in any closely related coronavirus, its emergence was either a rare event - or we simply don't know very much about wild coronaviruses. The first is possible and the second is surely true. At the same time, if it was created in a lab, the creators took a circuitous route, not using known strains or structures, and not always optimising the virus in obvious ways. Reflecting this, scientific arguments are deep in the weeds at the moment, arguing over the likelihood of one RNA sequence or another arising by natural or artificial means. So far they have served only to keep the window open on both sides. So where did the virus that actually started the pandemic come from? For the natural-emergence side, finding a coronavirus in a bat or intermediate animal that is more genetically similar to Sars-Cov-2 than those currently on record would demonstrate a clear, plausible evolutionary path. The closer the better, and bonus points if it had a physical path to the outbreak as well. This would never amount to an airtight case - meaning some version of lab-leak will always be with us as a fringe theory - but it would placate the majority of scientists. Efforts are ongoing, but could take years. For the lab-leak side, it's all about the source. Getting access to the WIV strain archive, the lab notebooks, regulatory filings, access to researchers. Again, if these turned out to be squeaky-clean there would always be a fringe alleging a cover-up. But if it is a case of research-gone-wrong, there would probably be evidence in the institute. The greater problem, though, is that access to the WIV isn't likely to happen any time soon. Scientists, the US government, and the WHO have asked for openness and cooperation from the Chinese state, and have been predictably stonewalled.

Johnson's voter ID checks are not about electoral fraud, they're about power



The government's voter identity scheme should be abandoned. It is unnecessary, inconvenient and a disincentive to vote. More serious, voter cards for those without a current form of photo ID would be another step, however modest, towards the regulation and surveillance of daily life, an obsession of governments worldwide since the digital revolution. A classic test of state liberalism is how soon after an emergency a regime chooses to dismantle any acquired emergency powers. Boris Johnson has gloried in his daily display of control, this week permitting Britons to hug, but "with caution". In his post-pandemic Queen's speech he announced that proof of ID would now be required by those wishing to exercise the right to vote. This, he says, will prevent election fraud. Voters without driving licences should apply to their local council with a photograph. Their details will presumably be registered. Those who do not register will be denied the vote. The need for this innovation is trivial. Voting is a bond of public trust, the harmless giving of a validated name and address in exchange for a ballot paper. In Cabinet Office research in 2019, of 266 cases of electoral fraud investigated in 2018, just one in five (57) related to complaints made about the voting process and only eight cases nationwide related to identity impersonation. There

have been just three convictions of impersonation at polling offices in the past seven years. In 2014, the Electoral Commission advised that there was no reason why photo ID in some form should not be used at polling stations as 92.5% of people had one. That left 7.5% adrift. Pilot studies in other countries into the introduction of voter ID, the most thorough from Canada, showed that between 5% and 10% of some groups - recent immigrants, ethnic minorities and young people - experienced increased difficulty. In Britain it is thought older people were also deterred. An London School of Economics review of the assembled data in 2019 found itself baffled. Three and a half million mostly poorer voters have no access to photo ID, and would need to get it from a town hall. Few voters said they were worried about fraud, with far more concerned about low turnout. As for the issue of impersonation, said the LSE, it was so minimal as to render it "hard to justify this level of disenfranchisement". The whole business is ridiculous. The reality of identity cards lies elsewhere. In their forms they are beloved of bureaucracies. In Britain they are an occupational disease of ministerial office, reflecting a craving to regulate any human activity under a minister's control. ID cards were introduced in the first world war, supposedly to trap German

spies, and promptly abolished in 1919. They returned in 1939, and Whitehall refused to let them go. They were retained by Clement Attlee's government after 1945 "because of the cold war", but were hated by the public who were being asked to show them by police. Johnson's hero, Winston Churchill, campaigned in opposition to "set the people free" of ID cards, and he duly abolished them in 1952 amid bonfires across the land. It then emerged that Whitehall had expanded the cards' National Information Register from just three categories of personal data to 39. I sense Johnson is eager to go down this path, in spite of his role model. Since the turn of the present century, an ever-authoritarian Home Office has itched to restore the cards. Under Tony Blair, it claimed they would "combat terrorism", while the NHS wanted a similar database to combat disease. Both would be secure against hacking, by criminals, blackmailers or insurance companies. Billions of pounds were blown on consultants. By 2006, the ID lobby had won. The Blair government proposed a new digitised ID card tied to a National Identity Register, this time covering a grotesque 50 categories of personal data on every citizen. It included up to 10 fingerprints, facial and iris scans and lists of all past places of residence. The records would be totally secure, yet somehow shared with other government departments and local authorities. This techno-dazzled home secretaries such as David Blunkett and Charles Clarke. Gordon Brown even wanted retailers to be able to check shoppers against the database. The 2006 card became so controversial it was eventually made voluntary, destroying its counter-terrorism role. As its launch costs soared to in excess of £12bn, it lost all contact with common sense or value for money. It was pointed out that driving licences and passports were a perfectly adequate proof of identity where one was really needed. What had become an obsessional Whitehall data

trawl was repealed by David Cameron's government in 2011. As with Churchill, it was announced that information so far amassed on the data register would be destroyed. But as Edward Snowden later disclosed, such pledges are useless from ministers who feel "national security" licenses mendacity. In 2013, a database belonging to the NHS also collapsed under a blizzard of National Audit Office criticism. Dodgy consultants were ripping off Whitehall left, right and centre. An estimated £10bn was lost by the NHS - as if it had money to burn. Meanwhile, regular leaks of health records show that all digital data is now inherently insecure. In his futuristic novel *The Circle*, Dave Eggers envisaged a control-freak society in which everyone is a walking open ID card. A Big Brother national register knows where everyone is, their histories, lives, ailments, friends, misdemeanours, entitlements and disqualifications. The individual is a prisoner of his or her present and past, an existence shared with everyone. To disconnect and retreat into privacy is a crime, and mobs set out to find you. Anyone who thinks this just a fantasy should watch the film *The Social Dilemma* and former Google design ethicist Tristan Harris's devastating account of the power of digital algorithms over 3 billion human beings. Cynics might shrug and tell us to get wise. The internet thrust us all into the electronic universe, as evolution once thrust us into the natural one. We expect the state to protect and sustain us. We can hardly object if the state wishes to know - and tell - all about us. Yet the very absurdity of voter ID indicates the carelessness of its backers. I always feared individual freedoms would be most at risk from a government of journalists. It is a profession instinctively hostile to the privacy of the individual. That is why voter ID is not about voting. It is about the abuse of power. You may think the 50 shades of you that were listed in the 2011 National Identity Register are a forgotten horror.

Covid experts warn against foreign holidays, so why is Boris Johnson so keen?

"Fly now pay later", offers one finance company, which gives loans for holidays, including those to Portugal and other green-listed countries. We may all end up paying later for those flying off to sun, sea and Covid. One travel company, Tui, alone has 19 flights to Portugal next week, eight of them now using Dreamliners, which have space for up to 345 people. Prof Martin McKee, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, says he finds the new travel rules bizarre. "Why Portugal? It might be OK if people only met Portuguese- and British-vaccinated people - but they'll mix with others from France, Italy and Spain, mixing at airports, waiting in queues." Oxford University professor John Bell, of the government's vaccine task force, is optimistic that the vaccines will protect against the variant first detected in India, but still strongly warns against foreign holidays this summer, for fear of importing fresh mutant strains. With about half of the UK population unvaccinated, a wait of several weeks after getting jabbed before vaccines are as effective as possible, and with some still vulnerable after vaccination, risk abounds. In the past week, infections and deaths rose: watch ministers now blaming any resurgence on vaccine refusers, nudging blame on to poor people and ethnic minorities. How much like déjà vu this feels, how like last summer. The dash to places like Greece brought back more than half of imported Covid cases, according to a Public Health England paper; McKee also notes that it accelerated infections in Greece. This was when the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, was subsidising the country to eat meals sitting indoors, breathing on each other, but not for a takeaway sandwich with a friend on a park bench. "Paying people to sit inside, studies show, did harm," says Prof Susan Michie, a participant in the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) through the behavioural science group. Here we go again, opening up foreign travel and pubs, restaurants and entertainment venues indoors, despite the health secretary, Matt Hancock, warning that this new variant transmits faster and could spread "like wildfire" among the unvaccinated. Ministers ig-



