

The Assam Rising

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Two Maoists killed

New Delhi, June 20 : Two Maoist rebels were killed in an encounter with police on Saturday in Orchha's Abujhmad area. A large quantity of Maoist literature has been recovered from the spot. SP Mohit Garg has confirmed the encounter. DRG fighters have been sent to the forest of Abujhmad to carry out Operation Monsoon in the core area of Maoists before the monsoon rains start. After killing a Naxalite in a Naxal encounter on Saturday morning and the Naxal search operation was continued in the area by the soldiers, in the afternoon again the encounter took place for the second time between the police and the Naxalites. One .303 rifle and 315 bore rifles and a huge amount of camping materials were also recovered from the spot.

Seven employees suspended

Guwahati, June 20 : The Assam government on Saturday suspended seven staffers of the Inland Water Transport Directorate for "gross negligence of duty" over partial submersion of a pontoon at Gobardhan ghat in Chandrapur on the outskirts of Guwahati. Transport minister Chandra Mohan Patowary ordered the suspension of the employees deployed at Chaulkhowa-Aparia-Gobardhan ferry service in Bongaigaon district, said an official statement. The suspended staffers are sectional assistant Sahnur Ali Laskar, Puspa Bora and Liladhar Nath, field khalasi Tarani Kalita and khalasi Maheswar Bhuyan, Dwarka Chowdhury, and Mantu Kumar Goswami, it said. The suspended employees cannot leave the headquarters without prior permission of the competent authority, the statement said. The pontoon which was stationed at the ghat on Kolong river for several years had remained partially submerged for about three days earlier this week and the employees concerned had reportedly not taken any action to retrieve it, a senior official said.

Encounter between police and UPRF militants

Guwahati, June 20 : A fierce encounter between the police and militants belonging to the United People's Revolutionary Front (UPRF) is underway in Karbi Anglong district of Assam. Two militants of the UPRF have been gunned down by the police in the encounter. The police have recovered two AK-47 rifles from the possession of the slain militants. Assam DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta has said that "intermittent firing" is still underway at the encounter site. "Braving the elements & extreme terrain, in an encounter @ assampolice in # KarbiAnglong neutralized two militants belonging to United People's Revolutionary Front today.

Assam to vaccinate three lakh people daily from today



Guwahati, June 20 : The Assam government has planned to vaccinate three lakh people every day from June 21 under the enhanced vaccination programme, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday. The CM said that in view of the enhanced vaccination programme under which three lakh people in the state would receive vaccine doses everyday, the district administrations should ramp up the matching infrastructure to make the campaign a success. During a review meeting with the Deputy Commissioners (DC) and District Superintendent of

Guwahati, June 20 : The Chief Minister had a week ago appealed to Assam's migrant Muslims to adopt "decent family planning" measures, predicting conflicts over living space, if the population continued to explode. The Opposition Congress and its ally All India United Democratic Front cited the December 2020 National Family Health Survey data released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to pick holes in the Chief Minister's view. They pointed

Assam to apply population norms to government schemes

out that the fertility rate across most States declined in the last five years. "According to the survey, the fertility rate of women in Assam declined from 2.2 in 2015-16 to 1.9 in 2020-21, indicating the population is showing a decreasing trend," the Congress said. Assam to apply population norms to government schemes. The Assam government has decided to apply "population norms" in all government schemes. The condition



7th Pay Commission: DA hike to come into effect from July 1, check how much raise you will get

New Delhi, June 20 : 52 lakh central government employees, central government servants (CGS), and more than 65 lakh pensioners are all set to start receiving Dearness Allowance (DA) benefits approved under the 7th Pay Commission from July 1, 2021. The Central government has recently confirmed in the parliament about

the rollout of stalled dearness allowance (DA) and dearness relief (DR) from next month. However, many employees are still confused about how much salary they will get from next month onwards according to their 7th pay commission matrix. Currently, dearness allowance is paid at 17% of the basic pay. The DA will be increased by 11% to 28% after it will be reinstated from July 2021 onwards. The 11% hike comes after adding three pending DA hikes, including a 3 per cent jump in DA from January to June 2020, a 4 per cent rise from July to December 2020, and a 4 per cent increase from January to June 2021. Also Read: Delhi unlock: Curbs eased further, bars and public parks to re-open



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Chief Minister Dr. Sarma reviews COVID and flood situation of Dibrugarh district

Asks districts functionaries to go for widespread inoculation under enhanced vaccination programme, Asks DC to fortify embankments to guard against flood

Guwahati, June 20 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma during his second day tour of Upper Assam reviewed COVID-19 situation of Dibrugarh district and flood preparedness of the district and its management strategy in a meeting held at the conference hall



of DC office Dibrugarh today. After taking a detailed review of the COVID situation, the CM directed the Deputy Commissioner and other state holders to focus on intensive vaccination and creation of Paediatric Intensive Care Units (PICU) in the district. He also di-

rected the Principal Secretary Health to monitor the ongoing works carried out for setting up 30 PICU beds at Assam Medical College & Hospital. During the mega vaccination drive which will start on June 21, the Chief Minister directed the health department to ensure vaccination of 15 thousand beneficiaries above 18 years of age every day in the district. He also asked to carry out vaccination at urban and rural areas very extensively in the district. After reviewing flood preparedness, the Chief Minister directed the water resources department to speedily carry out flood protection activities including construction and repair of embankments. He also directed Deputy Commissioner

Chief Minister Dr. Sarma visits Shaktipeeth Malini Than at Likabali

Offers his prayers for health and well being of all sections of the people



Guwahati, June 20 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today visited ' Shaktipeeth ' Malini Than at Likabali in Assam-Arunachal border today and offered prayers seek-

ing divine blessings for the health and well-being of all sections of the people of the state. It may be noted that Malini Than archaeological site belongs to early medieval period

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Can't pay Rs 4 lakhs ex gratia amount to COVID-19 victims' kin, Centre tells Supreme Court

New Delhi, June 20 : Citing financial constraints and other factors, the Central government has informed the Supreme Court on Saturday (June 19, 2021) in an affidavit that ex gratia amount of Rs 4 lakhs cannot be paid to the family members of those who died due to COVID-19. The Supreme Court, earlier on May 24 had issued a notice to the Centre, on hearing petitions seeking direction to the concerned authorities to provide ex gra-



tia compensation of Rs 4 lakhs to the family members of those who have succumbed to COVID-19, as per the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) letter in view of Section 12 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Replying to the notice issued, the Central government said that ex gratia amount cannot be paid due to financial constraints and other factors. However, the Centre government made it clear that it had already

Will Gradually Implement 2-Child Norm For Benefits Under Some Schemes: Chief Minister

Guwahati, June 20 : Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said the Assam government will gradually implement a two-child policy for availing benefits under specific schemes funded by the state. The proposed population control policy will, however, not be applicable in all the schemes in Assam immediately as many of the benefits are offered by the central government, Mr Sarma said at a press conference. "There are some schemes for which we cannot impose the two-child policy, like availing free admission in schools and colleges, or houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana." But, in case of some schemes, say if a housing scheme is launched by the state government, the two-child norm can be introduced. Slowly in later stages,

the population norm will come in every state government scheme," he added. The Chief Minister also criticised the opposition for target-

ing the size of his parents' family. Mr Sarma belongs to a family of five brothers. "There is no point in talking about what



India slams UN Rapporteurs' criticism of new IT rules, says our democratic credentials are well recognised

New Delhi, June 20 : India has slammed the UN Special rapporteurs who have criticized the new IT rules announced in February. In a strongly worded rebuttal, the Indian mission in Geneva highlighted that "India's democratic credentials are well recognised" and "right to freedom of speech and expression is guaranteed under the Indian Constitution". In the letter, the mission pointed out that the Indian Ministry of Information Technology and Information and Broad-



casting had in fact took consultations in 2018 to prepare for draft rules. Also Read: Automakers initiate production ramp-up with easing of COVID restrictions in states. Along with the dip-

lomatic note from the mission, a brief note on the new IT rules on how they are "designed to empower ordinary users of social media" and "victims of abuse at social media platforms shall have a forum for redressal of their grievances." On 11 June, special rapporteurs on right to freedom of opinion, peaceful assembly, and privacy--Irene Khan, Clement Voule, and Joseph Cannataci in a letter said that the rules "do not conform with international

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Tamil Nadu move to appoint women, non-Brahmins as priests triggers debate

Chennai, June 20 : Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department (HR&CE) Minister P K Sekar Babu recently announced that Hindus of all castes would be appointed as priests in over 36,000 temples under its department. He also said women could also be appointed as priests in temples following stipulated training. The minister also said the government will take measures to provide appointments to qualified priests before the newly elected DMK govern-

ment completes 100 days. The announcements, particularly regarding temples opening doors to women priests, have triggered heated debates in the state. While social activists have welcomed the move as they aim at gender and caste parity, there are others who feel the government should not interfere with agama sastra - a manual for temples that has norms related to pujas and other rituals in temples besides guidelines on structure and construction of shrines. Tamil



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Pickup truck driver hits Florida Pride parade spectators, killing one

London, June 20 : A man has died after a truck driver hit spectators at the start of a Pride parade in South Florida on Saturday, seriously injuring another, authorities said. Fort Lauderdale mayor Dean Trantalis said the



pickup truck driver appeared to be part of the Wilton Manors Stonewall Pride parade but then suddenly accelerated when he was told he was next, crashing into the victims, according to WSVN-TV. Trantalis said he believed it to be a deliberate attack. Justin Knight, the president of the Fort Lauderdale Gay Men's Chorus, whose logo the suspect wore on his t-shirt, said that to his knowledge it

was a "tragic accident" and not an attack on the LGBTQ community. The suspect was "part of the Chorus family" and the injured were members, he told local media. Fort Lauderdale police detective Ali Adamson said

Wasserman Schultz, who was in a convertible at the parade. "The parade had just begun and we saw people lining up and ready to move and all of a sudden this white pickup truck dashed right through the crowd, barely missing congresswoman Wasserman Schultz's car by inches and smashed through a gate," he said. In a statement, Wasserman Schultz said she was safe but "deeply shaken and devastated that a life was lost". "I am so heartbroken by what took place at this celebration," she said. "May the memory of the life lost be for a blessing." Scott Newton, the mayor of Wilton Manors, which lies just north of Fort Lauderdale, said: "Out of respect for everyone involved, the parade has been canceled and a thorough investigation is being conducted." Broward County sheriff Gregory Tony said in a statement. "Though authorities are still gathering information, we know two individuals marching to celebrate inclusion and equality were struck by a vehicle. This tragedy took

place within feet of me and my team, and we are devastated having witnessed this horrific incident." Spectator Christina Currie told the South Florida Sun Sentinel. "All of a sudden there was a loud revving of a truck and a crash through a fence ... It was definitely an intentional act right across the lanes of traffic." Photos and video from the scene

showed Wasserman Schultz in tears at the scene. A spokesperson for Wasserman Schultz did not immediately return an email seeking comment. June is Pride Month, commemorating the June 1969 police raid targeting gay patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York that led to an uprising of LGBTQ Americans and served as a catalyst for the gay rights movement.



A family poses for a selfie at the Toronto Zoo in Toronto

Squad goals: Ocasio-Cortez warns Biden patience is wearing thin

Washington, June 20 : Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez asked, pointedly: "Are we passing the deal that helps working people the most? Are we passing the deal that makes the most jobs? Are we passing a deal that brings down the most climate emissions?" They were pointed questions, not personal criticisms. But they will have conveyed a warning to Joe Biden that the patience of the left of the Democratic party and its leaders in 'the Squad' of progressive politicians is not infinite. "Are we passing the deal that helps working people the most?" asked Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the firebrand New York congresswoman and best known member of the squad. "Are we passing the deal that makes the most jobs? Are we passing a deal that brings down the most climate emissions? Are we passing a deal that raises wages and actually improves our infrastructure for the next generation?" Ocasio-Cortez's appearance on the influential TV program Morning Joe last week came with the US president weeks into negotiations with Republicans over a massive infrastructure spending package - and apparently little to show for it. The squad and others on the left of the party have remained broadly supportive of Biden as he seeks to restore an era of bipartisan cooperation. But with his agenda stalling on Capitol Hill, frustrations are mounting and threatening to crack the facade of Democratic unity. It was Ocasio-Cortez, a social media star with a global profile, who hailed Biden's first hundred days in office as having "definitely exceeded expectations that progressives had". After all, the president's staggering \$1.9tn coronavirus relief package had been swiftly passed by Congress and signed into law, albeit without a \$15-an-hour federal minimum wage that liberals have long sought. Now cold reality is intruding, however. Legislation on voting rights, gun safety, immigration and police brutality is faltering in a House of Representatives where Democrats hold a slender 220-211 majority and a Senate split 50-50 with Republicans (vice president Kamala Harris gives the party the tie-breaking vote). Biden's next big ticket item, the American Jobs Plan, which initially proposed more than \$2tn for infrastructure, is facing a rockier road. He conceded ground in negotiations with Republican senator Shelley Moore Capito that ultimately collapsed. Then a bipartisan group of senators came up with a \$1.2tn proposal but, progressives say, it fails to address the climate crisis, healthcare and childcare. Democratic leaders are now discussing a two-step process in which they pass a smaller bill with bipartisan support but then follow up with a second measure passed through a process known as budget reconciliation, which would require near total party unanimity. The underlying challenge for Biden is

