

The Assam Rising

Projecting the best of Northeast India everyday

Vol. No. VI ■ Issue No. 118 ■ RNI-ASSEN/2014/58385 | GUWAHATI ■ SUNDAY ■ JUNE 13, 2021 | PAGES 8 ■ PRICE RS. 7.00

French soldiers kill Mali jihadist
blamed for RFI journalists'...

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Northeast's first Kisan Rail

Guwahati, June 12 : Tripura chief minister Biplab Kumar Deb on Friday flagged off the first Kisan Rail train from the Northeast from Agartala railway station. The train was carrying 8,990 kg of pineapple and jackfruits to Guwahati. Indian Railways started running "Kisan Rail" in the country in August last year to transport perishable goods and agri-product, including milk, meat and fish providing a wider market to farmers and enabling them to increase their income. "With the inauguration of the Kisan Rail, the transport cost for agricultural products will now come down to a great extent. Earlier, the transportation cost for sending these products by air was Rs 20 to 50 per kg. Now, it will come down to Rs 2.25 per kg for Delhi and 88 paise for Guwahati," Deb said after flagging off the train.

Arms seized

Guwahati, June 12 : The Lunglei Battalion of 23 Sector Assam Rifles has recovered a huge amount of arms and ammunition from Kakichhua village in Mizoram's Siahla district. Assam Rifles and Mizoram police personnel conducted an operation at the Kakichhua village on Friday based on information received. The arms seized include one 9MM pistol with magazine, one 9MM revolver, four grenades and 55 rounds of ammunition. The cadres have been handed over to the Lawngtlai Police Station in Lawngtlai district and investigations are underway. On the other hand, the Keithlamnbi battalion of Assam Rifles seized a large quantity of arms and ammunition from Tmombung village in Imphal district.

Fake Indian currency racket

Guwahati, June 12 : The police seized fake Indian currency notes and equipment suspected to be used in producing fake currency notes. The five persons were arrested during two separate operations carried out at Bandiya Chapori under Mangaldai police station and Baroipara under Kharupetia police station. A police team from Kharupetia police station seized fake Indian currency notes of the face value of Rs 17,500 of Rs 500 denomination, genuine Indian currency notes worth Rs 13,410 along with a printer and a bundle of blank papers from the possession of the arrested people.

Population explosion : Owaisi criticises Assam CM's remarks



CITU activists stage a protest in Dibrugarh demanding revival of the two paper mills

Guwahati, June 12 : Activists of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) on Saturday staged a demonstration in Dibrugarh in protest against the Centre's decision to auction the two defunct paper mills under the Hindustan Paper Corporation (HPC) in the state. The workers of the paper mills demanded the

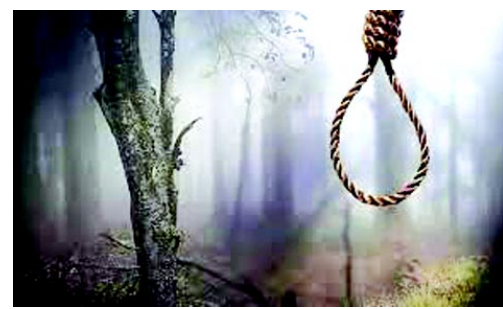
the official liquidator to auction the Nagaon Paper Mill and Cachar Paper Mill. While the reserve price has been set at Rupees 1,139 crore, the earnest money deposit amount has been set at Rupees 55 crore and the minimum incremental bid is Rs 1 crore. In May 2019, the National Company Law Tribunal

Guwahati, June 12 : AIMIM president takes to Twitter to reject Sarma's contention on population explosion. All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen president Asaduddin Owaisi on Friday rejected Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's reported comments urging minorities to adopt

population control measures. Taking to Twitter Mr. Owaisi argued that the Centre had taken a stand against coercive family planning and said that total fertility rate replacement levels have been achieved. "Assam CM has again started talking of 'population control'. This is Hindutva - Contd...Page 6

Two minor sisters found hanging from tree in Assam family

Kokrajhar, June 12 : Two minor sisters were found hanging from a tree in a village in Kokrajhar district of Assam with their family members claiming that they were raped and killed, police said on Saturday. The incident took place inside a small forest in Abhayakuti village, where the bodies of the two siblings were recovered late on Friday evening, a senior police officer said. The bodies were sent to Kokrajhar Civil Hospital for post-mortem examination, he said. "A preliminary investigation suggested that the two girls



suspectedly ended their lives. We will be able to tell after receiving the post-mortem reports," the officer said. Villagers were shocked at the incident. Contd...Page 6

5% GST on COVID vaccines to stay, no tax on black fungus drugs

New Delhi, June 12 : The GST Council has now approved the recommendations of GoM on GST rates on COVID relief material. It further agreed to stick to a 5% GST rate on the COVID-19 vaccine. There will be no change in the GST rate for

vaccines, said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. 5% GST on COVID vaccines to stay, no tax on black fungus drugs. There will be no change in the GST rate for vaccines, said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. No GST would be levied on Amphotericin B, the antifungal drug used for black fungus treatment. The GST Council on Saturday decided to slash rates of several Covid-relief items to 5% from



existing 12 to 18% levels but kept the much-anticipated tax rate on vaccines unchanged at 5%. Addressing the media, post the GST Council meeting, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the council agreed to go with the recommendations of the Group of Ministers (GoM) that was single point agenda on the council. It further agreed to stick to a 5% GST rate on the

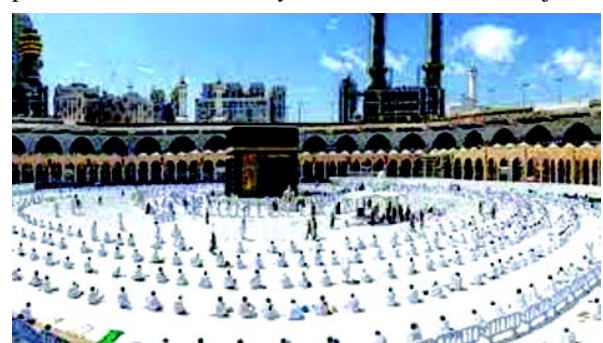
COVID-19 vaccine. There will be no change in the GST rate for vaccines, said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The GST Council has also decided to slash rates for Tocilizumab, Amphotericin to nil level. Besides that, the Council also gave approval to GST rate reduction for Remdesivir from 12% to 5%. The GST on ambulances has been reduced to 12%. No Contd...Page 6

No foreign travellers for Hajj this year, Saudi Arabia cuts pilgrim limit to 60,000

Dubai, June 12 : Saudi Arabia has restricted the annual Hajj pilgrimage to its own citizens and residents for the second year running in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the state Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported on Saturday. Only people aged between 18 and 65 who have been vaccinated or immunised from the virus, and are free of chronic diseases, will be able to take part, the ministry that manages the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca said in a statement carried by SPA. It also set a maximum of only 60,000 participants at a given time. "The decision (was made) to

guarantee the safety of haj amid uncertainty over the coronavirus," the kingdom's health minister Tawfiq al-Rabiah said in a televised press conference carried by

some countries still record high numbers of COVID cases, the other challenge is the different variants of the virus, hence came the decision to restrict haj," al-



SPA. "Despite the availability of vaccine, there is uncertainty over the virus and

Congress' first love is Pakistan, BJP intensifies attack after Digvijay Singh's Clubhouse chat leak

New Delhi, June 12 : Intensifying its attack on the Congress party over leaked audio of Digvijay Singh's Clubhouse chat, the BJP on Saturday (June 12) said that it was a part of the 'toolkit' mentioned a few days ago. The Bhartiya Janata Party suggested that the Congress party should name it as ANC (Anti National Clubhouse) in place of INC (Indian National Congress). Addressing a press conference, BJP National Spokesperson Dr Sambit Patra said, "It is quite possible that what Digvijay Singh has said in Clubhouse chat must have been stage-managed. Digvijay Singh or a senior Congress leader must have instructed the Pakistani journalist to ask such a question. It's all part of that toolkit

mentioned a few days ago. He mentioned everyone saw how the veteran Congress leader Digvijay Singh was spewing venom against India outside and how he is toeing Pakistan's line. He



pointed out that the same Singh had termed the Pulwama attack just an accident or called the 26/11 Mumbai attack a conspiracy of RSS and also tried

to give clean chit to Pakistan at that time. "In the Clubhouse chat, a Pakistani journalist asks that after the removal of Narendra Modi, what will be India's Kashmir policy. Digvijay Ji thanks the journalist and says that the Congress government will reinstate Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir," he said. Patra requested the Congress party to change its name from INC to ANC. "This is such a clubhouse of Anti-Indian and Modi haters," he said. In a leaked Clubhouse chat, Singh was found telling a Pakistani journalist that Congress would reconsider the decision of re-voking Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir once they are in power. Earlier, Union Minister Giriraj Singh said that Pakistan is the first Contd...Page 6

Oldest male chimpanzee dies in San Francisco zoo



San Francisco, June 12 : The oldest male chimpanzee living in an accredited North American zoo died on Saturday at the San Francisco Zoo & Gardens. He was 63 years old. The chimpanzee, named Cobby, had been

a hand-reared performing chimpanzee before he was brought to the San Francisco zoo in the 1960's. Although the zoo said in a news release that the chimpanzee's cause of death had not been determined, the animal had recently been ill and zoo officials believe old age was a factor. The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists chimpanzees as endangered, and they are considered among the most at-risk primates in Africa due to hunting, habitat loss and disease. The average life expectancy of the 100,000 to 200,000 chimpanzees living in the Contd...Page 6

Defence Ministry okays policy to archive, declassify histories of wars, operations



New Delhi, June 12 : The Defence Ministry has brought in a new policy to compile, publish, archive and declassify all war histories and histories of operations, under which everything will be officially recorded within five years, and will be handed over to the National Archives. However, the government will continue to have discretionary powers over withholding any such records it finds sensitive. The Defence Ministry mentioned in a statement on Saturday that Defence Minister Rajnath Singh "has approved the

policy on archiving, declassification and compilation/publication of war/operations histories by the Ministry of Defence" under which "each organisation under the Ministry of Defence such as Services, Integrated Defence Staff, Assam Rifles and Indian Coast Guard, will transfer the records, including war diaries, letters of proceedings & operational record books, etc., to the History Division" of the ministry for "proper upkeep, archival and writing the histories". It said that the "responsibility for declassification of

records rests with the respective organisations as specified in the Public Record Act 1993 and Public Record Rules 1997, as amended from time to time". Further, the statement said that according to the new policy "records should ordinarily be declassified in 25 years" and "records older than 25 years should be appraised by archival experts and transferred to the National Archives of India once the war/operations histories have been compiled". Sources, however, said that it does not mean that Contd...Page 6

French soldiers kill Mali jihadist blamed for RFI journalists' murder



Paris, June 12 : French soldiers have killed a Malian jihadist suspected of being responsible for the kidnapping and death of two French journalists in 2013. Florence Parly, the defence minister in Paris, said French forces in the Sahel region killed "four terrorists" during an operation in northern Mali on 5 June, including Bayes Ag Bakabo, the prime suspect in the deaths of Radio France International (RFI) reporters Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon. "His neutralisation means the end of a long wait," Parly said, adding that Bakabo had been in the village of Aguelhok preparing an attack against UN peacekeeping forces when he was killed. Dupont and Verlon, both in their 50s and veteran journalists, were seized in the flashpoint northern Malian town of Kidal in November 2013 after interviewing a separatist Tuareg leader. Their bullet-riddled bodies were found a few hours later, with al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claiming the killings as revenge for France's decision to intervene against jihadist groups in the country earlier that year. A French investigation concluded that Bakabo, also a known drug trafficker, drove the pickup truck used to kidnap the two

journalists. Parly expressed her "thoughts for the family and loved ones of Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon". The exact circumstances of their deaths have never been revealed, and relatives charge that military secrecy has hampered efforts towards that end. In November, Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, noted that "the alleged perpetrators have been named but are yet to be arrested and prosecuted". Callamard pressed the governments of France and Mali "to advance the investigation without further delay so that justice may be served". RFI's parent company, France Medias Monde, said on Friday it was waiting for the investigation "to fully clarify the circumstances of the tragedy and lead to the arrest of all the remaining members of the hit squad and their possible accomplices so they can be tried". The Friends of Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon group also noted the death of Bakabo, but said in a press release they "regret that this jihadist leader responsible for the double murder of RFI journalists was not arrested to be questioned on the circumstances of this tragedy". Parly said the operation "illustrates one of the main priorities of France in the Sahel region: taking down the main heads of terrorist groups that are causing havoc in the region". The news of Bakabo's death emerged just a day after the French president, Emmanuel Macron,

announced a drawdown of French troops in the Sahel region, who number 5,100 in bases across the arid and volatile region on the southern fringe of the Sahara. Macron did not give figures for the drawdown, but made clear he wanted future French involvement to be limited to counter-terror operations as part of a multinational European force. In Washington, a Pentagon spokesman, John Kirby, said the United States would still support counter-terror operations in the Sahel. "We'll continue to provide a measure of support - the kind of support that we've been providing to the French as they needed in the region." The Sahel is seen by many western politicians and experts as a major global security risk because of the growing strength of jihadist groups there, as well as its role as a crossroads for arms and people-smuggling. Journalists covering the insurgency in the Sahel often find themselves targeted by armed groups, either because of their reporting or for their ransom value. The French reporter Olivier Dubois, 46, disappeared in April and is believed to be in the hands of the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM), the biggest jihadist alliance in the Sahel. The 46-year-old freelancer was in the northern Malian town of Gao, where he had travelled to interview an al-Qaida-linked jihadist commander. In 2020, French soldiers serving in the Barkhane force killed the head of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel, in a major breakthrough, while regular airstrikes target other senior commanders. Another senior AQIM figure linked to the murder of the RFI journalists, Amada Ag Hama, was killed in a raid in northern Mali in May 2015.