Polly Toynbee

nore their own preconditions for easing up, the fourth of which requires that our "assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new variants of concern". But that test has surely been failed, with the risk fundamentally changed as new variant hotspots multiply. University of Warwick models indicate that if it is 40% more transmissible, that would mean 6,000 hospitalisations a day - above the second wave's peak. The prime minister, an admirer of the mayor from Jaws, is a stranger to the precautionary principle. He now shifts responsibility from state to individual: "I urge everyone to be cautious and take responsibility when enjoying new freedoms today." But who can be responsible for other breathers in a restaurant or cinema? Note the mood change in the air. Blame for his cavalier failure to shut borders as Covid rampaged through India is pouring out of his own Tory press, the Telegraph and Sunday Times hammering him for letting in 20,000 potentially infected travellers from India for three weeks after Pakistan and Bangladesh flights were stopped. From everywhere comes the damaging charge

that Johnson delayed because he put (over-hyped) hopes of a trade deal with India ahead of life and death of his people, only cancelling his India trip a day before he was due to fly. The India scandal flashes red political alarms, because Johnson owes his place in No 10 to that dog-whistle Brexit pledge to "take back control of our borders". He slams the door to EU builders, carers and farm workers but leaves the border wide open to places running hot with Covid. The mystery is why holidays abroad are given such priority. Though the risk is hard to quantify, leading experts warn against travel. Yvette Cooper, the chair of the home affairs select committee, which first warned of border-closure failures, tells me: "No department is responsible for border decisions, with no transparency on how the Joint Biosecurity Centre decides where people can travel." She urges rules to make hauliers take lateral flow tests on the ferry or Eurotunnel. But here's Cooper's most telling question (after revelations in David Cameron's "love DC" lobbying texts to chums): "Who exactly has Boris Johnson's ear on this? Who's texting him?" What commercial interests in reckless foreign travel hold sway? That's the

right question, after yet another contracts-for-chums revelation where Hancock helped a former minister secure a £180m PPE deal and Lord Udy-Lister sat on a board that granted a massive state loan to a company that he hadn't fully disclosed his links to. Who knows what secret influencers stop Johnson putting life and death before commerce? For a prime minister greedy for popularity, he oddly ignores public opinion on the borders: the public puts safety well above foreign holidays. Ipsos Mori finds 79% of Britons are alarmed at Covid-19 variants coming into the UK, with 67% wanting to stop variants spreading by barring arrivals to the UK from any foreign country. As many as 42% support introducing another national lockdown if needed. Johnson would pay a high political price for a third wave. Most senior Covid experts are perplexed by the government encouraging foreign travel, beyond a few special family and work cases. The UK is beautiful - I went to Berwick-on-Tweed and Northern Ireland last summer - and I feel no need to fly away now. Labour should take the lead on this, urging citizens to holiday here.

IT rules: Social media firms can now be sued by users for offensive content

Mumbai, May 29 : Official sources said that the government may not be vindictive and the social media firms can always engage with it, but the laws empower individual users and users' group also to lodge complaints and file cases and in such cases the government may not be able to do much. Though some social media firms like Facebook and Google have said that they aim to comply with the new laws, have already met some and are engaging with the government on other aspects, lawyers said that such partial compliance doesn't guarantee the immunity provided otherwise under Section 79. Though some social media firms like Facebook and Google have said that they aim to comply with the new laws, have already met some and are engaging with the government on other aspects, lawyers said that such partial compliance doesn't guarantee the immunity provided otherwise under Section 79. With the new rules for intermediaries that came into force on Wednesday, social media firms now run the risk of facing increased litigation from various parties, particularly users' and social activist groups on any content which is perceived as offensive. Majority of the players have not met compliance with the new rules so far and further delays can make their senior management vulnerable to facing

criminal charges in cases of alleged violation of rules. An imprisonment of up to seven years as part of penal provisions cannot be ruled out. Facebook won't remove posts claiming Covid-19 is man-made. Through its actions and deliberate defiance,



Twitter seeks to undermine India's legal system, the ministry added. Row escalates, govt says Twitter defaming India; Delhi Police slams company. This is because non-compliance with the rules would result in these social media companies losing their intermediary status, which provides them exemptions and certain immunity from liabilities for any third-party content and data hosted by them. Once this happens, they could be liable for criminal action, in case of complaints.

The earlier version of the Information Technology law did not have provision for criminal liability. Microblogging site, Twitter which has been directed by the government to remove the tag "Manipulated Media" from tweets by BJP leaders in an alleged Con-

sidered Rule 7 which deals with the non-observance of the rules states, "Where an intermediary fails to observe these rules, the provisions of sub-section (1) of section 79 of the Act shall not be applicable to such intermediary and the intermediary shall be liable for punishment under any law for the time being in force including the provisions of the Act and the Indian Penal Code." "Social media firms should be proactive in complying with the new intermediary rules as the provision for criminal liability, which is a new feature in the law can have serious consequences for them," cyber law expert Pawan Duggal said. He said that mere challenging the law in the court as WhatsApp has done, will not be of use unless the court stays the law. Official sources said that the government may not be vindictive and the social media firms can always engage with it, but the laws empower individual users and users' group also to lodge complaints and file cases and in such cases the government may not be able to do much. Though some social media firms like Facebook and Google have said that they aim to comply with the new laws, have already met some and are engaging with the government on other aspects, lawyers said that such partial compliance doesn't guarantee the immunity provided

otherwise under Section 79. The new intermediary rules, which were notified on February 25, are aimed at regulating all social media intermediaries like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Google, YouTube, etc., as well as over-the-top platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and stand-alone digital media outlets. While the guidelines relating to intermediaries was already in force from earlier times, through the new rules the government has tightened some clauses such as reducing the time provided to the platforms to remove what is deemed by it as unlawful content under Section 69A of the IT Act. Such content now needs to be removed within 36 hours of being flagged against 72 hours earlier. Further, these platforms would now have to appoint grievance redressal officers in the country and resolve consumer grievances within a specific time period, as well as have designated nodal officers for coordination with the government over law and order matters. For messaging platforms like WhatsApp, a new requirement has been inserted which requires it to provide the first originator of what is deemed as mischievous messages by government which may lead to law and order problem or threatens the country's sovereignty, integrity, or friendly relations with neighbours.

Centre accuses Twitter of trying to dictate terms to it



Mumbai, May 29 : "The purported commitment of Twitter, to its Indian user base, thus not only sounds hollow but completely self-serving," it said. The government on Thursday came down heavily on Twitter and accused it of undermining the country's laws which aim at providing it immunity from criminal liability. In a statement, the ministry of electronics and IT (MeitY) accused Twitter of trying to dictate terms to the government. The government response came after Twitter criticised the new IT rules, calling the Delhi Police's visit to its offices earlier during the week a form of 'intimidation' and said it was concerned about the 'potential threat to freedom of expression'. Though some social media firms like Facebook and Google have said that they aim to comply with the new laws, have already met some and are engaging with the government on other aspects, lawyers said that such partial compliance doesn't guarantee the immunity provided otherwise under Section 79. IT rules: Social media firms can now be sued by users for offensive content. Through its actions and deliberate defiance, Twitter seeks to undermine India's legal system, the ministry added. Row escalates, govt says Twitter defaming India; Delhi Police slams company. Delhi Police personnel had earlier during the week visited Twitter's offices in Delhi and Gurgaon. The visit came after the site had tagged some tweets related to an alleged Congress toolkit used to target the Centre over its Covid-19 handling as 'manipulated media', which the government later asked it to remove. "The only instance of scuttling free speech on Twitter is Twitter itself and its opaque policies, as a result of which people's accounts are suspended and tweets deleted arbitrarily without recourse," MeitY said. In a hard-hitting reply, the government said protecting free speech in India is not the prerogative of "only a private, for-profit, foreign entity like Twitter, but it is the commitment of the world's largest democracy and its robust institutions". The statement also highlighted the point that Twitter representatives in India routinely claim that they have no authority and that they and the people of India need to escalate everything to the Twitter headquarters in the US. "The purported commitment of Twitter, to its Indian user base, thus not only sounds hollow but completely self-serving," it said. Earlier during the day, in a statement which was critical of the new intermediary rules which came into force from May 26, Twitter said, "Right now, we are concerned by recent events regarding our employees in India and the potential threat to freedom of expression for the people we serve. We, alongside many in civil society in India and around the world, have concerns with regards to the use of intimidation tactics by the police. Twitter is deeply committed to the people of India." The microblogging site also raised concerns about the compliance officer being made criminally liable for content on the platform, the requirements for proactive monitoring and the blanket authority to seek information about its users. The platform said it represents dangerous overreach that is inconsistent with open, democratic principles. Twitter has requested MeitY to publish standard operating protocols on procedural aspects of compliance for public consultation and has sought a minimum three-month extension for implementing the rules. "We would also like to reaffirm that Twitter continues to accept grievances from users and law enforcement via our existing grievance redressal channel available here under the new rules," it said. This is not the first time when the government and Twitter have sparred over content. In February, MeitY had sent a string of letters to the social media platform asking it to remove hashtags/accounts/tweets related to farmers' protest, which according to the government, were leading to misinformation, having the potential to create law and order problems.