how to keep together an unwieldy Democratic coalition that encompasses conservative senator Joe Manchin from West Virginia - which is Donald Trump country - and senator Bernie Sanders, a self-declared democratic socialist from Vermont, who this week drafted a \$6trn infrastructure package. Then there is the squad, the left-leaning group of House members that now consists of seven people of color. The more that Manchin digs in his heels against ambitious legislation, the more restive the squad is likely to become, raising difficult questions over whether Biden is applying sufficient pressure to bring the doubters on board. Yvette Simpson, chief executive of the progressive organization Democracy for America, said: "Right now people are really getting frustrated because it's been six months and we don't see Joe Biden engaging in the way that he should to push for more support. In fact, he's negotiating against us and what Democrats want." So I think there's a growing sense of frustration among progressives and it's understandable. We're feeling like the clock is running out and we're wasting valuable time and that's where you're going to start to see the squad and other members of the progressive movement push back and saying, 'OK, we've got a limited window of time here. We need to put up or shut up.'" With more than two in three Americans supporting the infrastructure bill, according to a Monmouth University poll, Simpson argues that the squad is on the right side of history. "Their relentlessness, their fearlessness and their persistence on this should be rewarded; they should not be punished because they are fighting for what we should be doing anyway." There's going to be some blowback if the squad is fighting for things that we actually should get done and the rest of the party is saying, oh no, Republicans aren't on board, oh no, let one person decide that he's going to hold up an entire agenda for the entire nation, that the entire nation wants overwhelmingly. "Although the Biden administration has actively engaged with progressives in its early months, there have been some flash points. Ocasio-Cortez and others were quick to speak out when it emerged that Biden intended to retain Trump's cap on the number of refugees allowed into the US; the administration blinked first and backed down. Squad members including Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Michigan's Rashida Tlaib sharply criticized Israel for its recent bombing of Gaza and challenged the Biden administration's unwavering support for the country. And when Harris told Guatemala, "Do not come" to the US, Ocasio-Cortez called the comment "disappointing" and noted that it is legal to seek asylum. Ocasio-Cortez has also been pushing Biden to face up to the fact that bipartisanship with

a radicalized Republican party is a doomed enterprise. She tweeted: "Pres. Biden & Senate Dems should take a step back and ask themselves if playing patty-cake w GOP Senators is really worth the dismantling of people's voting rights, setting the planet on fire, allowing massive corporations and the wealthy to not pay their fair share of taxes, etc." Jamaal Bowman, one of the squad's newest members, said bluntly that Manchin "has become the new Mitch McConnell", referring to the Republican senate minority leader infamous for obstruction, after the West Virginia senator declared support for the legislative filibuster while opposing an expansive voting rights bill. The interventions carry weight in part because of the squad's outsized influence in both mainstream and social media. Ocasio-Cortez has 12.7m followers on Twitter. Activists praise them for speaking with moral clarity about Washington's failings in a way that strikes a chord with the public. Maurice Mitchell, national director of the Working Families Party, said: "I don't think they are outside mainstream thinking around the frustrations that people have with the Senate as an institution or the limitations that present themselves with such a narrow margin and with Joe Manchin continuing to buck his own caucus. They're playing a very useful role." Their willingness to dissent is a sign of party strength, not weakness, Mitchell argues. "When Joe Biden moves the struggle forward, they will give him credit for it. There are examples where the Biden administration has been outside of what we would consider progressive values and they've course corrected and it was, I think, because the squad were not afraid to call it." It led to the Biden administration actually getting better on those issues. That's an example not of disunity, but co-equal branches operating as they should. "But when it comes to the current legislative gridlock, some commentators argue that the squad would be wrong to take out their frustrations on the president, given

the balance of power in the Senate. Larry Jacobs, director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota, said: "I don't know how you criticise Biden for Manchin. Biden is putting up the legislation they'd like. The problem is Congress and the sheer numbers. It's an arithmetic problem more than an ideology problem." Democrats' narrow majority in the House should, in theory, give the squad more leverage over party leadership than ever. They threatened to torpedo a \$1.9bn spending bill to upgrade US Capitol security in the wake of 6 January insurrection over concerns about more money going to police; eventually three voted no, three voted present and one voted yes; the bill passed by a single vote. Dave Handy, a New York-based political activist



and consultant who worked on Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign, said: "We have a very slim majority in Congress. The squad now wield more power than they're giving themselves credit for. I don't know why they're ignorant of their bargaining position and the hand that they're holding." "Everybody else at the table seems to be aware of this. Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema in the Senate are very aware of the cards that they're holding. The squad is completely aloof. I'm not even sure they know that they're playing poker. They might think they're playing checkers." Handy argues that the squad should pressure Biden and other Democratic leaders much harder. "I don't think that they're wielding as much influence as they could be. The squad was elected to be rabble rousers. They are there to agitate. Theirs is the role of a reformer in Congress and, in my estimation, in this current Congress, they have not been doing that."

Five construction workers die in Belgium school collapse

Antwerp, June 20 : Five building workers have been confirmed dead after a school construction site partially collapsed in the Belgian city of Antwerp. The last two bodies were pulled out the rubble on Saturday afternoon, Antwerp's fire department said, meaning that all the missing victims were now accounted for. King Philippe of Belgium visited the scene on Saturday, accompanied by Belgian prime minister Alexander De Croo. Two of the dead were from Portugal and Romania, police told local media, while the nationality of the other dead

workers was not clear. But when three people were still missing, rescue workers had said they were looking for two more Portuguese and one Russian. Nine other people were injured in the incident on Friday afternoon, with three still in intensive care a day later. None were in critical condition, the fire department tweeted. As the school was still under construction, no students were present when the accident happened. The cause of the collapse was not known, but all the victims were sub-contractors for construction firm Democo, Belga news agency reported. "All the employees are devastated," Frederik Bijmens, Democo's managing director, told Belga. "Now that the emergency services have done all they can, a thorough investigation will begin to identify the cause of the accident," he added.



Visitors look at a goat at the Toronto Zoo in Canada

He pledged unity. But now PM hopes to tighten grip on war-torn Ethiopia

London, June 20 : Tens of millions of Ethiopians are expected to vote on Monday in crucial elections that could provide a launchpad for controversial prime minister Abiy Ahmed to consolidate his increasingly authoritarian rule. Abiy, who won the Nobel peace prize two years ago after concluding a peace deal with neighbouring Eritrea, will face voters at the ballot box for the first time in Africa's second most populous nation. Just over a fifth of more than 500 parliamentary constituencies are not voting due to logistical problems, violence or the war in Tigray. The conflict in the northern region

in the western city of Jimma. "The forces that saved Ethiopia from collapsing will turn the horn of Africa into Africa's powerhub. "Violence in Ethiopia, a patchwork of ethnic and linguistic groups theoretically united by a federal system, has surged since Abiy took power and implemented a series of wide-ranging reforms. In his first 18 months in power, Abiy freed more than 40,000 political prisoners, brought many more women into high office, lifted a ban on political parties, allowed more media freedom and opened up sectors of the economy. But jails are filling up again, with thousands reportedly held in military camps and more than 20 journalists imprisoned in the past year. "The situation now is as dire as it used to be before, if not more," said Fisseha Tekle of Amnesty International. Many parties in Oromiya, the nation's most populous region and site of last week's rally, are boycotting the polls, alleging government intimidation. Whatever the results of this week's poll - and Abiy is not



expected to lose - he will have to deal with a looming economic crisis. The country of 110 million faces an acute lack of foreign currency and has sought unsuccessfully to defer debt repayments. Billene Seyoum, the prime minister's spokeswoman, has described the election as a chance for citizens to "exercise their democratic rights" and accused the international media of mounting a "character assassination of the prime minister". Western diplomats and humanitarian agencies say that 350,000 people in Tigray are now suffering famine, with many millions more threatened by acute lack of food. Diplomats warned that if the promised changes did not follow the polls, further collective international pressure would be applied, insisting "if nothing is done, this is going to be an entirely man-made famine". They said they had received private assurances from senior Ethiopian ministers that restrictions on humanitarian access to famine areas could be eased once the elections were over. The UK ambassador at the UN, Barbara Woodward, has already warned: "It's not a drought or locusts that are causing this hunger, but the decisions of those in power." So far Ethiopia has ignored traditional diplomatic levers. These include two successive G7 statements, withdrawal of EU funding from the Ethiopian government, and the imposition by the US of visa sanctions on some Ethiopian officials. The Observer, Guardian and other media have reported a series of massacres over the last six months, with the most recent just weeks ago.

broke out in November after fighters loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the region's then-ruling party, attacked government military bases. Federal troops forced the TPLF to abandon its stronghold of Mekelle, Tigray's capital, after six weeks of fighting but have struggled to end an ongoing insurgency. The conflict has roots in a struggle for power at a national level. The TPLF dominated the government for decades until Abiy's appointment by the ruling coalition in 2018. It was unclear if the war would boost Abiy in the polls, analysts said. "At the beginning, the war was good for Abiy. The TPLF had been in power for a long time and had done a lot of crimes. They were very unpopular. But now there is a very costly stalemate, it is much more of a problem for [Abiy]," said Yohannes Woldemariam, a US-based independent analyst. Supporters of the prime minister are hoping the elections will strengthen his new Prosperity party. The election was originally scheduled for August 2020 but was delayed, with officials blaming the Covid-19 pandemic. It will involve candidates from more than 40 parties. Campaigning has been short. Abiy, a 44-year-old former military intelligence specialist, told a crowd of tens of thousands of supporters last week at his only rally that Ethiopia would show a sceptical world that he could unite his fractious country. "The whole world is saying we will fight [each other] but we will show them differently," Abiy told a packed stadium



shows sand creations for the upcoming 22nd Zhoushan International Sand Sculpture Festival in Zhoushan, east China's Zhejiang Province

CM Himanta Biswa Sarma visited Namrup Thermal, APL, BVFCL, Oil India LTD, AGCL and DNPL headquarters in Namrup and Duliajan

Naharkatia, Jun 20: With the objective to review the Oil, Gas, Petrochemicals, Power, and Fertilizer industrial upturn, CM Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma made a two day visit to Oil India LTD, Assam Gas Company Ltd, DNPL, APL, Namrup Thermal and BVFCL headquarters in Duliajan and Namrup starting from Jun 19. On Saturday, to review the ongoing and upcoming projects Assam Petrochemicals Limited, Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corporation Limited and Namrup Thermal Chief Minister paid the visit to Namrup. He arrived at Duliajan yesterday night and continued his review meeting with Oil India Limited Officials at the registered regional office of the Crude oil and natural gas national explorer and producing second largest profit making PSU. After reviewing the development and upcoming avenues of Oil India LTD today CM Himanta Biswa Sarma visited DNPL and AGCL head office campuses at Duliajan. CM Sarma visited campus of Duliajan-Numaligarh Pipeline Limited (DNPL) at Duliajan and inaugurated the 4th gas compressor package operation as its gas compression station. Minister of State in Ministry of Food Processing Industries Rameswar



Teli, Assam State Ministers Atul Bora, Bimal Borah, Sanjay Kishan, MLAs Taranga Gogoi and Terosh Gowalla, Chairman of DNP Ltd. Rupam Goswami accompanied Himanta Biswa Sarma in his visit to DNPL. The industrial upcoming project reviews and monitoring of the CM continued as he then talked about the impending project and proposals of Assam Gas Company Limited at its head quarter premises at Duliajan. Later in his briefing to the Media persons at the AGCL campus at a press conference, Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "Assam Gas Company Limited has been the backbone of BVFCL,

APL and Namrup Thermal as the State run PSU's have run on the gas supply done by AGCL. It is a good news for the masses of Assam that AGCL with their relentless efforts made a 40% increase in their gas reservoir. AGCL made an affirmative turnover of Rupees 300 crores in the last fiscal and succeeded to paid a dividend of 5 crores to government of Assam." Elaborating on his visions about AGCL Himanta Biswa Sarma further said, We arrived at a decision to collectively take Assam Gas Company Ltd to Rupees One thousand crores turnover business holding position so evidently there will be an

increase in the amount of Dividend paid by AGCL to Assam Government." Giving a detailed view of his visit CM Sarma said, "We're committed to augmenting power generation capacity of Assam. We have future plans to implement the fourth unit of BVFCL. The methanol extension project of APL has almost been complete. I have Visited power generation campus of Namrup Thermal Power Station (NTPS) in Namrup and keep myself updated from officials on the status of Namrup 100 MW Combined Cycle Replacement Power Project, Phase-I which is under trial run, and which when operational will add to our capacity. I also reviewed preparedness for the Namrup Replacement Power Project, Phase-II. We have inspected the 500 TPD Methanol expansion project being implemented at APL Namrup. Yesterday we have visited Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corporation Limited (BVFCL) at Namrup, Dibrugarh & took comprehensive review of its units and proposed efforts for commissioning of 4th plant. To realise our dreams of BVFCL, Namrup Thermal and APL we need to strengthen the gas supply scenario from AGCL. The realization of the dream of

AGCL to mark its presence among Rupees one thousand crores turnover company so should be an uncompromising mission for us." Giving a light to the visit to registered regional OIL Headquarter at Duliajan, Himanta Biswa Sarma Said, "Last year the socio political happenings post Baghjan Blowout and some other unavoidable situations resulted in the decline production of Crude oil from Oil India Limited. OIL has produced less than 3 MMT of crude oil last fiscal. The whole scenario made Assam Government a loss of Rupees Eight Hundred Crores from the crude oil Major." Sarma added. Now we decided to provided all the necessary help and assistance to OIL so that the Company could be back to track soon. "The presence of OIL as a profit making giant is a must for the interest of the State of Assam. So, I assured OIL that issues pertaining to land acquisition & forest clearances are being looked into." Sarma further said. Along with the cabinet Ministers and team of MLA's MD AGCL Gokul Chandra Swargiary, AGCL DGM Manoj Kumar Baruah, DC Dibrugarh Pallav Gopal Jha accompanied CM Biswa Sarma at the press conference.

Sonitpur deputy commissioner Bhupesh Chandra Das pay tribute to Bishnu Prasad Rabha

Rangapara, June 20: Assam has been fondly recalling the contributions of Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha on his death anniversary which is celebrated as Rabha Divas. Sonitpur deputy commissioner Bhupesh Chandra Das paid tribute to Rabha, one of the doyens of assamese culture and literature. On the occasion of Rabha Divas today, Deputy Commissioner Bhupesh Chandra Das today paid rich tributes to Kalaguru



Bishnu Prasad Rabha at a program organised at Bishnu Rabha Samadhisthal at Kalibari, Tezpur in the presence of Hon'ble MLA Tezpur and son of Bishnu Rabha, Prithiraj Rabha and other prominent citizens and journalists. Earlier in the day, he attended a program organised at Tezpur Sahitya Sabha premises and offered floral tributes to the cultural doyen on the occasion of his 52nd death anniversary today. He then attended a programme at Baan Theatre in Tezpur held to pay rich tributes to the revered cultural icon and social reformer. He was accompanied by CEO, Zilla Parishad Diganta Baishya, DDC Subhan Gowala and other senior officials of the district administration. Recollecting the contributions of the cultural doyen to the world of literature, culture, the Deputy Commissioner said his rich legacy will continue to inspire generations to come and urged the young generation to take his legacy forward.