'Unique problem': Catholic bishops split over Biden's support for abortion rights

Washington, June 12 : At some point this weekend, Joe Biden will take his place in a line of people approaching the altar of a Catholic church to receive communion. The US president, a devout Catholic whose speeches regularly include biblical references and who carries a rosary that belonged to his late son, attends Mass every weekend - in Washington, his home town of Wilmington in Delaware, or wherever he happens to be traveling. If the traditional Sunday morning Eucharist service is not possible because of his schedule, he will receive the sacrament on Saturday evening as permitted by the Roman Catholic church. "It's really an encounter with God," Father Kevin Gillespie of Holy Trinity in Washington, the church Biden usually attends in the capital, told the Atlantic earlier this year. For Biden, this "sacred and intimate moment" is a "gift that enhances his faith", and "we most certainly encourage him to improve his intimacy with God through the Eucharist". But not everybody in the Catholic church in America is quite so keen on Biden receiving communion. Next week, a national online meeting of US bishops will discuss whether the president and other high-profile political figures should be denied the sacraments because of his stance on abortion rights. "How can he say he's a devout Catholic and he's doing these things that are contrary to the church's teaching?" Archbishop Joseph Naumann, chair of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) committee on pro-life activities, asked last month. Biden's position was a "grave moral evil" which presents a "unique problem" for the church, Naumann said. Cardinal Raymond Burke, a leading conservative and critic of Pope Francis, has gone further, saying that politicians who "publicly



and obstinately" support abortion are "apostates" who should not only be barred from receiving communion but deserve excommunication. At their meeting, the bishops will consider a document aimed at clarifying the church's position on the Eucharist, and decide whether to commission further work on the circumstances in which the sacraments may be denied. The proposal needs the support of at least two-thirds of the 280 bishops in the USCCB - and more than 60 have already requested a suspension of all discussion, citing divisions within the conference. Among opponents of the move is Robert McElroy, the bishop of San Diego, who wrote in America Magazine, the Jesuit journal, that "the Eucharist is being weaponised and deployed as a tool in political warfare. This must not happen." A letter from a senior Vatican official last month urged US bishops not to rush any debate and decision, and there has been speculation that the first meeting between President Biden and Pope Francis could take place at the Vatican the day before the USCCB's virtual session opens. That would be seen as a strong signal from Rome. Whatever the outcome of the USCCB's

deliberations, the decision on whether an individual parishioner should be denied communion lies with the local bishop. Wilton Gregory of Washington and Francis Malooly of Wilmington, Delaware, have both made it clear that Biden is welcome to receive communion at churches in their dioceses. Father Gillespie's public defence of Biden attending Mass has drawn angry phone calls, letters and emails. He told the Guardian it seemed best to refrain from speaking further on the matter, but said the president "has and will be welcomed to receive the Holy Eucharist" at his church. Biden, the second Catholic to occupy the White House after John F Kennedy, has said his faith shapes "all that I do" and will "serve as my anchor" through his term in office. In his book, Promises to Keep: On Life and Politics, he wrote: "My idea of self, of family, of community, of the wider world comes straight from my religion." On abortion, Biden has said he personally believes life begins at conception but recognises others do not share his view. "What I'm not prepared to do is impose a precise view that is borne out of my faith on other people," he said in 2015. In recent



shows a herd of wild Asian elephants in Yimen County of Yuxi City, southwest China's Yunnan Province

Vladimir Putin says Biden 'radically different' after impulsive Trump

Moscow, June 12 : Ahead of a meeting in Geneva on 16 June, tensions are high between the US and Russia over a litany of issues including hacking allegations, human rights and election meddling. The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has said US-Russia relations are at their lowest point in years, in an interview before his meeting with the US president, Joe Biden, next week. Putin and Biden will meet in Geneva on Wednesday. The White House has said Biden will bring up ransomware attacks emanating from Russia, Moscow's aggression against Ukraine, the jailing of dissidents and other issues that have

irritated the relationship. "We have a bilateral relationship that has deteriorated to its lowest point in recent years," Putin said, according to an NBC translation of excerpts of an interview broadcast on Friday. Putin characterised the former US president Donald Trump as "an extraordinary individual, talented individual", but impulsive, and said Biden, as a career politician, was "radically different" from the "colourful" Trump. "It is my great hope that, yes, there are some advantages, some disadvantages, but there will not be any impulse-based movements on behalf of the sitting US president," he said, according to a translation by NBC News. Putin has openly admitted that in the 2016 vote he supported Trump, who voiced admiration for the Russian leader and notoriously at their first summit appeared to accept his denials of election interference. Biden, at the start of an eight-day visit to Europe this week, said: "We're not seeking conflict with Russia." "We want a stable and predictable relationship... but I've been clear: the United States will respond in a robust and meaningful way if the Russian government engages in harmful activities." Putin was asked about several Russian dissidents whose

deaths have been blamed on Moscow, including the ex-KGB spy Alexander Litvinenko who was poisoned in 2006. Putin dismissed the question and said some of those responsible for the deaths had gone to prison. Asked about Biden calling him a killer in an interview in March, Putin said he had heard dozens of such accusations. "This is not something I worry about in the least," Putin said, dismissing it as part of "macho behaviour" common in Hollywood. Such discourse "is part of US political culture where it's considered normal. By the way, not here, it is not considered normal here," he said. On the issue of recent ransomware attacks that the United States has traced to Russia, Putin denied any knowledge of the hackings and called on Biden to reach an agreement with him on cyberspace, NBC News said. Putin also dismissed a report in the Washington Post this week that Russia was preparing to supply Iran with an advanced satellite that would enable it to track potential military targets across the Middle East. "It's just fake news. At the very least I don't know anything about this kind of thing," Putin said, according to NBC News. "It's just nonsense, garbage."

UK Covid memorial wall should be made permanent, MPs say

London, June 12 : It started as an almost guerrilla act of memorialisation. In March, grieving relatives began inscribing red hearts beside a Thameside walkway - one for every person in the UK who died from coronavirus. Now stretching 500 metres, the Covid memorial wall should be made a permanent national landmark, say more than 200 MPs, peers and mayors. Boris Johnson is facing calls to "make this wall of hearts a, if not the, permanent memorial to the victims of the pandemic" from a cross-party alliance including the mayors of London and Greater Manchester, Sadiq Khan and Andy Burnham. Other supporters include the Conservative MPs Peter Bottomley and Edward Leigh, Liz Kendall, the shadow care minister, Ed Miliband, the former Labour leader, and Ed Davey, the leader of the Liberal Democrats. They have signed a letter to Johnson written by Afzal Khan, the MP for Manchester Gorton who lost six relatives to Covid - three in the UK and three in Pakistan. It argues the wall, which features more than 150,000 hearts, "brings home the scale of the national



devastation and grieving process our country is facing". In practical terms, the proposal would mean preserving a third of a mile of stonework covered with marker pen and paint behind a screen or lacquer, obtaining planning consent and establishing responsibility for the wall, which appears to be shared between St Thomas' hospital and Lambeth council. Politically, it would mean accepting an implicit challenge to the government's pandemic response showcasing the world's second worst per capita death toll in clear view of the Palace of Westminster. The prime minister said in May the wall "deeply moved" him when he visited but he favoured a memorial in St Paul's cathedral, "which will provide a fitting place of reflection in the heart of our capital".

In the mouth of the whale: lobster diver swallowed by humpback lives to tell the tale

London, June 12 : The Cape Cod fisherman estimates he was in the beast's mouth for 30 seconds; experts say the encounter was a fluke. A commercial lobster diver who got caught in the mouth of a humpback whale off the coast of Cape Cod on Friday morning said he thought he was going to die. Michael Packard, 56, of Wellfleet, told WBZ-TV after he was released from Cape Cod hospital that he was about 45ft (14 meters) deep in the waters off Provincetown when "all of a sudden I felt this huge bump, and everything went dark". He thought he had been attacked by a shark, common in area waters, but then realized he could not feel any

teeth and he wasn't in any pain. "Then I realized, oh my God, I'm in a whale's mouth... and he's trying to swallow me," he said. "And I thought to myself OK, this is it - I'm finally - I'm gonna die." His thoughts went to his wife and children. He estimates he was in the whale's mouth for about 30 seconds, but continued to breathe because he still had his breathing apparatus in. When the whale surfaced, shook its head, and spat him out. He was rescued by his crewmate in the surface boat. His sister, Cynthia Packard, originally told the Cape Cod Times that her brother broke a leg, but he said later that his legs are just bruised. Charles "Stormy"

Mayo, a senior scientist and whale expert at the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, told the newspaper that such human-whale encounters are rare.



A woman walks past a restaurant with an OPEN sign in Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Food item distributed to poor and needy peoples at Guwahati by the members of ngo NEEF and sponsored by Guwahati circle of Canara Bank

Kachutali in Sonapur adopted as Giloy Village

Guwahati, June 12 : Kachutali village under 61 No. Sonapur Gaon Panchayat, Dimoria block under Kamrup Metro was adopted as 'Giloy village' jointly by Environment and Forest, Sonapur SF Range under Guwahati SF Division and PNRD. Officials of Forest and Environment and PNRD distributed Giloy saplings to the people of Kachutali village at the Office of Sonapur Gaon Panchayat on Thursday. The officials urged the people for cultivation of Giloy commercially for its rich medicinal values and ever growing demand in the market. "Giloy is rich in compounds that can keep various health problems at bay," said the officials.

Giloy (*Tinospora cordifolia*) has many health benefits that is why it is commonly known as 'Xogunilota'. A powerhouse of antioxidants, Giloy helps to fight free radicals and keep cells healthy. It eliminates toxins, purifies the blood, fights bacteria that causes diseases and also combats liver diseases and urinary tract infections. It's also a good immune-modulator and helps to strengthen the immune system. It is ideal for people suffering from coughs and colds, or for those who are prone to stomach infections. The stem of Giloy is considered highly effective because of its high nutritional contents such as alkaloids, glycosides, steroids,

and other compounds. These compounds present in Giloy are very effective against treatment of various disorders such as diabetes, cancer, neurological problems, fever, etc. Even the roots and leaves of the plant also can be used. Giloy can be grown in a large variety of soils, but it needs proper drainage and sufficient moisture. It doesn't, however, need daily watering. The State Medicinal Plant Board is popularising Giloy cultivation for its immense health benefits. The medicinal plant occurs throughout tropical regions of India extending from Kumaon to Assam and Myanmar, Bihar, Konkan to Sri Lanka.

Minister Sanjoy Kishan in Lakhimpur district

Huge cash recovered from Bolero car at Misa

NAGAON, June 12: In a routine roadside raid, Misa police seized more than Rs 21 lakhs in cash from an upper Assam bound Bolero car today. Police subsequently picked up three persons identified as Mintu Ali, Amir Uddin of Golaghat Nahoroni and Shekijil Alom of Doboka area in Hojai district, sources said. During the preliminary interrogation, they claimed that they were involved in trading of scented Agor wood for long and the money in cash they carried in their vehicle were nothing but a part collection they collected from another trader of Hojai district, sources said adding further that further police investigation in this regard was on.

Students' Solidarity Day observed in North Lakhimpur

North Lakhimpur, June 12: The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) North Lakhimpur Regional Unit observed the Students' Solidarity Day on Thursday at Swahid Bakori in North Lakhimpur town in commemoration of two martyrs of the Food Movement of 1974 Putul Saikia and Gajen Engti who died on June 10, 1974 in Morigaon district in police firing during the movement. The day was observed with the programs of unfurling the flag, Swahid Tarpan etc. where the AASU leaders Simanta Neog, Faridur Rahman, Sanjib Konwar, Punamjoti Burhagohain etc. took part and highlighted on the significance of the Day in their speeches. The programs of the Day ended with the lit of the lamp in the evening.

