

The Assam Rising

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NEWS IN BRIEF MLA's With No Govt Residence

Guwahati, June 22 : Assam Legislative Assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary announced that MLAs who did not get a government residence at newly constructed buildings of MLA colony will receive Rs 25,000 each month from the government if they manage their own residence. There have been conflicts among the MLAs of Assam Legislative Assembly regarding their government residences after many failed to book a residence of their choice among newly erected buildings. However Biswajit Daimary has presented this new solution to end the confusion once for all by announcing Rs. 25,000 every month to the Legislators.

Heavy rainfall predicted

Guwahati, June 22 : Assam and Meghalaya are likely to receive heavy rains from Tuesday to Thursday, according to predictions by the Met department. Widespread rain and thunderstorms are likely to occur in Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram & Tripura on Tuesday and Wednesday. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted heavy rainfall activity in isolated places of the north-eastern states. Widespread rain or snow and thunderstorms are possible over Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim on Tuesday, Weather Channel reported. As per IMD, under the influence of a western disturbance as a trough, isolated to scattered rainfall are possible over the Western Himalayan region during the next 24 hours.

173 kg of cannabis seized

Agartala, June 22 : The police has seized 173 kg of dried cannabis and arrested four persons from Pecharthal in Tripura's Unakoti district. A large police force led by Kumarghat sub-divisional police officer Gamanjoy Reang and a large contingent of Tripura State Rifles (TSR) jawans and police led by Pecharthal Police Station sub-inspector Sanesh Debbarma have been waiting at Pecharthal since Monday morning.

MLA Akhil Gogoi acquitted in one of the two cases filed against him by NIA

Guwahati, June 22 : President of Rajgor Dal and MLA from Assam's Sibsaigar, Akhil Gogoi, was acquitted by a National Investigation Agency (NIA) court here on Tuesday in one of the two cases filed against him for his alleged involvement in protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in the state in December 2019. The cases pertain to criminal conspiracy, sedition, promoting enmity between groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language etc., assertions against national integrity, and support to terrorist organisations, etc. A prominent farmers' activist, Gogoi has been

under arrest since. The NIA filed two cases against him, one from Chabua police station in Dibrugarh and the other from Chandmari in Guwahati, under several sections of IPC and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act (UAPA). It is the Chabua case that Gogoi has been acquitted in even as the other case will proceed. The cases pertain to criminal conspiracy, sedition, promoting enmity between groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language etc., assertions against national integrity, and support to terrorist organisations, etc. Hearing in the Chabua case is



over and Akhil Gogoi and two others, Bhupen Gogoi and Jagjit Gohain, have been discharged as NIA failed to prove their guilt," Gogoi's advocate Krishna Gogoi told journalists. "CM

Stalin was keen that we should get the best minds in world to help us." The case against Phukan will now be heard in a Dibrugarh sessions court. Hearing in the Chandmari case is still on,"

he added. Gogoi has not got bail in the Chandmari case. The *Contd...Page 6*

Reforms by 'conviction and incentives' is the new model, says PM Narendra Modi in blog post, hails 'Centre-State bhagidari'



New Delhi, June 22 : Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and in the backdrop of a financial crunch seen across the world, states in India were able to borrow significantly more in 2020-21 and were able to raise an extra Rs 1.06 lakh crores in the period 2020-21, the PM Narendra Modi wrote in a blog post published on Tuesday. This, significant increase in the availability of resources, the Prime Minister said, was made possible by an approach of 'Centre-State bhagidari'. The COVID-19 pandemic has come with a whole new

set of challenges to Governments across the world in terms of policy-making. India is no exception. Raising enough resources for public welfare while ensuring sustainability is proving to be one of the biggest challenges. PM Modi wrote in a blog post titled "Reforms by Conviction and Incentives." The PM stated that while formulating the country's economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the central government wanted to ensure that solutions do not follow a 'one size fits all' model. "For a federal country of continental dimen-

sions, finding policy instruments at the national level to promote reforms by State Governments is indeed challenging. But, we had faith in the robustness of our federal polity and we moved ahead in the spirit of Centre-State Bhagidari," PM Modi said in the blog post. He stated that in May 2020, as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package, the Government of In-

dia announced that State Governments would be allowed enhanced borrowing for 2020-21. An extra 2 per cent of GSDP was allowed, of which 1 per cent was made conditional on the implementation of certain economic reforms. The PM mentioned further said that this nudge for reform is rare in Indian public finance, adding that this *Contd...Page 6*

Centre pressurising Alapan Bandhopadhyay: TMC on 'penalty proceedings' against ex-Bengal chief secretary

Kolkata, June 22 : West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress party on Tuesday slammed the Centre for initiating a major "penalty proceedings" against Alapan Bandhopadhyay, the former Chief Secretary of West Bengal who's presently serving as the advisor to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, under



All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules. The Department of Personnel and Training had on Monday confirmed that the Centre has proposed to hold major penalty proceedings against Alapan Bandhopadhyay, who is at loggerheads with the Centre for skipping an important meeting called by PM Modi and violating the All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules. Commenting on the issue, TMC MP Saugata Roy said, "It's a vindictive act against the rules."

Alapan Bandhopadhyay is a retired official and is not bound by the rules & regulations of Govt of India. They *Contd...Page 6*

Fake TRP case: Mumbai Police names Arnab Goswami as accused in second chargesheet

Mumbai, June 22 : The chargesheet was submitted before a magistrate's court by the police's Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU) probing the case. The Mumbai Police has named senior television journalist Arnab Goswami as an accused in the alleged TRP (Television Rating Points) rigging scam in its second chargesheet filed before a court here on Tuesday. The chargesheet was submitted before a magistrate's court by the police's Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU) probing the case. "Among others,



Goswami and ARG Outlier have been named as accused in the chargesheet," lawyer of Goswami, the Editor-in-Chief of Republic TV, said. The alleged fake TRP scam came to light in October last year when the rating agency Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) *Contd...Page 6*

Top opposition leaders meet Sharad Pawar, discuss plan to tackle BJP in 2024 Lok Sabha Elections

New Delhi, June 22 : Political leaders from across several opposition parties and many prominent personalities arrived at NCP chief Sharad Pawar's residence on Tuesday (June 22) to attend what is being said as a meeting to chalk out a plan to take on the BJP in 2024 Lok Sabha elections. TMC leader Yashwant Sinha, lyricist Javed Akhtar, Rashtriya Lokdal President Jayant Chaudhary and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah arrived at the residence of Sharad

Pawar. The meeting has been called to kick-start opposition unity efforts ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, NCP national spokesperson Nawab Malik was quoted. Malik said that in the first round, Pawar will meet leaders of a few political major parties, media persons, lawyers, social activists, retired judges and bureau-

crats, analysts, and other prominent experts from different fields at his New Delhi home. The political leaders would include Yashwant Sinha of the Trinamool Congress, Sanjay Singh of the Aam Aadmi Party, Farooq Abdullah of the National Conference, D. Raja of the CPI, former JD-U leader Pawan *Contd...Page 6*

IUML criticises Assam government's proposed population policy

GUWAHATI, June 22 : The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) has condemned the Assam government's proposed population policy and labeled it not only "discriminatory" but also "anti-secular and unconstitutional". It also slammed Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for advocating a two-child norm for availing benefits under specific state government schemes and omitting certain communities from it. "Sarma, while announcing the population and women empowerment policy of Assam which is to be introspectively implemented from January 1, 2021, has posed himself as the dictator in the Hitlerian fashion. This policy of Assam is not only discriminatory but anti-secular and unconstitutional," IUML national president K M



Kader Mohideen said in a statement. He added that all secular and democratic forces of the country should unite against this policy and force the Assam government to withdraw this "anti-national, unconstitutional policy of discrimination and destruction". "The chief minister seems to take pleasure in dividing the people and ruining the family life," Mohideen said. The former MP also took exception to the exemption offered to scheduled castes and tribes and *Contd...Page 6*

8 pygmy hogs released in Manas National Park

Guwahati, June 22 : It has been planned to release a total of 12 captive-bred pygmy hogs in Manas National Park by the Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme (PHCP) at two phases - June 22 and June 25, 2021. Of these, eight pygmy hogs were released on Tuesday in the Manas National Park. "This is the second batch of pygmy hogs released in the park, after successful release of 14 pygmy hogs last year. By 2025, the PHCP plans



to release a target of 60 pygmy hogs in Manas," leading environmental NGO Aaranyak said in a statement. The iconic spe-

cies now returns to their home where their last original population still survives, albeit in declined numbers. With this release,

the total number of pygmy hogs reintroduced into the wild by the PHCP has reached to 142 (67 males, 75 females) which is more than their current original global wild population, it said. In 1996, six hogs (2 male and 4 female) were captured from Bansbari range of Manas National Park to start the highly successful breeding programme. Later, a young male rescued in 2001, and another male and two females captured in 2013 from the same *Contd...Page 6*

Auction at Jorhat : Pabhojan Orthodox tea sold at a record price of Rs 4,000 per kg



Guwahati, June 22 : The first International Tea Day Special Auction organised by mjunction services limited, India's largest B2B e-commerce company, fetched record prices and met with resounding success at the Jorhat tea e-marketplace on Monday. Most of the best marks of Upper Assam like Hookhmol, Lankashi, Diroibam, Aideobari Premium, Muktabari, Rungliting Tea Estate, Narayanpur Panbarry, Durgapur, Tirul, Arin, Kathonibari, Friends Tea and Pabhojan

participated at the auction. More than 93% of the total teas on offer got sold. Buyers had logged in from Assam, West Bengal, Delhi, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Pabhojan Orthodox tea was sold at a record price of Rs 4,000 per kg. Diroibam Speciality Green tea was sold at Rs 1000 per kg, and the famous Hookhmol CTC tea fetched Rs 510 per kg - also record prices in their respective categories. The event organised by mjunction elicited a positive response from buyers and sellers alike. Kamal *Contd...Page 6*