COAI & CII organizes Roundtable for Robust Digital Communication Infrastructure in Assam

Guwahati, May 29 : COAI & CII today hosted a panel discussion to address the challenges and recommendations for the creation of a Robust Digital Communication Infrastructure in the state of Assam in presence of various dignitaries representing both industry bodies. The guest of honor and keynote speaker for the event was Mr. Jishnu Barua, Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, who participated in the in-depth discussion for public policies and state-based initiatives. The context for this discussion was addressed by Mr. Pradeep Bagla, Chairman, CII Assam State Council, and Managing Director Amrit Cement Ltd in his opening remarks, followed by Lt Gen Dr. S.P. Kochhar, Director General, COAI. The notable speaker list for the panel discussion included Sh. T.K. Paul, Member (T), Department of Telecom (DoT) and Sh. Sovan Mukherjee, CEO, Assam Circle Bharti Airtel Ltd, Sh. Sunando Shome, CEO Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd and Sh. Sanjib Bora, Cluster Head, East India Vodafone Idea Ltd, moderated by Mr. Vikram Tiwathia, Deputy Director General, COAI. Speaking on the occasion, Sh. Jishnu Barua, Chief Secretary, Government of Assam said, "The state of Assam has become the first north eastern state where villages are digitally connected. State is also planning to organize financial inclusion and digital literacy campaigns in rural areas. Government will further facilitate the creation of the robust and reliable Telecom and Digital Infrastructure in the State". Speaking on the occasion, Sh. T.K. Paul, Member (T), DoT said "Under the National Broadband Mission (NBM), the government envisaged providing broadband access to all villages in the country. DoT is holding regular review meetings of NBM and SBC having members from State Govt. officials and the industry to monitor the progress and extend help for resolution of issue." Speaking on the occasion, Lt. Gen. Dr. S.P. Kochhar, Director General, COAI said: "We are thankful to everyone who participated and helped address the issues and challenges faced by the industry for further creating a robust telecom infrastructure in Assam. COAI works closely with DoT, State Govt. and industry to achieve targets set under the National Broadband Mission (NBM) and to develop innovative implementation models for Right of Way (RoW). We have been constantly working with States/UTs to provide consistent inputs to policies about expansion of digital infrastructure including for RoW approvals required for laying of OFC. Mr. Pradeep Bagla, Chairman, CII Assam State Council & Managing Director, Amrit Cement Ltd. stated that "At times of the pandemic like this, Information Technology and telecom played a crucial role and have come to the forefront as critical enablers. The role of digitization became evident from the data traffic surged on the telecom networks fueled by the new Work from Home culture, increased reliance on e-commerce, social media and digital platforms to meet the daily and social needs of citizens." The discussion explored key aspects of technology and digitization initiatives that can unlock scalability and faster monetization for the state. Panelists highlighted their vision for creating robust infrastructure in the State and thus providing good Quality of Service to the Citizens. They also shared their

RBI report: 'Loan growth promising, banks' capital base unimpaired'

Mumbai, May 29 : As per the new accounting norm, the difference between sales proceeds of foreign currency and its weighted average holding cost is treated as realised profit or loss, as the case may be. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday said the second Covid wave's macro-economic cost to the country could hopefully be limited to the June quarter with a possible spillover to July, even as it chose not to alter its GDP growth outlook for FY22 from 10.5%. This turns out to be marginally higher than the recently revised estimates by Moody's (9.3%) and S&P (9.8%). Seeking to paint a somewhat rosy picture of credit demand and supply, the central bank observed that banks would have sufficient capital at the aggregate level even in a severe stress scenario. From the three-year low of 5.1% till October 2020, loan growth of banks rose to 5.6% on year till March 2021 and seems to be aided further by liquidity support, low interest rates and the government's 'growth-enhancing' steps, the RBI noted. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) balance sheet size of RBI's balance sheet up 6.99% for nine months to March 2021. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) flags risk of bubble in Indian equity markets. It, however, added that with the lifting of the interim stay on asset classification standstill by the Supreme Court on March 23, banks' asset quality would need to be closely monitored in the coming quarters, with preparedness for higher provisioning. Prognosticating that CPI inflation would likely average at 5% during 2021-22, with 'risks broadly balanced', the RBI reiterated its resolve

to retain its growth-supportive bias in the conduct of monetary policy, till economic expansion "gains traction on a durable basis" even while ensuring inflation remains within the target (4+/-2%). It pinned hopes on 'coordinated action' by the Centre and states



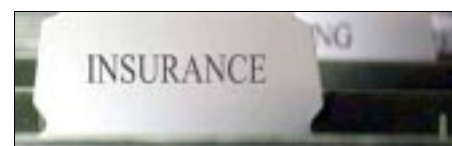
to reduce auto fuel taxes that fan fuel inflation. Meanwhile, the annual report also revealed that an accounting change that inflated the RBI's 'realised profit' from sale of foreign exchange by 69% to Rs 50,629 crore primarily enabled it to transfer a higher-than-expected Rs 99,122 crore as surplus to the government for the nine months to March 31, 2021. A lower appropriation to the contingency fund (Rs 20,170 crore in July 2020-March 2021 against Rs 73,615 crore in July 2019-June 2020), which reined in expenditure, also helped. The Union Budget had factored in just Rs 57,128 crore from the RBI for the financial year 2021-22, and the extra transfer came as a bonanza for it, amid a severe revenue shortfall in April-May and possibly in June too. The RBI is in the process of shifting to the April-March financial year, in sync with the government's

and corporate India's, from July-June previously. Though the higher realised gains from the sale of foreign exchange is computed in line with the Bimal Jalan Committee's recommendations which reviewed the economic capital framework of the RBI, many experts had warned against utilisation of the 'notional' gains from sale of foreign exchange. "India holds foreign currency assets for precautionary purposes and, therefore, needs to hold structurally long positions in foreign currency for policy purposes. This is not with a commercial intent. Foreign currency assets also form a high proportion of the total balance sheet assets. For the purpose of financial reporting and transparency, such assets are revalued at market rates and gains and losses are transferred to a revaluation account. The gains arising from such revaluation are unrealised and notional and have not come out of profits generated by RBI. It cannot, therefore, be treated as free reserves eligible for distribution. Any utilisation of these funds also has consequences for inflation and money supply," former RBI deputy governor Shyamala Gopinath had told FE earlier. As per the new accounting norm, the difference between sales proceeds of foreign currency and its weighted average holding cost is treated as realised profit or loss, as the case may be.

New areas of insurance unfold in Covid-19 pandemic

Mumbai, May 29 : Selling insurance is a kind of social responsibility which demands a missionary zeal to serve the people individually and the society at large. The entire world is in the midst of a catastrophe triggered early last year by the Covid-19 virus. The financial and physical health of all stands unpredictable. In such a scenario, insurance is the best rescuer. Those who are protected with suitable health insurance plans can hope for best possible treatment and meet their medical expenses without their own finances being adversely affected or depleted. Similarly, those who have taken adequate life insur-

ance for themselves are leaving behind some financial corpus for their loved ones to hang on to till they are able to fend for themselves. This magical protection through small monthly or periodical outgo can save lives from financial crisis. But unfortunately the trail of miseries that corona victims have been leaving behind for dependent family members scripts a very pathetic story. For this escapable plight of the people I would point my fingers towards the insurers who do not conduct their business with the commitment to provide financial protection to each eligible individual in the society through



different insurance plans. health insurance policy. Not following these 7 points will make Covid-19 claim difficult for you. Health Insurance, insurance claim, death in hospital, health insurance claim request, cost of hospitalisation, Covid-19 pandemic, how to make claim request, cashless claim, reimbursement claim, life insurance, IDBI Federal Life Insurance, life insurance online, Term

Insurance plan, insurance plan, term insurance, mic, my insurance club, Saral Jeevan Bima, term insurance, life insurance, IRDAI, COVID-19 pandemic, saral jeevan bima yojana, saral jeevan bima yojana LIC, Can second Covid-19 wave lead to increased penetration of health insurance in India? This pandemic must force the insurers to rethink their business in respect of product design, premium rates, policy conditions and privileges as also about the methods, medium and strategies to distribute the products in the market to achieve full coverage for all the eligible individuals

Panacea Biotech hits 5% upper circuit, nears 52-week high on Sputnik V vaccine production in India



Mumbai, May 29 : Panacea Biotech share price hit 5 per cent upper circuit at Rs 406.10 apiece on BSE after the company along with RDIF announced the launch of production of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine against coronavirus. Panacea Biotech share price hit 5 per cent upper circuit at Rs 406.10 apiece on BSE after the company along with the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) announced the launch of production of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine against coronavirus. The first batch pro-

duced at Panacea Biotech's facilities at Baddi will be shipped to the Gamaleya Center for quality control. Panacea Biotech stock was trading close to its 52-week high of Rs 407.20 apiece, touched on April 28, 2021. The company in a press release said that full-scale production of the vaccine is due to start this summer. The company's facilities have complied with GMP standards and are prequalified by WHO. "Panacea Biotech looks overbought and it could move up to Rs 425. Long-term investors

should wait for a dip near Rs 365 to re-enter the stock for better returns," AR Ramachandran, Co-founder & Trainer, Tips2Trades, told Financial Express Online. In traded volume terms, 61,000 Panacea Biotech shares have exchanged hands on BSE, while a total of 2.30 lakh shares have traded on NSE, so far in intraday. Sputnik V was registered in India under the emergency use authorisation procedure on April 12, 2021, and vaccination against COVID-19 with the Russian vaccine started on

May 14. As announced in April, RDIF and Panacea have agreed to produce 100 million doses per year of Sputnik V vaccine. To date Sputnik V has been registered in 66 countries globally with total population of over 3.2 billion people. Efficacy of Sputnik V is 97.6 per cent based on the analysis of data on coronavirus infection rate among those in Russia vaccinated with both components of Sputnik V from December 5, 2020 to March 31, 2021, company said in a release.

Contd. From Page 1

CM reviews implementation

Nagaon Deputy Commissioner to entrust one Additional Deputy Commissioner to oversee the implementation process on daily basis. Noteworthy that the Assam government has taken up the Batadrava Than beautification project with a cost of Rs. 188 crore covering an area of 165 bigha. Union Home Minister Amit Shah laid foundation of the project on February 25 this year. Health Minister Keshab Mahanta, Batadrava MLA Shivamoni Bora, Nagaon MLA Rupak Sarma, Barhampur MLA Jitu Goswami, DC Kavitha Padmanabhan, SP Anand Mishra, Chief Engineer and other senior engineers of PWD, former MLA Angoorlata Deka and satradhikar of Sri Sri Narowa Satra Devananda Deva Goswami, satradhikar of Sri Sri Salaguri Satra Jogendra Narayan Deva Goswami, office bearers of Sri Sri Batadrava Than Managing Committee and senior officials of the district administration were present in the meeting.