North Lakhimpur, June 12: Minister for Tea Tribes Welfare etc, Govt. of Assam and Guardian Minister of Lakhimpur district Sanjoy Kishan visited the Lakhimpur district Circle Officer's Office at 8-30 a.m. today and then participated in a meeting held here with the officers and employees of the office. In the meeting, Lakhimpur MP Pradan Baruah, Lakhimpur district MLA Manab Deka and Lakhimpur DC Sumit Sattawan also attended. The minister wanted to know from the Circle Officer about how many Govt. lands have been in waste condition under his area and what is the condition of the NEFA colony situated near the Lilabari Airport and instructed the Circle Officer to submit a report by investigating on the said two matters. He also asked the officers and employees of the Circle Office to take step so that the flood-affected people get plenty of relief. Then he visited Lakhimpur Medical College Covid Care Center, and the two Covid Care Centers situated at Johing Tea Garden Koilamari Tea

GU Observes World Day Against Child Labour

Guwahati, June 12 : World Day Against Child Labour was observed by Gauhati University NSS Cell on 12th June, 2021 along with the rest of the world. As a part of programme a webinar was organised by GU NSS Cell to mark the occasion. Inaugurating the webinar as Chief Guest Sri Pabitra Ram Khaund, IAS, Director, Sports & Youth Welfare, Govt. of Assam said that Child labour is a serious issue and there is need to create awareness in the society to eradicate it. Mr. Khound also said that all the stakeholders such as district task force, child welfare officers, district administration, NSS volunteers should come together for effective handling of the situation. He further said that since NSS plays an important role in the society its volunteers should sensitise the people, parents, employers against child labour. Ms Indrani Phukan Tahbaldar, Former Member, Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights & Chief Advisor, Destination attended the programme as Resource Person and in her speech said that due to poverty and economic status many children are forced into child labour. Ms. Tahbaldar mentioned rules from the Indian constitution which grants children rights against all kind of discriminations and right to free and compulsory education. She spoke about rescue and rehabilitation of victims of Child labour. Earlier welcoming the guest and participants Dr. Ranjan Kr. Kakati, Director, Students' Welfare, G.U. & Programme Coordinator, NSS Cell in his speech said that children from marginalised section of the society are deprived of education and a chance for a bright future due to child labour. Dr. Kakati further said we need to find ways to eliminate child labour as early as possible and create a Jana Andolan to create awareness against child labour. Dr. Kakati also expressed hope that all the NSS units under GU NSS Cell will make their adopted villages free from child labour. Dr Rituparna Bora, NSS PO, GU Unit offered vote of thanks. About 250 persons comprising NSS Programme Officers, volunteers and GU fraternity attended the webinar.



State Veterinary Minister Atul Bora visited the Milj processing unit of Nazira on last 12th June he alongwith the local M.P. Tapan Gogoi, D.C. of Sivasagar Bishnu Kamal Borah, SDO of Nazira Sabyasashi Kashyap also visited the much awaited Pork processing Farm of Nazira. After visiting these two units Atul Borah said that it will help the unemployed youths by providing a way for self employment and the state government will do the needful by taking positive measures in this regard.

Chief Secretary Reviews Covid And Flood Situation In Biswanath, Asks To Adopt "Targeted Approach" Towards Vaccination

Biswanath Chariali, June 12: Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, Shri Jishnu Barua today asked the Biswanath district administration to adopt a "targeted approach" towards vaccination where all frontline workers and persons coming in contact with masses are accorded priority. Mr. Barua was in Biswanath today to chair a high-level review meeting at Deputy Commissioner's Conference Hall where he took stock of the current Covid and flood scenario of the district. Highlighting on testing and vaccination as the only two ways of controlling the Covid pandemic, Mr. Barua said the administration needed to have a "vision plan" and "roadmap" in prioritising vaccination for those category of persons who were the most vulnerable. He stressed on the immediate need to vaccinate all Anganwadi workers and helpers in the district and persons working in Child Care Centres. He also asked the health department to ramp up vaccination in tea garden areas. "You will have to have a vision plan and roadmap for vaccination. Firstly, categorise people on the basis of vulnerability and have a targeted approach in vaccinating those who were the most vulnerable. Those who come in contact with masses, like Anganwadi workers, should be accorded priority; otherwise they might end up as super-spreaders," said Mr. Barua. Since Biswanath district lacks availability of Intensive Care Units (ICU), the Chief



Secretary instructed the health department to refer all Covid patients with comorbidities from now onwards to Tezpur Medical College and Hospital (TMCH); so that if required intensive care could be provided to them without any lapse of time. He also asked the administration and health department to ensure institutional quarantine for Covid patients above the age of 50. With regards to testing, Mr. Barua instructed the health department to scale-up RTPCR testing in the district. He also stressed on the need for strict and compulsory testing of passengers arriving by trains in the district. He also further reviewed the availability of beds and oxygen cylinders in hospitals and Covid Care Centres (CCCs). Citing the recent opening of a dedicated 300-bed Covid Hospital at Sarusajai stadium in

Guwahati, the Chief Secretary said the government was now concentrating in preparing itself with required infrastructure to face the third wave. Reviewing the flood situation in the district, Mr. Barua asked the administration to ensure social distancing was adhered to in relief camps. He said, if need be; more relief camps should be readied this time around in the district in view of the Covid pandemic. He also instructed the administration to guarantee that flood-affected people get required and adequate relief material. Today's meeting was also attended by Biswanath's DC Shri Pranab Kumar Sarmah, SP Shri Ripul Das, Sub Divisional Officer (Civil) Gopur Shri Aditya Vikram Yadav, Additional Deputy Commissioners (ADCs) and officers from administration, health, water resources and disaster management.

20 percent villagers are still unaware of COVID 19 : a recent online study by Nowgong College reveals Fresh 201 COVID cases recorded in Nagaon district

NAGAON, June 12: Around 20 percent people are not aware of COVID 19 in the rural areas while 64.2 percent people of the rural areas are suffering from mental agony for losing of their respective jobs or employment due to COVID pandemic situation rather than the disease itself. This was found in a recent online study initiated jointly by NSS Unit and Internal Quality Assurance Cell of the historic Nowgong College. A total of 50 members from both cells of the college led by the principal, Dr Sarat Barkakoti and programme officer of NSS Unit, Dr Bhuvan Chandra Chutia initiated the study jointly through online, covering around 2500 people of 500 households in 11 villages under Nagaon, Morigaon and Karbi Anglong districts, a press release issued by Nowgong College

added. In the release, it was stated that 50 percent rural people still believed COVID 19 just as a mere cold and cough while only 11.3 percent people were aware of COVID and were maintaining the COVID protocols as well as other SOP. Besides, the study confirmed it too that more than 22 percent people faced the acute scarcity of essential commodities as well as others which they usually used to avail before the pandemic situation. In the study, the institution concluded seven villages from Nagaon district while two villages each from Morigaon and Karbi Anglong districts respectively, the release added. Meanwhile 201 fresh COVID cases were detected in the district today while 276 people who were undergoing treatment in hospital as well as at their homes after being affected

by the virus, recovered from the virus today too. Sources claimed that among those who tested positive today, 76 were immediately 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 under home quarantine. Rapid Antigen Test was conducted on 8940 people today while RT-PCR test was conducted on 67 swab samples, sources added.

NGO Offers Lunch to Medical Staff

Golaghat, Jun 12: In the fight against Covid the medical professionals and health workers are offering their service day and night. To prevent further spread of the disease and to save the common people medical professionals and health workers are doing their job with full dedication taking risk of their own lives. Seeing this Prayash Development Society, a leading organization from my yesterday visited a Covid vaccination centre at Bhulukiting Tea Estate in Golaghat and offered lunch to the health workers there. President of Prayash Development Society Partha Pratim Rajput stated that similar initiative was taken last year also during the first wave of Covid pandemic.

ONGC Jorhat donates Ambulance to Uriamghat Model hospital



Guwahati, June 12 : Under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy, 'ONGC, Jorhat work center' donated, ambulance to Uriamghat Model hospital in Golaghat District. The Mahindra SUPRO ZX Ambulance for Uriamghat Model hospital is being procured spending Rs 8,72,588.00/- . In a brief function held

will cater to the medical needs of people in remote areas of Dhansiri sub divisions who need to be transported to referral hospitals for treatment. At present there is no sanctioned ambulance attached with Uriamghat model hospital and great difficulty is being faced by people especially in critical medical emergencies, when they are to be referred to district civil hospital in Golaghat. Ambulance donated by ONGC is modified and customised with all advanced medical equipments to rapidly transport patients. The emergency vehicle will be of immense help to the people especially during the current scenario of COVID pandemic. Apart from Ms. Sushma Rawat, SDO (Civil), Dhansiri, Mr Javir Rahul Suresh IAS, Asst Commissioner, Dhansiri, Mr Japheth Darngawn ACS, , SDM & HO Sarupathar CHC, Dr. Pawan Kumar Gonju and GM-Incharge-Corporate Communications & CSR ONGC, Jorhat Ms Lily P Chawang also attended the function.

Covid toll climbs to 58 in Lakhimpur

North Lakhimpur, June 11: The Covid-19 situation in Lakhimpur district continues to remain grim as the district reported two more fatalities on Friday, which took the death toll to 58. Among the deceased was a teenager from Borchala in Nowboicha Revenue Circle. Total positive cases in the district since onset of the pandemic is 4561, out of which 3306 persons have been discharged, while the active cases as on Friday stood at 1197. On the other hand, some Covid-19 patients admitted in Lakhimpur Medical College's Covid Hospital alleged that they have been deprived of proper medical treatment here. There are no required doctors and nurses to do treatment for the covid patients, besides required rooms, beds etc., they alleged. But the superintendent of the hospital Dr. Nikhil Kakati denied the allegations of the patients. He told that the allegations were not true. The doctors and nurses have been providing service to the covid patients with great dedication, he further said. Notably, there are 66 covid patients from different parts of Lakhimpur district in the Covid Hospital, Lakhimpur Medical College.

KBSA Carried out Massive Plantation and Cleanliness Drive at PHC Kamba

Aalo, 12 June : The Kamba Bango Sports Association led by its Ex. Officio Chairman and ADC Kamba Shri Rujum Raksap, President KBSA Shri Mukpak Kato and Secretary Shri Mogum Nomuk carried out massive cleanliness and plantation drive at Primary Health Centre Kamba today. Altogether 100 members including senior citizens, youths and women wing members of the association took part in the day long cleanliness and plabntation drive, Er



Nyomar Karbak, AE RWD sponsored all plantation seeds from his side. This PHC located in the heart of the Kamba town has a spacious and re-

mained barren last few years due to construction of PHC building and other infrastructure that have come up there in a big way now.

THE ASSAM RISING

VOL. NO. VI, ISSUE NO. 118 SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 2021

1.6 billion children and young people were out of education

The pandemic has deepened the long-running crisis in global education. Many children around the world missed the majority of the last academic year. At the height of school closures, 1.6 billion children and young people were out of education. Girls have been among the hardest hit. When they are not enrolled in school they are more likely to be forced into child marriage, subjected to female genital mutilation and exposed to gender-based violence. There is a real risk of a lost generation of girls, with 20 million likely to never return to school. So we must act. We are working together on this issue because we believe that educating girls is a game changer - and it is one of the smartest investments we can make. It will help to lift people out of poverty, grow economies, save lives, and build back better from Covid-19. A child whose mother can read is 50% more likely to live beyond the age of five years, and twice as likely to attend school themselves. They are also 50% more likely to be immunised. This is why the UK is using its G7 presidency to put the spotlight on girls' education, rallying global leaders to increase their support. On the first day of the G7 summit, the prime minister announced a pledge of £430m of new UK aid to the Global Partnership for Education. The EU and Italy have also made commitments, with further announcements on funding expected from G7 partners in the coming days. This support will mean real, practical support for education in 90 lower-income countries and territories that are home to a billion children over the next five years. It includes reaching the most disadvantaged children with education in Nepal, special needs education for children in Uganda, outreach programmes to keep at-risk girls in school in Sierra Leone, and supporting community schools for girls in Afghanistan. The funding will go to the Global Partnership for Education, the largest partnership and fund dedicated to transforming education in lower-income countries. In the two decades since the Global Partnership was established, we have seen the largest expansion of primary and lower secondary schooling in history. Kenya is a great example of where this work is helping governments make a huge difference, transforming young people's lives. In just five years, the Global Partnership has supported the government of Kenya to train more than 102,000 Kenyan teachers and distributed 60m textbooks to primary and secondary schools. It supports hardworking headteachers like Nicholas Gathemia, from Nyamachaki primary school, which sits on the southwest flank of Mount Kenya. He says that "most of the children in our school come from the slums ... a programme like this gives those children the chance to learn and to become what they are supposed to become". Kenya has now realised the goal of universal primary education. We must keep up this momentum. Under the UK's leadership, the G7 has now signed up to two critical, ambitious global targets of getting 40 million more girls in school and 20 million more girls reading by age 10, or at the end of primary school, in low-income and lower middle-income countries by 2026. Through the Global Partnership, we are putting our shoulders to the wheel with the aim of training 2.2 million more teachers, building 78,000 new classrooms and buying more than 500 million textbooks, transforming opportunities for children in the world's poorest countries. In July, the UK and Kenya will host a landmark Global Education Summit in London to raise funds for the Global Partnership to keep up this vital work. The aim is to raise at least \$5bn across five years to transform education in the world's most vulnerable countries. This will give 175 more million children the chance to learn - that means millions of lives transformed and millions of communities with better prospects for the future. Ultimately, education is the foundation on which communities and nations build their future. We cannot tackle poverty and inequality or fully recover from the pandemic without it. As Malala Yousafzai said: "One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world." For the good of the next generation, it is time for the world to step up and fund education.