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'Slap in the face' for Macron as French voters shun local elections

London, June 22 : Emmanuel Macron's centrist party received what one of its own MPs called a "slap in the face" in regional and department elections on Sunday. The president and his government failed to mobilise supporters, with an estimated 68% of voters shunning the polling stations - an unprecedented rate of abstention. If there was any consolation for the ruling party it was that exit polls suggested Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally had failed to garner its expected support. Early results indicated that the main winners were various centre-right parties, including the main opposition Les Républicains, who were supported by 29.3% of voters. National Rally polled 19.1% and the Socialist party 16.5%. Macron's La République En Marche (LREM) was estimated to have won 10.9% of votes. Aurore Bergé, an MP for LREM, said the result was a democratic "slap in the face". "I'm not going to minimise what has happened," Bergé told BFM TV. In the Ile de France, which includes Paris, the centre-right candidate Valérie Pécresse was in a strong position to retain control of the region. In regional elections in 2015 just over 50% of French people failed to vote, a drop on just under 53.7% in 2010. The vote was to elect new councils for France's 13 mainland and one overseas regions as well as 96 departments. Regional councils have budgets running to billions of euros and are responsible for schools, transport and economic development. There were a total of 15,786 candidates standing for 4,108 seats. Winners are normally elected for a six-year term. Le Pen did not run as a candidate but campaigned hard, particularly in rural areas where support for the far right remains high. "Our voters didn't turn out," she said in her first comments after the vote from her stronghold of Henin-Beaumont in northern France. "I call on them to respond urgently." In the Paris region, voters had a choice of 11 lists - candidates present a list of proposed councillors - including Pécresse for a rightwing coalition, the former journalist Audrey Pulvar for the Socialists, Julien Bayou for Europe Ecology the Greens, and Clémentine Autin for the hard left Unbowed France. This year's campaign - with voting delayed by three months because of the

pandemic - has been unique in that health measures meant there could be no door-to-door canvassing, which in any case is not a widespread French electoral tradition, and until recently outside rallies were constrained by health restrictions. Parties were required to present electoral lists that listed male and female candidates consecutively on their lists. The number of candidates from each list who are elected depends on each party's score. Le Pen's National Rally hopes to win control of a region to boost her decade-long effort to legitimise her party, formerly the Front National. The region thought to most likely to tip into far right hands is the National Rally's traditional stronghold in the south-east Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur region which covers Marseille, Saint-Tropez and Cannes. However, the party was strong in five other regions, including the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, Centre-Val de Loire, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Occitanie and Brittany. In Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, early estimations suggested the National Rally is jostling neck-a-neck with Les Républicains after the first-round vote. Between Sunday's results and next week's second round, the focus will be on what alliances are made between parties. Candidates standing in the first round must obtain at least 10% of votes to pass into the second round, and a major question for the runoff is whether French voters will again band together to keep Le Pen's party out of power as they have in the past. There is general agreement that it is unwise to conflate regional results with predictions of what will happen in next year's presidential election. Neither the mainstream right, Les Républicains, nor the mainstream left, the Socialists, have any credible presidential candidate at this stage. Analysts said the abstention level threw any political predictions into doubt. A recent poll for the Journal du Dimanche suggested that 49% of French people considered that any regional win would make National Rally a "danger for democracy". Most polls suggest the 2022 presidential race will be a second-round runoff between Macron and Le Pen. The second round run-offs in the regional and department elections take place next Sunday.

Medical leaders urge Boris Johnson to bring air pollution below WHO limit

London, June 22 : Medical leaders are urging Boris Johnson to cut legal levels of air pollution in the UK to below World Health Organization limits in response to the death of the schoolgirl Ella Kissi-Debrah from toxic air. Members of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change are calling for the reduction in limits of PM2.5 to be included in the environment bill, which returns to parliament this week. A letter to the prime minister from leaders of the British Medical Association, more than 20 nursing colleges, the Lancet and the British Medical Journal (BMJ) says: "Today, before the environment bill returns to the House of Lords, we urge your government to use this bill to make a legally binding commitment to reducing fine particulate pollution (PM2.5) in the UK to below the maximum level recommended by the WHO by 2030." Air pollution is among the greatest environmental determinants of health, and contributes to many serious and chronic health conditions affecting every organ in the body. Despite this, the UK's legal limits for PM2.5 pollution - some of the most damaging of all pollutants - are currently more than double the WHO recommended limit. "Last week, in response to recommendations by the coroner in the inquest of nine-year-old Ella to cut the limit to WHO levels, the government failed to commit to such reductions. Instead, Johnson's government promised to hold a public consultation next January, with a view to setting new air pollution targets in October 2022. It made no commitment to setting the legal limit at below the WHO level for PM2.5 of an annual mean 10 µg/m3, but said it would use



the WHO guidelines to inform its ambitions. In a landmark ruling, the coroner Philip Barlow found that air pollution was a cause of Ella's death in 2013. Barlow said during her life Ella was exposed to nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter (PM) pollution in excess of WHO guidelines, the principal source of which were traffic emissions. Failure to reduce pollution levels to legal limits possibly contributed to her death, as did the failure to provide her mother with information about the potential for air pollution to exacerbate asthma, he found. In their letter to Johnson, the medical leaders point out that the Royal College of Physicians estimated about 40,000 deaths a year may be attributed to air pollution. NHS and Public Health England figures over five years before the Covid-19 pandemic showed 5% of all deaths were attributable to PM2.5. "Thousands more are living with health conditions caused or exacerbated by dirty air. Such lung conditions leave people more vulnerable to viruses such as Covid-

19, so protecting the lung health of the public is a key element of the fight against the virus," the letter says. It goes on to challenge Johnson to show leadership in the year the UK hosts Cop26, the 26th UN climate change conference, in Glasgow. "The sources of fine particulate pollution - road transport, domestic and industrial burning - are also the sources of a significant proportion of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions. We can therefore tackle the challenges of climate change and air pollution simultaneously ... We must do so, if we are to meet your government's commitment to reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050," the letter says. "As your government aims to build back better, the economic, health, and environmental cases for strong legal protection from fine particulate air pollution are clear. This should be in line with the standards set by the WHO." The environment bill returns to parliament this week when the House of Lords considers the bill at committee stage. The medical leaders urged members of the Lords to back

an amendment by Maggie Jones to introduce WHO-compliant targets for PM2.5 pollution. The letter's signatories include Dr Richard Smith, chair of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change; Dr Edward Morris, president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; Prof Jon Bennett, chair of the British Thoracic Society board; Dr Andrew Goddard, president of the Royal College of Physicians; Dr Adrian James, president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists; Prof Maggie Rae, president of the Faculty of Public Health; and Dr Camilla Kingdom, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

'Mistakes need to be dealt with': anger in South Africa as third wave hits

London, June 22 : Cyril Ramaphosa's government has been criticised for its slow reaction and faltering vaccination programme. Governments across Africa are scrambling to reinforce health systems and accelerate vaccine drives as a third wave of Covid-19 infections threatens to overwhelm hospitals and kill tens of thousands of people. South Africa, the worst-hit country in the continent, has reported a doubling of new daily cases over the past two weeks, with no sign of the rise slowing. Gauteng province - home to a quarter of the country's population of 60 million as well as the administrative capital, Pretoria, and financial hub Johannesburg - is the centre of the latest outbreak, accounting for about 60% of the latest national daily increase. Hospitals and health workers are close to being overwhelmed. One large hospital was shut earlier this year after a fire and other big facilities are closed because of a lack of trained staff. Doctors are making dozens of phone calls to secure a bed for critically ill patients. South Africa has suffered two major waves already, pushing its official death toll to 60,000, though excess mortality figures reveal that at least another 100,000 people are likely to have died in the pandemic. Last week, Cyril Ramaphosa, the president, imposed light restrictions that most experts have said are unlikely to make much difference. Expectations of the government are low, with much anger at a series of corruption scandals involving Covid-19 spending. Earlier this month, the health minister, Zweli Mkhize, was forced to step down while allegations of impropriety in the awarding of Covid-19 response contracts were investigated. The 60 or so inhabitants of Union Street, a narrow alley in Soweto, said they have learned the hard way not to hope for too much. "All the times were bad. It has always been tough here. But this is really worse. We have orphans in our church now," said Leonard Magranya, 74. "I trust in God. I have faith in God. One day Covid will be finished and we can go back to normal, but that lies only in the power of God," he said. South Africa had many advantages over other African countries before the Covid crisis: a greater ability to borrow money, a more extensive public health system reinforced by a large private sector, world-class scientists and long experience of dealing with

pandemics. Yet after a much-lauded early response, the authorities have struggled. The economic damage wrought by the pandemic has already been severe. Tasneena Sylvester, 35, who has lived on Union Street for 11 years, lost her job as a cleaner, and her husband was laid off by the construction firm that had employed him for years during the hard lockdown in March and April last year. Now the couple and their

said. South Africa's faltering vaccination campaign has yet to reach more than one in 30 of the population, after a series of missteps and misfortunes were compounded by bad decision-making, critics say. Officials were slow to initiate discussions with manufacturers, and the talks were then held up by bureaucracy and internal factional battles. The UN-backed Covax programme delivered a million



three children live on government handouts, and spend their days watching television and pirated Netflix films traded on USB drives. "I want education for my children, and a job to survive. But there is nothing now," she said. At the tiny shack that is the headquarters of the Soweto Kliptown Youth organisation, Bob Nameng, the 51-year-old founder, accused the government of mishandling the crisis. "There is too much corruption. The rich are benefiting from the tears of the poor. The poor are weeping. The rich are dancing," he said. Nameng said he believed the ruling African National Congress, in power since 1994, had "become the opposite of what the people of Soweto fought for" during the long battle against the racist, repressive apartheid regime. "They don't care about anyone but themselves. We supported the ANC but we won't for ever. They have lost a lot of votes. A hungry man is an angry man," he