Tamulpur MLA Leho Ram Boro

and the entire UPPL family. He devoted most of his life to the development and upliftment of the region."Added Boro, "He tested positive for Covid a few days back. At the time of treatment at GMCH, he suffered a stroke and succumbed to death at the hospital. May his soul rest in peace and always be in heavenly abode."In the recently held state elections, Boro had won the Tamulpur constituency seat by garnering 46.75 per cent of the votes polled. The UPPL won six seats in 126-member house. Leho Ram Boro is the second legislator in Assam to die due to reason related to Covid. On Wednesday, Majendra Narzary, who represented Gossaigaon assembly constituency, died of post-Covid complications.

Provide rations to Covid19-hit sex

already identified the sex workers and their families. In an order (Criminal Appeal No 135 of 210 - Buddhadev Karmakar vs the State of West bengal & others) passed on September 29, 2020, the Supreme Court observed that the sex workers have a right to live with dignity as they are human beings, the HC bench noted. The apex court had also constituted a committee to look into the conditions of sex workers in the country. According to reports, there are around 70 sex workers earn for their families of about 300 people in the redlight area of Silchar but the Covid19 restrictions have severely affected the livelihood of the sex workers.

Assam Government hikes wages

The decision of raising the daily wage of tea garden workers was announced by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday. CM Sarma said: "In consultation with workers unions, gardens managements we have agreed on upward revision in wages of tea garden workers by Rs 38, to be effective from February 23. With this, workers in Brahmaputra Valley shall get Rs 167+38 (Rs 205) & those in Barak Valley will get Rs 145 + 38 (Rs 183)." "For the remaining Rs 12, we shall initiate consultation with stakeholders and certain that an acceptable solution will be found out soon," Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma added. For the remaining Rs 12, we shall initiate consultation with stakeholders and certain that an acceptable solution will be found out soon. Notably, the Assam Government on May 26 had cancelled its earlier notification that had increased daily wage of tea garden workers in the State by Rs. 50, which was yet to be implemented due to a court stay order.

‘Ready to touch PM's feet.. but I

on cyclone Yaas devastation, she said, "I had other meetings to attend, and I took PM's permission before leaving.""By the time were reached the place where the PM-CM meeting was to be held, we found out that the PM had already arrived and that there was a meeting going on. We were asked to wait outside, told that there will be no entry at the moment because a meeting is going on. We waited patiently for a while. Then, when we asked again, we were told that no one can enter for the next one hour," she said. Later when she reached the conference hall, the PM was in a meeting with the Honourable Governor, central leaders and even some MLAs of the opposition party, Banerjee said. "This was clearly against the brief. It was supposed to be only a PM-CM meeting. So, we decided to submit our report to the PM and then with the Prime Minister's permission we went to Digha. I sought the Prime Minister's permission three times," she said. Further, she said, "Bengal is my priority and I will never put it in danger. I will remain a security guard for the people here. If the Prime Minister asks me to touch his feet for the welfare of Bengal people, I am ready to do that; but I should not be insulted." She also appealed to PM Modi to end political vendetta and, withdraw the order recalling West Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay and allow him to work for COVID-infected. The Centre on Friday night sought services of the Chief Secretary and asked the state government to relieve the officer immediately. The face-to-face encounter on Friday was the first between PM Modi and Banerjee since the April-May assembly election that the Chief Minister's Trinamool Congress party won, despite a no-holds-barred campaign marked by extensive poaching and coarse rhetoric.

Twitter maintaining double

said. Earlier on Thursday, Twitter had said that it was concerned by recent events regarding their employees in India and the potential threat to freedom of expression. "Concerned by recent events regarding our employees in India and potential threat to freedom of expression for people we serve. We have concerns with regards to intimidation police's tactics in response to enforcement of global Terms of Service and core elements of the new IT Rules," a Twitter spokesperson said. The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) on Friday had asked the microblogging company to "stop beating around the bush" and "comply with the laws of the land". In a statement on Thursday, MeitY asserted that India had a "glorious tradition of free speech and democratic practices" and Twitter's statements were an "attempt to dictate its terms to the world's largest democracy. In a statement on Thursday, MeitY asserted that India had a "glorious tradition of free speech and democratic practices" and Twitter's statements were an "attempt to dictate its terms to the world's largest democracy. On May 24, the Delhi Police visited the Twitter India offices after it issued notice to Twitter seeking an explanation on what grounds it tagged BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra's tweet on the alleged Congress toolkit designed to target the Central government as 'manipulated media'. The Delhi Police Special Cell asked Twitter to explain the rationale and share all the information on how it described the toolkit as manipulated media. MoS G Kishan Reddy also slammed the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for arriving late at a cyclone review meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said that people should re-think about electing such Chief Minister. "The people in West Bengal have been affected by Cyclone Yaas. The Prime Minister himself visited the state to provide confidence to the people. The Chief Minister should have come forward to help the Centre in rehabilitation and should not have politicised the matter," Reddy said. "Politics will not help in the development of the state or the development of people. Mamata has no desire to develop infrastructure in the state or people. People should re-think about electing such CM," he added. Yesterday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a review meeting at Kalaikunda in Paschim Medinipur district in West Bengal to take stock of the post cyclonic situation. Mamata Banerjee was supposed to attend the meeting. However, she arrived late by 30 minutes and handed him over reports of damage caused by the impact of Cyclone Yaas. Following this, she left for her pre-scheduled meeting at Digha. Banerjee asked for a Rs 20,000 crore relief package from the Centre after a cyclonic storm Yaas ravaged several parts of the state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also conducted an aerial survey of the cyclone-affected areas in West Bengal and Odisha. Cyclone Yaas made its landfall in West Bengal on Wednesday. Several districts including Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, Bankura, South 24 Pargana and Jhargram suffered the impact in the last two days. The coastal areas like Digha and Sundarban were the worst affected.

Nature of war changing

and soon to be formed theatre commands, the Navy chief said. During his visit, the Navy chief got down on his hands and did push-ups with the cadets, as is the tradition followed in the squadron, an official statement said. The entire staff of the Admiral, NDA Commandant and other officers present there also joined him.

Students should be catalyst

teachers and students should work together for value addition and contribution to the GDP of the region," the Nagpur MP said. Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari appealed to students to make a resolve in life, which he said was necessary to become successful. "Success comes through a resolve. Work hard to achieve that goal," he said. On the occasion, Shankar Baba Papalkar was conferred the honorary D.Litt. By the varsity for his work in the fields of environment conservation and rehabilitation.

Covishield vaccination centres

age group of 18-44 years, will have to get their slots and timing fixed through CoWIN or Aarogya Setu Apps before get their first dose of Covid19 vaccine. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has approved a number of laboratories, both government and private, for RT-PCR test to detect Covid19 infection. Where a person will have to go for Covid19 RT-PCR tests in Guwahati? According to the list of ICMR, the RT-PCR test for Covid19 can be done in government laboratories of Gauhati Medical College Hospital (GMCH), Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST), Guwahati and the Army 151 Base Hospital, Basistha; Government Ayurvedic Medical College, Jalukbari; A person can also undergo his/her Covid19 RT-PCR test in a number of ICMR-approved private laboratories in Guwahati. These private laboratories include Ultracare Diagnostic Centre, Ashok Path, Survey, Beltola; Dr Lal Pathlabs Ltd., MRD Road, Chandmari; Krsnaa Diagnostics Pvt Ltd; Department of Laboratory Services, Ayursundra Superspeciality Hospital, Ahom Gaon; Molecular Testing Lab, GNRC Lab services, GNRC Hospitals, Dispur. Dept of Lab Medicine, North-East Health City Pvt Ltd, Koinadhara; Dispur Clinical Lab, Dispur Hospital Campus, Ganeshguri; Dept of Clinical Lab, Hayat Hospital Pvt Ltd, Odalbakra; Dept of Lab Medicine, Narayana Superspeciality Hospital, Near Tolaram Bafna Medical Complex, Amingaon. Molecular Diagnostic Lab, Pratiksha Hospital, Borbari; Marwari Hospitals, Athgaon; Phoenix Diagnostics, Assam Trunk Road, Bharalumukh; Laboratory services, Down Town hospital Ltd; Central Nursing Home, Beltola; Nemcare Hospital, Bhangagarh; Department of Laboratory Sciences - Molecular Laboratory, NEMCARE Hospitals Pvt Ltd, Bhangagarh; Dept of Molecular Biology Lab, Gate Hospital, Geetanagar; Sanjevani Hospital, Maligaon. The Apollo Hospitals has also an ICMR-approved laboratory for Covid19 RT-PCR test. The Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test is the most recommended one for tracing the Covid19 infection in individuals suffering from influenza-like symptoms. This particular lab test has a specificity rate - meaning it can identify individuals without disease of nearly 100% and a sensitivity rate - the ability to identify those with COVID19 by 67%.