 Joel Golby

What is the point of TV? I've always thought - and, as one of the Guardian's most beloved, or if not beloved then at least one of its most frequent TV previewers, my opinion finally holds some weight here - that television fulfils one of two functions: either to entertain or inform. Come Dine With Me, or Attenborough. Ant and Dec, or Panorama. Occasionally you will see a crossover between the two - when the families on Gogglebox are forced to watch the news, for instance - but more or less, there's a clear binary. That was until I watched Keir Starmer on Piers Morgan's Life Stories, which, over the course of 50 minutes, didn't really manage either. What was it, then? Well, gun to my head, I would describe the genre as "what if they did a panto version of Frost/Nixon?" - as we were introduced to Keir, Just Keir, he told us that this performance was his first as Labour leader in front of a live audience, which the audience warmly applauded. Later he told us he was married to a woman, and the audience applauded. In fact, so much of Life Stories was geared towards the studio audience - even after all these years, Morgan's presenting style is still very "eerily precocious child, who wears a shirt and tie, has come down after dinner to sing in French to you" - that I almost forgot the only audience at home was me and about 60 other shift journalists. All of us watching and typing out any quotes in case they turned out one day to be usable, and instead just getting "DON-



KEYS?????" over and over again. What do we think of that, ladies and gentlemen? The format, in case you didn't watch it: Piers and Keir do a bit of pre-roll, to-camera, jolly stuff about how Piers doesn't know who Keir actually is and Keir says nobody knows who he actually is, and this is his chance to show them, show them all. Then Starmer then dropped a clanging football analogy - a hint of how often this would veer into the territory of "middle-aged dads making Peroni small talk at a barbecue" - that was so workshoped I had an intrusive image of a filled-up flipboard pad being dumped into a skip. Excruciating to think about, but Keir had to spend actual human minutes learning the line, "Piers, it feels like we're in the tunnel at the Emirates stadium about to come out ... so see you pitch-side!" in the mirror. There is no dignity in being Labour leader. Then we learned about Keir, Just Keir: a hard, sad, but crucially not tragic childhood; a sense of ruddy duty (the word "duty" was mentioned three times - we also had one "bootstraps", one mention of his "forensic PMQs", and about five mentions of the word "moisturiser", which he uses daily); a

flawless academic record without being smug about it; a classic har-har ho-ho tearaway period during his adolescence (two bad haircuts and the firm hint that he might have once smoked a joint); then a smooth transition into proper tie-and-a-job adulthood: lawyer, married, and being on first-name terms with a famous couple (the Clooneys). Before this aired I was idly wondering "what sort of life could Keir Starmer have lived to make the British public like him?", and it turned out he already had lived it. He just neglected to tell anyone for the last year and a half. As an episode of television, it wasn't great - mawkish, paint-by-numbers sentimentality, chummy pre-planned banter, that particular brand of sycophancy Morgan so excels in, and some really quite unbearable football chat along the way (Starmer is apparently a "combative midfield general with a silky left foot", and just from that descriptor alone I feel like I know the man - exactly how he moves over the Astroturf, exactly how hard he clunks into tackles, exactly how pink he goes after two minutes of running, the exact promptness with which he sends out a PayPal link for the £9 each the pitch cost

for 45 minutes, the one you had to catch two trains and a bus to but is very near his work). But as a PR move, I have to concede it was a smart one, at least for the hundred-or-so non-journalists who might have seen it. Aha! Piers Morgan's Life Stories said, for 14 months you thought Keir Starmer had no personality at all. Well, get this: he very slightly does have one, actually! But if this semi-successful pivot to being slightly likable on ITV is part of a new Labour strategy to actually say things and not be weird about it, then the message has not yet filtered through to Batley and Spen in Yorkshire, where Kim Leadbeater (with the support of Anneliese Dodds) is laying the groundwork for an upcoming byelection. "People are really keen to have a conversation with Labour about national issues, and local ones, too," Dodds said this week, in a strange, almost haunting campaign video that made me feel like I was experiencing some kind of sleep paralysis vision. "They're really pleased to hear from Labour," she continued, as reality started to shake around me. "They want to have a discussion about their views about Labour, and what they want us to be doing." Leadbeater's pamphlet wasn't much better: "I am listening to local people," it promised, semi-ominously. "I will act on the issues you raise." Yes that's ... that's what an MP is supposed to do, isn't it? It's as if you went to a restaurant where the owner earnestly and repeatedly promised to cook whatever it is you order and serve it to you so you can eat it. What's on the menu? "No menu," a ghost in the body of a waiter says to you. "We just listen to what you want - what local people want." A burger, maybe? Chips? "Labour promises to do its absolute best to listen to you and make you some chips." All right, well. Cheers.

Imran Khan promised us press freedom in Pakistan. Now journalists are under attack

 Hamid Mir

Once upon a time, Imran Khan and I used to fight for press freedom together in Pakistan. In November 2007, when then military ruler General Pervez Musharraf imposed a state of emergency and banned me from appearing on television, Khan was among the few politicians who stood by me. I took my popular political talkshow on to the streets of Islamabad, where large crowds would come and hear us speak live, and Khan was a regular guest. "When I become prime minister," he promised, "journalists will have true press freedom." Now I have been taken off the air once again, but this time Khan is the prime minister. The

ban came immediately after I spoke out at a protest for press freedom in Islamabad. Journalists, lawyers and civil society activists were there to show our solidarity with Asad Ali Toor, a journalist who was attacked last week inside his own home. Three men came in, tied him up, and beat him severely. The attackers, Toor said, identified themselves as being from the Inter-Services Intelligence agency. In my speech at the protest, I delivered a warning to the attackers. If they continue to enter our homes and attack us, I said, we won't stay quiet. I didn't name any individual or organisation. This is the real tragedy of Pakistan today. The country is being run by unknown people. Everyone knows who they are, but no one dares identify them. From the shadows, they evade accountability. Despite the presence of CCTV footage, which shows three men matching



the description of the attackers entering Toor's building, no one has been arrested. Instead, a smear campaign has been launched against him. He has been accused of faking the attack, despite the deep scars and bruises that mark his body. Some have claimed it was a "personal dispute", that he had been attacked by his girlfriend's brothers. Toor replied to the latter with a simple challenge: "If this is true, then arrest those brothers and prove me wrong." The attack on Toor was the latest in a long series of assaults on journalists in the Pakistani capital. In April, my former colleague Absar Alam was shot while walking in a park. In July 2020, Matiullah Jan was abducted for several hours. The government claims that Islamabad is the safest city in the country, but as the media watchdog Freedom Network Pakistan recently reported, it has become the most dangerous city for the country's journalists. The pattern is depressingly predictable. It is always critical and independent-minded journalists who are targeted. The attacks come after a series of threats. After the attack, the victim is accused of faking the incident to seek publicity or political asylum. Despite the evidence, the attackers are never caught. Instead, the victims are called traitors and even made to face new charges. Since the attack, the Federal Investigation Agency, which routinely harasses journalists, has summoned Toor to answer new charges. Meanwhile, a journalist on a previously unknown newspaper has filed a complaint demanding that I be put on trial for treason. This isn't the first time I've faced this situation. In 2014, I survived an assassination attempt after being shot six times. The doctors managed to remove four of the bullets. I still carry the remaining two inside my body. Two years earlier, a powerful bomb was discovered under my car. I have never re-

ceived justice. Instead, I've been vilified for demanding it. I decided to speak out last week because enough is enough. Over the past year, there were a reported 148 cases of threats and attacks against journalists. There is heavy censorship - including the beeping out of voices, shows suddenly taken off the air and channels mysteriously disappearing from screens. Online, there are vicious and coordinated cyberharassment campaigns. When Imran Khan came to power, Pakistan was ranked 139th on the World Press Freedom Index. Now it stands at 145th. "Impunity for crimes of violence against journalists is total," says Reporters Without Borders. Speaking on the BBC last week, the information minister, Fawad Chaudhry, comically claimed: "We probably have more free media than in the first world." His own ministry has proposed a new law, the Pakistan Media Development Authority ordinance 2021, that would make the junta in Myanmar proud. Under this law, all spaces for journalism would be subject to draconian provisions. A tribunal, appointed by the ministry and not the judiciary, would decide what can and cannot be said. Any content could be prohibited without notice or a hearing. Offenders would be punished by up to three years in prison and millions of rupees in fines. Banning me is just the beginning. There is a lot more to come. When the management of Geo News called me to say they were facing pressure to take me off the air, I didn't blame them. The channel's owner, Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman, spent 241 days behind bars on what Human Rights Watch condemned as "politically motivated" charges. I do want to ask prime minister Khan if he remembers the promise he made to me 14 years ago. Will he stand with journalists now, as he did then, or will he take the side of the enemies of press freedom?

Why the World Economic Forum does not take a public stand against injustice



What do you do when violent conflict erupts, innocent people get killed, and human rights are being violated? I believe any person with a heart and a moral compass would feel compelled to condemn the aggressors. Not doing so feels wrong on a moral level, and could raise the risk of further escalation. Are we misguided then, as an international institution, to not speak out unequivocally when conflicts emerge, and innocent people suffer? Are we "hiding" behind our impartiality? My personal conviction goes strongly towards speaking up. I grew up in Germany during and just after WW2, and among the most impactful moral lessons we were taught were those of the pastor Martin Niemöller. He repented for having done nothing and warned of the consequences. "Finally they came for me," he said of being detained in 1938, "and there was no one left, to speak out for me." To me, his lesson was not so much about the personal price we may

 Klaus Schwab

50 years ago, as a rule does not publicly speak up as an institution when injustice occurs. Many of us in the organization's leadership have wanted often to take a stand, yet we almost never have. The World Economic Forum has not issued public condemnations when wars broke out, regimes committed crimes, or authoritarian, racist or xenophobic leaders came to power. Why? The reason is that we play another role in our quest to help and improve the state of the world. It is the role of bridge builder, that of impartial and independent broker, not only between the public and private sector, but also where possible between opposing political forces. It is a role that is most successful when it happens behind the scenes and without public noise. Nevertheless, it is crucial to establishing a world of peace, cooperation and shared prosperity, and it critically depends on not taking a public stance. Throughout

our history, we have grown organically into this role. As we are at our origin an economic forum, we attracted parties that came of very different backgrounds: competing companies, but also opposing political parties and geopolitical rivals. They found in us a platform where they could speak about something that connected them, rather than something that pitted them against each other. And it allowed us over time to bring parties together that otherwise would not meet. In the 1980s, for example, political leaders of Turkey and Greece convened in Davos and used it as an informal forum to work towards peace and collaboration. The same thing happened with the outgoing and incoming South African leadership of F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, the leaders of West and East Germany, the leaders of Cyprus, and, during various eras, political and later business leaders from Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Impartiality and neutrality are enshrined in our charter as an international organization. We also built it into all our governance rules, allowing people to associate with the Forum independent of their race, nationality, gender or political conviction, knowing that the purpose of the Forum is to improve the state of the world through dialogue and action-oriented collaboration. Ultimately, I am convinced that our role as an impartial and independent organization is the appropriate one. It has allowed us at many occasions to convene parties that could not even fathom to meet, and to convince them to work towards peaceful cooperation. We could do so, not as the result of a single action or statement, but thanks to the consistent application of our impartiality principle, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

GST Council may decide on IGST levy on oxygen concentrators imported for personal use on May 28

Mumbai, June 12 : The GST Council is its upcoming meeting, scheduled to be held on May 28, is likely to take a call on levy of 12 per cent tax on import of oxygen concentrators for personal use. The Delhi High Court last week said that imposition of 12 per cent Integrated GST (IGST) on oxygen concentrators for personal use or those received as gifts is "unconstitutional". According to the RBI's customary study of state finances, the total capex roll-out by all states stood at Rs 4.97 lakh crore in FY20, down 20% from the BE of Rs 6.22 lakh crore. States' capex down annually despite March spike; tax transfers by Centre, GST aid help avoid a sharper fall. New Delhi believes that it has a strong case and the verdict of the appellate body, when it comes, should go in its favour. Incentives for R&D: New foreign trade policy to retain key schemes despite WTO trouble. The Court's observation came on a plea filed by an 85-year old COVID patient whose relative had sent oxygen concentrator from the US. It also quashed a May 1 notification of the Finance Ministry which said that a 12 per cent IGST will be levied on oxygen concentrators imported for personal use or gift. Sources said the final decision on this issue would be taken by the Council in its upcoming meeting on Friday. Tax experts said that the Council may decide to exempt IGST on such imports as the revenue implications would not be much. Abhishek Jain, Tax Partner,

EY, said, the government had already provided exemption from IGST on free import of oxygen concentrators for COVID relief by any state government or any agency



authorised by the state government. "The Delhi High Court has beneficially extended the benefit of this IGST exemption to personal import as gifts for individual use as well. Given the enormity of the pandemic situation and as a life saving measure and given that the revenue loss for the government may not be significant, the government may consider accepting the judgement and extending the benefit," Jain added. AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said collecting tariffs on medical equipment, medicines, and vaccines, scarcity of which is leading to the death of millions, is against

the nation's fundamental principles. "Lowering prices for Covid related material is needed, and neutralising tax on all such imports is one such effective method

items costlier for consumers as manufacturers will not be able to offset the taxes paid on inputs. Currently, domestic supplies and commercial imports of vaccines attract a 5 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST), while COVID drugs and oxygen concentrators attract a 12 per cent levy. The government had on May 1 slashed IGST rate to 12 per cent, from 28 per cent, for import of concentrators for personal use. The reduced rate would be applicable up to June 30. IGST rate on import of oxygen concentrator for commercial use too is taxed at 12 per cent. Under Goods and Services Tax (GST), the tax levied on consumption of goods or rendering of service is split 50:50 between the Centre and the state. Such tax is known as Central-GST or CGST and State-GST or SGST. On interstate movement of goods as well as imports, an Integrated-GST or IGST is levied, which accrues to the Centre. The amount paid as IGST can be utilised by businesses for claiming credit while making CGST or SGST payments at the time of actual sale.

that would have an immediate trickle-down effect on the entire supply chain," Mohan added. The council in its May 28 meeting also likely to discuss tax rate cuts on Covid essentials, besides compensation shortfall of states. Opposition parties Congress and Trinamool Congress had demanded that all life-saving drugs, equipment and instruments required to treat COVID-19 patients must be exempted from GST. The Centre had earlier ruled out exempting COVID vaccines, medicines and oxygen concentrators from levy of GST tax saying such an exemption will make the lifesaving

Bitcoin's fizzling 2021 returns start to lag mainstream assets

Mumbai, June 12 : The returns from Bitcoin this year are sliding below traditional assets as cryptocurrencies struggle to claw back ground lost in a rout in May. The largest token tumbled almost 6% at one point in Asian trading Tuesday and was at a two-week low of about \$33,000 as of 1:07 p.m. in Hong Kong. The wider Bloomberg Galaxy Crypto Index fell as much as 10%. Bitcoin is still up 14% this year but that trails commodities as well as some European and Asian share gauges. The proximal cause of Tuesday's weakness was unclear -- one theory was that the recovery of a high-profile Bitcoin ransom by the U.S. showed the token isn't beyond official control to the extent claimed by its biggest proponents. The fact that investigators "could trace the untraceable and seize it might be undermining the libertarian, free-of-government-control case," said Jeffrey Halley, a senior market analyst at Oanda. The implications of that may have provoked the selling, he said. The U.S. recovered almost all the Bitcoin ransom paid to the perpetrators of the cyber attack on Colonial Pipeline Co. last month in a sign



that law enforcement is capable of pursuing online criminals even when they operate outside the nation's borders. Strategists such as Halley and Evercore ISI's Rich Ross are watching key technical levels for Bitcoin. Halley said a break below \$30,000 could lead to "another capitulation." Ross sees a test of support around \$29,000. Bitcoin has plunged from a peak of almost \$65,000 in mid-April, casting a pall over the cryptocurrency sector. The selloff was exacerbated by billionaire Elon Musk's public rebuke of the amount of energy used by the servers underpinning the token. Harsh Chinese regulatory oversight also soured the mood.