AstraZeneca jabs, which were rejected once it became clear they were less effective against the new local variant. Finally, a consignment of 2m Johnson & Johnson vaccines had to be destroyed when regulators decided it might have been contaminated after breaches of safety and sanitary rules in a factory in the US. With wealthy nations in the west buying up millions of doses for their populations, it has been hard to secure supplies for South Africa. "What has constrained us has been the lack of vaccines. All the provinces and private sector have been champing at the bit to open additional sites," said Nicholas Crisp, the deputy director general of the health department. The vaccination campaign has also been suspended at weekends to allow health workers to rest, and because there is "no overtime budget". In a media briefing last week, the acting health minister, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane, promised the

campaign would accelerate, as sufficient shots finally began to arrive, and said army medics would be brought in to reinforce the health system in Gauteng. One big problem is vaccine hesitancy. In a recent survey, 67% said they would definitely take the vaccine, with 18% saying they would not. The survey found that those who think Ramaphosa and his government are doing a bad job are much less likely to accept a vaccine. On Union Street, some even doubt the existence of Covid-19. "I think it is all made up. They want us to believe there is Covid and follow their instructions. And I've heard the vaccines shut down your body systems," said Jemima Dladegane, 54. Officials say they are aware of the problem and will try to communicate better in the future. After extensive interaction in early months of the pandemic, ministers and government specialists have rarely given briefings. Ramaphosa has limited interventions to infrequent televised speeches. Alex van den Heever, professor of public administration at Wits University, Johannesburg, said the failure to acknowledge the true death toll in the pandemic, as revealed by excess mortality figures rather than recorded hospital deaths, stemmed from a "political decision made early on". "They wanted to make sure the pandemic management was seen as being done by the ANC, and negative issues minimised. That is an improper intent. The information must be made public, mistakes need to be dealt with and any questions answered," he said. "The reality is we have had a severe, severe epidemic." Most residents of Union Street have seen images from the US or Europe, and are aware that the pandemic is ebbing there. "In the rich countries, they are going out and working. They have better governments, I think," Rebecca Mfunguza, 23. "Maybe they could help us a bit. We need it."

Hong Kong's Apple Daily newspaper in crisis talks to avert shutdown

Hong Kong, June 22 : Hong Kong's Apple Daily newspaper in crisis talks to avert shutdown, advisor says. Adviser to jailed owner Jimmy Lai said newspaper cannot pay its staff and suppliers after officials blocked banking facilities. Activists in London rally in support of Hong Kong's Apple Daily staff and executives. The board of Hong Kong's Apple Daily newspaper is in crisis talks amid expectations it could shut down in a matter of days after the arrest of its senior editors and executives, and the freezing of its assets and



accounts. According to Mark Simon, a close adviser of the paper's jailed owner, Jimmy Lai, the board was holding its fourth meeting in as many days on Monday morning, urgently seeking information to make assessments about the future of the paper. "The only thing that matters is the secretary of security has locked up all the accounts, and any ability to work with the accounts, so no money equals no news," he told. National security officials have blocked access to the company's accounts, leaving it unable to pay staff and suppliers, or accept funds, he said. He told Reuters: "We thought we'd be able to make it to the end of the month. It's just getting harder and

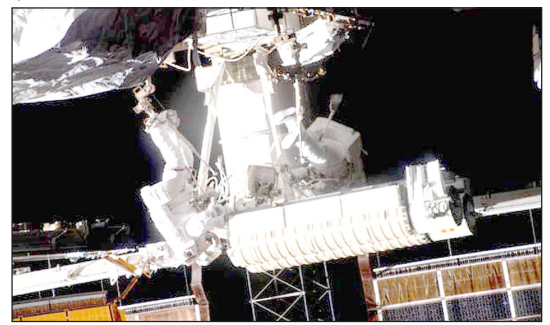
harder. It's essentially a matter of days." Apple Daily said on Sunday the freezing of its assets had left the liberal newspaper with cash for "a few weeks" for normal operations. "Lam Man-chung, executive chief editor of Apple Daily, confirmed to AFP that the media group's board was meeting on Monday. On Thursday morning a national security police operation involving hundreds of officers raided the homes of five executives, including Apple Daily editor-in-chief, Ryan Law, and arrested them under the national security law, before raiding the newsroom with an unprecedented warrant allowing the seizure of journalistic materials. Police also froze HK\$18m (US \$2.3m) in assets of three companies, Apple Daily Limited, Apple Daily Printing Limited and AD Internet Limited. Simon said an additional \$500m was in the locked accounts. He said the process for seeking an unfreezing of the assets would take weeks. Law and the company's chief executive, Cheung Kim-hung, were charged on Friday, accused of colluding for foreign or external forces, and were denied bail. The three companies connected to Apple Daily are also being prosecuted for the same crimes. Simon, who has since relocated to the US, is wanted by Hong Kong police under the national security law.

ISS astronauts complete six-hour spacewalk to install solar panels

London, June 22 : Successful International Space Station installation followed an attempt on Wednesday that ran into several problems. Expedition 65 Flight Engineer Thomas Pesquet (L) of the European Space Agency takes a 'space-selfie' during Wednesday's first spacewalk to install new roll out solar arrays on the International Space Station. French and American astronauts have completed a six-hour spacewalk as they installed new solar panels to boost power supplies to the International Space Station (ISS), Nasa said. "It is a huge team effort each time and couldn't be happier to return with @astro_kimbrough," Frenchman Thomas Pesquet tweeted on Sunday, referring to his American colleague Shane Kimbrough. Pesquet is with the European Space Agency, Kimbrough with Nasa. The two men, who

arrived on the space station in late April, activated the internal batteries in their space suits at 11.42 GMT, then opened the hatch to the ISS airlock. Thomas Pesquet (L) of the European Space Agency is attached to an articulating portable foot restraint on the end of the Canadarm2 robotic arm carrying new roll out solar arrays towards the International Space Station's P-6 truss structure, next to US astronaut Shane Kimbrough. They then continued the work of positioning, attaching and deploying six new-generation solar panels, referred to as iROSA, for Roll-Out Solar Array. The solar wing unrolled like a red carpet once the final set of bolts was released, relying solely on pent-up energy. The

slow but steady extension took 10 minutes, with station cameras providing live TV views. "It is beautiful," Pesquet called out. "Well done, both of you." Mission Control replied once the operation was complete. "That was great to see." As the six and a half hour spacewalk concluded, Kimbrough, who has three children, wished "Happy Father's Day" to all the flight controller dads.



Vaccination Drive In Biswanath Gets A Booster Dose With The Inauguration Of Vaccine Storage Facility By Pijush Hazarika



Biswanath Chariali, 22 June: Covid vaccination drive in Biswanath district got a booster dose today with the inauguration of the sole vaccine storage facility by guardian minister Mr. Pijush Hazarika. Till yesterday, Biswanath was sharing the facility with neighboring Sonitpur district. With an exclusive storage facility now, the vaccination drive in the district is expected to get more seamless and

effective. While inaugurating the vaccine storage facility, Mr. Hazarika praised the Biswanath district administration for readying it within a record time of ten days; as was asked by him on his previous visit on June 6. He said from now onwards, separate quota of vaccines would be allotted on regular basis to Biswanath district which will help it focus on the vaccination drive without any dependency

Apollo Tyres and Ashok Leyland launch COVID helpline for the trucking community

Guwahati, June 22 : Apollo Tyres and Ashok Leyland together has launched 'Saarthi' COVID helpline for the trucking community. This helpline, targeted towards truck drivers, helpers and their family members, will provide COVID Consultation, Vaccination Guidance and non-COVID consultation (for other diseases). This pan-India helpline service is available in 5 languages -- Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Assamese -- as of now. Telerad Foundation is the technical partner for the helpline service. To avail the services, members of the trucking community can call on 7028105333, between 1000 to 1700 hours from Monday to Saturday. Members of the trucking community, who have tested COVID positive, and are in home quarantine, can get Doctor Consultation by calling on the helpline. They can also get guidance on nutrition during the infection period. For non-COVID patients, Doctor Consultation and prescription would be provided as a part of the 'Saarthi' initiative. Beneficiaries from the trucking community

seeking guidance on Vaccination, will be provided with counseling to clear their doubts regarding the vaccine, help with registration on COWIN/ Arogya Setu portal, scheduling of appointment at the nearest government hospital, help with downloading of vaccination certificate and post vaccination medical assistance, if required. Since 1994, Ashok Leyland has been educating the driving community on good driving practices through the establishment of the Driver Training Institutes. Currently, 11 Driver Training Institutes are operational across the country and cumulatively 14,82,462 drivers have been educated since inception, through various sessions. Apollo Tyres launched its healthcare initiative in 2000 and has since reached out to nearly 50 lakh people with its HIV-AIDS Awareness and Prevention, Vision Care, Tuberculosis, and other healthcare services in 31 centres across the country. Company has won multiple awards for its pioneering and effective work with the trucking community.