Rabha Divas observed in North Lakhimpur

North Lakhimpur, June 20: Lakhimpur District Multi-lingual Poets' Meet, in collaboration with Lakhimpur District Horizon Mazdoor Union, organised Rabha Divas program at Ma-Kali Temple premises, Horizon Colony here today adhering strictly to Covid protocols. As per the programs, after community cleanliness and plantation, Labour leader Nandalal Basfor lit the lamp and Swahid Tarpan by Assam Multi-lingual Poets' Meet Vice-president Rupiyoti Dutta. Then, a discussion titled "Contributions of Kalaguru to the national life and it's relevance to present time" was held under the chairmanship of Lakhimpur District Multi-lingual Poets' Meet President Mohan Kumar Das where sportsperson Latiful Ahmed Hussain, yogasadhak Bhadreswar Das, poet Manoranjan Das etc. participated as speakers. Dipshikha Das performed song and many poets recited poems during the discussion. Pyarelal Prasad Sharma, Faruk Ahmed, Parboti Basfor, Mufti Abdul Hasib and many other dignitaries attended in the discussion. Rupiyoti Dutta anchored the discussion, besides giving welcome address. Earlier in the discussion, a one-minute silent prayer was held for the eternal peace of the departed souls of the dead died of Covid-19.

Rabha Diwas Observed in Golaghat

Golaghat, Jun 20: To mark the occasion of the death anniversary of Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha, one of the pioneers of Assamese art and culture, literature and a revolutionary leader Rabha Diwas is observed throughout the state. In Golaghat also this particular day is observed today. Today Golaghat District Sahitya Sabha and Paschim Golaghat Sakha Sahitya Sabha jointly observed Rabha Diwas at the office of Golaghat District Sahitya Sabha. Lighting of lamp was done and tributes were paid to the legend. Similarly Golaghat Regional Students Union today observed Rabha Diwas by hoisting of flag, Swahid Tarpan and paying floral tributes to Kalaguru and Sainik Shilpi Bishnu Prasad Rabha. In Khumtai a cleanliness drive was conducted near Ganakpukhuri by the local women and cleanliness drive was also conducted at the area where construction work for a children park and flower garden are going on. On the other hand renowned artist Rana Kalita paid tributes to Bishnu Rabha through his painting work near Golaghat Municipal Board office.

Minister Suklabaidya inaugurates Gram Sabha hall, GP Office building, business shop at Derby GP

Guwahati, June 20: Minister for Forest and Environment, Fisheries and Excise, Parimal Suklabaidya inaugurated a Gram Sabha hall constructed at an estimated cost of Rs.6 lakh under the 14th Finance Commission Award for 2018-19 at Derby Gaon Panchayat under Narsingpur Development Block in Cachar district on Sunday. The Minister also inaugurated a business shop in front of Derby GP Office built under the 14th Finance Commission Award for the year 2017-18 amounting to Rs 6.7 lakh and extension of Derby GP Office building under the 14th Finance Commission Award for the year 2016-17 at an estimated amount of Rs.5 lakh. Deputy Commissioner, Cachar, Keerthi Jalli, Chairman, Cachar Zila Parishad, Amitabh Rai, CEO, Cachar Zila Parishad, Madhya Dholai Zila Parishad member Sashanka Chandra Paul, BDO Narsingpur Block, Probab Das Gupta, Narsingpur Block Assistant Engineer Rajkumar Roy, West Dholai ZP member, Lakshmi Rani Yadav, Derby GP President, Pradip Kanu, among others, were present on the occasion.

Biswanath fully geared up to meet it's 7000 daily vaccine target

Biswanath Chariali, June 20: Biswanath district has fully geared up itself to achieve its daily target of administering 7,000 vaccines from June 21 onwards; so that the state's ambitious target of administering 3 lakh jabs per day, as envisioned by Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, is achieved. Deputy Commissioner Mr. Pranab Kumar Samah informed that to help achieve the ambitious target of administering daily 7,000 vaccines seamlessly, the administration has significantly scaled up the number of Covid Vaccination Centres (CVCs) in the district. Around 25 new CVCs have been readied to meet the enhanced target and 200 doses of vaccines would be assigned to each centre. For tea garden workers, vaccines would be provided at their respective tea garden hospitals. Any person above the age of 18 and carrying any of the government issued identity cards, like Voter Card, Aadhar Card, Pan Card, Driving License, Ration Card, can walk in into a CVC, do a

spot registration and get vaccinated. The whole process would be on a first-come-first-served basis. Beneficiaries will be administered either first or the second dose of Covishield vaccine; depending upon their requirements. Mr. Samah yesterday chaired a meeting with health and other concerned departments at his Conference Hall and reviewed the micro-plans prepared for achieving the ambitious target. Personnel from various other departments have been trained for deployment at the new CVCs. To cater to the old and vulnerable population, few of the newly readied centres would be Near-to-Home CVCs (NHCVC). The Deputy Commissioner has also asked concerned departments to associate local organizations and the civil society in creating awareness among people for vaccination, particularly in tea garden areas. Aggressive announcement strategy through mobile vans has also been chalked out in the district to generate further awareness towards vaccination.

Pious Lady Died

Golaghat, Jun 20: Dipa Saikia (55), a pious lady from Lakhbari area in Golaghat died in a hospital in Guwahati on June 18. She has been suffering from a critical disease for the last couple of years. Her husband Chakreswar Saikia and her son work at Jallan Mani Tea

Company. Dipa Saikia was associated with several religious and social institutions



of Lakhbari and Jamuguri area. Her death is deeply mourned by the workers and staff of Jallan Mani Tea Company as well as the local people. She left behind her husband, a son, two daughters, daughter in law, son in laws, grandchildren and many other relatives.

Guwahati, June 20: Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today visited Margherita in Tinsukia and held a meeting with senior officers of Coal India Ltd. He discussed various issues pertaining to re-starting mining activities in the North Eastern Coalfields (NEC). Later talking to the newsmen, he said that issues like pollu-



tion, forest and environmental clearances etc are involved regarding resumption of mining activities and a tripartite meeting between Ministry of Coal, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India and Government of Assam would be held next month in New Delhi to take final decision in the matter. He said all stakeholders must come together to find a solution to the problem and said the Coal India Ltd. should also

come forward in this regard by taking steps such as contributing in Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) which is meant for promoting afforestation and regeneration activities. He said a concentrated and scientific approach is needed to resolve the issue and steps have to be taken in a phased manner to achieve the balance between mining and forest protection. The Chief Minister also received memorandums from various organisations and stakeholders today and said that a way would be found to resume economic activities without harming the environment. Steps have to be taken for sustaining economy, livelihood and environment, he said. Union MoS in Ministry of Food Processing Rameswar Teli, Agriculture Minister Atul Bora, Tea Tribes Welfare Minister Sanjay Kishan, MLAMargherita Bhaskar Sharma and senior officers of concerned departments were also present in the meeting.

Massive afforestation drive to expand green cover in Assam

Guwahati, June 20: Massive afforestation drive is on to increase green cover in Assam. The Environment and Forest department has taken up mega plantation drives in different parts of the state, with focus on degraded land. The area covered under afforestation schemes under Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC), Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) and State Owned Priority Development (SoPD) of National Forestry is 35,916 hectare. It may not be out of place to mention here that more than four crore seedlings have been distributed free of cost to the people against the target of 10 crore seedlings in mission mode under Pollution Free Assam. Under Phase II of APFBC, 12,500 hectare will be brought under plantation, besides 1,800 hectare plantation under CAMPA. Sahitya Manishi Upabans have come up in 24 districts of the state. Each Upaban showcases rich indigenous floral biodiversity of around 1,000 plant species having medicinal values in an area of three hectare. "Afforestation taken up under different schemes has yielded a very positive impact on the state's green cover. As per the latest India State Forest Report, 2019 published by Forest Survey of India, Government of India, Assam's green cover has extended to 221.51 sq.km, which is quite a significant achievement," said Forest and Environment Minister, Parimal Suklabaidya. Another step toward strengthening conservation effort is reconciliation of forest

boundaries with the help of Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS) and satellite imaginary under CAMPA. "It will be done in three phases starting with reconciling the forest boundaries of some of the divisions on a pilot basis," said a forest official privy to the development. The department is among the front runners under SDG 15: Life on Land in NITI Aayog's SDG India Index 2020-2021. Among the 17 broad based global goals (Sustainable Development Goals) with 232 indicators, the State of Assam had a composite score of 78 on SDG15 this year which is higher than the national average



score of 66. Though there was a 12 per cent decline this year as compared to the composite score of 90 in SDG India Index 2019-2020, the Environment and Forest department managed to make it to the front runners' slot - not a mean feat by any standards. "The downward slide of 12 points is mainly due to over a double increase in number of wildlife cases detected in protected areas, thus impacting the score," said a forest official, adding that most of the indicators have shown either no change or marginal improvement. As regards forest plus tree cover as a percentage of the state's total geographical

area, Assam has registered 37.91 per cent as against the all India average of 24.56 per cent. In terms of percentage of state's geographical area covered under afforestation schemes, the state with 0.457 per cent is marginally lower than the national average of 0.51 per cent. Insofar as percentage of degraded land over total land area is concerned, the State stands at 9.45 per cent as against the national average of 27.77 per cent. As a way forward towards conservation efforts, the Environment and Forest department is focusing on biodiversity conservation and forest area development, including restoration of degraded forests, habitat improvement of wildlife and extension, human-wildlife conflict management, identification, mapping, securing of corridors, extension of forest cover, enhancing forest and ecosystem resilience to frequent floods and droughts and disaster risk reduction. It will also given added thrust to community strengthening, forest and non forest based livelihoods, recreation forestry that include aesthetic forestry and developing ecotourism sites, institutional strengthening and capacity building of staffs and officers, structural reorganisation of field staff and technology interventions and partnerships with local people, NGOs, CBOs, educational and Research and Development institutions. As climate change is intertwined with environment (SDG 13: Climate Action), the Forest department has been making assessment of climate change impacts coupled with strategies to adapt forests to climate change while preparing a baseline for state forest reference level.

THE ASSAM RISING

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Theaterisation of the military

An expert committee has been constituted for carrying forward consultations within the three Services, besides the home and finance ministries, to chart the way forward on theaterisation of the military. The committee, which comprises the Vice Chiefs of the three Services and the Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC), comes after a high-level review meeting held last week showed that not all stakeholders are on board. "A committee has been formed earlier this week which will speak to all stakeholders, including the home ministry and the finance ministry," a source said. As reported by ThePrint, a number of issues had come up for discussion at the review meet, with several different views on how the theatre should be structured and who the theatre commanders should report to. Incidentally, the changes proposed could also entail extension of tenure of current officers who could become Theatre Commanders, which could affect the seniority of some officers. While a timeline for the committee has not been fixed, sources said it will start work instantly and carry forward discussions. The big dilemma facing the government and the armed forces is whether theatre commands, which call for a joint war strategy, should be country-specific or based on challenges. The government had last week asked all relevant stakeholders to sit together and discuss the issues further so that all kinds of reservations or diverse thoughts are settled and everyone is on the same page. As the secretary for the Department of Military Affairs, Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat has been tasked with "facilitation of restructuring of military commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint/theatre commands". The plan is to roll out two theatres first - the Maritime Theatre Command and the Air Defence Command. In total, the current plan is to have five theatre commands. The nearly 17-lakh strong Indian armed forces have 19 commands as of date. Of this, only two of them are tri-service commands - the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) and the Strategic Forces Command, which looks after nuclear assets. The idea is to cut down these different service commands to five theatres and functional commands like logistics and training.

Ronaldo's Coke snub is a start. Over to Indian celebs to tell us 'darr ke aage obesity hai'

It's not the first time a celebrity's denouncement of a branded product has sent its shares tumbling, but the sheer drama with which footballer Cristiano Ronaldo shoved two bottles of Coca-Cola out of the camera at a European Championship press conference made it a historic, meme-worthy moment. The market response was quick. Coca-Cola's market value plunged by \$4 billion. What makes the entire episode so fulfilling is that Ronaldo didn't give a damn that Coca-

Cola is one of the top 12 sponsors of Euro 2020. Maybe he had had some Thums Up before coming to the conference - who knows! In the meantime, Pepsi, it seems, remains the go-to drink of our cricket team. Although Cristiano Ronaldo's act is getting all kinds of attention, he isn't the first celebrity to remind the world just how bad Coca Cola - or any other carbonated soft drink - is for people's health. We all



know how much caffeine and sugar they contain, are extremely water intensive, and are possibly the easiest way to put on weight in an unhealthy manner. Bollywood veteran Amitabh Bachchan confessed at an event in 2014 that a little girl made him give up endorsing Pepsi and he became conscious about promoting such products. Ramdev ran an entire campaign denouncing the drinks as toilet cleaners. These two have been the OG anti-coke influencers in India. For many

adults, the entire functionality of Coke/Pepsi/Thums Up is to mix it with their Old Monk and have it with Blue Lay's. Maybe Ronaldo would understand if he ever gets his hand on an Old Monk bottle. For now though, what Ronaldo has unwittingly done is possibly heralded an era when people would start de-endorsing soft drinks in the same way that they once denounced tobacco, as lobbies weaken in front of

the evident ill-effects to one's health. Just see how quickly it sparked off similar reactions: within a day, France midfielder Paul Pogba removed a beer bottle of Heineken placed in front of him, while Italy midfielder Manuel Locatelli also put aside Coca-Cola bottles at a press conference, inviting warnings from the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). Walk the talk, practice what you preach, etc. etc. must apply to brand ambassadors. While Cristiano Ronaldo snubbed coke for water in Budapest, earlier he was busy endorsing the brand. Safe to assume, he