Sugar stocks extend rally; Balrampur, Triveni, EID Parry hit record highs



Mumbai, June 12 : Shares of sugar companies rallied for the second day in a row, with Balrampur Chini Mills, EID Parry and Triveni Engineering & Industries hitting their respective all-time highs on the BSE in intra-day trade on Tuesday on a strong outlook. Triveni Engineering hit a record high of Rs 198 as the scrip rallied 18 per cent today, up 31 per cent in the past two trading days. The stock surpassed its previous high of Rs 196 touched in December

2007. Balrampur Chini Mills soared 6 per cent to Rs 357, gaining 13 per cent in two days, while EID Parry (India) was up 5 per cent at Rs 463, adding 10 per cent in the last two sessions. Both these stocks surpassed their previous highs recorded in May 2021. Shree Renuka Sugars, Magadh Sugar & Energy, Dwarikesh Sugar Industries, Dhampur Sugar Mills and Dalmia Bharat Sugar and Industries were up between 5 per cent and 10 per cent on the

BSE. On World Environment Day (June 5), Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the target of 20 per cent ethanol-blended petrol has been advanced by five years to 2025 to cut pollution and reduce import dependence. Ethanol extracted from sugarcane as well as damaged food grains such as wheat and broken rice and agriculture waste is less polluting and its use also provides farmers with an alternate source of income. "Sugar industry is well poised to benefit both from global and domestic factors. A tight global demand-supply situation, favourable government policies and push for higher ethanol blending in India will keep the inventory under control. In light of the above, the short to the medium-term outlook of the industry remains promising," Dalmia Bharat Sugar said on the outlook of the sugar industry. "Balrampur Chini Mills is the most efficient sugar company with sustainable earnings and strong cash flow generation. We believe the company would increase shareholder's payout (buybacks, dividend) to around 60 per cent from the current 40 per cent payout. We believe the market recognises the big opportunity in ethanol blending programme and the stock is poised to command better valuation multiples," ICICI Securities said in a Q4FY21 result update.

Hindustan Unilever CMD's salary drops 21% to Rs 15.36 cr in fiscal 2021

New Delhi, June 12 : FMCG major Hindustan Unilever's Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Mehta's annual gross salary declined 20.9 per cent to Rs 15.36 crore in the pandemic-hit FY21, according to the company's annual report. Mehta's remuneration included Rs 11.19 crore as salary and allowances, a bonus of Rs 2.02 crore, perquisites of Rs 1.69 crore and Rs 0.44 crore as contribution to his provident fund, as per the report. In FY20, Mehta's total income was Rs 19.42 crore, which included a salary of Rs 12.46 crore, along with a bonus of Rs 3.31 crore, perquisites of Rs 3.20 crore and Rs 0.45 crore as contribution to PF, superannuation and consultancy fees. It was an increase of 2.86 per cent from FY19, the annual report of Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) said. Earlier in FY19, Mehta's gross salary was reduced to Rs 18.88 crore. In FY21, HUL's managing director, whole-time directors and key managerial personnel together took a gross salary of Rs 36.13 crore. This includes the gross salary of CMD Mehta, CFO Srinivas Phatak, Executive Director - Legal and Corporate Affairs Dev Bajpai and Executive Director - Supply Chain Wilhelmus Uijen. Mehta's salary was 122 times higher than

the median remuneration of HUL employees in FY21. Uijen's salary was 64.51 times the median remuneration. CFO Phatak salary was 56.59 times and Bajpai's salary 43.93 times higher than the median remuneration. As of March 31, 2021, HUL had 8,525 permanent employees on the rolls of the company. "The percentage increase in the median remuneration of Employees for the financial year was 2.6 per cent," said HUL. The average increase made in the salaries of employees other than the managerial personnel in the financial year was 3.4 per cent. "This has been a challenging year for all our employees, especially those in the frontline and factories, as they have strived hard to serve the nation by ensuring that our production and distribution of essential commodities runs smoothly," said HUL. In FY21, a one-time special cash award was also granted to the frontline sales force and factory-based employees, it added.

MBRDI helps procure 110 oxygen concentrators as part of Covid-19 relief measures



Mumbai, June 12 : Mercedes-Benz Research and Development India has announced new initiatives to ensure the health, safety, and holistic wellbeing of its employees and the community in the midst of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Mercedes-Benz Research and Development India (MBRDI) has announced new initiatives to help support its employees and the community during the second wave of Covid-19. The initiatives are aimed to ensure the health, safety, and holistic wellbeing of its employees and the larger community. MBRDI has collaborated with C-CAMP (Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms), the German Consulate, Bengaluru, Rhenu Logistics, and Nayonika Eyecare Charitable Trust. Its collaborative efforts are said to have helped in the procurement of 110 oxygen concentrators for hospitals in Karnataka. Manu Saale, Managing Director and CEO, MBRDI said "We've taken extensive measures right from virtual medical consultation, Covid-19 care leaves, insurance cov-

erage to vaccination programmes to support our employees and their families," He added; "Empathy is the need of the hour and at MBRDI, we are mindful that the communities around us need to be supported in all possible ways. It is both our honour and duty to strengthen the larger relief efforts with the procurement of oxygen concentrators for the hospitals in Karnataka." MBRDI is supporting its employees by covering the cost of covid-19 vaccination for all its 6000 employees and their dependents. Additionally,

tionally, MBRDI has collaborated with Apollo Clinic for its employees to be provided with a home isolation programme. Medical care and advisory services for two weeks will be provided with daily monitoring, consultation with physicians, diet counselling, physiotherapy sessions including breathing techniques, daily critical vitals checks and more under the plans free of cost. Employees and their dependents will be provided with additional insurance cover exclusively for Covid-19 treatment. An internal task force has also been set up at the MBRDI where employees are volunteering in assisting colleagues in distress. A 24x7 helpline has been put in place to provide virtual medical teleconsultation, end-to-end guidance on the doorstep RT-PCR swab collection, and information on hospitals and emergency services providing medical assistance to Covid-19 patients. MBRDI employees will also be provided with support for mental and emotional wellbeing with the Employee Assistance Programme now providing free counselling. The entity is also planning to provide free healthy meals to be delivered to employees and their dependents who have been affected by the virus or in quarantine.

From Train Cancellations to Disaster Management Cell, steps by Indian Railways to face Tauktae cyclone

Mumbai, June 12 : Besides, in order to prevent loss of life and damage to property, the Safety Department has also reiterated Disaster Management guidelines. Efforts are on to ensure minimal time disruption of any railway operation as well as earliest resumption of services wherever temporary suspension occurs due to safety reasons. Tauktae cyclone: Piyush Goyal-led Indian Railways is taking all measures to face

Tauktae cyclone. Recently, in view of the Tauktae cyclone, several passenger train services were cancelled by the national transporter. Besides, in order to prevent loss of life and damage to property, the Safety Department has also reiterated Disaster Management guidelines. Also, the Railway Ministry has said that efforts are on to ensure minimal time disruption of any railway operation as well as earliest resumption of

services wherever temporary suspension occurs due to safety reasons. Following are the steps taken by Indian Railways to face Tauktae cyclone: According to the ministry, zonal and divisional controls are currently monitoring the situation. They are constantly in touch with all stations in Southern Railway zone, South Western Railway zone, Western Railway zone, Central Railway zone and Konkan Railway zone.

Consider including Hydrogen Fuel Cell EVs under FAME II: Delhi High Court to DHI

Mumbai, June 12 : The Delhi High Court has directed the Department of Heavy Industries to consider including Hydrogen Fuel Cell electric vehicles and Hydrogen refuelling infrastructure under the scheme for Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India Phase II (FAME India Phase II). The court went on to also direct the government to consider allocating unused funds from the FAME II scheme for promoting hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles in the country, and construction and operation of refuelling stations. If hydrogen-powered vehicles fall under the FAME II scheme and avail of the incentives, manufacturers like Hyundai and Toyota could consider bringing their vehicles like the Toyota Mirai and Hyundai Nexa to India. Hydrogen fuel cell-powered vehicles offer a greater driving range in comparison to battery electric vehicles (for example, an FCEV would deliver about 650 km range as compared to about 400 km of a BEV), take only about 2-3 minutes to refuel, and emit nothing but water through the tailpipe. Details of the plea filed on the subject: The plea, filed by Advocate Ashwini Kumar, stated that the FAME India Scheme aims at encouraging domestic manufacture of electric vehicles and to promote and create a market for electric vehicles in India. The plea further states that the primary objectives of the FAME scheme are to reduce the dependence on petroleum resources, counter the impact of internal combustion engine vehicles on the environment, and keep pace with the gradual shift of the automobile industry towards alternate fuels including electric vehicles. The FAME scheme has not been able to adequately utilise its budget towards the adoption of electric vehicles and, for example, out of a total budget of Rs 700 crore for setting up charging infrastructure only Rs 20 crore have been disbursed in the period from 2019 up to 10th February 2022, the plea states.



Contd. From Page 1

Northeast Frontier Railways

Devi Katra at 3:45 am every Wednesday to reach Kamakhya at 11:30 am on Friday. The services of the Kamakhya - Ranchi special express will resume from June 29 and leave Kamakhya at 12 am every Tuesday to reach Ranchi at 2:45 pm on Wednesday. The Ranchi - Kamakhya special express will be restored from June 30 and will leave Ranchi at 8:30 pm every Wednesday to reach Kamakhya at 11:30 pm on Thursday.

Two minor sisters found hanging

while the family members and relatives of the two girls claimed that they were raped and killed. Locals also said the two sisters were missing since Friday afternoon. According to police, the two girls were found hanging from the branch of a tree in a nearby forest area on Friday evening. The bodies of the minors were spotted by the villagers on Friday evening at the hilltop around 1 km from the village. Locals said the entire family had gone to the paddy field for harvest and returned around 4 pm but did not find the two girls in the house. When they did not return, the family members started searching in the area and later some villagers found their bodies hanging from a tree in a nearby forest area atop a hill. They suspect the two were raped and murdered. Police have started investigating the case. Kokrajhar Additional Superintendent of Police Surjeet Singh Paneswar said police are waiting for the post-mortem report. Various organizations have condemned the gruesome incident and demanded an investigation into the case. Chairperson of Child Welfare Committee, Kokrajhar Malati Rani Brahma demanded a judicial inquiry into the case.

Population explosion : Owaisi

speak for blaming poor & marginalised Here are the facts @himantabiswa Assam has already achieved replacement levels of TFR 2.1. National TFR is 2.2. In simple words, there's no population explosion," he said, adding that per an economic survey Assam was one of the States where population was growing by less than 1%. In another tweet, Mr Owaisi said: "Your govt should worry about skewed sex ratio due to barbaric practice of sex-selective abortions. It's projected that even in 2036 Assam's sex ratio will still be seriously skewed in favour of men. There's a clear need to fight against underlying sexist cultural ideas."

CITU activists stage a protest

home minister Amit Shah during his election campaigns at Sarbhog in Barpeta on April 4, Shah had promised that his government will not only revive the two paper mills, but also augment paper production Assam," said a CITU leader. "Now they have made a U-turn on their promises by announcing the auction of the two paper mills. A suitable revival package should be prepared to protect the two paper mills and the employees," he said. The Nagaon Paper Mill in Morigaon district has been closed (without notice) since March 13, 2017, while the Cachar Paper Mill in Hailakandi district has been closed (also without notice) since October 20, 2015. Over 2,500 employees of both the mills have not received salaries for over four years. Recently, the Joint Action Committee of Recognized Unions (JACRU) alleged that 88 poverty stricken employees of the two mills have died being unable to afford medical treatment, while four of have committed suicide. "The government should take necessary step to revive the two defunct paper mills. Many workers who are associated with the paper mills are in bad condition and looking for a hope that the state government will revive the paper mills," said a protester.