Sonitpur deputy commissioner Bhupesh Chandra Das kick started Mega vaccination campaign



Rangapara, June 21 : Deputy Commissioner Bhupesh Chandra Das today kick started the Mega Vaccination Campaign in Sonitpur district at an opening ceremony held

at Phulbari TE, Rangapara. This is part of the free for all Vaccination Campaign launched by the Government of India. As part of this programme, free vaccinations are being provided to all citizens over 18 years of age through online as well as walk-in registration. The Deputy Commissioner appealed to the people to come forward and get themselves inoculated as the only way to defeat the Covid19 virus. ADCs Satyajit Chetia, Dyotiva Bora, Joint Director Health Services Dr J Ahmed, Assistant Commissioner Ankan

Online competitions held on Rabha

Biswanath Chariali, June 22: The Village Defence Party (VDP), Borpam, to the north of Sootea under Biswanath district had organized a series of online competitions among the students on Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha. In this regard, the VDP, Borpam had given the theme and subject to the students a week ago. On Sunday, the VDP had organized a memorial meeting to pay rich tribute to the music maestro maintaining Covid protocol. Jagananda Kurmi offered floral tribute to the legendary artist and Arun Bordoloi lit up the ceremonial lights. The members of the VDP including Hemanta Bora, Yadab Swargiyari, Pranjal Nath, Latu Bordoloi, Raju Kurmi, Dhrubajyoti Bodo along with others visited the rank holders door steps and handed over prizes, cash awards, face masks, a packet of books etc. on Monday.

Enhanced COVID-19 vaccination drive gets underway in Nazira

Nazira, 22 June : The Nazira Sub-Divisional administration has intensified the COVID-19 vaccination drive as per the recent directives of the Chief Minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma. Keeping this in view, the SDO(c) Sabyasachi Kashyap on Monday visited a number of covid vaccination centres (CVCs) mainly catering to the tea-garden labourers and their family members in tea-tribe dominated areas. With the aim of achieving last-mile vaccination in the

sub-division, the SDO(C) took stock of the preparedness on the part of the officials and personnel involved in the vaccination process, while urging them to ensure that every single residence of such areas are vaccinated. He further appealed to the concerned citizens and civil society groups working in tea garden areas to help the administration in mitigating all inhibitions regarding vaccination among certain sections of people, rising out of rumours doing the

on the neighboring district. The storage facility was readied at the expense of Rs. 4 lakh; and the sum came in the form of donations from a local businessman and a highway construction company. With this facility, Biswanath, as of now, can store 40,000 vaccines and work is underway to augment the capacity further in coming days. During his visit, the Minister also took stock of the ongoing mega vaccination drive in the district and also visited two Covid Vaccination Centres (CVCs) and oversaw the facilities therein. He asked the district administration to pay importance on generating awareness among masses with regard to vaccination so that Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi and Assam's Chief Minister Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma's vision of 'Free Vaccination for All' could be achieved in totality at the earliest in the district. "Vaccination is the only way out to save people from Covid-19. We have to focus on generating awareness so that we complete cent per cent vaccination of the eligible population at the earliest," said Mr. Hazarika. The Minister during his tour of Biswanath district was accompanied by local MLA Mr. Promod Borthakur, Behali MLA Mr. Ranjit Dutta and Biswanath's Guardian Secretary Mr. Rajesh Prasad.

Chief Minister Dr.Sarma takes stock of the progress of construction work of Lakhimpur Medical College and Hospital

CM also inspects the construction work of North Lakhimpur Sports Complex

Guwahati, June 22 : Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma today visited the ongoing construction site of Lakhimpur Medical College and Hospital and took stock of the progress of the construction. Chief Minister inspected the newly constructed blocks and wards of the Medical College and other facilities put in place. He also held a meeting with the Medical College authorities, PWD, Deputy Commissioner and Superintendents of Police and reviewed progress of the work and discussed issues related to manpower. The Chief Minister directed the PWD for early completion of the buildings. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Dr Sarma also visited the ongoing construction site of Sports Complex at North Lakhimpur and took stock of its progress. Tea Tribes Welfare Minister Sanjay Kishan, MP Pradan Baruah and MLAs Manab Deka and Naba Kumar Doley were also present during the visit of the Chief Minister.

International Yoga Day'21 celebrated across all North East Airports



Guwahati, June 22 : The 7th International Yoga Day was celebrated by Airports Authority of India across all Airports in North East Region on 21 June 2021 adhering to all Covid related health protocols and safety norms. Most of the employees

participated in the Yoga session online from their home along with family members and followed the instructions of experts who conducted the sessions on various Yoga Asanas with clear guidelines and caution. The event commenced at 7 am and continued for an hour. At AAI Regional Headquarters, Guwahati the Yoga Session was led by Shri Ravi Kant, Regional Executive Director, North East Region where few regular members also participated. Inaugurating the session he said that Yoga is not just an art but a way of life. The programme is to promote well-being of all individuals both, mentally, physically and spiritually. He requested all employees posted at North East Region to regularly practice Yoga in daily

life. It not only relieves you from stress but also adds mental peace and a sense of inner strength, which is much needed for professionals in our field. This should be a regular activity and a way of life, Shri Ravi Kant added. International Yoga Day activities were observed and officials at other airports in the North East Region actively participated in the programme. Apart from this, a special session is also being organized by 'Art of Living, Tripura Centre' at MBB Airport, Agartala. AAI employees are participating in short Yoga session in 03 days virtual Program which is conducted from 21 June 21, 2021 to 23 June, 2021 on "Immunity Enhancement Program - Meditation Breath and Yoga". At Shillong Airport, trained instructors from CISF personnel led the International Yoga Day event and employees participated through online sessions as well as physical session maintaining all covid health protocols. Similar activities were observed at all other Airports namely Jorhat, Tezpur, Dibrugarh, Silchar, Lilabari, Rupsi, Imphal, and Dimapur in North Eastern States.

BSF Apprehended 02 Indian cattle Smugglers And Rescued Cattle From Indo- Bangladesh Border

Guwahati, June 22 : In yet another success in its crusade against smuggling activities, 192 Bn BSF under the aegis of Guwahati Frontier of Border Security Force apprehended 02 Indian cattle smugglers and rescued cattle heads, on 21st June 2021 from bordering area of village Kalamati Police station Sahebganj, Distt-Coochbehar (West Bengal)., 02. Acting on tip off, on 21st June 2021, BSF troops of Border outpost (BOP) Kalamati-Ilof 192 Bn BSF carried out a special operation in the general area of village Kalamati close to Indo-Bangladesh border and apprehended 02 Indian cattle smugglers and rescued cattle heads while these were being smuggled from India to Bangladesh. 03. Details of apprehended smugglers are as under:- a) Ashidul Sekh (25 Yrs), S/o - Owap Sekh, R/o

Vill - Nagorerbari, PS - Sahebganj, Distt - Coochbehar (West Bengal). b) Saddam Sekh, (23 Yrs), S/o Jayanal Sekh, R/o Vill - Poaturkuthi, PS Sahebganj, Distt - Coochbehar (West Bengal). 04. Apprehended Indian smugglers and rescued cattle heads have been handed over to P.S. Sahebganj, Distt - Coochbehar (West Bengal) for further legal action. 05. Keeping in view of the vulnerability of border, heightened activities of the smugglers and anti-national elements on the

BSF Guwahati Frontier Observes 7th International Yoga Day-2021



Guwahati, June 22 : Troops of Guwahati Frontier of Border Security Force observed 7th International Yoga Day on 21 June 2021 to spread awareness among the masses about the importance of Yoga and its effects upon human life. The awareness campaign on how "Yoga" an age and health care and wellness practice for holistic living, ensures a balance of mind, body and soul. The theme for this year's International Yoga Day is "Yoga for Wellness". 2. The world is reeling under the COVID-19 Pandemic due to which people all over the world have suffered physically and mentally. Under the present scenario, Yoga has been accepted worldwide, cutting across Geographical boundaries and everyone talks about the benefits of Yoga and has also adopted it as a regular practice in their day to day lives. 3. The Yoga programme at Frontier HQ Guwahati campus was led by Shri Sanjay Singh Gehlot, Inspector General, BSF. All Officers, Subordinate officers, other ranks of BSF, 1st Bn NDRF and CAPFs Composite Hospital Guwahati attended the Yoga programme. 4. Shri Sanjay Singh Gehlot, Inspector General, addressed the participants after conclusion of Yoga programme and emphasized practicing of Yoga as part and parcel of life. He further informed that yoga is proven panacea for making oneself free from stress and tension. Moreover, it has been potential tool for improving respiration, energy and vitality of body. Appreciating benefits of yoga in strengthening body and mind, BSF has also made it a part of daily morning physical training parade at all BSF formations. 5. Besides, BSF Wives Welfare Association (BWVA) members of BSF Guwahati Frontier organized a two days Yoga Session at Frontier campus wef 20 to 21 June 2021 in which all BWVA members of BSF and their wards have participated. 6. Similar programmes were also organized in Sector HQs of Dhubri, Cooch behar and Gopalpur, all Battalion HQs and BOPs under command of Guwahati Frontier. The aim of observing International Yoga Day upto the BOP level was to spread the message of keeping healthy heart and mind amongst the border population with zero cost expense. A large number of men, women and children of Border villages participated in the Yoga programme. During Yoga programme all Seema Praharis followed COVID-19 Protocol.

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1st NDRF Celebrates First International Yoga Day



Guwahati, June 22 : 1st Battalion National Disaster Response Force celebrated seventh international yoga day on 21st June 2021, 800 personnel of 1st Battalion NDRF celebrated the day at different team locations i.e. Patgaon, Mirza, Changsari, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Jorhat (Assam), Unakoti, Agartala (Tripura), Aizawl (Mizoram) with great enthusiasm and also planted around 1000 saplings of different varieties. 1st NDRF is based at Patgaon, Guwahati and rendering its services to the people of North East states, any part of the country and abroad for rescue operation during any disaster. Sh. H P S Khandari, Commandant 1st BN NDRF said that "the rescuers who are directly experience or witness life threatening danger or physical harm, exposure to gruesome death, loss of home and neighborhood or community, loss of communication with or support from close relations during or after disaster are at greatest risk for severe stress. Yoga is an antidote for stress and potentially powerful complement to living a healthy and balanced life." This programme is very useful for human body and relieves mentally stress, tension and made active to work round the clock. Yoga is used as a tool to live in harmony, mind, body and spirit. The United Nations in December 2015 at the initiative of the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi declared 21 June as International Day of Yoga and 177 countries became its co-proponent.