Shubhangi Misra

wasn't drinking it back then either. Same goes for India cricket captain Virat Kohli, who decided against endorsing fairness creams and Pepsi. Much like the UEFA, you will also see these brands sponsor sports in India, and associate themselves with actors. Let's talk about cricket in silos here. Pepsi sponsored the Indian Premier League (IPL) from 2013 to 2015, and has historically employed India's cricket stars as its brand ambassadors. Their sponsorship ended prematurely after corruption scandals in the IPL came to light. Coca-Cola will remain the International Cricket Council (ICC)'s main beverage partner until 2023. This subconsciously allows us to associate the drinks to athletes - one of the fittest people on the planet. It's not difficult for them to wonder, 'If Virat Kohli drinks Pepsi or Ronaldo drinks coke and even endorses it, then what's the harm in it?' But when those same celebrities disown a brand and take up responsibility, it makes people sit up and take note. Such de-endorsements are important. Fictional character Don Draper from Mad Men who dominated Madison Avenue street and the ad world in the 1960s, wrote a full-length ad on Lucky Strikes, a cigarette com-

pany that comprised 35 per cent of his agency's revenue but was pulling out of business with them, ending a long partnership. His ad in The New York Times was titled 'Why I'm Quitting Smoking', where Draper succinctly pens down how and why advertisers have been selling us poisonous products, "For over 25 years we devoted ourselves to peddling a product for which good work is irrelevant, because people can't stop themselves from buying it. A product that never improves, that causes illness, and makes people unhappy. But there was money in it. A lot of money. In fact, our entire business depended on it. We knew it wasn't good for us, but we couldn't stop," Draper wrote. Mad Men was set in a time when restrictions on selling tobacco products were just taking off. We have known, for a while now, that soft drinks are just as harmful to us and damage our bodies in ways we don't fully understand. Yet, we tolerate them. In 2016, non-alcoholic beverage market in India was Rs 37,660 crore with carbonated and aerated drinks accounting for 40 per cent of it. Since the production of aerated drinks drains the water resources at places they are manufactured, companies aggressively direct their CSR (corporate social responsibility) towards water conservation projects and return every drop of water they use. Though it's doubtful it ever happens. There was a time when Bollywood stars Akshay Kumar and Jackie Shroff were selling cigarettes. Today, Salman Khan, Hrithik Roshan, Ranbir Kapoor, cricketer Shafali Verma and the like are selling soft drinks. In the near future, perhaps Ajay Devgn or Shah Rukh Khan won't be able to do a 'Zubaan kesari' and sell us Vimal Elaichi, and Hrithik Roshan won't be able to get away by saying 'Darr ke aage jeet hai' to sell us Mountain Dew. Because it's more than clear that Mountain Dew ke aage sirf diabetes or obesity hai.

Covid has devastated India's self-employed women

Lasuben Shivalal Raval is a 70-year-old grandmother from Ahmedabad in India. She has worked as a 'headloader' - a goods carrier - in one of the city's biggest wholesale cloth markets for decades. Her work was always tough, but life became immeasurably harder for Lasuben and her fellow workers when Covid-19 struck and business slumped. Yet she has not given up, and in her position as the leader of the local headloaders she has helped coordinate assistance for her sister workers. The efforts of Lasuben and thousands of aagewans, or local women leaders, has been crucial in the current crisis. Embedded in their communities, they have been pivotal in providing health education and awareness about coronavirus, as well as linking people to basic medical care. The impact of COVID-19 in India has been devastating, and the burden has not fallen equally. Women employed in the country's huge informal economy have been hit disproportionately hard as millions of livelihoods have become even more precarious or evaporated completely. As the world looks beyond the current crisis to a post-pandemic future, it is essential to ensure lower-skilled workers like Lasuben are not left behind by the shifting tectonic plates of the global labour market, and that they have the tools to achieve self-reliance. The task is daunting. Women employed as domestic workers in India's cities - frequently migrants from rural areas - have lost work in vast numbers, forcing many to return to their home villages. Those working as street vendors could not sell their goods due to lockdowns and manual labourers have also seen demand for their services disappear overnight. This dire situation is made doubly hard by the increased demands on women to provide unpaid care to the sick, the elderly and young children during the health emergency and prolonged lock-downs. With schools and childcare centres shut for over a year now, the challenges are manifold. This loss of work and rise in care demands has left many women and their families struggling for survival. Unsurprisingly, it is the poorest and most vulnerable households that are the worst affected, with many now going hungry and having to cope by cutting back their food consumption. The problematic combination of informal work, poverty and gender bias is common in many developing nations, but it is particularly acute in India, given the structure of the economy and society. The country has one of the world's highest rates of informal employment - and the pandemic has increased this further, leaving the vast majority of citizens outside the protection of labour laws or any social security net. Today, an estimated 93% of the workforce, or 500 million people, work informally in India, compared to a global average of 61%. With unemployment rising in both urban and rural settings, the situation is particularly severe for women, who tend to have lower-paying and less secure work than men. As result, women have suffered more livelihood losses than men during the pandemic, as pre-existing gender inequalities exacerbate an already difficult situation. What is more, the experience from

... Those working as street vendors could not sell their goods due to lockdowns and manual labourers have also seen demand for their services disappear overnight ...

India's first wave of COVID-19 was that men are the first workers to be taken back as lockdown restrictions are eased. Faced with this erosion of livelihoods, there is an urgent need for a cooperative approach to help women - both to help them survive the crisis in the short



term and to get them back on their feet to find gainful employment in the longer term. My organization, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), has half a century of experience in organizing women through a joint strategy of union and cooperatives. Inspired by the

MIRAI CHATTERJEE

values of Mahatma Gandhi, it brings together 1.8 million informal women workers across 18 Indian states in a national trade union. Today, we are putting this collective strength to work to fight the devastation caused by the pandemic. We support women like Lasuben and Ayeshaaben, a garment worker turned health worker. She first joined the cooperative movement without being able to read or write but is now a key member of a healthcare cooperative that disseminates information on sexual-reproductive health and provides COVID-19 relief. We have provided community health kits and food boxes to self-employed women leaders, as well as teleconsultations with doctors and counsellors in half a dozen different languages. At the same time, we must look to the future, given the structural obstacles facing informal women workers in India. Unfortunately, the pandemic has added to several labour-market changes already underway that disadvantage women, including a shift to

greater mechanization of farm and construction work, which has traditionally been done by hand by women. The pandemic has also exposed a growing digital divide in society. This division needs to be addressed as a priority if the accelerated shift towards online working is not to exclude millions of workers without the skills or resources to participate. Yet despite these problems, there are also opportunities for women microentrepreneurs and female-owned collective enterprises to tap into, if they receive the right support. Examples include artisans who have switched to making protective face masks; a health cooperative producing Ayurvedic medicines that is now supplying hand sanitizers and immune system boosters; and catering businesses that are providing

tiffin (packed meal) deliveries for isolating individuals and families. In the agricultural sector, meanwhile, women are joining together to protect and improve the food supply chain - an essential component both for food security and to ensure a sustainable livelihood for farmers. We must now build on these successes to help women's enterprises explore new strategies and provide them with the right training, digital tools and working capital to succeed - whether they are based in cities or the countryside. Specific ideas include connecting farmers with consumers of their vegetables in local cities via WhatsApp, opening a direct marketing link that cuts out middlemen, or supporting a city-based cooperative to establish a deep-cleaning business for offices to meet today's more stringent requirements. One thing is clear: the informal sector plays a pivotal role in the Indian economy - accounting for 55% of GDP - and big business, government and society at large must do more to ensure that its workers receive a fair deal. This ultimately means universal health care, as well as social protections like childcare, insurance and pensions. The vulnerability of millions of informal sector women workers has been cruelly exposed by the pandemic. But with the right decentralized approach, re-building from the local upwards, we can build a better future for them, their families and their enterprises.

Don't expect Netanyahu's departure to alter the course of politics in Israel

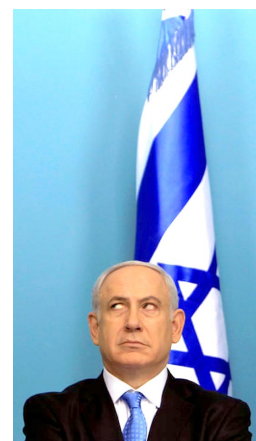
It would be encouraging to think that the massive upheaval afoot in Israeli politics with the unseating of Benjamin Netanyahu also signals a seismic shift in political culture. Perhaps a turning point in its democratic decline, even a move towards ending its rule over millions of Palestinians. Unfortunately, it signals none of these things. The burning desire to depose Israel's longest serving leader is certainly the driving force behind the disparate eight-party coalition that hopes to replace him. But another factor also unites them - by default, if not by design: the consensus that in determining the future of the Jewish state, the conflict with the Palestinians can be managed in perpetuity. Netanyahu, more than any other Israeli leader, has promoted this idea, cementing it so fast within the national consciousness that it may be his most enduring legacy. It is a sign of how invisible the Palestinians now are in Israeli politics that even the truly historic inclusion of an Arab party in the coalition has not introduced them on to the agenda. Islamist party Ra'am is using its four seats to extract some narrow gains for its own constituency but, like

all the other partners, has agreed not to become entangled in the whole Palestinian issue for the purposes of avoiding friction. For a long time, the decades-long occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip did play a central role in Israeli politics and in a national debate over the direction of the Zionist project. Even after the failure of the Oslo accords, successive prime ministers at least stayed theoretically loyal to the idea of implementing a two-state solution. Netanyahu did something different. He sold Israelis the idea that the occupation of millions of unwilling Palestinians could be managed as an inconvenience rather than an existential threat. The Arab spring and the Syrian civil war not only shifted global attention away from Israel-Palestine but gave weight to Netanyahu's premise that now was not the time to even consider the creation of a Palestinian statelet. No matter how much European liberals decried its human rights record, Israel's economy continued to soar. Amid lurid warnings that Israel's policies would make it the pariah of the west, Netanyahu pursued stronger economic and diplomatic ties with less fastidious partners in Africa, Asia and eastern

Europe. And life was good. No matter how much European liberals decried its human rights record, Israel's economy continued to soar, singer Netta won the Eurovision song contest in 2018 and the Jewish state ushered in the world's most successful coronavirus vaccine programme. Donald Trump's warm embrace, with the US embassy's move to Jerusalem, the annexation of the Golan Heights and a sequence of peace deals with Arab monarchies, seemed to validate Netanyahu's entire strategy. In the midst of such national success, it's not a hard narrative to sell to your constituents - that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is uniquely intractable and because of eternal Palestinian intransigence, the problem must be managed or at best shrunk rather than resolved. That is not so different from the view of Yair Lapid, the leader of the largest bloc and slated to become prime minister in 2023 if by some miracle the coalition lasts until then. The Mondeo Man of Israeli politics, he represents a huge and significant constituency of centrist, secular citizens. But they want civil marriage, subsidised childcare and for buses to run on Jewish

holidays more than they want to confront an occupation with little impact on their day-to-day lives. As for Naftali Bennett, the potential next prime minister and once Netanyahu's political protege, he has done more than anyone to rebrand the whole image of the settlement enterprise within Israel. He transformed the staunch party of religious Zionism from a clutch of dusty old hilltop zealots to one that claimed to offer a home to all Jews, including, like himself, urbanites in hi-tech businesses. The argument that the overriding impetus for control over the Palestinian territories was not religious fanaticism but security proved a concept much more palatable to the wider Israeli public. The presence in the coalition of the fragmented rump of the Zionist left, leaping at the chance to finally regain some kind of political relevance, will also not revive the Palestinian issue. Labour and Meretz have nothing fresh to offer, clinging to the idea of the two-state solution as a kind of magical thinking to perpetuate their dream that Israel can be both Jewish and democratic. The Netanyahu years have shown that aim to be an illusion.

Daniella Peled



Delhi govt eases Covid restrictions further, allows parks, golf clubs to reopen from Monday; check details

New Delhi, June 20 : Coronavirus Cases in India News Live: As the overall Covid-19 cases in India declined consistently for over a few weeks, several states are now unlocking and easing restrictions, the latest being Telangana that announced the complete reopening of the state starting Sunday, with all educational institutes set to open from July 1. The decision was taken after the state cabinet examined reports by the Medical and Health department and found that the number of positive cases

with 1,576 fresh fatalities, the lowest in 63 days. Recoveries continue to outpace daily new cases for the 38th days in a row. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 2,87,66,009, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.29 percent, according to Health Ministry data. The Centre has urged the states to ensure test-track-treat and vaccination the "extremely important" five-fold strategy of Covid-appropriate behaviour to prevent the spread of the disease. The roll out of

stitute of Epidemiology and Microbiology has developed Sputnik V and the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) is marketing it globally. Odisha's COVID-19 tally surged to 8,77,502 on Sunday as 3,577 more people tested positive for infection, while 40 fresh fatalities pushed the state's coronavirus death toll to 3,590, a health official said. As many as 2,039 new cases were reported in quarantine centres, while 1,538 fresh infections were detected during contact tracing, he said. Khurda district, under which Bhubaneswar falls, reported the highest number of new cases at 571, followed by Cuttack (407) and Jajpur (337). Bargarh and Cuttack districts recorded the highest number of fresh fatalities at five each, followed by Koraput, Mayurbhanj and Rayagada (four each), and Ganjam, Jharsuguda and Khurda (three each). The Delhi government has allowed reopening of bars, public parks and gardens from Monday under a phased easing of restrictions, which were imposed due to the second Covid wave. The Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in an order on Sunday stated that bars will be allowed to reopen with 50 per cent seating capacity, from 12 pm to 10 pm, from next week. The Philippine government has signed a supply agreement for 40 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer Inc and BioNTech SE, the head of the government's COVID-19 vaccine procurement said on Sunday. Deliveries of the vaccine, among several brands of coronavirus shots allowed for emergency use in the Southeast Asian country, will begin "after eight weeks starting August", Carlito Galvez said in a statement. The deal comes as a delay in vaccine deliveries had earlier this month forced some cities in the capital region to close vaccination sites, complicating Manila's efforts to ramp up its immunisation drive in an Asian country with one of the biggest numbers of infections and deaths. With the latest deal, the Philippines has now secured the delivery of 113 million doses from five vaccine manufacturers namely, Sinovac with 26 million doses, Sputnik V with 10 million doses from Moderna, 17 million doses from Astrazeneca, and now 40 million doses from Pfizer, Galvez said. He described the Pfizer-BioNTech agreement as "the biggest and most decisive deal we had for 2021". "(It) will significantly boost our national immunisation programme and will enable us to realize our goal of achieving herd immunity by year-end," Galvez said. "This

is another positive development that will give a happy and better Christmas for all Filipinos. The Philippine government has signed a supply agreement for 40 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer Inc and BioNTech SE, the head of the government's COVID-19 vaccine procurement said on Sunday. Deliveries of the vaccine, among several brands of coronavirus shots allowed for emergency use in the Southeast Asian country, will begin "after eight weeks starting August", Carlito Galvez said in a statement. The deal comes as a delay in vaccine deliveries had earlier this month forced some cities in the capital region to close vaccination sites, complicating Manila's efforts to ramp up its immunisation drive in an Asian country with one of the biggest numbers of infections and deaths. With the latest deal, the Philippines has now secured the delivery of 113 million doses from five vaccine manufacturers namely, Sinovac with 26 million doses, Sputnik V with 10 million doses from Moderna, 17 million doses from Astrazeneca, and now 40 million doses from Pfizer, Galvez said. He described the Pfizer-BioNTech agreement as "the biggest and most decisive deal we had for 2021". "(It) will significantly boost our national immunisation programme and will enable us to realize our goal of achieving herd immunity by year-end," Galvez said. "This