5% GST on COVID vaccines

GST would be levied on Amphotericin B, the antifungal drug used for black fungus treatment, Nirmala Sitharaman said following the 44th GST Council Meeting. "GST on electric furnaces and temperature checking equipment brought down to 5% and on ambulances to 12%. These rates will be valid till September as against August end recommended by the GoM," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on the outcome of the 44th GST Council meeting. The special duty cuts would be applicable till September 30, 2021. Sitharaman said that though the GoM recommended the rate cuts till August, the council decided to keep it till September end and later decide if further extension was required. In another major move, the GST rate on ambulances has been reduced to 12% from the previous 28%.

Congress' first love is Pakistan

love of Congress. In a tweet, Singh said, "Congress' first love is Pakistan. Digvijaya Singh conveyed Rahul Gandhi's message to Pakistan. Congress will help Pakistan in grabbing Kashmir." The chat was released on Twitter by a handle @LeaksClubhouse (ClubHouse Leaks). Interestingly, the Twitter profile of Clubhouse Leaks mentioned that the handle has been created today. In the chat, Singh said, "Decision of revoking 370 and reducing statehood of Jammu and Kashmir was an extremely sad decision and the Congress party would certainly relook the decision."

No foreign travellers for Hajj

some 2.5 million pilgrims used to visit the holiest sites of Islam in Mecca and Medina for the week-long haj, and the lesser, year-round umrah pilgrimage, which altogether earned the kingdom about \$12 billion a year, according to official data.

Defence Ministry okays policy

reports such as the Henderson Brooks-Bhagat report, an operational review of the 1962 war with China, which is still classified, will automatically be made public. The government can still decide what to share with the National Archives even after the 25-year period. The Defence Ministry's statement also mentioned that its History Division will be responsible for coordination with various departments to compile and seek approval and publish the war/operations histories. The compilation will be done by a committee headed by a Joint Secretary in the Defence Ministry and will also include representatives of the Army, Navy and the Air Force, the External Affairs Ministry, Home Ministry and "other organisations and prominent military historians (if required)". The policy has laid down timelines to be followed to compile all such records. The committee will have to be formed "within two years of completion of war/operations" and after that "collection of records and compilation should be completed in three years and disseminated to all concerned". Sources mentioned that till now the official records of each operation or war were not available at one central location, which this policy will remedy, by going through all relevant documents. "The requirement of having war histories written with clear cut policy on declassification of war records was recommended by Kargil Review Committee headed by K Subrahmanyam as well as NN Vohra Committee in order to analyse lessons learnt and prevent future mistakes," the statement mentioned, and added that the recommendation by the Group of Ministers on national security after Kargil "also mentioned the desirability of authoritative war history". The ministry stated that the timely publication of war histories will give people "accurate account of the events, provide authentic material for academic research and counter the unfounded rumours".

Oldest male chimpanzee dies

wild is 33 years, while it is between 50 and 60 years under human care, the zoo said. Cobby was integral in bringing together the San Francisco Zoo's chimpanzee population, officials said, and acted like the elder of the troop. "Cobby was a part of San Francisco," said Tanya M. Peterson, executive director of the San Francisco Zoological Society, in a statement. "He touched so many lives, and people have so many memories of him. He is irreplaceable, and our hearts are broken. We will all miss seeing his handsome grey beard watching over us from the top platform of the yard."

Football Player, Referee and Social Activist Ramesh Jitani Passes Away

Golaghat, Jun 12: A football player, referee and social activist from Golaghat Ramesh Jitani passed away yesterday. He was 61. Jitani was associated with several social organisations. He was the Secretary of Town Hindi High School Golaghat and also he was the President of Jr. Bengenakhova Boys Club. He left behind his wife, son and daughter and many other relatives.

Supreme Court rejects plea seeking loan moratorium, interest waiver from Centre

New Delhi, June 12: The apex court struck down the plea stating the reliefs sought by the petitioners are in the realm of policymaking and "we are not experts on matters of finance". A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said that the top court cannot do a judicial review of the Centre's financial policy decision unless it is malafide and arbitrary. A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said that the top court cannot do a judicial review of the Centre's financial policy decision unless it is malafide and arbitrary. The Supreme Court on June 11 rejected a plea that sought loan moratorium, interest waiver, and financial reliefs from the Government of India. The apex court struck down the plea stating the reliefs sought by the petitioners are in the realm of policymaking and "we are not experts on matters of finance". "It is not for courts to dictate government policies, the SC observed, adding that the government has "so many things to do; it has to vaccinate people and attend to migrant workers also". The petitioners had sought relief from the SC on account of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. They had cited economic distress and job losses to back their plea. The Supreme Court had earlier in March struck down a similar bunch of pleas involving interference with the Centre's and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI's) decision to not extend the loan moratorium beyond August 31, 2020, stating it is a policy decision. A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said that the top court cannot do a judicial review of the Centre's financial policy decision unless it is malafide and arbitrary. The Bench had said it cannot interfere with the government's decision to fix priorities for relief during the pandemic which has affected all across the country and the government has been under severe financial constraints.

Timbers, band saw seized by forest personnel

Guwahati, June 12: A vehicle loaded with teak sawn timbers was detected at Bangha in Karimganj on Thursday. Range Officer, Sadar and AFPF personnel seized the vehicle fully loaded with timbers and brought it to the Divisional Forest Office. During interrogation of the driver, it came to light that the timbers were loaded in Mizoram and passed through Hailakandi district. In another incident that took place on Thursday, forest personnel under Barpeta Road Range detected an illegal band saw mill at Karekun area under Sarbhog Beat Office and brought the machinery and other equipment under its safe custody.

Mask and Sanitizers Distributed

Golaghat, Jun 12: Today a young professional working at a reputed Motor Car Company visited Golaghat District Journalist Association office and Golaghat Media Forum office and distributed masks and hand sanitizers among the media persons. Parasmoni Bhattacharya who is working as General Manager (Sales), Krishna Hyundai, Golaghat and Bokakhat stated that his father was a journalist and he had seen the hard work, courage, dedication of the journalists and also the hard times they have to suffer since his childhood. In this pandemic situation like the doctors and other medical staff, journalists and the police force are also working as Frontline Covid Warriors taking risk of their lives. So as a mark of respect to their service he has offered these masks and hand sanitizers to the media persons and the police force in Golaghat today.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation Presents 'Kitaab'- the All India Launch Of Lord Jeffrey Archer's Book 'Turn a Blind Eye' in North-east

Guwahati, June 12: Prabha Khaitan Foundation today hosted 'Kitaab', marking the India launch of Lord Jeffrey Archer's Book 'Turn a Blind Eye' in north-east. 'Kitaab' provides a platform to authors to display and showcase their newest literary works before a discerning audience and the media through tastefully curated book launches. The newest novel in Jeffrey Archer's latest series is reason for excitement for those who have a penchant for the author's attention to detail. "Prabha Khaitan Foundation is dedicated to promoting Indian culture. Under the initiative 'Kitaab', Prabha Khaitan Foundation has curated literary sessions across the country and even in different parts of the globe. We are glad to launch our initiatives in north-east with Guwahati, our 38th city; and open the doors to promote the rich culture of north-east India. 'Turn a Blind Eye' by Lord Jeffrey Archer is a cozy crime thriller and yet another outstanding instalment of Jeffrey Archer's William Warwick series", said Ms Manisha Jain, Communications & Branding Chief, Prabha Khaitan Foundation. 'Turn a Blind Eye' a well-written, absorbing book. This is the third instalment of William Warwick. It can be read as a standalone book but it would be much better to read the first two books as this is a series worth reading from page one. About the Author: Now published in 97 countries and more than 33 languages, Jeffrey Archer is firmly established as one of the world's bestselling authors, with international sales passing 275 million copies. He is the only author ever to have been a number one bestseller in fiction (nineteen times), short stories (four times) and non-fiction (The Prison Diaries). The 'Kitaab' initiative has hosted some of the greatest stalwarts from the world of words, and is focused on creating a platform for aspiring talent. Kitaab provides a platform for authors to display and showcase their literary works. Through Kitaab, Prabha Khaitan Foundation has launched books by renowned writers like Dr Shashi Tharoor, Vir Sanghvi, Pavan Verma, Salman Khurshid, Sunita Kohli & Anupam Kher to name a few.

Online poetry competition vorganised

North Lakhimpur, June 12: Lakhimpur district multi-lingual poets' meet is going to organise a state-level online poetry competition which is open for all and will be held in three languages - English, Assamese and Hindi. Lakhimpur district multi-lingual poets' meet President Mohan Kumar Das and General Secretary Rupjyoti Dutta informed in a press release today. They further informed, in the release, that the competitors can send their self-composed poems written in one language only within June 27, 2021 to the address -- Ratan Stores, Malpani Chari, P.O. - North Lakhimpur, District- Lakhimpur, PIN - 787001 or Whatsapp number-- 8634706342. Certificates will be sent to the winners in their addresses by post after declaring the results of the competition. The results will be published in the newspapers. An anthology of poetry will be published with the selected poems of the competition in near future, the President and the General Secretary of the organization stated in the release.

Transport Minister inspects Azara and Changsari Railway Yards

Guwahati, June 12: Transport Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary visited the Azara Railway Yard, Changsari Railway Yard and FCI Godown today to inspect the unloading of goods. Transport Department in collaboration with Railway and FCI officials have been working relentlessly to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities in the state. From May 3 till today, 722 railway rakes have been unloaded engaging 67,347 labourers and dispatched 45,479 trucks to various parts of the state. Transport Minister Patowary has commended the dedicated service of the people engaged in this task and appreciated their endeavor to make essentials goods including medicines available in every nook and corner of the state. Transport Commissioner Adil Khan and other senior officials were present during the visit.



Shillong- distributes food items to vendors

FDA rejects emergency use authorization for Bharat Biotech's Covaxin jab

New Delhi, June 12: This development comes at a time when Bharat Biotech is under criticism in India for not sharing data from its phase 3 clinical trials almost six months after the company's vaccine was included in India's immunization programme (Photo: Twitter@BharatBiotech). This development comes at a time when Bharat Biotech is under criticism in India for not sharing data from its phase 3 clinical trials almost six months after the company's vaccine was included in India's immunization programme (Photo: Twitter@BharatBiotech). The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has rejected Bharat Biotech's proposal for an emergency use authorization (EUA) of its covid vaccine, delaying the company's vaccine launch in that country. Ocugen, the US partner of Bharat Biotech, on Thursday said the company will now be seeking a full approval of Covaxin. This is a consequence of the US FDA asking the company to launch an additional trial so that the company can file for a Biologics Licence Application (BLA), which is a full approval. "The FDA provided feedback to Ocugen regarding the Master File the Company had previously submitted and recommended that Ocugen pursue a BLA submission instead of an EUA application for its vaccine candidate and requested additional information and data," said a statement from Ocugen to NYSE. Adding that the company is in discussions with the FDA on the additional documents required to clear its application. "While this will extend our timelines, we are committed to bringing Covaxin to the US," said Shankar Musunuri, chief executive of Ocugen. This development comes at a time when Bharat Biotech is under criticism in India for not sharing data from its phase 3 clinical trials almost six months after the company's vaccine was included in India's immunization programme. The company has been betting on being able to launch its vaccine in regulated markets as it looks to gain validation at a time where authorization of a covid vaccine from WHO or a regulator such as USFDA or the European Union is needed to cross borders. At present, several countries do not recognize the Bharat Biotech vaccine, and those who have received two doses of the vaccine are considered "unvaccinated" in some countries. Ocugen's rejection of emergency authorization is because the company submitted partial data from the Covaxin trial only in March this year, but the USFDA last month came out with a revised guideline for covid vaccine approval that said it will no longer grant emergency authorization to new applications. Despite this revised guideline from FDA, Ocugen in a statement to investors on 26 May said that the company will be eligible to submit its EUA in June. "Since we have been in discussions with the FDA since late last year, we do not believe that the FDA's recently revised guidance regarding EUAs raises any concerns about our ability to submit the EUA for Covaxin as planned, which is currently in process and which we expect to submit to the FDA in June. We believe that the FDA's new guidance confirms that Ocugen continues to meet all criteria for submission of an EUA," the company's statement from 26 May said. Bharat Biotech did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment. In India, too, the company delayed its timeline to release the phase 3 data. In a statement to wire agency ANI, the company said that it will release results from its phase 3 data in July (the earlier timeline was June). The phase 3 data is crucial for the company, as only with those results can the company seek emergency approval from the World Health Organisation. An emergency approval from the WHO will allow the company to export its vaccines, besides granting the much-needed validation that is required for the vaccine to be considered as part of a "vaccine passport". Vaccine passport or immunity passports are becoming a reality as countries open their borders for non-essential travel to fully vaccinated individuals.