Mass Online and Offline Yoga Sessions in Various Parts of West Siang Held

Aalo June 22 : A mass online and offline Yoga sessions with theme, 'Be with Yoga, Be at Home' based on common Yoga protocol issued by the ministry of Ayush, Govt of India was organised VKAJ across the district on 21st June last. Altogether 126 participants turned up due to pandemic situation. Program Sanchalan Shri Ribom, Miss Amang Tabang and Shri Tumge Ete stressed the importance of Yoga in our daily life. Smty Mojum Ete Ado gave a detail presentation on Kendra Parichay and Miss Jomsni Tair Geet presented 'Bane Hame Rastra ke Yogi' the Yoga was conducted offline at Govt. H.S.S. School Aalo, ADC Office Conference Hall, Liromoba and other places of the district.

No. TECH/URBD/BLDG/IFB/2019-20/87 Dated. 21.06.2021

PRESS NOTICE INVITING FOR BID

The Executive Engineer, PWD Udaluri (R&B) Division, Udaluri on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids from approved and eligible Contractors registered with Public Works Department (Buildings), Assam/Contractors registered with Bodoland Territorial Council in the category of Class-I (A, B&C), Class-II & Class-III for 11 (eleven) nos. of works for bids amounting to Rs. 1,38,65,014.00 (approx) (Rupees one crore thirty eight lakh sixty five thousand fourteen) only.

Details may be seen at the office of the undersigned during office hours.

SD/-
Executive Engineer, PWD
Udaluri (R&B) Division
Udaluri

IPR(BTC)-87/2021

No. KDO/EST/AP/1/2021/115 Dated Kokrajhar the 21st June/2021

RESULT

Recruitment to the post of Khalasi (Grade-IV) in the office of the Deputy Director, Town & Country Planning, Kokrajhar vide Adv. No. CHD/UDD/EST/1/2018-19/982A, dated 16-02-2021.

The following candidate has been selected.

Number of Post: 01 (one)

Position	Roll No.	Name of Candidate	Gender
I	001	Dansrang Narzary	Male

Sd/- Deputy Director,
Town & Country Planning,
District Office: Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)-88/2021

THE ASSAM RISING

VOL. NO. VI, ISSUE NO. 128 WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23, 2021

There is still some way to go out of this pandemic

Why the need for prolonged restrictions when the rollout has been so successful? What does a safe level of vaccination look like? To date, 46.8% of the population are fully vaccinated in the UK and 64.2% have received one dose of a coronavirus vaccine. The jabs approved in the UK use the virus's spike protein to educate our immune system so when it meets the real thing, it can produce antibodies and T-cells that recognise this spike and control the infection. After the first vaccination (or natural infection) it takes a couple of weeks to expand the relevant immune cells, but then memory cells protect us from severe disease in future infections. In previously infected people, the first vaccination acts like a booster, helping them retain antiviral immunity for longer. Immunological memory duration differs for different viruses, and this is why we need to monitor how long protection lasts for new vaccines and viruses, enabling us to work out when we need booster vaccinations. The second vaccination in two-dose regimens acts to increase the power and duration of immunity after the first jab. We appreciate that immunity may wane a few months to a year after coronavirus infection, but the timing of this has yet to be established following vaccination. Given the pressing clinical need and early sparsity of vaccine doses, the initial decision was taken to vaccinate at an interval of 12 weeks for two-dose vaccines. This helped us protect the most vulnerable faster, despite some vaccines being tested only at eight-week intervals in clinical trials. The latest advice is to bring forward the second jab appointments to eight weeks, to help keep us safe from a third wave of infection. Vaccines, however, are not magic; they do nothing to stop us catching a virus if someone sneezes over us, and this is why restrictions still play a role. Vaccines do help reduce the opportunities for the virus to take hold and the intensity of an infection's aftermath, while cutting down transmission. So far, they are estimated to have saved 12,000 lives in England alone, and prevented more than 30,000 hospitalisations. Most vaccinated people will show mild symptoms or none at all when infected. But symptoms may also depend on the variant. There is still a chance that vaccinated people will pass the virus on, particularly at super-spreader events and with highly transmissible variants, such as the Delta variant now predominant in the UK. As new variants that carry mutated spike proteins emerge, the effect of our current jabs may be reduced and the vaccines will require updating. But right now, there is evidence that our vaccines are protective against the Delta variant. So what does a safe level of vaccination look like, in order to protect those unable to have a jab and achieve herd immunity? It depends on the virus, and this coronavirus has a few tricks up its sleeve. At the beginning of the pandemic, experts estimated that about 70% of the population needed to be vaccinated to keep everyone safe from severe disease, but the Delta variant is more transmissible than the original virus, and the new estimate is closer to 85%. We are on the right track, with cautious restrictions and extending the vaccine rollout, and upcoming school closures for the summer are on our side. We have to continue taking personal precautions to stop the spread, or new variants will emerge that will eventually escape the vaccines we have now. We are also rightly planning for a booster jab programme in the autumn, which itself raises questions, such as how to safely combine Covid vaccinations with winter flu jabs. The aim is to reduce the risk as much as possible for everyone; we don't yet fully understand long Covid, or the impact of infection on tissues such as the brain. Until the majority of us are fully protected and infection rates are brought back under control, I will continue to wear my mask in busy places and indoors after restrictions are lifted. We must do all we can to protect the effectiveness of our vaccines for as long as possible, or we will find ourselves back at square one. I will also continue to monitor immunity in vaccinated people, because we don't know yet how long protection will last. When immunity starts to wane, we need to detect this through immune surveillance tests and invite those who are vaccinated to get booster jabs of the same or updated vaccines, as needed, in the years to come. There is still some way to go out of this pandemic.

Oxygen shortages are killing thousands. Why aren't we doing more about this?



The basics of caring for acutely unwell patients are simple: air needs to go in and out and blood needs to go round and round. Across the world, the pandemic has consistently shown how poorly equipped healthcare systems are for addressing these needs. Much attention has been paid to vaccines, drug therapies and ventilators in recent months, while relatively little has been said about the most basic human requirement of all - oxygen. Oxygen is all around us, and yet there are acute shortages of it in many healthcare settings. This is because the infrastructure needed to supply oxygen to patients, such as large vacuum-insulated evaporators (which are like giant, very cold vacuum flasks), is relatively expensive and needs regular maintenance and top-ups of liquid oxygen. Where this isn't available, hospitals might use concentrators that extract oxygen from the surrounding environ-

ment. These require electricity and compressed air - which, again, are scarce in many places. Or they might use cylinders, which can store and deliver short-term oxygen therapy. But they need regularly refilling, which depends on secure supply lines. I am a doctor who specialises in respiratory and intensive care medicine. Thankfully, I have never been in a situation where I needed to provide a patient with oxygen therapy when none was available. But this is exactly the situation facing healthcare workers in many other countries. During the pandemic, systems for delivering oxygen came under pressure almost everywhere. In the UK, hospitals that were decades old struggled to cope with surges of patients needing the type of high oxygen flows used in modern therapy. In some low- and middle-income countries, the infrastructure to deliver oxygen to patients was nonexistent.

Human lungs are enormous gas exchange surfaces made up of tiny little air sacs called alveoli (when flattened out, these are the size of roughly half a tennis court). The purpose of lungs is to transfer oxygen from the air to the blood to maintain the function of our body's cells, and to transfer carbon dioxide from our blood back out into the air. The virus that causes Covid-19, influenza and other causes of pneumonia make the lungs less efficient at transferring oxygen into the blood, a situation known as acute hypoxaemic respiratory failure. The immediate treatment for patients with acute hypoxaemic respiratory failure is oxygen. Though the World Health Organization has included oxygen for the treatment of respiratory failure in its List of Essential Medicines since 2017, people continue to die through a lack of it. In 2017, pneumonia - a treatable condition - killed more than 2.5 million people worldwide, of whom a third were children under five years old. Before the pandemic, I worked together with colleagues in Uganda to research the effects of acute hypoxaemic respiratory failure in African countries. We found that 4.5% of patients arriving at emergency departments in Uganda had this condition, most commonly caused by pneumonia. The average age of these patients was 38 years; 77% of them died before ever leaving hospital. Studies have shown that oxygen therapy can reduce the risk of death from pneumonia by 35%, and that improved access to oxygen would save the lives of more than 120,000 children every year. Oxygen can be admin-

istered to patients who need it via simple face masks that use up to 15 litres of oxygen a minute, high-flow systems that use up to 60 litres of oxygen a minute, or high-pressure systems that can use more than 70 litres of oxygen a minute. The key element is a secure, plentiful and uninterrupted supply. Complex treatments such as expensive drug therapies or mechanical ventilators can provide marginal improvements in survival, though often it is the simple things that save the most lives. Governments and health policymakers have long failed to address the scarcity of oxygen in hospitals across the world. Ensuring every patient who needs it has access to oxygen, both during the pandemic and in the future, isn't an insurmountable challenge; indeed, if scientists can work out how to provide oxygen for astronauts to live in the International Space Station for months at a time, we can surely ensure it's delivered to those who need it here on Earth, wherever they live. The pandemic has thrown a spotlight on the inequalities of access to essential treatments such as drugs and vaccines. Oxygen must be included in this list. Improving the world's supply would mean investing in robust supply chains able to meet surges in demand as well as the infrastructure - vaporisers, electricity, pipework, engineers and cylinders - used to supply it. Medical oxygen accounts for only about 1% of the world's liquid oxygen supply; the rest is used mainly for industrial purposes such as mining and steel production. Providing medical oxygen to patients could prevent thousands of deaths every year.