PM Modi announces measures

parents due to COVID-19 pandemic. "Children represent the future of the country and the country will do everything possible to support and protect the children so that they develop as strong citizens and have a bright future," Modi said. The Prime Minister's Office in an official statement announced a slew of measures to support the children, it says the children will get a monthly stipend from PM-CARES fund once they turn 18-years-old and a fund of Rs 10 lakh when they turn 23.

Andhra Chief Minister Says Suspend Covid Vaccine Supply To Private Hospitals

Amaravati, May 29 : Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Saturday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to suspend supply of COVID-19 vaccines to private hospitals as they are allegedly charging exorbitant prices per vial. In a letter to the Centre, the Chief Minister alleged that the private hospitals are charging exorbitant prices - from ? 2,000 to ? 25,000 per vial. He also said that the control over vaccines should be with the central and state governments. "Due to the price differential offered to them and also the flexibility available to the private hospitals to fix the price of their vaccines, these hospitals are charging as high as ? 2,000-25,000 for each dose from the public," the Chief Minister mentioned in the letter. This makes these doses one of the costliest in the world, inviting criticism from the general public, Mr Reddy said while underscoring that vaccines are for the public good and ideally they need to be given free of cost or at least at affordable rates. He also mentioned that due to insufficient availability of vaccines under both channels of supply many states have not been able to vaccinate people below 45-year-old. "Many governments including ours have taken a decision to vaccinate people in the 18-44 age group also free of cost. However, due to insufficient availability of vaccines under both channels of supply, currently only those who are above 45 years of age are being vaccinated in our State as they are more vulnerable," he told the Prime Minister. He said that the availability of vaccines at both public and private hospitals would be a good idea only if there is surplus availability of the vaccines wherein anyone can choose any mode as per his or her choice and financial capability. "In today's situation where supply is very limited, providing this option to private hospitals wherein they charge an exorbitant price is socially unacceptable and administratively difficult to monitor," he wrote. He added that the policy decision of the Centre in this regard to allow private hospitals to directly purchase vaccines is sending out "wrong signals" to the people and also creating a situation of black marketing of the vaccines.

Health minister Keshab Mahanta inaugurates 68 oxygen connecting beds at Nagaon Civil Hospital

NAGAON, May 29: State Health Minister Keshab Mahanta formally inaugurated the 68 oxygen connecting bed through pipelines facilities at Nagaon BP Civil Hospital to combat the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic in the district today. Inaugurating the oxygen connecting 68 beds in the hospital, the minister devoted these oxygen connecting beds to those COVID victims in the district. In his speech, Mahanta said the facilities will enhance the strengths of the hospital authority to provide adequate treatment to those COVID victims in the district itself instead of referring them to other hospitals in the state for better treatment so far. Local MLA Rupak Sarma, Deputy commissioner Kavitha Padmanabhan and other officials from the district health services were present in the inaugural function. The minister expressed his gratitude and also thanked to district administration as well as the local MLA Rupak Sarma for completing all those facilities in the hospital within just only 14 days, a release issued by district information and public relations office added. On the other hand, 286 fresh cases were recorded on Saturday, taking the total cumulative active COVID cases in the district to 5072 while one succumbed to the virus today. It is pertinent to mention that total 61 people died of COVID 19 till date in the district during the second wave of the virus. Significantly, 139 people who were undergoing treatment in hospital as well as at home, have been recovered from infection of the virus in the district on Saturday, including these total 5041 people have been recovered from the virus till the time of filing of this report, sources added. Sources claimed that among those who tested positive today, 75 were admitted to Nagaon COVID hospital as well as other COVID Care Centres set up at various places in the district while the rest were put in home isolation. Rapid Antigen Test was conducted on 5480 people today while RT-PCR test was conducted on 302 swab samples, sources added.

Special task force to prevent rhino poaching in Kaziranga National Park

GUWAHATI, May 29 : The Assam government has decided to strengthen the special task force to prevent rhino poaching in Kaziranga National Park (KNP), said Assam health minister Keshab Mahanta after a meeting with chief minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday. CM Sarma reviewed flood preparedness as well as safety of wildlife of the national park at a meeting with deputy commissioners, superintendents of police, officials of forest and veterinary departments of Golaghat, Nagaonm Sonitpur, Biswanath and Karbi Anglong at Kaziranga. The meeting which was held in the presence of ministers Atul Bora, Keshab Mahanta, Ajanta Neog, Parimal Suklabaidya, assembly deputy speaker Dr Numal Momin decided to appoint an ASP and DSP additionally for the task force. "It has been decided to appoint an ASP and DSP additionally to strengthen the task force," said Mahanta. On the other hand, the government decided to increase the amount of ration for the forest staff. "The forest personnel of the state were getting monthly ration of Rs 830. Honourable chief minister has decided to increase the amount to Rs 2,000. It will be released soon," minister Mahanta added.

MP Bordoloi announced to provide Ambulance to Omprakash Pramila Devi Memorial Chairtable Trust

Hojai, May 29 : Member of Parliament from Nagaon Mr. Pradyut Bordoloi visited State's first Model Vaccination Centre run by Omprakash Pramila Devi Memorial Charitable Trust at Parsuram Girls' High School in Lanak. MP Bordoloi inspected the vaccination process going on. Speaking to media, Bordoloi whole heartedly praised the efforts of the trust for the mankind. He promised to help and cooperate with the trust in their social activities. Meanwhile, MP also handed over large numbers of PPE Kits, Masks, Face shields, sanitizers, Vitamin D tablets, nebulizer and hand gloves etc. for distribution to the needy people of the area. He even announced to provide the trust one 'Ambulance' for the use of the needy people. He also encouraged the volunteers and Medical staff of the centre. Within last days, total 650 people are being Vaccinated in this centre.

Congressmen Join the BJP

Golaghat, May 29: Today two Anchalik Panchayat members from Pulibor and Golaghat Gaon Panchayat formally joined the BJP. AP Members Diganta Gogoi and Dibyajyoti Saikia today joined Bhartiya Janta Party by leaving the Congress party in presence of Padumoni Mandal BJP President Sushanta Hazarika. In this joining ceremony Oating ZPC Member Lohit Gogoi along with several other BJP leaders and activists were present.

Ex-principal Brajen Sharma Baruah died

North Lakhimpur, May 28: The Ex-principal of Lakhimpur Commerce College, North Lakhimpur, and a resident of Bazarpaty Road, North Lakhimpur town, died in the afternoon today at the Health City Hospital, Guwahati at the age of 84 years. He was found Covid positive after death. He retired from Lakhimpur Commerce College as the Principal in March, 1998. As its Principal, he could able to establish Lakhimpur Commerce College as one of the best institutions in commerce education in Assam.

Deplorable Condition of Irrigation Project : Farmers Suffer

Golaghat, May 29: The farmers of a region in Golaghat have to suffer a lot due to the deplorable condition of Irrigation system in the region. The Da Chamua, Hognunpara villages in Golaghat are famous for agricultural works. There is an Irrigation Project which was set up during the tenure of Soneswar Bora. Now this particular project has been in a deplorable condition for the past several years. The farmers are unable to get any service from the Project due to lack of maintenance and repair work. The farmers alleged that there are fifteen employees in this out of service Irrigation Project and they have been getting their salaries without any work. So the locals have req the newly formed state government to look into the matter and take some steps for revival of the Project.

Forest personnel seize valuable timbers, generator sets at Samaguri area

NAGAON, May 29: In two separate raids, Forest personnel from Salna forest range led by range officer Nepal Mandal seized illegally hand sawn timbers from Naltoli area and two generator sets from Samaguri Bajiagaon and Sapanala area respectively last night. Sources claimed that the generator sets were being allegedly used in illegal saw mills. Forest personnel subsequently brought all those generator sets as well as seized sawn timbers to the office of the range for further legal action, sources added.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation Premiers The Guwahati Edition Of The Write Circle Initiative With Ruskin Bond

Guwahati, May 29 : Prabha Khaitan Foundation today presented the first Guwahati edition of The Write Circle initiative, bringing together authors, conversationalists and people to focus on rejoicing literature. The Write Circle initiative hosted a virtual session in Guwahati for the first time ever, featuring Ruskin Bond, the renowned Indian author of British descent. The indulgent session had the literati and media fraternity of Guwahati engage in an hour-long candid conversation with Roopa Pai, on 29th May at 6:30 PM. Bangalore based Roopa Pai, a journalist and children's author, has over 20 published books which include India's first fantasy-adventure series for children Taranauts and the national best seller The Gita for Children which also won the 2016 Crossword Award for children's writing. Prabha Khaitan Foundation is dedicated to all round development of social, cultural, welfare and humanitarian aspects of Indian society. It is a non-profit trust founded by Late Dr. Prabha Khaitan - an eminent litterateur, philanthropist, social worker, and industrialist. Based in Kolkata, the organization promotes art, culture and literature of India, and, is engaged in welfare activities with its associates for children, women and the elderly. The organization collaborates with caregivers, committed individuals and like-minded institutions to implement various cultural, educational, literary and social welfare projects in the country. The objective of the foundation is to create an enabling structure and promote networking so that communities engage with each other to build up positive self-esteem, inspire creativity and promote culture & knowledge. Prabha Khaitan Foundation is an ardent supporter for the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Foundation is committed towards enabling effective implementation of policies for rights, entitlements and empowerment of women from marginalized sections of the society in safe, inclusive and gender responsive environments. One of the prime initiatives of Prabha Khaitan Foundation is - Ehsaas - Women of India. The Foundation believes that the women of today are the brigade of change for the times to come and it brings together minds who think of a better future and pledge to make a difference. Ehsaas is a conglomeration of women from all walks of life who are graceful in their own ways and inspire others for the betterment of the society and promote Indian culture.