Ather 450X, 450 Plus new city-wise prices out: Rs 14,500 cheaper after FAME II subsidy revision

Mumbai, June 20 : Ather Energy says that the revised FAME II incentive is applicable to all scooters that have been invoiced on or after 11th June, 2021. In order to be precise, the Ather 450X and Plus electric scooters have gotten cheaper by Rs 14,500 post the FAME II revision. A few

price of Rs 1,13,416. Now, talking of Bengaluru, which happens to be Ather Energy's home market, the 450X electric scooter is now available here for a price of Rs 1,44,500 while the Ather 450 Plus is now priced here at Rs 1,25,490. Apart from these cities, the company has announced the reduced



days back, the Government announced its decision to increase electric two-wheeler subsidies under its FAME II scheme. In order to be precise, a notification issued by the Department of Heavy Industry had stated that the incentive for electric two-wheelers in the country has now been increased to Rs 15,000 per kWh compared to the previous Rs 10,000 per kWh. As a result of this, electric two-wheelers in India have now become cheaper significantly. That said, if you have been noticing prices of electric bikes and scooters slashing in recent days, now you know the reason behind it. Among all EV makers, Ather Energy was the first one to announce the price cut for its products. After the FAME II subsidy revision, the Ather 450X electric scooter now costs Rs 1,32,426 in the National Capital. On the other hand, the lower-spec Ather 450 Plus is now available in Delhi for a reduced

prices for cities like Ahmedabad, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Kochi and Jaipur. The price info for other cities in which Ather Energy currently operates in has been updated on its official website. The company says that the revised FAME II incentive is applicable to all scooters that have been invoiced on or after 11th June, 2021. In order to be precise, the Ather 450X and Plus electric scooters have gotten cheaper by Rs 14,500 post the FAME II revision. Here are reduced prices for the Ather 450X and 450 Plus in 18 cities (where Ather Energy is currently selling its electric scooters) across India, you can check out the company's official website. Stay tuned with Express Drives for more updates and also, subscribe to our YouTube channel for the latest auto news and reviews.



has come down drastically and the situation is now under control in the state. Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh have also relaxed Covid-19 curbs from June 21. In Uttar Pradesh from Monday (June 21), the night curfew hours will be from 9 pm to 7 am and shops, malls, and restaurants can be opened till 9 pm on weekdays. Saturday and Sunday will be weekly holidays. At Karnataka shops, hotels, clubs to operate till 5 pm. Meanwhile, AIIMS Chief Randeep Guleria told the Indian Express that the next three months are crucial for India as the unlifting of restrictions can lead to a rise in cases. Red flagging the emergence of cases in the UK with the Delta variant, he said the timeline of the third wave will depend on two factors transmissibility and Covid-appropriate behavior. India reports 58,419 new Covid cases, 1,576 deaths in the last 24 hours, the lowest in 81 days, taking the total number of Covid-19 cases to 2,98,81,965, according to the Union Health Ministry data on Sunday. The number of active cases in the country also declined below 8 lakh to 7,29,243; The death toll climbed to 3,86,713

Russian COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V at Indraprastha Apollo and Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital in Delhi has been delayed for some days, officials said on Sunday. A spokesperson of Apollo Hospitals said the facility in Delhi will tentatively start administering the two-dose vaccine by June 25. An official had earlier said the hospital would start giving Sputnik V jabs by June 20. According to an official of Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital, there is a delay on the part of the suppliers. "We are expecting (roll out) next week," he said. Fortis Healthcare, which had said it would make Sputnik V available at its Gurgaon and Mohali hospitals from Saturday, also has not started administering the Russian vaccine so far. "The roll out did not happen on Saturday. We expect there will be some clarity on Monday," an official said. The Centre has fixed the price of the vaccine at Rs 1,145 per dose. The maximum price of Covishield for private COVID-19 Vaccination Centres (CVCs) has been fixed at Rs 780 per dose, while that of Covaxin is Rs 1,410 per dose. Russia's Gamaleya National Research In-

Recent GST clarifications and their impact : Tax relief in milling, pharma, education, food sectors

Mumbai, June 20 : The government recently published numerous clarifications on various issues pursuant to the decisions taken in 43rd and 44th GST Council Meetings. Many of these will have a positive impact on the public at large. No intention of delaying fixing minimum wages and national floor wages: Labour Ministry. No intention of delaying fixing minimum wages and national floor wages: Labour Ministry. Govt to link innovative agriculture technologies to farms to help farmers in North East region. Amid the situation of Covid-19, it would be cogent to say that citizens of the country were eagerly waiting for the grant reliefs and benefits beyond date extensions. The country's middle class suffered significant losses in the current situation. The keen move by CBIC for providing clarification relating to the exemption of GST on various services provided by the Central and State Boards such as National Board of Examination (NBE) will benefit millions. CBIC clarified that GST would not be levied on services provided by the Central or State Boards, including NBE, in the conduct of examinations for students including entrance exams. This move will benefit millions of households whose wards are at different levels in education. Furthermore, GST is also exempt on input services relating to admission, or conduct of examination, such as online testing service, result publication, admit card and questions papers etc., when provided to such Boards. This will further rationalize the cost of educational institutions, the benefit of

which can be passed on to the households. The Mid-day Meal Scheme ("MDMS") is the flagship school-based meal program of the Government of India. In India, 115.9 million children from vulnerable segments receive cooked meals every school day through the MDMS. The GST Council also stated that food services given to educational institutions (catering, including mid-day meals) are excluded from GST, regardless of whether the institution receives money from government grants or corporate donations. Hence, serving food to anganwadis shall also be covered by said exemp-

COVID-19 has crushed the education ecosystem, fueling spending on mid-day meals will attract more students relegating into a win-win situation for both the corporates and students. The GST council also clarifies that no GST is applicable on the composite supply of service by way of milling of wheat into wheat flour, by any person to a State Government for distribution of such wheat flour under Public Distribution System. However, in case the supply of service by way of milling of wheat into flour or paddy into rice is not eligible for the exemption for the reason that value of goods sup-

on the basis of calculation. This clarification will undoubtedly end all the pending disputes where the summons have been issued related to the milling of wheat or paddy. GST Council, in its 44th meeting, reduced the GST Rates on the specified items being used in Covid-19 Relief and Management till September 30, 2021, as specified below: The Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers, National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) instructs all manufacturers and marketing companies to revise MRP of drugs/formulations on which tax/GST rates have been reduced. Recalling, re-labelling, or re-stickering on the label of container or pack of released stocks in the market prior to the date of notifications is not mandatory if manufacturers are able to ensure price compliance at the retailer level through the issuance of a revised price list. Whereas savings in medication and related equipment is beneficial to the public, limiting the exemption period would make it impossible for businesses to plan new investments and expand their supply chains to ensure that relief material reaches every corner of the country. Companies engaged in the manufacturing and trading of these medicines would hope that the relief period is extended beyond September 30 till the time this pandemic threat is over. Recent clarifications establish that the spirit of the GST council is to ease the complexities in the GST Law, including GST rates. The interest of all the States and Center is to ensure that there is a balance and fairness in the taxation principles. We look forward to many other clarifications in the coming months on the GST taxation principles.



tion, whether sponsored by government or through donations from corporates. This clarification on the applicability of GST on food supplies to Anganwadis and Schools will reduce the cost of such meals, especially for corporate donors. Educational institutions involved in supplying such meals lower their GST costs, could now approach corporates to increase the budget for such donations/ contributions to fulfill their Corporate Social Responsibilities. Rural India, where the

plied in such a composite supply exceeds 25%, then the applicable GST rate would be 5%. This clarification will positively impact the industry as, in many cases, DGGI has demanded GST @ 18% from taxpayers. Now the taxpayers can claim the benefit under this clarification, and the material component will be decided on a case-to-case basis, which has to be checked by the books of accounts and cost sheets. Refunds can be filed on excess tax

No intention of delaying fixing minimum wages and national floor wages: Labour Ministry

Mumbai, June 20 : The government has no intention to delay fixing minimum wages and national floor wages, the labour ministry said on Saturday. The clarification comes amid reports that forming an expert group on the issue with a three-year term is an attempt to delay fixing minimum wages and national floor wages. Earlier this month, the Centre constituted an expert group under the chairmanship of economist Ajit Mishra to provide technical inputs and recommendations on fixing these wages. The tenure of the group is three years. Govt to link innovative agriculture technologies to farms

to help farmers in North East region. Monsoon, Indian agriculture, Kharif, rabi. Normal monsoon to support economic recovery; will agri commodity price rally continue in coming days? The provision of minimum wages provided in the labour code on wages was passed in 2019. Currently, the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act apply to workers in scheduled employments, including mining, plantations and services. The wage code is meant to ensure the "right to sustenance" for every worker and extends the legislative protection of minimum wage to 100% of the country's 50-crore workforce from the current 40%. In an official statement issued Saturday,

the labour ministry said, "The tenure of the expert group is three years. It has come to notice that certain sections of the press and some stakeholders required." First meeting of this group was held on June 14 and the second meeting is scheduled for June 29," it said. After the labour ministry announced the



have opined this as an attempt to delay the fixation of minimum wages and national floor wages by the government. It is clarified that the government does not have any such intention and the expert group will submit its recommendations to the government as early as possible," the statement added, but did not mention any timeline for implementation of the provision. The government, however, stated that the tenure of the panel has been kept as three years so that even after the fixation of minimum wages and national floor wages, the government may seek technical inputs or advice from the expert group on subjects related to minimum wages and national floor wages, as and when

constitution of the panel, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-affiliated Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), the country's largest trade union, flayed the move. "Workers across the country are feeling cheated today as the government has not been able to bring about a change in minimum wages in the last seven years and another three years for completion of this report would mean an end of the incumbent government's current tenure as well," wrote BMS general secretary Binoy Kumar Sinha to Union labour minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar on June 5. Other trade unions also criticised the government for delaying the implementation of the provision.

Contd. From Page 1

Assam to vaccinate three lakh

Police of all 34 districts via video conferencing, Sarma asked the health department to generate adequate awareness by sufficient publicity. He also reiterated the need of vaccinating all sections of the people right from government employees to vendors. A health official said that from June 21 onwards, the Centre would give free vaccinations to everybody above 18 years of age. He also asked the health department to provide Rs 100 to each paramedical staff engaged in vaccination for their transportation. Sarma directed the DCs to ensure proper food for them. Over 2,000 vaccination centres would be set up across the state to undertake the enhanced vaccination programme. Over 53.20 lakh of Assam's 3.30 crore population have been vaccinated. They include 10.55 lakh people who have received both the Covid doses.

Assam to apply population norms

will initially not apply to the tea garden community and people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told journalists on Friday evening. "Whether it is a waiver of loans or government schemes, we are going to implement the population norms in the near future. "The number of children per woman or family would be kept on the higher side but would gradually be brought down, he said. The State government has already implemented the Population and Women Empowerment Policy of Assam that makes any person with more than two children ineligible for government jobs and election to the panchayats and civic bodies. The policy came into effect on January 1. The Chief Minister had a week ago appealed to Assam's migrant Muslims to adopt "decent family planning" measures, predicting conflicts over living space, if the population continued to explode. The Opposition Congress and its ally All India United Democratic Front cited the December 2020 National Family Health Survey data released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to pick holes in the Chief Minister's view. They pointed out that the fertility rate across most States declined in the last five years. "According to the survey, the fertility rate of women in Assam declined from 2.2 in 2015-16 to 1.9 in 2020-21, indicating the population is showing a decreasing trend," the Congress said.

Can't pay Rs 4 lakhs ex gratia

made payments and a lot of government measures had been introduced for the needy persons. In its affidavit before the Apex Court, the Centre also submitted that the Central government and all the state governments have spent a huge amount for needy persons to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and their finances are overstretched. According to a petition filed in the Supreme Court, keeping in view the spread of COVID-19 virus in India and the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), by way of special onetime dispensation, it has been decided to treat it as notified disaster for the purpose of providing assistance under State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). The Central Government issued a revised list and norms of assistance from SDRF and National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) through its MHA letter and recommended ex gratia compensation of Rs 4 lakhs per deceased person, the petitioner claimed. The petition also sought the issuance of direction to respondents, respective State Governments to fulfil their obligation to take care of victims of the calamity and their family members. The lawyers - Reepak Kansal, and Gaurav Kumar Bansal - in their petition, filed before the Supreme Court, sought immediate appropriate directions to the concerned authorities to pay financial help or ex gratia amount of Rs 4 lakh, as laid down by the Central government in its statute and rules to the family members of the deceased, who succumbed to COVID-19 pandemic. Pointing out that "the medical officers have not been conducting post mortem of the persons who are dying due to COVID-19", Reepak Kansal said, "It is the right of the family members to know the real cause of death of their family member/relative on any official document."