Charlotte Summers

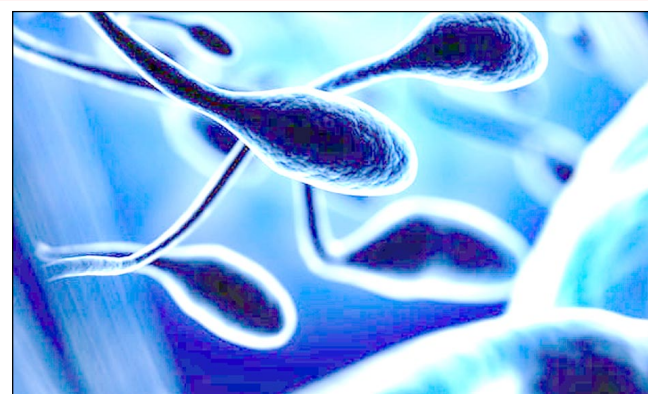
Falling sperm counts aren't as alarming as they sound

What's too small to see with the naked eye, made by half the population in batches of millions, and in alarmingly short supply? The answer, according to some scientists, is sperm. Specifically, researchers are concerned that men in the west have been producing fewer and fewer sperm since the 1970s, a decline that they say shows no sign of stopping. At the current rate, they say, these men could be infertile by 2045. But these figures should give us pause. The idea that the sperm of men in western countries is about to flatline is, in a word, extraordinary. The data doesn't support it. The fear of a decline in sperm counts is potent and far-reaching. It has been voiced by everyone from environmentalists such as Erin Brockovich to white supremacists and their mainstream media mouthpieces such as Tucker Carlson. The broad appeal of this notion is possible because the alleged causes of a decline run the material and ideological gamut. They include chemicals found in common household products as well as modern urban lifestyles in which white men are physically sedentary and compelled to share power with people of ever-diversifying genders

and ethnicities. It's worth taking a closer look at the evidence before turning out for the "save the sperm" rally. The most recent round of apocalyptic predictions was sparked by an influential 2017 paper that compiled sperm count data from studies published between 1973 and 2011. Figures from the US, Canada, western Europe, Australia and New Zealand - ie majority white, affluent countries - were grouped under the category "western" and the remaining data was lumped into the "other" category. While there wasn't enough data to draw any conclusions

about "other" men, the authors found that average population sperm counts among men in the "western" category had decreased by more than 50% since 1973. We analysed the data and found that the apocalyptic verdict of vanishing sperm is far from the only plausible interpretation of what's going on here. The authors assume that the high sperm counts of men in "western" nations in the 1970s represent the norm. This assumption makes the pernicious but all too common mistake of treating men in affluent, majority white nations as the standard to which everyone else should

be compared. It also takes for granted that, when it comes to sperm, more is better. Available evidence doesn't support this association: male fertility does not scale proportionately with sperm count. Some men with low sperm counts may be



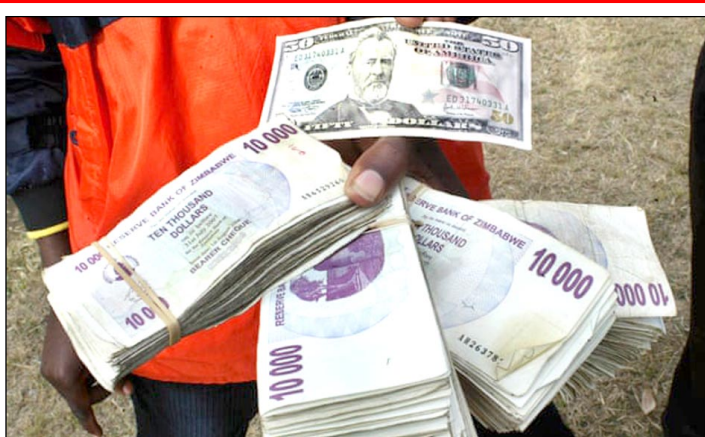
Marion Boulicault

highly fertile, while others overflow with sperm may struggle to conceive. Add to this the well-known fact that sperm counts are highly context-sensitive - to tight underwear, exercise, a hot bath and even to the season - and it's easy to see how a single measure of sperm counts is an unreliable gauge of fertility. There's also the question of what is causing the decline in sperm counts. If we take seriously the idea that environmental pollutants are hostile to sperm production, we would expect to see the steepest declines among men living in the most polluted environments. It is well established that

the global poor - ie those predominantly (but not exclusively) living in the "other" countries - bear the greatest burdens of environmental pollution. Yet the authors and the media have instead jumped to frame the crisis as one facing "western" men; what is ignored is the fact that the study's data was insufficient to draw any conclusions for men in the "other" category. The very use of the categories "western" and "other" makes little scientific sense and imports dangerous racial undertones. Men frequently migrate between "western" and "other" nations, making countries a poor proxy for the environments that might affect any man's sperm.

Price rises should be short-lived - so let's not resurrect inflation as a bogeyman

A decade ago the financial press, echoing predictions from mainstream macroeconomists, obsessed about whether governments would run out of money as deficits rose to combat the global financial crisis. Stark predictions of rising bond yields and inevitable debt defaults came to nought. Now, with much larger deficits, the headlines are all about inflation. No one seems worried any longer about government insolvency as capitalism survives on fiscal life-support systems. The focus has shifted from meaningless financial ratios to substantive issues relating to real resource scarcity (that is, how close nations are to full employment). However, the inflation mania is as misconstrued as the earlier solvency fears. Lurid statements, like this in the Wall Street Journal: "Anxiety about inflation is at a fever pitch, among economists and in markets" and this headline in the Dow Jones-owned Marketwatch: "The biggest 'inflation scare' in 40 years is coming", feed the frenzy. Apparently, rising household saving during the lockdowns will become an expenditure binge as restric-



tions ease. Accordingly, the former US treasury secretary Larry Summers claimed that Biden's fiscal injections would "overheat" the economy and cause accelerating inflation. The former German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble has also claimed that accelerating inflation will result from the European Central Bank's public bond-buying programme, which has purchased most of the eurozone government debt issued since the pandemic began. He wants a return to austerity or "monetary and fiscal normality", a normality that maintained elevated unemployment levels and stagnant growth. Inflation hawks claim the large deficits and central bank bond buying

programmes - quantitative easing, or QE, which is mischaracterised as "money printing" - will deliver Zimbabwe-like outcomes. However, they just misunderstand how governments spend and are ignorant of the history of hyperinflations. All government spending is facilitated by central banks typing numbers into bank accounts. There is no spending out of taxes or bond sales or "printing" going on. All spending - public or non-government - carries inflation risk if nominal spending growth outstrips productive capacity. As full employment is reached, governments have to constrain spending growth and may have to increase taxes to

curtail private purchasing power. But we are a long way from that point, with elevated levels of unemployment and largely flat wages growth. Japan's experience since the 1990s demonstrates the spurious nature of mainstream macroeconomics, which erroneously predicted bond market revolts and accelerating inflation in the face of its large deficits and QE programme, which most nations have now copied. Modern monetary theory (MMT) demonstrates that QE involves central banks buying government bonds by adding cash to bank reserves. Bank lending is not constrained by available reserves - they are never loaned out to consumers. Rather, lending is driven by demand from credit-worthy borrowers, who are thin on the ground in deep recessions. The only way that QE can stimulate total spending is via its capacity to lower interest rates. When the central bank buys bonds in the secondary markets, the increased demand reduces yields and this permeates into lower rates for relates financial assets. The lower bond yields

may have stimulated increased demand for equities, but they have not pushed total spending beyond resource constraints. Further, massive supply shocks explain the hyperinflation of 1920s Germany and modern-day Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean government's confiscation of highly productive white-run farms to reward soldiers who had no experience in farming, caused farm output to collapse, which then damaged manufacturing. Even with fiscal surpluses, hyperinflation would have occurred, such was the supply contraction. The current supply chain disruptions are temporary and relatively small by comparison. There are misconceptions as to what inflation actually is. Inflation is the continuous rise in the price level. A one-off price rise does not constitute inflation. For example, after recessions, firms often withdraw discounts and return prices to pre-recession levels. These adjustments do not constitute inflation. Share market booms are also not akin to generalised inflation. Some price pressures have emerged as the pandemic eases. Oil prices fell sharply as the lockdowns kept us off the

road. The increased demand for fuel, as cars have returned to the roads, is pushing up prices. But the Opec Reference Basket (ORB) for global oil prices is still below pre-pandemic levels and well below the stable post-global financial crisis levels. The US Energy Information Administration forecasts oil prices will flatten out through 2022. Fearmongers point to the Opec hikes in October 1973, when global oil prices rose from an average 2.48 US dollars per barrel in 1972 to \$11.58 in 1974. However, there is little prospect of a 1970s-style inflation emerging. Then, strong unions and firms with price-setting power engaged in a dispute aimed at shifting the real income losses from the rising oil prices on to each other. But the strength of the relationship between oil prices and inflation has waned since the 1990s. The ability of workers to engage in this sort of distributional struggle has been constrained by the rise of precarious work, persistent elevated levels of unemployment and underemployment, and pernicious legislation that has reduced union capacity to pursue wage demands. Since 1995, the

IMF's World Economic Outlook data shows that average annual inflation across advanced nations has been just 1.87%. In Japan, the average inflation rate has been 0.2%. A 1970s-style wages breakout will not happen. Modern monetary theory draws attention to inflationary triggers that are independent of aggregate spending pressures: for example, administrative pricing practices (for example, indexation agreements with privatised energy or mass transport companies to increase prices irrespective of current conditions) and abuse of market power (such as cartels). Further, one of the problems the global financial crisis exposed, which has not been adequately dealt with, is the speculative move by hedge funds into agricultural commodity markets, which triggered massive food price increases in 2008. These triggers do require legislative focus. I believe that the current price spikes, though, are transient, and will be absorbed without any entrenched inflation emerging. Accordingly, they do not justify a return to austerity.