"Jumla, Links To Ration Mafia": Union Minister On Delhi Ration Scheme

New Delhi, June 12: Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Friday attacked Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal over his plans for doorstep delivery of food rations in the national capital, labelling it "jumla" (a false promise) and accusing the ruling Aam Aadmi Party of links to the "ration mafia". A furious Mr Prasad also demanded to know why Delhi had still not implemented the centre's 'one nation, one ration card' scheme that, he said, ensures economically weaker sections get subsidised food grains and protects against corruption by linking distribution to the Aadhaar card's biometrics. "This ration delivery to homes sounds like a novel idea... but if you check the details you will find loopholes and possibilities for corruption. Is this what Arvind Kejriwal wants? Do you (Mr Kejriwal) want to break the law and fool the people?" Mr Prasad shouted at assembled reporters. He also mocked Mr Kejriwal because "he is talking about home delivery when he failed to provide oxygen" - a cruel swipe at horrific scenes during the peak of the second Covid wave, when the centre and state struggled (and squabbled) to provide medical oxygen for patients on life support. "Arvind Kejriwal is talking about home delivery of ration when he failed to provide oxygen to the people of Delhi. The Delhi government is under the control of the ration mafia," Mr Prasad raged. "We introduced 'one nation, one ration card' based on Aadhaar... people can get their ration at fair price shops anywhere in the country, and can even divide portions with family back home... sad to say only three states have not implemented - Delhi, Bengal and Assam," he said. Food ration centres in Delhi ran out of stock last week after distributing to non-ration card holders. Mr Prasad explained the delay in BJP-ruled Assam and in Bengal - "where Mamata didi has problems with central policies". "But what is the problem with Delhi and Kejriwal?" he asked. "He talks dime to the dozen about ration cards and providing rations to the poor, but why have you not implemented the scheme? What is your problem?" the Union Minister shouted again. "If there is a 'lokpriya', or 'people's', Chief Minister and a full majority... what is stopping them? Delhi government wants the centre to do the work... all they want to do is give speeches on TV," he said. Last week the centre blocked a doorstep food rations delivery scheme Delhi said would benefit 72 lakh people past the economic hardship - loss of jobs and wages - as a result of the lockdown. Initially Mr Kejriwal tweeted: "Mr Prime Minister, what kind of an arrangement do you have with the ration mafia that you had to stop the Kejriwal government's 'Ghar Ghar Ration Scheme'?" Days later an apparently now-subdued Chief Minister wrote to the Prime Minister to seek his help in overturning the centre's decision to block the doorstep delivery of food rations. The AAP government in Delhi had cleared the proposal to allow home delivery of rations in July last year; it was one of the promises made by the party in the run-up to the February assembly polls.

Novak Djokovic reaches French Open final with epic win over Rafael Nadal

London, June 11 : For the second time in eight months, Rafael Nadal welcomed his greatest rival into his Parisian lair. In last year's French Open final Nadal laid waste to Novak Djokovic in three brutal sets, but the world No 1 had no intention of allowing history to repeat itself. After losing the first five games, Djokovic stood up to the



challenge in full, and the outcome was one of the greatest wins he has achieved in a career already bursting with greatness. "Definitely the best match that I was part of ever in Roland Garros for me, and top three matches that I ever played in my entire career, considering the quality of tennis, playing my biggest rival on the court where he has had so much success and has been the dominant force in the last 15-plus years, and the atmosphere which was completely electric,"

Keir Starmer accuses Boris Johnson of failure of leadership in anti-racism row

London, June 11 : Keir Starmer has accused Boris Johnson of a lack of courage over his reluctance to condemn fans who boo England's players for taking the knee and has told the prime minister that his "failure of leadership" undermined the team's chances of success at Euro 2020. The Labour leader, who believes that Gareth Southgate has shown Johnson how to be a leader, said no football supporter should boo their team and argued that backing the players in their fight against racism and discrimination should not be a difficult choice for those in positions of political power. The row over the anti-racism gesture has threatened to overshadow the start of the tournament and Starmer, who wants the jeers to stop when England face Croatia in their opening game at Wembley on Sunday, has been left unimpressed by Johnson's conspicuous failure to take a stronger stance after a section of fans booed when Southgate's side took the knee before recent friendlies against Austria and Romania at the Riverside Stadium. "The idea you boo the team is completely wrong," Starmer said. "This is a response to what is an important collective decision by the team about their expression of their opposition to discrimination and racism. That's the decision they've taken and I think they're right. All of us should support them and all of us in a position to do so should show leadership, as Gareth Southgate has done, and have the courage to call it out and say it's the wrong thing to do. The prime minister was wrong when he refused to call it out. He didn't have the guts to call it out, he hedged his bets and in doing so he undermined the team on the verge of this competition." He didn't have the courage to side with the players. That is leadership. Compare and contrast him and Gareth Southgate on this. He didn't have the courage to stand by the England team on the verge of this competition and he's wrong about that and that's a failure of leadership. "On Monday the prime minister's official spokesman appeared to offer support to both sides of the debate after being asked about the booing before the Romania game. Johnson "fully respects the right of those who choose to peacefully protest and make their feelings known", the spokesman said, adding: "On taking the knee, specifically, the prime minister is more focused on action rather than gestures." On Friday No 10 moderated that view. Asked if Johnson supports players taking the knee, his spokesperson said: "Yes. The PM respects the right of all people to peacefully

said Djokovic. "For both players, a lot of support. Just amazing. "He did what so few have done to Nadal on Court Philippe Chatrier, matching his level, equalling his desire and then making him doubt across a remarkable four hours and 11 minutes as he won 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (5), 6-2 to reach his sixth French Open final. With his momentous

victory, Djokovic inflicted only a third career loss at Roland Garros on Nadal in 108 matches and he will compete for his second French Open title in addition to a 19th grand slam title, which would pull him to within one of Nadal's and Roger Federer's joint men's record. He will meet Stefanos Tsitsipas, who squandered a two-set lead against Alexander Zverev before demonstrating the full scale of his mental fortitude by recovering from 0-40 down at the start of the fifth

protest and make their feeling known about injustices. "Asked if he condemns fans booing, No 10 said: "The PM has spoken before about his desire for everybody to get behind the national team. The PM would like to see everyone getting behind the team to cheer them on - not boo." But No 10 refused to correct the education minister, Gillian Keegan, who said taking the knee was "divisive". Starmer, who spoke about how the country came together when England hosted Euro 96, argued that those comments raised doubts over Johnson's character. "I think it tells you a lot about the prime minister and a lot about leadership," he said. "The idea we should be opposed to racism and discrimination is fundamentally right. Rather than hedging as the prime minister did, without the courage to actually do it, we should come out and say they're right about that. They're fundamental principles." Starmer made his patriotic pride clear and



questioned Johnson's credentials as a fan. "Unlike the prime minister I'm a true football fan," he said. "I'm a football fan who supports Arsenal and England. I want both of them to win and a fan doesn't boo his or her own team. It's a fundamental rule of being a fan." England's players have vowed to continue taking the knee before games. Jordan Henderson, the vice-captain, has said the booing shows that racism remains a problem and Southgate said the negative reaction feels like an attack on England's black players. Southgate rejected the idea that taking the knee is a political act and the manager has repeatedly used his position to raise awareness of society's ills. The 50-year-old was praised after expressing passion about his role and responsibility in a self-written article titled "Dear England" for the Players' Tribune this week. Scotland's manager Steve Clarke announced his side would take the knee as a one-off gesture of solidarity with England when the two teams meet at Wembley next Friday. But Scotland intend to

set to reach his first grand slam final with a 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 4-6, 6-3 win. Tsitsipas barely held back tears as he digested the achievement of becoming the first Greek player to reach a grand slam final. "This win is the most important one of my career so far," he said. Nadal had arrived on court in combative mood. He spent the first five games of the match simply obliterating his forehand, striking it with an untouchable combination of pace, spin and depth, while his defence was impenetrable. Frustrated and outplayed, for a second straight year Djokovic trailed 0-5. At this time stood up to the challenge. He finally began to catch hold of Nadal's serve and he dragged it back to 3-5. Although Nadal did enough to serve out the set, momentum had shifted. Throughout the second set, Djokovic wrestled his way to the baseline and he dictated an increasing number of points. His backhand was sublime and he pinned Nadal in his backhand corner while constantly lacing the opposite baseline with his depth. By the seventh game of the second set, the intensity broke through the roof but Djokovic held serve in a tremendous 10-minute game for 5-2, and he eventually took the second set. As the third set began, Djokovic remained on top of the baseline, dictating so much of the proceedings. He dragged Nadal off

"stand up to racism" for their other two group games. "I thought it was a fantastic piece by Gareth Southgate," Starmer said. "It spoke to the pride I have in the England football team. Every time I see England play I have pride. That's why I go and watch them play, and desperately want them to do well." I would encourage the prime minister to read that piece by Gareth Southgate if he hasn't done so and actually have the courage to say the right thing to do is support the team when we've got a chance of doing well. All of those players have huge pride in their country and in that sense they're in the same position as the fans. "England have a diverse team and have connected with most of the fanbase. Manchester City's Raheem Sterling has been a powerful anti-racism voice and Marcus Rashford, the Manchester United forward, forced the government into U-turns over free school meals last year. "Rashford and Sterling have been shining examples of leadership



in very difficult circumstances," Starmer said. "The prime minister and those in political leadership have a choice. Do we back those players in what they are standing for or do we not? Do we back those players as they stand with an England shirt on? These are not difficult questions of leadership." The former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown also urged Johnson to support England taking the knee and said he should avoid "culture wars". Starmer believes England can become European champions. "When I look at that squad I see incredible talent, particularly up front," he said. "Bukayo Saka's in there from Arsenal. There are other brilliant young players. I hope the defence is strong enough. But this feels like the sort of squad that with the right backing could go a very long way." Starmer remembered being at Wembley for England's quarter-final and semi-final at Euro 96. "My starting point is no England fan boos the England team on the verge of a major tournament on English soil.

the court with wicked angles and suffocated the Spaniard with his return of serve, generating eight break points in the set across four different games. But each time Djokovic broke away, Nadal pulled back. From 3-5 down, Nadal returned to lead 6-5, saving numerous break points with roaring forehands and wrestling control of the baseline back in his favour. By the time they had reached a tiebreak, Nadal seemed as if he may have the upper hand. Instead, Djokovic rose to the moment by playing a delirious tiebreak. At 5-4 in the tiebreak, Djokovic served an ace down the T and a desperate attempt at a drop shot by Nadal sealed his fate in the set. If there is any true measure of this rivalry, it is perhaps reflected in the decisions made outside the court: as Djokovic went to the bathroom after the 93-minute tiebreak set and the clock ticked towards the 11pm curfew, according to Marion Bartoli on ITV the French prime minister Jean Castex was watching at home. He called in and issued Roland Garros an exemption, allowing the fans at the venue to watch history unfold until the end. Nadal opened the fourth set by leading 2-0, but Djokovic refused any resurgence. Although Nadal fought until the end, Djokovic pulled him back and ensured that the ending was emphatic. He moved on to the final having won six consecutive games in the fourth set, emphatically toppling the king. Tsitsipas, the fifth seed, who has won more ATP matches than any other player this year and marked himself as one of the best clay court players in the world, savoured his own exceptional win over Zverev. "I'm proud of myself," he said. "I actually love what I'm doing. I love that I get to play in this stadium. I'm grateful for every single match that I get to play. I'm obviously just blessed to have the opportunity to play against the best and test myself, something that I've always dreamed and wished to happen one day. I'm able to be here and really going for it. I love that."

Everton in advanced talks with Nuno over replacing Ancelotti as manager

London, June 11 : Everton will hold further talks with Nuno Espirito Santo this weekend that could conclude with the former Wolves manager being appointed as Carlo Ancelotti's replacement. Farhad Moshiri, Everton's majority shareholder, and the director of football, Marcel Brands, have assessed several candidates following Ancelotti's surprise return to Real Madrid 10 days ago and are believed to be close to an agreement with the Portuguese coach. Negotiations remain to be concluded on issues such as the size of Nuno's coaching staff - part of the reason Crystal Palace withdrew their



interest in the 47-year-old this week - but providing talks run smoothly Moshiri could appoint the former Valencia and Porto coach next week. The influence of Nuno's agent, Jorge Mendes, is another potential complication for a club whose

transfers are handled mainly by Brands. Nuno's availability having left Wolves at the end of last season made him an attractive proposition for Everton as soon as Ancelotti exited, and he was sounded out shortly afterwards. The former Everton manager David Moyes was another candidate who interested the club's hierarchy but he has agreed a new three-year contract with West Ham. Nuno returned to the top of Moshiri's wish-list after the breakdown of his proposed move to Palace, and with Moyes committed to West Ham. He would be Everton's sixth permanent manager in the past five years.

Italy make flying start to Euro 2020 with dominant opening win over Turkey

Milan, June 11 : Euro 2020 is finally under way, and Italy are back, and nature is healing. On a taut and muggy night in Rome, a crowd of 16,000 were treated to a vivid display of smart, patient attacking football: a statement performance that instantly marks Roberto Mancini's side out as one of the favourites for the tournament. And yet perhaps the symbolism of the occasion was greater still. Three decades after Italy last hosted a major tournament, five years after they last competed in one, 15 months after this fixture was postponed in the most disorienting and dreadful of circumstances, this felt like a sort of rebirth: a celebration of sport and congregation and the importance of savouring every last moment. From the first whiffle Italy set about the much-fancied Turks with a restless, percussive impatience. Their press was smart and well-organised, their movement on and off the ball exquisite. And yet after a frustrating goalless first half you wondered if the weight of expectation might just get to them. Instead, with an emotional maturity that has not always been the hallmark of Italian teams past, they plundered three unanswered goals, building an irresistible momentum that Turkey were powerless to arrest. "The crowd helped us," Mancini admitted afterwards. "It was crucial for us to move

the ball quickly." Left-back Leonardo Spinazzola, one of the best players on the pitch, went even further, declaring it a "perfect performance". For once, this is an Italy side that may be greater than the sum of its parts. Perhaps they lack a little genuine star quality, which may come to bite them in the later stages. But Domenico Berardi and Lorenzo Insigne are a fine pair of wingers, Jorginho was at his creative best in midfield and on the left flank Spinazzola was given the license to get forward and threaten. The brilliant Federico Chiesa, given a 10-minute cameo here, still has plenty to offer. These are exciting times to be an Italy fan. And yet perhaps the defining motif of this game came right at the end. As Turkey poured forward in search of a late consolation, in stepped the veteran

failures like a scar on the heart, this was a matter of pure professional pride. But first, of course, there was a predictably immoderate opening ceremony to be dispensed with: a spectacularly vaudeville affair featuring some weird semaphore with bouncing inflatable balls, enough soldiers to take over North Tyrol, lots of coloured smoke and Andrea Bocelli offering a spine-tingling rendition of Nessun Dorma. For once, though, the theatrics and the bombast felt appropriate. As the final notes of the national anthems drained away, the Olimpico was filled with a grateful, guttural, cathartic roar. Football. Nations. Lots of people in the same place. Grown adults yelling. How we've missed this, all of it. And after a nervy start, Italy soon took control, dominating territory and possession.