Will Gradually Implement 2-Child

our parents did or other people did in the 1970s. The opposition is saying these strange things and pushing us back to 70s," he added. The Chief Minister, who assumed office last month, has been advocating a two-child norm for using benefits under the government schemes. On June 10, Mr Sarma had spoken about recent evictions in three districts and urged the minority community to adopt "decent family planning policy" for population control to reduce poverty, which leads to shrinking of living space and consequent land encroachment. He had also blamed the immigrant Muslim community for having large families, drawing sharp reactions from various quarters, including the AIUDF having a strong base in the community. Assam currently has a two-child norm along with requirements of minimum educational qualifications and functional sanitary toilets for contesting in panchayat polls as per an amendment in 2018 to the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994. Mr Sarma also said that the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) chief and MP Badruddin Ajmal has been appreciative of the government's thrust on women education, which has a correlation with population control. "Badruddin Ajmal met me yesterday. He appreciated the importance we are giving on women education," he added.

India slams UN Rapporteurs'

human rights norms". The letter pointed that "India as global leader in technology innovation" can develop "legislation that can place it at the forefront of efforts to protect digital rights" United Nations special rapporteurs are individuals for specific issues or countries who usually advise or report on a specific issue. The French word literally means someone who reports to a body. In the letter by the Indian mission, salient features of the new IT rules were also highlighted. These included, Grievance Redressal Mechanism, Ensuring Online Safety and Dignity of Users, especially for women users, Removal of Unlawful Information. The new IT rules came into effect a few weeks ago but some social media platforms like Twitter haven't complied with them. Other social media platforms like WhatsApp had gone to the high court on the issue of traceability of messages as envisaged under the new IT rules. Traceability means finding the first message and who created it, something WhatsApp says violated its privacy policy. Also Read: 7th Pay Commission: DA hike to come into effect from July 1, check how much raise you will get

Chief Minister Dr. Sarma visits

and was built by Chutiya kings in the 13th -14th century. The Chief Minister Dr. Sarma visiting the Than took a look at the ruins of the archaeological site which are preserved at the temple campus. During the visit, the Chief Minister was also felicitated by the Malini Than archaeological site management committee and expressed its gratitude to the Chief Minister for having visited the site. Union Minister of State for Food Processing Industries Rameswar Teli, Education Minister Dr. Ranuj Pegu, Tea Tribes Welfare Minister Sanjay Kishan, MPs Pradan Baruah and Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, MLAs Bhuban Pegu and Taranga Gogoi were also present during the visit of the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister Dr. Sarma

Pallab Gopal Jha to take appropriate steps for providing financial assistance to flood affected victims and repairing of damaged houses as well as school, Anganwadi Centre buildings under the new financial power delegated to the DCs. Union Minister of State for Food Processing Industries Rameswar Teli, Agriculture Minister Atul Bora, Power Minister Bimal Bora, Tea Tribes Welfare Minister Sanjay Kishan, MP Pradan Baruah, MLAs Prasanta Phukan, Chakradhar Gogoi, Binod Hazarika, Punakan Baruah, Terosh Gowala, Taranga Gogoi, Bhuban Pegu were also present during the visit.

7th Pay Commission: DA hike to

Commission, the salary of a central government employee consists of three components: basic salary, allowances and deductibles. The minimum basic salary of central government employees according to the pay matrix is Rs 18,000. On the existing pay matrix, Rs 2,700 per month will be directly added to the basic salary of the central government employees. With the hike, employees' total dearness allowance will increase by Rs 32,400 on annual basis. The employees of the Central government are requesting the Centre to pay DA arrears. However, the government has already made it crisp and clear that no arrears will be paid for DA hike that would have been come into effect a lot earlier than there been no pandemic. Also Read: India can't comprise with its digital sovereignty under leadership of PM Narendra Modi: RS Prasad.

Tamil Nadu move to appoint

Pe Maniarsan, president of Tamildesa Podhuudamai Katchi, said the initiative to appoint non-Brahmin priests in temples began during the era of social reformist and rationalist Periyar E.V. Ramasamy when he launched the 'Koil Nuzhaivu Porttam' (temple entry agitation) to eradicate discriminatory practices against non-Brahmin priests. "In 1971, Kalaigarn Karunanidhi amended the HR & CE Act to abolish the hereditary appointment of priests which paved the way for non-Brahmins to become priests. Many outfits challenged the Act and later Kalaigarn informed the public that the Supreme Court had struck down the amendment. In 2006, the DMK government again issued an order where it mentioned that any Hindu possessing requisite qualification and training can be appointed as Archaka in temples. It was again challenged by many outfits, including Sivachariyargal Nala Sangam, in the Supreme court. The case continued for many years, and in its judgment in 2015, the court didn't strike down the DMK's order but allowed any qualified Hindu to be appointed as priest in Hindu temples while ruling that the appointment of archakars will have to be made in accordance with Agamas," he said. After the DMK government passed an order in 2006, as many as 207 men including many from SC/ST communities were trained for priesthood in major temples. After the first batch graduated from as many as six schools, the programme was shelved. Till date, only two of the government-trained non-Brahmin priests have been appointed in temples. Shanmuganthan (37), who hails from Turaiyur in Trichy district, was one of the priests who graduated from the training programme in 2007-08. He said as many as 15-20 people have gone to other countries and the rest have taken other government jobs. "It has been a long wait. We are hoping that the government will provide appointments to us soon. We haven't received any notification from the department, we just came to know through the minister's announcement. We don't know whether there will be another round of interview, as we were already chosen for the programme after undergoing theory and practical tests," he said. Murali Battar from Sri Ranganatha Swamy Temple in Srirangam said appointment of non-Brahmins as priests was already in practice in the DMK regime. "This is already in practice in temples like Siruvachur Madhurakaliamman temple, this is nothing new. The government didn't specify whether they would implement this in temples run as per Agama Shastras. If that is the case then we do have a difference of opinion because you cannot go against tradition. We will take it up legally," he said. A priest from Chidambaram whose family had been involved in temple services for more than three decades said tradition is different from rules. "There is no rule that women cannot become priests. However, rules are different, traditions are different. Women priests already exist in our state. In Siru Theiva Vazhipaattu Thalangan you can see a lot of women priests. In many instances, when the male priest is not available, his wife or his daughter do puja in small temples in villages. We have not appointed women as priests so far owing to practical difficulties, security reasons being the main among them. For early morning puja, the priest has to reach the temple by 3 - 3:30 am to make necessary arrangements. If women are appointed, then there will be security concerns," he said. Arjun Sampath, the leader of Hindu Makkal Katchi, too, reiterated that it is against tradition to appoint women priests. "We have to say just one thing, the government doesn't have the right to get involved in internal matters of the temples. Sun rises in the east only, you cannot change that. Similarly, you cannot change traditional practices that have been in place for over thousands of years. HR and CE can concentrate on maintaining the temples, making necessary arrangements outside the temple. Non-brahmin priests are already working in many temples, Tamil archana is done in temples, many women are giving arul vaaku and doing puja in many amman temples. DMK just wants to divert attention from the current Covid-19 crisis, they want to separate Hindus and Tamils. The traditions which the temples are following have been in practice for thousands of years. True god-fearing women themselves won't be willing to enter sanctum to do the rituals. Will you allow women to enter Sabarimala temple? It is similar to that," he said. Few people noted that there are some temples that follow Shaivite and Vaishnavite traditions function under a few Aadheenams and Samasthanams and have their own set of rules and if the government calls representatives from such temples and reach an amicable solution, then there won't be much of an issue.

Delhi has 2 days of Covaxin, 14 days of Covishield: AAP MLA Atishi urges youth to get COVID jab

New Delhi, June 20 : Senior AAP leader Atishi on Saturday (June 19) said that two days of Covaxin and 14 days of Covishield is available for the youth in Delhi. Further, she appealed to youths to book slots through the CoWin app and get themselves vaccinated. Atishi informed that Delhi received 1.67 lakh doses of Covishield for the 18-44 age group on Friday, and now the national capital has 2.95 lakh vaccines available for the youth. There are 8.46 lakh vaccine doses available for above 45 years age category, we have 6 days Covaxin and 58 days Covishield stock available for this age group, she added. AAP MLA stated, "On June 18, 77,345 doses were administered in Delhi out of which 62,230 were first doses while 15,115 were second doses. This brings the tally of total doses administered in Delhi to 64,26,302." It has been observed that whenever Delhi has enough vaccine supply for the 18-44 age group the vaccination process speeds up, and when the vaccine stocks start diminishing the speed of the vaccination process also slows down rapidly," she added. Further Atishi said, "Delhi received one installment of 1,67,320 Covishield doses yesterday for the 18-44 age group. So now Delhi has 2,95,000 vaccine doses available for the 18-44 age group, out of which, there is 37,000 Covaxin doses which will last for 2 days and, 2,58,000 Covishield doses that will last for 14 days. For the 45+ age group Delhi has a total of 8,46,000 vaccine doses available out of which; there are 80,000 Covaxin doses for 6 days and 7,66,000 Covishield doses for 58 days." Asking people to get the COVID-19 jab, Atishi said, "The youth of Delhi must come forward and book their vaccination slots through the CoWin application. While they are stepping out to get their vaccine jab they should also take along any family member who is of age 45 and above and hasn't been vaccinated till now for their vaccination as well." "For now the most important step to save Delhi from the next possible Covid-19 wave is vaccination. Currently, Delhi has the vaccine stock available and therefore everybody must step forward and get themselves vaccinated at the earliest possibility," she stated.

TMC MLA Jayanta Naskar dies after testing negative for Covid-19

Kolkata, June 20 : Trinamool Congress MLA Jayanta Naskar, who had tested positive for COVID-19 in May, died at a hospital here on Saturday, a health department official said. The 73-year-old legislator, however, had tested negative for the disease on Friday, a doctor of the medical facility said. The three-time MLA from Gosaba breathed his last at 8.20 pm, he said. Naskar had tested positive for COVID-19 soon after the announcement of the assembly election results on May 2, the official said. The Gosaba MLA was initially treated at the state-run MR Bangur Hospital and shifted to the private medical facility a few days back, the official said, adding that he had comorbidities. "Naskar tested negative for COVID-19 on Friday. But prolonged illness caused damage to his lung," the senior doctor of the private hospital said. West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee condoled the demise of Naskar. "Heartfelt condolences to the family & supporters of Jayanta Naskar. Deeply pained at this colossal loss. As a 3- time MLA from Gosaba, he had dedicated his life towards serving people and was always with us through our many struggles. He will be remembered dearly," Banerjee said in a statement.

CM visits DNPL, Assam Gas Company and BCPL

Guwahati, June 20 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today visited the campus of Duliajan-Numaligarh Pipeline Limited (DNP Ltd.) at Duliajan in Dibrugarh district and inaugurated the 4 th compressor package operation at its gas compression station. Inauguration of this gas compressor package will significantly enhance capacity of the PSU and benefit it financially. During his visit the CM also inaugurated an orchid conservation centre and planted a rudraksh sapling at the campus. Later, the Chief Minister also visited Assam Gas Company Ltd. at Duliajan and reviewed the ongoing activities and upcoming projects of the state Government PSU. Notably, AGCL is India's first dedicated natural gas transmission and distribution company which was established in 1962. The company has been constantly making profit during last 12 years and has made significant contribution to the state exchequer. While reviewing activities of the PSU, the Chief Minister stressed on increasing annual turnover of the company by expanding its infrastructure network and tapping gas from different sources which could be sold to major buyers. The Chief Minister said that gas will play a vital role in realizing Assam Government's goal of speedy economic progress and urged AGCL to focus on becoming a gas exporter. The Chief Minister also urged company management to aggressively expand piped gas network in the tea garden areas of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. On the other hand, the Chief Minister also visited Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited at Lepetkata in Dibrugarh district today which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016. The BCPL was conceived in the year 1985 as part of the historic Assam Accord. The Chief Minister visited the control room and product warehouse of the industry and interacted with the staff to get a first hand understanding about polymer production. He also held a meeting with the management of BCPL and reviewed the ongoing activities and growth strategy of the industry. BCPL authority apprised the Chief Minister about the present status of the company including its production and financial position. The Chief Minister stressed on expanding market of the polymer produced at BCPL and the need to develop strategies for generating conducive environment for setting up more downstream polymer industries. Union Minister of State for Food Processing Industries Rameswar Teli, Agriculture Minister Atul Bora, Power Minister Bimal Bora, Tea Tribes Welfare Minister Sanjay Kishan, MP Prodan Baruah, MLAs Prasanta Phukan, Chakradhar Gogoi, Binod Hazarika, Punakan Baruah, Terosh Gowala, Bolin Chetia, Taranga Gogoi, Bhuban Pegu, Vice Chairman of AGCL Indra Gogoi, Chairman of DNP Ltd. Rupam Goswami, Vice Chairman of Assam Housing Board Subhas Dutta and Principal Secretary of Industries and Commerce K. K. Dwivedi, MD BCPL Reep Hazarika were also present during the Chief Minister's visit.

COVID-19 : India's daily count falls below 60,000 after 81 days, active caseload drops to 7.29 lakh

New Delhi, June 20 : The daily COVID-19 count in India fell below 60,000 after 81 days, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare informed on Sunday (June 20, 2021). With 58,419 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, the active caseload in the country has now dropped to 7,29,243. The national weekly positivity rate now stands at 3.43%, while the daily positivity rate has come down to 3.22%. India-coronavirus-cases-second-wave India also witnessed 1,576 deaths and 87,619 recoveries between Saturday and Sunday morning. The country has so far seen a total of 2.98 crore infections and 3.86 lakh coronavirus-related fatalities. However, AIIMS Delhi Director Randeep Guleria on Sunday warned that the third wave of COVID-19 can strike India in the next six to eight weeks. He said that it is possible if crowds are not prevented and if rules are broken as states and UTs ease lockdown restrictions. Guleria also emphasized on the need for stricter surveillance and area-specific lockdowns in case of a significant rise in COVID-19 cases. Meanwhile, over 27.66 crore vaccine doses have been administered across India so far. As per the Health Ministry, more than 38 lakh vaccine doses were given in the last 24 hours. Earlier on Saturday, the Centre directed all the states and UTs to step up the pace of the COVID-19 vaccination. The Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla in a letter to Chief Secretaries said that vaccination against COVID-19, in the present scenario, is 'critical to break the chain of transmission'. He also urged the officials to keep a close watch on the situation as activities are opened in a cautious manner. Bhalla asked them to scrupulously ensure that there is 'no complacency in adhering to COVID appropriate behaviour' and in the test-track-treat vaccinate strategy.