FMCG sector to drive growth as India revives post lockdown 2.0; HUL, Nestle, others look fundamentally strong

Mumbai, June 22: COVID 2.0 turned out to be stronger than the first wave of the pandemic and inflicted more severe damage to the whole nation than the first one. While the waves forced the government to impose stringent restrictions to curb further spread of the virus, both lockdowns, 'Lockdown 1.0' and 'Lockdown 2.0' differed starkly from each other. As against a nationwide lockdown observed in the first wave, the key difference of Lockdown 2.0 was that it was State-imposed with more localized lockdowns that had varying degrees of severity including night curfews, weekend or complete lockdowns and restrictions on contact-based services. Besides, the duration of 1-1.5 months too was lesser than the lockdown (2-2.5 months) experienced last summer. Coronavirus inoculation drive: As India seeks to increase procurement, a look at upcoming vaccines in the country Making efforts to check Covid-19 spread, says Delhi traders after HC flags violations Making efforts to check Covid-19 spread: Delhi traders after HC flags violations Having learnt a few lessons in COVID 1.0, companies are focused on optimizing supply chain, stock-keeping units (SKUs) and product assortments this time around. According to NielsenIQ, assortment optimization strategies have become even more crucial as consumers streamlined their budgets, favored smaller format neighborhood stores and e-commerce channels. With a rise in e-commerce, shoppers are visiting physical stores less often, and when they do, they visit stores with prepared buying lists, thereby spending less time browsing the shelves and thus reduced pantry loading during Lockdown 2.0. As per NielsenIQs, on an average 1,059 SKUs are launched every month in India. Of these, only 10% of them get sufficient distribution to survive. So, COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 made companies realize the beauty of simplicity as against the hidden cost of complexity. This has resulted in companies proactively aligning their go-to-market strategies with those of consumer preferences. Another trend that has sustained high growth is consumers' preference for immunity-building natural and ayurvedic products. Demand for products

like Chywanprash, Tulsi, Amla Juice, Turmeric, Ashwagandha and Honey to name a few have seen astronomical rise in demand. Consequently, the leading names in Ayurveda space such as Dabur, Zandu, Baidyanath, Patanjali and Himalaya have seen a strong surge in the demand for their products. While companies have adopted



strategies to optimize their portfolios and ensure product availability on the shelves, Covid 2.0 has damaged household finances across families owing to higher medical treatment expenses and loss of employment. Lower income coupled with higher medical expenses have eaten up savings and increased their overall debt levels (most of it informally funded). Consequently, consumer confidence for discretionary spending has been materially lower than observed in the previous wave. Discretionary categories like clothing, jewellery, home renovation, luxury products, weddings and others have seen material cuts in spending. Staple and value oriented personal, household care categories too have seen pressure on budgets as is evident from down-trading within the staples categories. Despite down-trading, companies with wider product offerings straddling across the price-value matrix stand to benefit given their brand image, quality of product and affordability. COVID

2.0 has inflicted severe damage to the hinterlands of the country and with the subsequent lockdown of economic activities; concerns over rural demand cannot be ignored. With a wider and deeper spread of the second wave, the emerging popular view holds that unlike last summer, when rural demand remained resilient despite a

wider and stringent lockdown, this year demand may not show a similar resilience. Additionally, rising stress in the household and unorganized sector is also expected to keep discretionary spending under check. Despite the headwinds, we believe 'Bharat' - the backbone of our economy, will bounce back post experiencing a slowdown in the April-May period. This will primarily be on account of 1) a record food production in the fifth consecutive year led by good rainfall last year; 2) forecast of a normal monsoon season this year at 98% of the long period average (LPA) and a weak El-Nino over the next six months; 3) income/ratio support announced by Governments and 4) easing of lockdown restrictions to aid mobility ahead of the Kharif sowing season. In conclusion, higher crop volume coupled with remunerative pricing and improved economic activity augurs well for driving overall rural income and thereby a positive impact on consumption demands. While demand could bounce

back in the upcountry markets which is critical for companies, rising raw material prices are a key concern. This has caused management across the staples, durables and other sectors to be in a Catch 22 situation, whether to raise prices of final products or to take a hit on profitability in the near term. This is because prices of raw materials be it agricultural (edible oils, palm oil, tea etc), chemical or crude (PFAD and packaging material), have seen an unprecedented rise between 25-150% during H2FY21 and is expected to continue in Q1FY22 too. Although, over the longer term such high input prices are unlikely to sustain. While a few companies such as Hindustan Unilever Ltd, Britannia Industries, and Colgate Palmolive, among others opted to raise prices to strike a balance between growth and profitability, a few others like Jyothy Labs, Emami etc have strategized to protect their shares and volumes in these challenging times. Backed by the experience of two Covid-19 waves by far, we believe the 3rd wave which is likely to emerge in September/October is likely to be less fatal. This is because the most vulnerable segment (people aged above 45 years) which accounted for ~88% of Covid-19 related deaths would get vaccinated by then. Further, inoculation of population between 18-44 years too will pick up speed as supply constraints ease. This will shelter consumption from taking a severe hit and will help companies as well as the customers to sail smoothly through the stormy Covid-19 weather, moving forward. Against this backdrop, we pick fundamentally strong companies with healthy balance sheets and growing industry opportunities that can be added to the portfolio. Amongst large caps- Britannia Industries, Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL), Dabur India, and Nestle India while in the mid & small-cap space Relaxo Footwear, Varun Beverages, Mold-Tek Packaging and CCL Products are the interesting ones.

Samsung Launches BingeMonster Galaxy M32 with Segment-Best Display in India



Delhi, June 22: Samsung, India's most trusted smartphone brand, today announced Galaxy M32, dubbed as the #BingeMonster. Galaxy M32 is optimized for bingeing on movies, games and social media. It comes with segment-best 6.4" FHD+ Super AMOLED display and smooth 90Hz refresh rate to provide immersive viewing experience while minimizing motion blur. In bright light, the High Brightness Mode automatically turns on to take Galaxy M32's screen brightness to 800 nits. This makes Galaxy M32 the brightest and most powerful display ever on an M Series smartphone and the perfect device for entertainment and binge-watching. Galaxy M32 is launching in two memory variants- 4GB+64GB and 6GB+128GB priced at INR 14999 and INR 16999 respectively. Galaxy M32 will be available in two attractive colours - Black and Light Blue. It will be available on Amazon.in, Samsung.com and all key retail stores. As an introductory offer, consumers can avail an instant cashback worth INR 1250 while paying with ICICI cards which brings the effective ownership price of the 4GB+64GB variant to INR 13749 and 6GB+128GB variant

to INR 15749. "Ever since Samsung launched the Galaxy M series in 2019, it has consistently disrupted the market with each new launch, bringing segment-best features that have re-defined power and performance for our GenZ and millennial consumers. Today we are extending this 'Monster' legacy to our newest #BingeMonster, the Galaxy M32. It comes with three segment bests: An FHD+ Super AMOLED 90Hz display, the brightest and most powerful ever on an M series, monster 6000mAh battery and the ultimate data security and privacy with Knox and AltZLife. Galaxy M32 also sports versatile 64 MP quad rear camera for capturing stunning photos and videos. All this makes it the perfect device for our young consumers who love bingeing on entertainment and social media," said Aditya Babbar, Senior Director and Head, Mobile Marketing, Samsung India.

Binge on Flicks: Galaxy M32 comes with stunning 6.4" FHD+ Super AMOLED Infinity-U screen with 90Hz refresh rate for content streaming, video calls and attending online courses. The High Brightness Mode of 800 nits offers more immersive viewing experience even in bright sunlight. The 90Hz dynamic refresh rate provides shorter length of motion blur by minimizing afterimage in display transition and shorter MPRT (Motion Picture Response Time) which allows faster and smooth display. What's more, the display is protected with Corning Gorilla Glass 5 that prevents scratches and breakage. Galaxy M32 also comes with

Tata Tea's latest Jaago Re initiative urges people to lend a helping hand to support staff in their COVID-19 vaccination journey



Guwahati, June 22: Tata Tea launched its latest edition of #JaagoRe, Iss Baar #SabKeLiye #JaagoRe with an aim to spread awareness on a cause which is the need of the hour in the current state of Pandemic - urging people to lend a helping hand to those who have been a helping hand in their daily life. Taking an extension from last year's initiative Iss Baar #BadonKeLiye #JaagoRe, Iss Baar #SabKeLiye #JaagoRe aims to sensitize people and urge them to help those who may need support in their Covid-19 vaccination journey. The initiative calls on individuals to come forward and offer assistance to everyday workers like maids, drivers, security guards and gardeners who may not have access to the right resources, platforms to register for their vaccination or may have limited access to knowledge on vaccination. At present people may be facing various challenges in their vaccination attempt, including lack of awareness, Covid-19 related misconceptions, digital divide, technology, and language barriers. Iss Baar #SabKeLiye #JaagoRe is hopeful of addressing some of these by aiming to spread awareness and facilitating change. The initiative will involve: "Spreading awareness and inspiring others to help their support staff and people around them to get vaccinated through digital outreach and leveraging authentic influencers on Social media," "Facilitating information, which involves a dedicated microsite offering vaccination-related information, resources, and support tips," "Tying up with volunteer groups and NGOs to help the less privileged in their vaccination journey. Over the years, Tata Tea's #JaagoRe initiative has become a clarion call for social awakening, with the brand and platform inspiring and facilitating genuine changes for a better society.