Michael Holding critical of England's 'moment of unity' Test gesture



London, June 11 : England's pre-match "moment of unity" has drawn scorn from Michael Holding, who believes the gesture is akin to saying "all lives matter" and sits in stark contrast to the backbone shown by Gareth Southgate's footballers. During the visit of New Zealand the England players have lined up before both Tests wearing T-shirts that carry an array of anti-discrimination slogans, having last summer moved away from taking a knee for the Black Lives Matter message following the departure of the West Indies side. This was in part fuelled by supposed concerns about the politicisation of BLM but for Holding, whose powerful testimony at the Rose Bowl last year drew widespread praise and has led to Sky subsequently winning a host of broadcasting awards, any such link is irrelevant. Speaking to Sky cricket on the second day of the Edgbaston Test, Holding said: "When you hear people saying BLM is Marxist, some of those people don't even know who Karl Marx is or what he stood for. But they tell you that because they are trying to pull down the movement of BLM. I have no idea who started the political movement or who started the website. I care about the three words: Black. Lives. Matter. I'm going to go further with this England team. What they are doing now with this 'moment of unity', that is not supporting Black Lives Matter. Don't tell me that's supporting Black Lives Matter. Because what you are doing there is, when I say Black Lives Matter, you are telling me all lives matter." England's footballers have pledged to continue taking a knee during

Euro 2020 despite boos from their own supporters in recent times. Holding, who has written an upcoming book on racism called Why We Kneel, How We Rise, is full of praise here. "[The manager] Gareth Southgate and the England team, I applaud them. They're getting a lot of stick for taking a knee, they are getting booed. But they are showing some backbone. They are showing some intestinal fortitude, to say: 'OK, but we are still doing it because we know what we're doing. We are not doing it for the political movement, we are doing it for humanitarian reasons.'" The criticism of English cricket comes at an acute time. Ollie Robinson is awaiting possible sanction for offensive tweets sent in 2012 and 2013, while questionable posts from other England players are also being assessed. Azeem Rafiq is still awaiting the outcome of an investigation regarding his allegations of racism at Yorkshire and, separate to this, is taking the club to an employment tribunal next Wednesday with a claim for discrimination and harassment on the grounds of race. On Friday it also emerged Lancashire are looking into "more than 50 tweets" from five squad members that date back to 2011 and, according to the Lancashire Telegraph, contain "racist, homophobic, anti-disability or misogynistic content". Daniel Gidney, the Lancashire chief executive, said: "We abhor all forms of discrimination which, as a club, we find totally unacceptable. We are currently undertaking an immediate review and investigation and the relevant information has been referred to the England and Wales Cricket Board."

After much waiting Euro 2020 opener shows football's restorative powers

London, June 12 : Delayed gratification is supposed to be good for the soul but, particularly in a pandemic, it is easy to become tired of waiting. Yet if no one can yet be quite sure whether staging Euro 2020 in 2021, one year and one day after its original, scheduled start date, will prove quite as restorative as Uefa hopes, this curtain-raiser inside Rome's Stadio Olimpico served as a welcome reminder of football's transformative powers. After so many months of so much human loss, Italy and Turkey emphasised that even a highly unconventional tournament spread across 11 countries and op-



erating in accordance with sometimes stiflingly strict Covid protocols has retained its traditional power to enchant. Football is full of false dawns - Middlesbrough fans may remember Lee Cattermole was pre-

turely dubbed "the new Steven Gerrard" after a fabulous one-off Uefa Cup performance against Roma in the Stadio Olimpico - but Roberto Mancini's Azzurri surely demonstrated why they rank among the tournament favourites. With Jorginho controlling midfield and Ciro Immobile's intelligent movement contradicting his surname, an impressively high-pressing Italy were as relentlessly efficient as their suave manager is expensively elegant. Turkey defended well during the first half and, despite subsequently being made to look extremely ordinary, are arguably not yet done but,

game one of 51, kick-off was preceded by a suitably extravagant opening ceremony. There is often a sense of "once you've seen one, you've seen them all" about these preambles and, sure enough, the initial display of giant coloured balls, unfurling national flags, fireworks, coloured smoke and harnessed drummers dangling on ropes suspended from the stadium roof, seemed both utterly spectacular and pretty par for the course. The tone was raised significantly once the slick choreography and Euro synth rock soundtrack was replaced by the sight of the tenor Andrea Bocelli standing on the pitch in a royal blue jacket giving a spine-tingling rendition of Nessun Dorma. Evocative felt an understatement. For five minutes the world felt wonderful again. All this ceremonial stuff concluded with aerial drone shots tricking television viewers into believing a kaleidoscopic display of coloured flares and twinkling lights had transformed the ground into a giant birthday cake studded with candles. It hardly mattered whether or not the players would match such artistry (although Domenico Berardi and co most definitely did as they passed and moved at pace). For the 16,000 fans who had traversed the tree-lined boulevard leading to a stadium sandwiched between the Tiber and the Monte Mario hill it really must have felt a bit like several birthday parties rolled into one. The largely joyous noise they generated belied the fact

the stadium was only a quarter full. After so long spent performing behind closed doors, the tempo - at least from Italy - remained surprisingly intense and energetic for an opening game on such a humid evening. The players looked high on adrenaline with Mancini's charges increasingly finding their one- and two-touch passing range and ruthlessly penning Senol Gunes's side into their own half. Insigne played a lovely one-two with the ever dangerous Berardi but couldn't quite wrap his foot around the ball and bend it into the top corner while only Ugurcan Cakir's fingertips kept Giorgio Chiellini's header out. Further half-chances - plus a penalty appeal after the ball struck Zeki Celik's arm - came and went but, initially at least, Turkey maintained their defensive cool, making it tough for Mancini's men by pulling everyone behind the ball and, albeit briefly, transforming their compact out-of-possession shape into the sort of formidable red (shirted) wall even Boris Johnson probably dares not dream of commanding. It soon crumbled though, leaving Gunes's pre-match desire for a rematch with Mancini's side "in the final" appearing somewhat ambitious and Italy's failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia almost unfathomable. Along with an entire continent's football fans, Immobile and friends now appear determined to make up for lost time. Maybe, just maybe, good things really do come to those who wait.



Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova's French Open run a feat of mental strength

Moscow, June 12 : Throughout her career, Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova's talent has never been in doubt. Her ball striking has always been clean as a whistle, her touch supreme since the days she was terrorising far older junior players aged just 14, but her success has always been handcuffed by her mental game. It has made her breakout tournament in Paris all the more impactful. While the women's semi-finals produced the rare scenario of four first-time semi-finalists, an instance that only happened 43 years ago at the 1978 Australian Open, not everybody was in the same boat. Most players have had to break new ground in terms of their performance along with their results, but that cannot really be said of Pavlyuchenkova. Her consecutive wins against Aryna Sabalenka, the third seed, Victoria Azarenka and Elena Rybakina were excellent. But before this tournament she had already defeated 35 top-10 players, won 12 titles and garnered more than \$10m in prize money. What she has done so far this week is consistently replicate her level and frequently manage the important moments far better than before. Against Sabalenka and Rybakina, two of the most destructive ball strikers in the sport, she hit a combined 38 fewer unforced errors than her opponents while constantly trying to expose their movement. Her win against Azarenka, conversely, was her shotmaking at its best as she refused to relinquish control of the baseline. But her most impressive showing was rather the contest she was most heavily favoured to win - her semi-final victory against Tamara Zidansek. Pavlyuchenkova has been waiting to reach her first semi-final for 10 years since she blew a 6-1, 4-1 lead against Francesca Schiavone in 2011. When she did, she was heavily favoured against, at least historically, a far inferior player. That alone could have been her downfall and she later explained how it was even tougher than other encounters: "You think, 'OK, I'm ranked higher, whatever.' [...] It definitely was a lot of mental game going

on there." Over the past two weeks, Pavlyuchenkova has shown she is in some of the physical form of her life and with age she now knows how she needs to carry herself in order to get the most out of herself. Asked earlier in the tournament when she first felt like an adult on the tour over her more than 15 years as a professional, the 29-year-old said she developed that maturity in the past year. Against Zidansek, she navigated her way to victory by using all of her experience. Pavlyuchenkova banked on her game's more solid foundations and her ability to play at a high level for a long period of time, maintaining her depth and relentlessly harassing Zidansek's backhand: "I tried to stay in the match every point. I had my tactic. I knew what I had to do. So, just the discipline. I was trying to follow the discipline simply." "Disciplined" is not a word even her most ardent fans would have used to describe her in the past, yet over the past two weeks it has defined her. With the discipline she has demonstrated this week, she will also be favoured against Barbora Krejickova in the final on Saturday. While only one spot separates them in the rankings - Pavlyuchenkova is ranked 32nd and Krejickova 33rd - they will arrive in their first major final under completely different conditions. No player has taken longer to reach their first major final than Pavlyuchenkova in her 52nd event. Conversely, a year ago Krejickova was outside of the top 100. It was not until Roland Garros last year that she contested a main draw at a major as a direct entrant for the first time. Now they will play for the whole thing. "I definitely didn't expect to be in the final this year," said Pavlyuchenkova. "I guess you can't expect those things. I was just there working hard, doing everything possible. I just said to myself: 'You know what? This year let's do whatever it takes, anything you can do to improve your game, your mentality. Started working with a sports psychologist, everything.' I just wanted to give it a try so I have no regrets after. That's it."

Olympic boxing champion Claressa Shields wins MMA debut by TKO

London, June 12 : Olympic boxing champion Claressa Shields made short work of Brittney Elkin, and the mixed martial arts novice proved she may have a future in the sport with a TKO win on Thursday night in the main event of a Professional Fighters League card. "I'm not losing this fight," the undefeated boxer said. "I got myself going with those big right hands. My right hand has never failed me. Shields proved in her 155lbs lightweight fight she's just as adept at unleashing a beating in mixed martial arts. She shook off a slow first two rounds before she got Elkin on the ground and needed a few heavy shots to cause the decisive damage. She earned the win with a right hand at 1:44 of the third round. "I feel like I am dreaming. This is crazy," she said. Shields ditched some of the flamboyant costumes she's worn in boxing (where she's 11-0) for straight red trunks and top. She still wore her hair in a blue ponytail to raise awareness to the clean water fight that's gone on for years in her hometown of Flint, Michigan. She has already won the light middleweight, middleweight and super middleweight crowns in her boxing career and was the fastest fighter in history either male or female to become a three-division world cham-

pion. Shields only started her MMA training in December. Shields calls herself the GWOAT, the Greatest Woman Of All Time. At least in boxing. In MMA, her inexperience showed early. Elkin took Shields down early in the first round and mounted her as she pounded the rookie in the face. Shields took more of a beating in one round than she did over most of her pro boxing career. Elkin landed a big right early in the second that did little to rattle Shields. Elkin went back to the mount and kept the career boxer on her back. Shields escaped

trouble late in the second and swung and missed on a wild right before she connected on more head shots that set the stage for the third round. "I kept hitting her, kept hitting her," Shields said. "I told myself, keep hitting her until she quits." Shields won Olympic gold in 2012 in London and repeated the feat four years later in Rio de Janeiro. Shields cut a wide swath of fans: Philadelphia 76ers center Dwight Howard wrote "Let's go champ" on Instagram and actor Rosie Perez tweeted "Best of luck tonight." NFL hall of famer Ray

Lewis, who has an equity stake in PFL and serves on its advisory board, watched cage-side and admired Shields' decision to shift to MMA while still in the prime of her boxing career. "The genius of champions making transitions is they start all over and don't care," said Lewis. "Lot of people are afraid to start over. They end their careers, I'm stuck, I'm good. But when you make that transition, you're chasing something else. I think she's chasing something else and just that's good to see. I just love her adapting to it." CEO Peter Murray said Shields would fight one more time this year for PFL before a decision was made for 2022. "This is just her first step to prove to herself that she has really what it takes to make the '22 season," Murray said. One potential dream match for 2022 in the PFL would have Shields fight Kayla Harrison. Harrison, a two-time Olympic judo gold medalist, has emerged as the face of PFL. Harrison (9-0) fights again on June 25. "We think that's a pay-per-view fight," Murray said. "That starts tonight." Unlike other MMA organizations, the PFL uses a season format, with playoffs and a championship fight night that awards a \$1m prize for each of its six weight class champions.







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