This all-English Champions League final is actually an all-Pep affair

Werner can put frustration behind him with starring role for Chelsea

London, May 29 : Welcome, European friends, to the Premier-Champions League final, brought to you this year by Manchester City, Chelsea and our service providers at Uefa. We hope you enjoy this product sample. And be sure to subscribe to the full Premier League package wherever you get your branded football content. It is almost exactly a decade since the planned date of the first Premier League 39th Game. The idea, floated by then chairman Richard Scudamore, was to stage an additional season-ending fixture in some biddable territory, designed to spread the eyeballs, retail the heritage, pimp the brand and all the rest. At the time the mere suggestion sparked tea-spitting fury from the moral guardians of the game. Sepp Blatter called it "a circus", Michel Platini "nonsense". But a good idea is a good idea for ever and on Saturday night in Porto English football will co-host its second de facto 39th game in four years. The latest all-English Champions League final follows Liverpool v (it says here) Tottenham in Madrid two years ago, with only 2018 special guest stars Real Madrid and last year's plague-football affair interrupting that succession. It is of course easy to overstate this run of knockout stage success. La Liga took seven out of 10 Champions League final spots in the years 2014-2018, a genuinely dominant streak. Germany and Spain had more teams in the last-16 stage than England this year. Luck and small details have played their part in progress past that point. Chelsea in particular, have reached this stage thanks to a best-guess mid-season managerial hire, an attacking plan based on throwing so much money at the wall some of it eventually sticks, and the paradoxical emergence of a fine crop of academy players. There is no obvious plan here, nothing for other leagues to copy and learn from, no sense of a coherent sporting culture in play. And this is perhaps the most interesting structural element of the latest Game 39 at Estádio do Dragão on Saturday night. The Premier League may provide the staging and the heritage. But as English footballing triumphs go, this really

isn't that English at all. Or at least, not in a way that immediately meets the eye. The players are more English than was once the case. City have four regulars in their squad. Chelsea have five. Otherwise both of these clubs have reached their current sustainable level only through vast overseas investment. The ownership and governance of both is defined in many ways by its non-Englishness. Both were intent on severing their basic link to the pyramid only six weeks ago, before

brilliance was no secret. But it is easy to forget that nobody played like this in England, that there were hold outs still clinging to the idea there was something effete or vulnerable or essentially transient about this Catalan-Dutch possession-based style. And yet in an odd twist that game turned out to be the end of something not the start. Guardiola hasn't been to a Champions League final since, a state of affairs that would have seemed inconceivable at the time. And as recently as his first season

Munich in October 2015. Thomas Tuchel talks to Pep Guardiola before his Borussia Dortmund team take on Despite a natural association with the German school of coaching, Thomas Tuchel's base note is still basically Guardiola, his early obsession Guardiola, his fascination with keeping the ball more Pep than Klopp. When Guardiola shifted his own formation recently to mirror Tuchel's back three it isn't too far-fetched to imagine Chelsea's manager might just have felt a fan-boy thrill of recognition, of an influence coming full circle. And City v Chelsea is in this sense a mono-cultural event, one version of football speaking to itself - just not English football. Or not entirely. The adoption of Guardiola is in itself a very English thing. Like it or not, English culture has always been a kedgere, a melange, an amalgam, a smorgasbord of influences. This is what the Premier League offers too, a kind of service industry stage for its assembled global talents, a highly successful corporate culture, but not really a sporting one. There has been an element of cultural mix, of give as well as take. City's evolution into a more pared-back, physically robust entity seems to owe something to English football's demands. Phil Foden, the club's defining Englishman, is also a deeply Pep-style creation, perhaps the least English super-talented young Englishman ever to emerge in the domestic leagues. And Pep himself has seemed deeply anglicised in recent times, happy in that borrowed skin, with his Oasis singalongs, his coy insistence that "we have no history", that he, Pep, is also approaching this final in a spirit of wide-eyed novelty. Quite where this leaves Saturday's result is, as ever, by the by. Chelsea appear to be decelerating at the wrong moment, with three defeats in their last four and five games without a clean sheet. City, meanwhile have won seven of their last nine and scored 11 in their last three. They look favourites in a game that doesn't often throw up shocks. Either way this will be a moment of full-circle for one footballing culture. Not so much another all-English final as the closest thing yet to an all-Pep.



simultaneously enjoying a Damascene conversion when it became clear this was going to be quite difficult and unpopular. As for the actual football there is no identifiably English style in play here, no defining native elements. In fact, the real story here is not English football's growing influence, but the opposite process, the high point of English football's influence by something else. This is above all the Guardiola final, an expression of the way his style, personality and tactical setup have filtered through English football from the top level down. It is easy to forget how profound this process has been over the last decade, and how dramatic its acceleration in the last five years. As it happens this week also marked the 10-year anniversary of the high water mark of Pep-era Barcelona, the evisceration of Manchester United at Wembley in the 2011 Champions League final. At times that day United's players just seemed to want to stop. "Nobody has ever given us a hiding like that," Alex Ferguson noted afterwards. Rio Ferdinand called it "the most embarrassing night of my life". Barcelona's

at City he was still being cast by some in England as a smoke and mirrors man - a fraud, a bald fraud, a bald Fraudiola - defined by his "what is tackles" moment at Leicester, his doomed attempts to introduce "fannyng about at the back" into the English cultural landscape. Fast forward five years and the top end of English football has been remade in Guardiola's image. His influence is everywhere, from park level - the parental nods of approval as the ball is funnelled about between defenders, the howls of dismay at balls sent into the mixer - right up to the England team, of all teams, playing possession football. Almost every club in the top tier has adopted some aspect of the Pep/Barça template, from tactical rhythms to the way culture, DNA and playing philosophy is now accepted corporate management speak. And so to Porto, where Guardiola finally takes his place again at the stage that has always seemed to matter most to him. The Englishness presented here is that Pep-filtered version. And it is present on both sides too. Thomas Tuchel talks to Pep Guardiola before his Borussia Dortmund team take on Bayern

Manchester, May 29 : Timo Werner had scored 36 goals in his first year and a half at RB Leipzig but modesty prevailed when he was invited to assess his standard. "To become world class, you have to play in the really big teams," he said in February 2018. "And then also play in big games like the final or semi-finals of the Champions League." The moment of anointment arrives in Porto on Saturday evening, or at least that is the idea. Last week Werner called his first campaign at Chelsea "the unluckiest season I have had and will have", but the line between ill fortune and a place among the stars is vanishingly thin. All it might take is a 13th strike since his arrival last June: should he decide the biggest match of his career in Chelsea's favour, most of the question marks that have accompanied him will evaporate. How can one fairly assess a contribution to date that, taken at face value, falls short of the expectations bestowed when Chelsea activated Werner's £47.5m release clause at Leipzig? Perhaps by waiting on what comes next. Werner has spoken with disarming honesty about his struggles in front of goal, the most troublesome a run of two in 31 games, but his willingness to do so smacks of experience. It is not hard to find moments during his career in which light and shade have followed in sharp succession. The common theme is the style with which Werner has always rebounded. As far back as April 2015, the season after Werner's record-breaking arrival on the Bundesliga scene, a goal-shy five months led Stuttgarter Zeitung to muse he had "reached a dead end in his development"; that summer suggestions followed that, at 19, living with his parents in their family home was holding him back. A year later, after a better mid-season run for an otherwise gloomy and relegation-bound Stuttgart, he had shaken it all off and was on the way upwards to Leipzig. An element of streakiness remained. Werner quickly became a goal machine in Saxony but only twice did he score in more than three straight games and droughts of four or five matches were not uncommon. He scored 21 braces for Leipzig and three hat-tricks, accounting for 51 of his goals for them; the other 44 came across 135 appearances. The comfort for those watching lay in knowing that, when it inevitably returned, Werner's form would be much like his playing style: explosive and often at its most effective in short, irresistible bursts. The overall point is that Werner has usually tended



to come good, even if it has sometimes been difficult to predict how or when. It can be hard to get a handle on exactly where his potential sits given his relative youth at 25 and, against that, the fact he has made almost 350 senior career appearances. Given Werner's only genuine anticlimax before this year had been Russia 2018, when he and Germany flopped after he had won the Confederations Cup golden boot a year previously, the obvious gap in his achievements is a resounding contribution on one of the major global stages. "I'm still flying a little under the radar and can really only win," he said in that interview three years ago, given to Die Welt, when asked if he could top the World Cup scoring charts. That was probably wishful thinking but there is no chance of evading scrutiny when he faces Manchester City. Plenty of his early work at Chelsea has, in fact, stood up to inspection. Flashes of brilliance stick in the memory: the clean shot with which he got off the mark at Spurs; the electric spin past Jan Bednarek against Southampton that brought a thrilling first Premier League goal. A finish at Burnley in October, opening his body up in once-familiar fashion, was another; while a first-time strike at West Ham resulted from own strong hold-up play and was arguably Chelsea's most important of the top-flight season, even if he fluffed a sitter afterwards. When he nodded in a rebound against Real Madrid, the goal looked simple but it set them fair for the final. While his conversion rate is the third-lowest in the top flight a more edifying statistic is that, in reaching double figures for goals and assists across all competitions, he has made more decisive contributions than any of his teammates in 2020-21. It all makes for a picture that, confusingly, looks different from every angle.