UP gets a whopping Rs 10,870.5 cr under Jal Jeevan Mission, highest allocation in history

New Delhi, June 20 : The Centre has allocated a whopping Rs 10,870 crore to Uttar Pradesh under the Jal Jeevan Mission for 2021-22, the highest allocation so far to any state, the Ministry of Jal Shakti said on Saturday (June 12). The amount is more than four times what was allocated to the poll-bound state last year. The northern state will go to the polls in 2022. Uttar Pradesh has assured to achieve the goal of providing water to every rural household by 2024, the ministry said. "The Union government has increased the Central allocation for the implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission to Uttar Pradesh to Rs. 10,870.50 crore. In 2019-20, the Centre allocated Rs 1,206 crore, which was increased to Rs 2,571 crore in 2020-21. Thus, this year, the central allocation for implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission in Uttar Pradesh has increased four-fold," the ministry said. The ministry had last week announced Rs 6,998.97 crore to West Bengal, the second-highest allocation to a state under the Jal Jeevan Mission. Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh have been allocated Rs 3,410 crore and Rs 5,117 crore, respectively. The northeastern states have been allocated a total of Rs 9,262 crore. Under the Jal Jeevan Mission, Maharashtra has been allocated to Rs 7,064.41 crore, while Chhattisgarh got Rs 1,908.96 crore. The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide tap water connections to all rural households by 2024. The Union budget for 2021-22 has earmarked Rs 50,000 crore for this ambitious scheme. Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, during his last meeting with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, had assured to provide all assistance to the state under the Jal Jeevan Mission. Adityanath had also assured that his government would ensure tap water connection to every rural home by 2024 as announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the announcement of the scheme on August 15, 2019. In Uttar Pradesh, there are 2.63 crore households in 97,000 villages, out of which, now 30.04 lakh (11.3 per cent) households have tap water supply. Only 5.16 lakh (1.96 per cent) households had tap water supply before the scheme. In the last 21 months, under the Jal Jeevan Mission, the state has provided a tap water supply to 24.89 lakh (9.45 per cent) households. Despite this, there are about 2.33 crore households without tap water supply in Uttar Pradesh, officials said.

Harry Kane hits back at doubters and insists transfer push is no distraction



London, June 20 : Harry Kane has played down concerns over his fitness after being substituted during England's 0-0 draw with Scotland and insisted he has not been distracted by the focus on his desire to leave Tottenham this summer. England's captain, who admitted that he is not undroppable after struggling during last Sunday's win over Croatia, is adamant that his sluggish start to Euro 2020 is not down to a lack of sharpness. Kane, substituted against Scotland because of Gareth Southgate's desire for more energy in attack, stressed he is not injured and the team's main source of goals aims to be firing when it matters after fading towards the end of the 2018 World Cup. "Gareth is within his rights to make the changes he

thinks are best for the team," Kane said. "What we've learned over past tournaments is about trying to peak at the right time. The best time to be peaking is in the knockout stages and hopefully kick on from there. Maybe in Russia there were times, towards the quarter- and semi-final, when I wasn't as sharp as I wanted to be. In the end we didn't get to where we wanted to go, maybe partly for that reason. It's about managing the squad, making sure everyone is feeling as fit and sharp as possible. In my case, it was a tough couple of games and it's about making sure I'm right for the rest of them. I didn't have any issues. I didn't feel physically I wasn't up to it. I felt going into those games as good as I've felt all season, if I'm honest." Kane, who is being targeted

by Chelsea, Manchester United and Manchester City, dismissed the idea that publicising his determination to leave Spurs has affected his performances. "Absolutely not," the 27-year-old said. "All my focus is on how I can help this team and how we can be successful in this tournament. I understand from a media point of view there is speculation but I am fully focused on the job here." Kane, who has scored twice for club and country since recovering from an ankle injury in April, called for patience after Southgate's young side were booed off against Scotland. England, who have four points from their first two games in Group D, need to beat the Czech Republic on Tuesday to ensure they qualify for the last 16 in first place. "Inside the group, it's time to be calm," Kane said. "The first objective was to qualify. If you turn the results around and we drew against Croatia and beat Scotland and had four points, I don't think there would be too many arguments. "We could have played a lot better on Friday night but these games aren't easy. Scotland are playing for their life in this tournament. You don't just turn up and walk over teams. You have to play to your best ability to win. We didn't quite do that but we didn't lose, which was important." Kane suggested that England are yet to peak. "I still feel like there are things we can improve but I also feel like we still have enough ability and togetherness to

go very far in this tournament," he said. "We'd have loved to have won the first two games and beat the Czech Republic and be nine points and be cruising." But then sometimes you get a hit back down to earth when you get knocked out in the early knockout stage because you think everything is great and there might be one or two things you've missed and you need to work on. Sometimes a result like Scotland wakes you up a little bit - maybe opens your eyes to areas that we do need to improve. It could be a good thing, what happened to us last night." Kane suggested that he is still building an understanding with his fellow attackers, Mason Mount and City's Raheem Sterling and Phil Foden joined the squad late after playing in the Champions League final between Chelsea and City last month. "Obviously you don't get as many England games as you do club football," Kane said. "It might take you a game or two to get that little bit more understanding of where each other are going to be on the pitch, the runs players make when I drop deep, people running in behind, or vice versa. These couple of games have been a bit of that." "We've had two great clean sheets and that's what we're going to be going forward. We all pride ourselves on not conceding, from front to back, and now I feel we can get better in the attacking third and be a bit more fluid and a bit more free and create a few more chances. Then we can be a strong team."



Louis Oosthuizen's long eagle putt sets up US Open final-round thriller

London, June 20 : A bunched leaderboard that made for endless possibilities on moving day at the US Open got even more crowded at the top in the dying stages of Saturday's third round. Louis Oosthuizen deposited a 30-foot putt for eagle on the 18th green, shortly after sinking a 30-footer for birdie on the 16th, to vault into a three-way tie for the 54-hole lead at Torrey Pines Golf Course alongside Canada's Mackenzie Hughes and Russell Henley of the US and setting the stage for high drama on Sunday afternoon. Hughes, the 30-year-old Canadian who entered the tournament on a string of four missed cuts, leapfrogged up the board after draining a 63-foot eagle putt on the par-five 13th before getting up and down from a bunker on the 18th to card a three-under 68 for the day. Henley, the 32-year-old from Georgia who has won three titles on the PGA Tour but none since 2017, went off in Saturday's final group and largely stood up to the pressure of the halfway lead, mixing four birdies with four bogeys for an even-par 71 to stay at five-under and on the pace. Eighteen players started the day within five strokes of surprise halfway leaders Henley and Richard Bland and it didn't take long for the household names to make their charges, most notably Rory McIlroy and Bryson DeChambeau. Ten years to the day he broke his major championship maiden with an eight-stroke win at the 2011 US Open at Congressional, McIlroy opened the back nine with three birdies in four holes and salvaged a bogey after flaying a drive into the yawning barranca that separates the North and South Courses. After saving par from a greenside bunker on the 16th, McIlroy parred the 17th and then birdied the par-five 18th to match the low round of the tournament with a four-under 67. "This is the only tournament in the world where you first pump a bogey. Only losing one [on the 15th] was a big deal, and getting it up-and-down out of the bunker on 16 and making that birdie on 18 just to get that shot back that I lost. Really big," He added: "Twenty-eleven felt like a walk in the park compared to this. You know, if I am going to get another US Open trophy, I'm going to have to fight for it a little more than I did 10 years ago." McIlroy was joined at three-under by DeChambeau, the 2020 US Open champion who drifted as low as five-over during Friday's second round but managed to revive his title defense after making birdies Saturday on the first, fifth and 15th holes. He will enter Sunday's final round

two shots off the lead - same as last year at Winged Foot. That he only managed to hit five of 14 fairways was immaterial: this was DeChambeau's first bogey-free score in 67 career rounds at majors. "You've got to be really patient out here at these majors," DeChambeau said. "It's something that is not easy to do. My first few goes at majors, I was not successful or anywhere near successful, and I feel like I'm starting to understand major championship golf and how to play it and how to go about managing my game, my attitude and just my patience level. If I can continue to do that tomorrow, I think I'll have a good chance." For the unheralded Bland, who captured his first European Tour title in his 476th attempt last month, a storybook tournament finally took a southward turn with six bogeys and no birdies for a 77, dropping all the way back to one-over for the championship and six strokes off the pace. "That's the US Open. Some days it's just going to beat you up all day, and today was my day," Bland said. "I struggled with my irons all day. I drove the ball pretty good, which is what you need to do. I just couldn't take advantage from there, and I didn't really give myself any decent looks for birdies." Phil Mickelson, who became the oldest ever major champion at last month's US PGA Championship, was among the early starters after firing a second-round 69 to make the cut following an opening-round 75. The six-time US Open runner-up needed something special to revive his fading hopes of completing the career grand slam in his hometown, but made only one fairway on the front nine and six of 14 overall en route to a 76. Jon Rahm carded a 72 to sit at two-under for the week along with Scottie Scheffler (70) and Matthew Wolff (73). Former major champions Dustin Johnson (68) and Collin Morikawa (70) are among the six at one-under. They will all be chasing the leaders on Sunday with plenty of chances on a course that expects to play even more difficult for the final round. The 38-year-old Oosthuizen is no stranger to the top of the leaderboard at professional golf's four bedrock events: he was the 2010 Open champion and can boast runner-up finishes at the other three majors, including at last month's US PGA Championship. "It's a golf course where anything can happen," Oosthuizen said. "There's a lot of great players up there that's got a chance of winning this, and I just need to go out and play as good as I can tomorrow."

Cameron Norrie sees off Denis Shapovalov to reach Queen's Club final

London, June 20 : Cameron Norrie joined British tennis royalty by reaching the final at Queen's Club. The 25-year-old is one match away from claiming a first ATP title after a 7-5, 6-3 semi final victory over the second seed, Denis Shapovalov. The only other Britons to reach the Queen's final in the last 40 years are Tim Henman and Andy Murray, and Murray remains the only one to lift the title since the second world war. "It hasn't sunk in yet," confessed Norrie. "I think I played very, very good today and I'm so pleased to get into the final. I can't really describe it, it's nice to get over the line. It's a huge tournament for me. I couldn't be more pleased with myself." The British No 2 made a nervy start as two double faults and two unforced errors gifted Shapovalov the opening game. But Norrie retrieved the break to love then took a tight first set with a stunning backhand down the line which left the Canadian on his backside. Shapovalov,

who had to finish his rain-interrupted quarter-final against Frances Tiafoe earlier in the day, needed treatment on his left leg early in the second set. Another backhand winner

Berrettini, the big-serving world No 9 who accounted for Murray and Dan Evans this week. The Italian has yet to drop a set on his Queen's debut and has won his last 30 service games,



for Norrie in the eighth game sealed the decisive break. The world number 14 was powerless to stop Norrie claiming another notable scalp in a what has been a stunning season so far - he has now won 29 matches this year, more than any other player on the Tour except for Russia's Andrey Rublev. Standing in the Briton's way on Sunday will be the top seed, Matteo

having swept aside Alex de Minaur of Australia 6-4, 6-4 in the first semi-final. "I've watched him throughout the week, he has a huge serve he's one of the best players on the tour at the moment," added Norrie. "I might have a chat with Evo and Andy and see if they have any tips. I saw him play earlier today and he had a really good day. It's not going to be easy."

Kohli and Rahane build platform for India against New Zealand

New Delhi, June 20 : The World Test Championship final is proving to be a tease. The first two days have seen just 64.4 overs bowled but the quality of cricket on show so far suggests that, if rain and bad light can abate for the remainder of the match, a classic contest could yet unfold. A look at the forecast offers few guarantees here, even factoring in the reserve day. Either way, India will head into the third morning on 146 for three, their captain, Virat Kohli, unbeaten on 44 from 124 balls and his deputy, Ajinkya Rahane, 29 not out from 79, having successfully repelled New Zealand's five-strong seam attack during a stop-start afternoon in Southampton. This was no mean feat and though the 4,000 spectators present were left annoyed by a string of interruptions - the last of which, at 4.25pm, proved terminal - India will be pleased to have established a foothold in conditions that appeared to vindicate Kane Williamson's decision to bowl at the toss. A developing theme of this summer is that the latest batch of Dukes balls only start to truly talk once the lacquer has come off and, after Friday's washout, this again proved the case. New Zealand did not quite hit their straps first thing, Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill putting on 62 for the first wicket, but the threat certainly increased with the passage of time. Indeed



when Kohli and Rahane came together at 88 for three in the 41st over the ball was doing plenty under overcast skies. But the pair held firm, their unbroken stand of 58 underlining an ability to reset in between deliveries and stoppages as Tim Southee in particular repeatedly beat the outside edge. While Southee was unfortunate to go wicketless on his return to the side, Kyle Jamieson was the most threatening seamer on show. His 14 overs of probing deliveries from that 6ft 8in frame delivered nine of the 24 maidens sent down and he also claimed the initial breakthrough in the morning when Sharma pushed at a full delivery and Southee held a flying catch at third slip. Having dominated England's batsmen during their recent 1-0 series victory, New Zealand's relief

was palpable. And by lunch they had India 69 for two, Gill following Sharma for 28 when an edge behind off Neil Wagner gave BJ Watling a simple catch in his final Test behind the stumps. It was an error from Gill, who was undone by the angle, but an innings of promise nonetheless. The right-hander, 21, had produced some eye-catching punched drives down the ground and also shaken off a jarring blow to the helmet from Jamieson when, batting out of his crease, he was unable to duck. Cheteshwar Pujara was the second Indian batsman struck on the day, this time from a Wagner short ball after lunch. It did not appear to affect a batsman who overcame a peppering from Australia's attack at the start of the year, but when Trent Boult got one to first swing and then seam into

his pads after the break, India's rock had to depart lbw for a 54-ball eight. New Zealand were energised and only four balls later Boult was convinced he had a second wicket. Kohli, who had earlier opened his account with a crunching driven four, swished at a ball down leg and, after consulting with his on-field colleague, umpire Richard Illingworth went upstairs for a review. By using the umpire's review, Illingworth was checking to see whether the low catch behind by Watling was indeed clean, with a soft signal of "out" - one missed by the TV cameras and causing some confusion as a result - indicating a belief that Kohli had indeed made contact with the ball on its way through. The protocols dictate that the third umpire, Richard Kettleborough, must first check for the legitimacy of the delivery and whether contact was made. On further inspection ultra-edge confirmed no bat was involved, with the previously animated Kohli seeing the correct decision reached in the end. Thereafter the Indian captain found resolute support from a familiar face in Rahane and now he heads into the third day looking to end a curious 18-month period without a century in any format. This final, one which has promised so much but frustrated in the main, could certainly do with it.