'Boxing is a mess': the darkness and damage of brain trauma in the ring

London, May 29 : The writer, the fighter, the doctor and the widow all look down into the darkness and damage of boxing. They understand the previously untold story of brain trauma in the ring and, as they talk to me, their moving testimony underpins a shared belief that change has to come. There is a measured urgency to their words for they love the fighters and they want to offer their knowledge to help make this brutal sport a little safer. Damage and death have always framed boxing. This harsh truth means that, despite the chaos outside the ring, boxing is shockingly real. It can maim and even kill but, in a strange paradox, boxing also makes most fighters feel more intensely alive than anything else. Tris Dixon has written the book that boxing has always needed. Dixon, the former editor of Boxing News, now a freelance writer and the host of the Boxing Life Stories podcast, confronts the damage done to fighters with unflinching honesty. It is shattering yet tender as Dixon charts the history and science of CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy), a brain condition caused by repeated blows to the head. He shows how it was called "punch-drunk syndrome" and "dementia pugilistica" as neurologists struggled to explain the slurred speech, memory loss, shakes, violent mood swings, depression and other symptoms. Dixon's book reads powerfully because he is such an authority on boxing and he writes about fighters with deep affection and respect. Pryor was friends with Muhammad Ali but The Hawk and The Greatest were both irreparably damaged. Boxing spares no one. Pryor died in 2016, aged 60, and his widow explains his deterioration and the salvation boxing once offered. Tony Jeffries is the fighter. The 36-year-old is from Sunderland and he and his family are now "living the dream" in Los Angeles where he runs two successful gyms. Jeffries won an Olympic bronze medal



in 2008 and he was an unbeaten pro after 10 bouts when, in 2011, his fragile hands forced his retirement. Jeffries hopes he "dodged a bullet" called CTE. He boxed between the ages of 10 and 27 and, according to his calculations, was punched in the head "between 40,000 and 50,000 times". Jeffries waits anxiously for the consequences. Those numbers are described as "scary" when I share them with Dr Margaret Goodman, a Las Vegas neurologist who worked as a ringside physician from 1994 to 2005. She tended to fighters in more than 500 professional bouts but, in campaigning for their safety, was burnt out by boxing and so she founded, and is now the president of, Vada - the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association. "Boxing," Goodman notes, "is a beautiful sickness in so many ways." The widow, the fighter and the doctor feature in Dixon's book. They recognise its significance, which

comforts the writer. "I am worried the anti-boxing brigade might use my argument against the sport," Dixon tells me. "But the direction of the book is to say: 'We don't talk about it but this is what needs to be done to mitigate the risks and to make sure these guys have a better life after boxing.' I don't want a scrapheap of damaged fighters." He has been immersed in the sport for decades but does Dixon feel fresh hope that boxing might examine the damage it causes fighters who generate billions of dollars for wayward governing bodies, promoters and managers? "No - but it's time to find out who cares. Who wants to look after fighters? If these people want fighters to be OK after boxing then I'm not going to have the ego to say they must read the book. But I suggest they learn about CTE, tau protein and links with Alzheimer's, dementia, Parkinson's and ALS [amyotrophic lateral

sclerosis]." If they want what's best for the fighters, then regulate how much sparring they do and have open conversations with boxers as to how they feel after sparring. It's also down to the fighters to not be so macho. Fighters and trainers need to know what's going on with their brains." Dixon, Pryor, Jeffries and Goodman soon list the causes and possible solutions to brain trauma but it is instructive to hear about the book's origins. "It was only when I read League of Denial about the NFL's concussion crisis that I started to piece the puzzle together," Dixon says. "I read about the erratic behaviour of Mike Webster [who won four Super Bowls with the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 1970s]. He fell on hard times and ended up living in his car." I thought: 'This is boxing.' CTE is actually punch-drunk syndrome. It was a big epiphany for me: 'Hang on, the NFL are addressing this but we do

nothing in boxing.' I'd been in boxing 25 years and I didn't know about CTE, tau protein and things that should be a staple. Fireworks went off in my head: 'Wow, these guys worrying about the NFL could be worrying about boxing, which is far more dangerous.' The NFL concussion debate started with the Webster case in 2000. Boxing turned its back for nine decades and we haven't had our Webster moment yet." The historical sweep of Dixon's book shows how, in 1928, the American doctor Harrison Martland wrote a paper called Punch Drunk. It was a groundbreaking study but Martland argued wrongly that punch-drunk syndrome only affected mediocre boxers. Damage is a salutary reminder that almost all great fighters - from Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson to Muhammad Ali and Aaron Pryor - had their senses obliterated by boxing. Dixon and Frankie Pryor argue that boxing missed a huge opportunity to educate people during Ali's tragic case. "The old punch-drunk terminology was rarely used with Ali," Dixon says. "Perhaps they thought it too cruel a label for a man who gave so much and awed the world with his brutal elegance. The stigma remains that punch-drunk syndrome happened to guys who aren't very good. Maybe Ali was too vain to say: 'Boxing did this to me.'" Frankie Pryor agrees: "The one fighter who could have brought lots of attention to this was Ali. [But] Ali's family chose to say, 'Oh, he has Parkinson's', it has nothing to do with boxing." It has everything to do with boxing. "Dixon's book is compassionate in the company of Frankie and Brenda Spinks - whose husband, Leon, shocked a faded Ali in the first of their two fights in 1978. Leon Spinks, who fills the final pages of Damage, was a slurred wreck before his death in February." At the end," Dixon says, "I wrote that the neurologists were as much the heroes to me as the fighters. If I could rewrite that sentence I'd say the wives, women like Frankie and Brenda,

are the real heroes. Their strength of character is what boxing needs to address the damage. The fighters I've met who don't have these women to look after them, to feed or clothe them, end up homeless and suicidal." Frankie Pryor fills my Zoom screen with warmth and humour - and a little anger at boxing's failure to discuss the damage it did to her husband and most fighters. "I took care of everything," she says of her 30 years with Aaron. "I didn't understand the damage was caused solely by boxing until he started showing anger. Aaron was so easy-going until then. I started taking him to a neurologist around 1994. At that point we didn't know [it was CTE]. Initially it was just front temporal lobe damage but he never stopped going to a neurologist until he died. A neurologist said: 'This is the only Hall of Fame fighter I'll ever work with and we need more proof to confirm what we believe.'" Was there sufficient proof Pryor had been brain-damaged by boxing? "Oh yes. You see that damage in every old fighter - without exception. I noticed all the fighters acting the same when we got together. His wife would go to the restroom and that fighter would get confused. One of us other wives would handle the situation. We educated ourselves about CTE because it's not something you talk about to your regular girlfriends. We had this group-me, Brenda Spinks, Marvin Hagler's wife Kay, Ken Norton's wife, Rose." Frankie Pryor, with her husband Aaron 'The Hawk' Pryor, who died in 2016. She says boxing's authorities 'take such advantage of dedicated fighters who love their sport'. Amid the mess of boxing will their experience of CTE be shared widely? "You said it. Boxing is a mess and that's why I have no hope this will ever get solved unless there is one central governing body. I'd talk for hours if you get me started on the crooks in boxing. It's awful and they take such advantage of dedicated fighters who love their sport.

Nadal and Barty at odds with Naomi Osaka over media stance



London, May 29 : The fallout from Naomi Osaka's announcement that she will not be conducting her mandatory media duties at the French Open this year due to its effects on her mental health has continued at Roland Garros. Rafael Nadal, Ashleigh Barty and Daniil Medvedev were all asked to discuss Osaka's comments during the pre-tournament media day. Nadal, trying to win his 14th Roland Garros title over the next fortnight, affirmed his "respect" for Osaka and her decision while arguing for the importance of the press in promoting sports: "I respect it," said Nadal. "I respect her, of course, as an athlete and her personality. I respect her decision. I don't know. I mean, we as sports people, I mean, we need to be ready to accept the ques-

tions and to try to produce an answer, no?" "I understand her, but on the other hand, for me, I mean, without the press, without the people who normally travel, who are writing the news and achievements that we are having around the world, we probably will not be the athletes that we are today. We [wouldn't] have the recognition that we have around the world, and we will not be that popular, no?" Barty, the world No 1, said that she views speaking with the press as part of the job: "We know what we sign up for as professional tennis players. I can't really comment on what Naomi is feeling or her decisions she makes. At times press conferences are hard, of course, but it's also not something that bothers me. I've never had problems answering

questions or being completely honest with you guys. It's not something that's ever fazed me too much." Medvedev, the second seed, said that he is satisfied with his press encounters because journalists are yet to tell him how he should act on-court: "I don't see any journalist trying to go at me, you know," he said. "Of course we know, for example, I don't win a lot on clay and I can get crazy. But I didn't really have one journalist saying: 'OK, you shouldn't do this or that,' because that's when I'm going to get crazy. I'm going to say: 'You cannot tell this to me.'" Medvedev also argued that he is rather more concerned by social media abuse, particularly from gamblers, than his interactions in the press room: "Talking about journalists, me, I have no problems. I try always to come to press conference [whether in a] bad mood or good mood. And I feel like even sometimes in the bad mood I can be in a better mood after talking to you guys." Osaka may have anticipated more public agreement from her colleagues. On Thursday night, Sports Illustrated journalist Jon Wertheim published an email correspondence from Osaka to the French Tennis Federation, affirming her aim to change the current system. "This stance is against the system requiring athletes to be forced to do press on occasions when they are suffering from mental health," she wrote. "I believe it is archaic and in need of reform. After this tournament I want to work with the Tours and the governing bodies to figure out how

best we compromise to change the system." Earlier on Thursday, the French Tennis Federation president, Gilles Moretton, had branded Osaka's announcement a "phenomenal mistake" and said the tournament would enforce the rules which stipulate that players can be fined up to \$20k. Osaka's absence from the pre-tournament press conference would mark her first rule breach. The Women's Tennis Association later offered a statement on Osaka, affirming the importance of mental health to the organisation and the role that media plays in its promotion: "The WTA welcomes a dialogue with Naomi (and all players) to discuss possible approaches that can help support an athlete as they manage any concerns related to mental health, while also allowing us to deliver upon our responsibilities to the fans and public. Professional athletes have a responsibility to their sport and their fans to speak to the media surrounding their competition, allowing them the opportunity to share their perspective and tell their story." Meanwhile, the British No 1 Johanna Konta announced that she became engaged to her boyfriend, Jackson, last Monday on her 30th birthday: "We haven't set a date yet. It was a semi surprise, I wasn't completely shocked, I kind of expected it once the box came into my hand and I thought this could be a ring, all done in good humour and all done with lots of love and it was something that I will always think back on as really lovely," she said.

Flickering of flair tips brutal Champions Cup final in Toulouse's direction

cmv

London, May 29 : These two have been the undisputed stars of European rugby this season. So hopes were high for a final to match. Alas, it was not to be. Let us record the result, applaud Toulouse's record fifth title and La Rochelle's place among the European elite - and let us move on. This was the fourth time Toulouse have prevailed in an all-French final. Every one of them has been hard work for those watching, not that the jubilant 10,000 allowed into Twickenham were less than delighted to be there. A team tends to have to pay their dues in this tournament, so Toulouse's pedigree carried much weight, even if their last title was 11 years ago. Under the circumstances, a victory for La Rochelle in their first final would have been quite the feat anyway, but their mission became even unlikelier when they were reduced to 14 in the first half for rugby's latest red card. Sure enough, a match in which they had held an edge drifted away from them in the second half. Not that the match was really ever in anyone's grip. It is back en vogue these days to describe the French as oozing with flair, after a long decade or so in which they went absent, those clichés about Gallic elan ringing hollower with each passing year. The truth is,

though, French rugby has been every bit as much about brutality and ugliness, even in the eras of Blanco, Villepreux et al. Flair is ephemeral, which means at best it rises up only sporadically. Besides, there were only 15 of the 30 starters here whom we might describe as French - and a few of those have been naturalised. Southern-hemisphere accents were at least as prevalent as French, with referee Luke Pearce's noble attempts



at speaking the teams' official language introducing a home counties element. Mr Pearce did not restrict his interventions to the vocal. The "French", whatever their nation of origin, were in beastly mode, the Top 14's top two teams - now officially Europe's as well - not caring to advertise France's club game. Any referee would have struggled to let this

one flow. The good news is that the mandatory red card - this one a first for a Champions Cup final - could hardly spoil this contest any further. Levani Botia's shoulder found the chin of Maxime Médard, who clearly dipped at the last split second, but such was the intensity of the collision no one seemed of a mind to mitigate this card. Pearce did not even mention mitigation - in either language. Botia was close to miss-

ing this game with injury. He looked a little off before his fateful tackle on the half-hour. Twice he tried to carry off attacking scrums; twice he lost the ball. But it would be unfair to pick on him. The ball spent a disproportionate amount of its time, particularly in the first half, bobbling on the floor after some monstrous collision or other. The Twickenham

turf was greasy after much drizzle in the buildup, but the sun was out too. The elements on their own could hardly explain the incoherence of the contest. The tension of the occasion was a far more plausible explanation. Toulouse took quite a pummeling from La Rochelle. The mighty Richie Arnold was lost in the first 10 minutes, and his twin brother Rory had to take treatment in the first half too. The Australian locks were not the only ones to suffer during the onslaught. Toulouse players were regularly sprawled on the surface, even come the final minutes when treatment for Clément Castets required the match to be stopped for a moment at its most delicate point. But brutality was not to be the decider. That, happily for those who yearn for flair, was supplied by those two jewels as responsible as any for the wider renaissance in French rugby. Antoine Dupont and Romain Ntamack could hardly be said to have dominated, but the former's break paved the way for the penalty with which Ntamack levelled early in the second half. Quarter of an hour later, Ntamack found the key, a beautiful cutout pass on the hour to Selevasio Tolofua creating the game's crucial try for Juan Cruz Mallia. A flickering of flair, then, proved the difference.

From Telfer to Erasmus: how rugby coaches inspire players to greatness

London, May 29 : Rugby is primarily a game of deeds, not words, but there are some stirring exceptions. Fifty years ago this month, for example, a group of players sat in the Park Lane hotel in London, waiting for the wine waiter to refill their glasses and for their perceptive, thought-provoking coach to give his keynote address. "I want each one of you to be your own man," said Carwyn James, issuing what amounted to a pre-tour sermon to his soon-to-be-immortalised 1971 British & Irish Lions squad. "Express yourself not as you would at the office for the next three months but as you would at home." "I don't want you Irishmen to pretend to be English, or you English to think you are Celts, or for Scotsmen to be anything less than Scottish to the core." If the sinews remain unstiffened, how about the impassioned words of Jim Telfer, which bungee jump off page 219 of a compelling new book, *This Is Your Everest*, by Tom English and Peter

supposedly useful innovations. "This new midfield 'crash-ball' is disaster - hunks of manhood with madness in their eyes, battering-ram bulldozers happy to be picked off on the gain-line by just-as-large hunks from the opposing side. For what? Just to do it all over again." The equally great David Foot, who also graced these pages for years, once penned an inch-perfect essay on his good friend that appeared in his outstanding book *Fragments of Idolatry*. How about this for a description of Carwyn's voice. "It was musical and sweetly tuned, too calm, one would have thought, for the biting winds of an exposed touchline. That voice, fashioned by the hymnal, was rarely raised in rebuke at the expense of a player" Or this, about the coach's ability to converse with equal facility about literature, the arts or politics. "He loved talking, philosophising, paying homage to genius, whether he saw it at the time as Beethoven or Phil Bennett. It is prob-



Burns, about the fabled 1997 Lions tour of South Africa. "This is your fucking Everest, boys," growled Telfer, addressing the semi-circle of forwards sitting in front of him in Cape Town. "Being picked for the Lions is the easy bit. To win for the Lions in a Test match is the ultimate." Every bit as powerful was his timeless payoff. "Nobody's going to do it for you. You have to find your own solace, your own drive, your own ambition, your own inner strength because the moment's arriving for the greatest game of your fucking lives." Some claim this kind of stuff is mostly outdated, that modern rugby players need little extra stimulation, that less is more before big games nowadays. Maybe, for some, it is. But as every successful director of rugby knows, the aspiring coach who fails to connect emotionally with their flock will struggle to win consistently. To quote the former athletics coach Frank Dick: "Coaching requires strength both in technical skills and people skills. No matter how strong you are in the technical, without the people you will be ineffective." In the frequently pre-programmed, homogenous modern game the value of coaches who refuse simply to follow the herd has rarely been higher. Dipping into this newspaper's archives (James was once a *Guardian* columnist) it is fascinating to revisit some of the Welsh guru's thoughts on how best to play rugby and, crucially, the open-mindedness needed to prosper. "The most telling of any pre-match team-talk consists of just three words: 'Think! Think! Think!'" he wrote. He was similarly ahead of his time in skewering

ably true to say that Carwyn saw rugby, for all its physical whims, as a cerebral game. "The bawling and blaspheming did not interest him. He encouraged his teams to play with their heads, to think what they had to do, to reject stereotyped notions and the temptations to opt for caution (and boredom). 'Take a risk or two, make a few mistakes. As long as you are adventurers, I won't mind.'" Telfer's style was appreciably different: more direct, more confrontational but no less motivational. It is instructive to be reminded in *This Is Your Everest* that, as a teacher, he had a keen appreciation of the power of silence in a group setting, regardless of the players involved. "Often in team talks I would say: 'Sit and think about what you are going to do here today.' I'd even say that with Melrose Under-18s." The effect on Ireland's Keith Wood was mesmeric: "It was a slightly out-of-body experience. He was a bit mad. He was. But he got it. Jeez, did he get it." The moral of the story? That the most enlightened coaches positively encourage players to think for themselves, to go above and beyond what they might regard as possible. Re-watching the footage of Rassie Erasmus in *Chasing The Sun*, the documentary about the 2019 World Cup-winning Springboks, is also to wonder if the blood-pumping energy of that old *Living with Lions* video is still fueling South Africans of a certain vintage. "They're playing to put rugby on the map," Erasmus tells his squad at one point, before their knockout showdown with Japan. "We're playing to put a country together."





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