Harlequins into Premiership final after stunning extra-time win over Bristol

London, June 20 : What a time to be a rugby fan in England. This match begged belief. English rugby has chosen for its climax to go head-to-head with a major international football tournament, but if any of round ball persuasion were watching, well might they have wondered. Where to start? Harlequins won. After 20 minutes of extra-time. With a seventh try in the 100th minute. Having been 28-0 down after half an hour. By the end, players were strewn across the turf at every break in play. Bristol finished with 13 - and not, for once, because of any card. They were just exhausted, in agony, physically and spiritually, with no one left to come on. Quins, seemingly in a similar state after half an hour, summoned the form of their lives from somewhere, no one more so than the young South African who has stepped in at full-back for the suspended Mike Brown.

Tyrone Green's form held throughout, even during their horror show at the start. At times he was practically unplayable. "That's probably the most crazy game I've ever played in," he said, his grin as wide as he makes a rugby pitch look. "The best game I've ever played in." "Alas, there is no English granny with this one, but he knows how to light up a game. And, boy, he was not alone. Ashton Gate, barely a fifth full, was rocking in a way that Wembley wasn't. Tries are all the rage in the Premiership these days and so are comebacks, but those on show in this first semi-final were as remarkable examples as any we have



seen. In any era, any land. Defence is so last decade, it's true, but Quins have explored the idea to its fullest extent. Against a team like Bristol the dangers for them were obvious and so it unfolded initially. But it would be ridiculous to pin this on anyone's defence. In the first half, Bristol were magnificent, just as Quins were after that, all of them playing rugby as if they simply loved it. There were no bonus points to chase, but the Bears had their fourth try before the half-hour mark anyway. In a blur of running rugby they were 28 points up after 28 minutes. Charles Piutau took a quick lineout to himself, exchanged passes with Max Malins, and was off through the guts of Quins, linking up with Semi Radradra, who sent Ben Earl away for the first. Magnificent. Bristol's tries were more or less all like that, either in execution or approach. Harlequins' players celebrate victory with their supporters in

the top tier at Ashton Gate. Alins scored two in 10 minutes, both featuring exhilaration aplenty in the buildup, before Luke Morahan scored the fourth. Radradra moving and passing like an emperor, Malins flicking the ball over his head like a conjuror. Then Quins took over - and Green in particular. Alex Dombard pulled back the first try just before the break, and Green finished a minute into the second half. Quins were ravenous suddenly and Bristol looked lost, their off-loads now forced, their confidence shot. They forced another play on their 22, and James Chisholm was on to the loose ball for Quins' third. Louis Lynagh, another superb performer in the Quins back three, finished the fourth after Dombard had burst clean through. Quins were now four points shy. Harry Randall had a brilliant finish disallowed for a forward pass, but Callum Sheedy landed a penalty to stretch Bristol's lead to seven.

Unlikely hero **Robin Gosens** shows Germany anything is possible

London, June 20 : When Robin Gosens was a young man he wanted to be a police officer, just like his grandfather. However, he was told by one regional office that his legs were too different in height to make it so he ended up pursuing plan B instead: a career as a professional footballer. The German police force's loss has been the Nationalmannschaft's gain. On Saturday night Gosens was instrumental as Germany rediscovered their form and beat Portugal 4-2 to make an interesting Group F even more interesting. Having stared elimination in the face, Germany go



into their final game against Hungary level on points and with a head-to-head advantage over Portugal, and only a point behind France. Gosens has taken a circuitous

route to the top. He played for Fortuna Elten, FC Bocholt and VfL Rhede in Germany before joining Vitesse in the Netherlands. However he never made a league appearance for the Dutch club and after spells with Dordrecht and Heracles he signed for Atalanta in 2017. There he has developed into an international player of the highest order under Gian Piero Gasperini. If you play for Gasperini you run and you fight. Of course you have to be a good footballer as well but if you are not giving 100% you are not in the team. In Munich on Saturday

Gosens gave his all as always but, perhaps more unexpectedly, he put in a man-of-the-match performance, crowned by a thundering header to make it 4-1 after the hour. It was just

reward for Joachim Löw's side, who looked aggressive from the outset, with Kai Havertz bundling over a startled Pepe, Thomas Müller flying into tackles in central areas and Mats Hummels wiping out Cristiano Ronaldo around the half-way line all in the first 10 minutes. Then Gosens produced one of the moments of the game as he came flying through the air to score an acrobatic goal from a precise Joshua Kimmich cross. Sadly for Gosens and Germany, Serge Gnabry had strayed offside in the middle and was judged to have interfered with play as he stretched for the ball. Germany did not give up though and it was the two wing backs, Gosens and Kimmich, who created most of their chances. After Portugal had gone ahead against the run of play, the two of them were both involved in Germany's equaliser after 35 minutes. Kimmich found Gosens with another crossfield ball and the Atalanta player cushioned it towards Havertz in the middle, only for Rúben Dias to steer it past his goalkeeper, Rui Patrício. And so it continued throughout the first 60 minutes, Kimmich and Gosens swapping passes to open up a baffled Portugal defence. The head coach, Fernando Santos, looked bemused, unsure what was going on, and the European champions

never found a way of dealing with the galloping Gosens. His goal, the second in his ninth cap and the first at a finals, was nothing more than he deserved. Kimmich - who else? - supplied a pinpoint cross for the 26-year-old to head home. Shortly after that he was withdrawn. Perhaps it was no coincidence that he had the game of his life against Portugal. In his book Träumen Lohnt Sich (Dreaming is Worth It) he recalled an incident when he tried to swap shirts with Ronaldo against Juventus. "After the final whistle I went to him, having not even gone public to celebrate," he wrote. "But Ronaldo did not accept. He didn't even look at me, he just said: 'No!' I was completely ashamed." There was no shirt swapping this time either, Ronaldo probably being even less in the mood despite scoring his side's opener. Portugal tried to salvage something from the game but despite Diogo Jota scoring and Renato Sanches hitting a post they never came close to grabbing a point. It was a huge win for Löw. He had selected the same starting XI as in the defeat against France and the same system, a 3-4-3. This time it paid off and it will be intriguing to see how Germany do from here. They did everything right on a blistering afternoon in Munich and now anything is possible. Just ask Gosens; he knows.



The week that rocked Australian **swimming** Maddie Groves blows lid on ugly culture

London, June 20 : Like any good swimmer, Maddie Groves knows how to make a splash. But while the timing of her bombshell withdrawal from the Swimming Australia (SA) Olympic Trials last week ensured maximum impact, one of the many lingering questions is why it was necessary for Groves to repeat herself - and miss out on Tokyo 2021. The two-time silver medal-winning Olympian has an entertaining and outrageous Twitter presence. In recent months she has used the platform to mock the International Olympic Committee - "Is anyone surprised at how willing [the] IOC is to risk people's lives to make money?" - and offer commentary on RuPaul's Drag Race. But late last year, her feed took a darker turn when Groves tweeted allegations of harassment and abuse within swimming. She complained of body-shaming, inappropriate sexual comments and harassment. "We didn't really have a #metoo moment in swimming," one tweet read, "but just realising maybe it was this weirdo staring at my tits when I'm trying to swim." In the week and a half since Groves withdrew on the eve of the trials, it has become painfully evident that SA failed to react to those allegations at the time. The peak body says it reached out to the swimmer; when Groves did not engage, SA took no further action. It was not until her explosive announcement last week, where Groves called out "misogynistic perverts in sport and their boot lickers", that SA was forced into action. Every day since the trials started last Saturday, there has been more scrutiny, more revelations and more mea culpas. Seven months on from Groves' initial tweets, swimming's #MeToo moment has belatedly arrived. Combined with an independent review into gymnastics from the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), which last month raised concerns about abuse, harassment and mistreatment, these developments leave Australian sport facing an overdue reckoning. The allegations, which are now pouring out from within swimming and beyond, point to a bigger question: what is the true cost of Olympic glory? Funded by taxpayer dollars to the tune of A\$250 million each year, Australian high performance sport is supposed to be a well-oiled gold medal-winning machine. But the past week has revealed an ugly, male-dominated underbelly, where women are mistreated, abused and harassed. That reality is profoundly unfair and unjust, maintaining gender inequality within sport at all levels. "If we want to be the best in the world, it has to start with the systems we use," ex-SA boss Leigh Russell said during the week. SA has pledged to convene a panel to investigate the experiences of women and girls within swimming. The degree of inde-

pendence, and authority, to be afforded to the panel remains uncertain. Initially, SA indicated that board member Tracy Stockwell would "help establish this process". By Monday, possibly in response to criticism about the independence of a panel led by a board member, SA clarified that Stockwell "is overseeing the formation of this panel on behalf of this Board, but not leading this panel". The SA board has begged for patience. "We are optimistic about the future of the sport we love," it said in one of the half-dozen press releases issued in the past week, by a consultant specialising in "crisis, special situation and reputation management". But is unclear whether an SA-managed panel review is the right approach, or goes far enough. In the AHRC's gymnastics report, Changing the Routine, a recurring theme was the need for oversight and complaints-handling to have sufficient distance from the close-knit world of elite sport. A core recommendation was that "all matters regarding child abuse and neglect, misconduct, bullying, sexual harassment, and assault be investigated externally of the sport". It was suggested this could be achieved by adopting the recently unveiled National Integrity Framework (NIF) of Sport Integrity Australia, a new government agency. For complaints not within the NIF, the AHRC said, Gymnastics Australia should engage "independent, external investigators". SA has not adopted the NIF, nor has it engaged the AHRC - a well-respected independent statutory body - to undertake the review. At a press conference this week, chief executive Alex Baumann said SA wanted to go its own way. "I think [engaging the AHRC and/or joining the NIF] was given consideration by the board, but we felt this approach was more conducive to what we hope to achieve," he said. These comments fly in the face of the AHRC's exhaustive gymnastics review, which found that managing things in-house was precisely the problem. Groves' concerns have also echoed beyond the pool. In The Age on Saturday, Russell, former Sport Australia chief executive Kate Palmer and former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick called for more holistic external intervention. An independent whole-of-sport review into the experience of women as athletes, administrators and coaches was one suggestion; a statutory office for women in sport, with oversight of sporting organisation on diversity and inclusion measures, was another. With Brisbane all but confirmed to host the 2032 Olympics, the additional funding that will flow from a home Games could be used to fundamentally reshape gender equality in sport.

Martina Navratilova, Wimbledon and the summer that transformed America forever

London, June 20 : On its face, it was a benign American summer. Big budget movies filled the theaters. Sugary pop songs wafted from the radio. An elderly woman asking "Where's the Beef?" was a national laugh line. Ronald Reagan Era was in full free-market, take-cutting bloom, a few months before his resounding reelection. But in retrospect, the June-July-August of 1984 marked a pivotal season, 90 days that would change the country. Americans fell in love with the personal computer; and realized a universe of television channels beyond the three major networks. Bruce Springsteen and Prince would release the albums - Born in the USA and Purple Rain - that would vault them to a new plane of celebrity. This transformation was especially pronounced in sports. Compressed in the summer of 1984: Michael Jordan was drafted by the Chicago Bulls, won an Olympic gold medal and lent his name to a signature shoe. Magic Johnson and Larry Bird faced off in the NBA finals for the first time, cementing their rivalry - to the delight of the league's new visionary commissioner, David Stern. Donald Trump would - as owner of the USFL's New Jersey Generals - use sports to become a national figure, while Vince McMahon would consolidate pro wrestling, bringing it into the

mainstream. In the following extract from Glory Days: The Summer of 1984 and the 90 Days That Changed Sports and Culture Forever, the author Jon Wertheim writes about Wimbledon that year, John McEnroe at the peak of his powers and Martina Navratilova, breaking ground on grass. In the summer of 1984, John McEnroe conjured a level of tennis - equally athletic and aesthetic - so sublime that it overshadowed his antics. Or at least cause authorities to look away. At the time, McEnroe had effectively chased off one rival, Bjorn Borg. Another, Jimmy Connors, was in his mid-30s, then the athletic equivalent of dotage. A third rival, Ivan Lendl, had just achieved his awaited breakthrough at the French Open - coming back from the brink of defeat to beat McEnroe in the final, a loss that haunts McEnroe to this day. But that was on clay; on the barbed lawns of Wimbledon, Lendl professed an allergy to grass. With so few challengers, McEnroe treated the All England Club as his personal performance space, the guys on the other side of the net not so much opponents as accompanists. McEnroe's lyrical flourishes were in full effect. He unspooled his sidwinding lefty serve to great effect. He attacked the net, executing angles no other players would even conceive of, much less conjure. He deployed


pointillist volleys. So well that his extravagant tennis stifled his volcanic temper. Facing little resistance, McEnroe won Wimbledon and, in turn, won over the British crowds that, before, had been so ambivalent - attracted as they were by his tennis and repulsed by his

Navratilova's greatest challenger at the time, their rivalry approximated the rivalry between a lawn mower and a swath of grass, a hammer and a nail. Mozart and Salieri. Navratilova had won each of their previous 10 matches. Almost as an afterthought, Navratilova paired



outbursts. This two-week cadenza on the grass would mark the highlight of his gilded 1984, a year in which McEnroe would go 82-3 and win 13 titles. At the time, McEnroe was only the second most dominant force in the sport. As the tennis circuit left Paris and wended its way to Wimbledon in the summer of 1984, Martina Navratilova had won 31 straight matches and, almost comically, 85 of her last 86. She had won the two previous Wimbledon titles and four overall. While Chris Evert was


with Pam Shriver to hold the doubles title at all four Majors in 1984 as well, an achievement that no other player in tennis had ever pulled off. At the time, the annual event in Eastbourne, a Wimbledon tune-up tournament, played in England and on grass, doubled as the site of the WTA's player revue, something akin to a summer camp talent show. At one point in the evening, a group of players performed a spoof song of Michael Jackson's hit from the previous year, Beat It.







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