The iconic all-new MINI range of cars arrives in India

Guwahati, June 22: MINI India launches the all-new MINI 3-Door Hatch, the all-new MINI Convertible and the all-new MINI John Cooper Works Hatch in India today. This all-new MINI range will be available in petrol engines as Completely Built-up Units (CBUs). Test Drives and Bookings are open at all MINI authorised Dealers and the MINI Online Shop (shop.mini.in). MINI now offers its latest range of products in the premium compact car segment in India. Mr. Vikram Pawah, President, BMW Group India said, "Since inception, authentic design, unique style and driving fun are timeless qualities that distinguish the iconic



MINI. 20 years after the launch of the modern MINI, the latest model generation continues to reinvent itself all over again and amplifies its emotional design, go-kart feel and clever functionality. We are delighted to offer our customers in India a completely new range of MINI products with the launch of the new MINI Countryman in March and now the all-new MINI 3-Door

Hatch, all-new MINI Convertible and the all-new MINI John Cooper Works Hatch. This significantly strengthens the exceptional position of MINI within the premium small car segment in India." The all-new MINI 3-Door Hatch, the all-new MINI Convertible and the all-new MINI John Cooper Works Hatch enter the next stage of evolution with an intensive makeover, an enhanced standard profile and a simplified offer structure. They embody MINI's love for fun-filled driving as well as passion for agile handling along with a modern design. The new generation cars also introduce MINI's new Brand Campaign 'BIG LOVE', that captures its inimitable spirit of celebrating individuality while embracing diversity. We're all different but we're pretty good together. BIG LOVE.

Four of top-10 firms add Rs 68,458.72 cr in m-cap; HUL, Infosys biggest gainers

Mumbai, June 22: Four of the 10 most valued companies together added Rs 68,458.72 crore in market valuation last week, with Hindustan Unilever Limited and Infosys emerging as the biggest gainers. While RIL, TCS, Infosys and HUL were the gainers from the top-10 list, HDFC Bank, HDFC, ICICI Bank, SBI, Bajaj Finance and Kotak Mahindra Bank witnessed a cumulative erosion of Rs 43,703.55 crore from their market valuation last week. The market valuation of Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) zoomed Rs 26,832.3 crore to reach Rs 5,82,874.25 crore. The valuation of Infosys jumped Rs 24,628.79 crore to Rs 6,41,108.34 crore. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) added Rs 9,358.6 crore to its valuation to stand at Rs 12,19,577.24 crore,

while the market capitalisation of Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) climbed by Rs 7,639.03 crore to Rs 14,10,557.79 crore. financial planning, financial planner, mf risk, investments, funds, financial planning, intelligent tips on financial planning, investment portfolio, debt repayment plan, credit score, emergency fund, Fixed deposits, FDs, fixed deposit interest rates, fixed deposit calculator, fixed deposit rates in sbi, retirement planning, ULIP, NPS, Equity Funds, EPF, National Pension System, PPF, debt schemes, Stock, stock market investment, asset allocation, asset allocation strategy, rebalancing portfolio, asset mix, mutual funds, asset classes, equity, debt, cash equivalents, gold, Financial emergency, health insurance, Patience, diversification, investing, Covid-19, equity

market, Mutual Fund, MF, SIP, direct plans, regular plans, direct plans, regular plans, Mutual Fund, MF, mutual fund investment, Debt Mutual Fund 2020, asset allocation, asset allocation strategy, rebalancing portfolio, asset mix, mutual funds, asset classes, equity, debt, cash equivalents, gold, SIP, Biggest money lessons of 2020, money lessons of 2020, Financial emergency, health insurance, Patience, diversification, investing, Succession planning: Need of the hour to secure wealth and business before uncertainty hits Covid, lockdown, HUL, FMCG sector FMCG sector to drive growth as India revives post lockdown 2.0; HUL, Nestle, others look fundamentally strong In contrast, State Bank of India's valuation diminished by Rs 14,948.73 crore to Rs 3,68,407.96 crore and that of HDFC declined Rs 12,796.03 crore to Rs 4,49,176.18 crore. The market capitalisation of Kotak Mahindra Bank dipped Rs 6,908.63 crore to Rs 3,49,019.23 crore and that of ICICI Bank dived Rs 3,644.88 crore to Rs 4,36,390.78 crore. HDFC Bank's valuation eroded by Rs 3,503.96 crore to reach Rs 8,16,587.81 crore and that of Bajaj Finance dipped Rs 1,901.32 crore to Rs 3,67,425.99 crore. In the ranking of top-10 most valued firms, RIL maintained its numero uno status, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Infosys, HUL, HDFC, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India (SBI), Bajaj Finance and Kotak Mahindra Bank. During the last week, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 130.31 points or 0.24 per cent.



Unlock 2.0 to let Vi Users Connect Back to India's fastest 4G network as they Resume Work

Guwahati, June 22: With the commencement of gradual state wise unlocking efforts, India's migrant working populations have started returning from their home towns to their work locations. During the lockdown period, a segment of prepaid telecom users were unable to recharge due to several reasons. Vi is inviting all such customers back

to India's fastest 4G network, as they resume work. To reconnect these low income group customers, India's leading telecom services provider, Vi is giving 50 Vi to Vi calling minutes along with 50MB of data. This complimentary benefit comes with a validity of 15 days, post which customers can recharge with their preferred value recharge packs.

Contd. From Page 1

Fake TRP case: Mumbai Police

filed a complaint through Hansa Research Group (HRG), alleging that certain television channels were rigging TRP numbers. A case was registered in regards to the scam last year after then commissioner of Mumbai Police Param Bir Singh named Republic TV being involved in the scam. In October last year, Param Bir Singh had said that the Mumbai Police busted a TRP racket which involved Republic TV, Box Cinema, and Fakt Marathi. The channels, Singh alleged, manipulated TRPs by bribing Partho Dasgupta, former CEO of Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), to increase their viewership. TRP scam came to light after BARC lodged a complaint alleging that few TV channels were rigging rating numbers. Thus far, the Mumbai Police has arrested 13 people in connection with the case.

Top opposition leaders meet

Verma, and others. Besides, he will also meet prominent personalities like Justice A.P. Singh (retired), Javed Akhtar, K.T.S. Tulsi, Karan Thapar, Ashutosh, A. Majeed Memon, Vandana Chavan, MP, S.Y. Qureshi, K.C. Singh, Sanjay Jha, Sudheendra Kulkarni, Colin Gonsalves, Ghanshyam Tiwari and Pritish Nandy. However, Shiv Sena's Sanjay Raut said that it was a meeting of "all opposition parties". "I won't say that this is a meeting of all opposition parties. SP, BSP, YSRCP, TDP and TRS are not participating in this meeting," Raut said. Earlier today, the NCP held its national executive meeting and discussed the current national issues, the party's future policies and its role in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The meeting was chaired by Sharad Pawar and attended by party leaders Supriya Sule, Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare among others. The meeting, which was held at Pawar's residence here, lasted for about two hours. The future goals of the party were discussed in detail at the meeting, Pawar said in a series of tweets in Marathi and English.

Reforms by 'conviction and

was a nudge, incentivising the states to adopt progressive policies to avail additional funds. The results of this exercise are not only encouraging but also run contrary to the notion that there are limited takers for sound economic policies, said PM Modi. He stated in his blog that the four reforms to which additional borrowings were linked (with 0.25% of GDP tied to each one) had two characteristics. Firstly, each of the reforms was linked to improving the Ease of Living for the public and particularly the poor, the vulnerable, and the middle class. Secondly, they also promoted fiscal sustainability, he said. He mentioned that the first reform under the 'One Nation One Ration Card' policy required State Governments to ensure that all ration cards in the State under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) were seeded with the Aadhaar number of all family members and that all Fair Price Shops had Electronic Point of Sale devices. The main benefit from this is that migrant workers can draw their food ration from anywhere in the country, said PM Modi, adding that apart from these benefits to citizens, there is the financial benefit from the elimination of bogus cards and duplicate members. 17 states completed this reform and were granted additional borrowings amounting to Rs 37,600 crores, PM Modi said in his blog. He stated that the second reform, aimed at improving ease of doing business, required states to ensure that renewal of business-related licences under 7 Acts is made automatic, online and non-discretionary on mere payment of fees. "Another requirement was the implementation of a computerised random inspection system and prior notice of inspection to reduce harassment and corruption under a further 12 Acts. This reform (covering 19 laws) is of particular help to micro and small enterprises, who suffer the most from the burden of the 'inspector raj'." It also promotes an improved investment climate, greater investment and faster growth. 20 states completed this reform and were allowed additional borrowing of Rs. 39,521 crores," read the blog. PM Modi stated that the 15th Finance Commission and several academics have emphasised the crucial importance of sound property taxation. The third reform required states to notify floor rates of property tax and of water and sewerage charges, in consonance with stamp duty guideline values for property transactions and current costs respectively, in urban areas. This would enable a better quality of services to the urban poor and middle class, support better infrastructure and stimulate growth, said the Prime Minister. He stated that property tax is also progressive in its incidence and thus the poor in urban areas would benefit the most, adding that this reform also benefits municipal staff who often face delay in payment of wages. 11 states completed these reforms and were granted additional borrowing of Rs 15,957 crores, said PM Modi in his blog. Stating that the fourth reform was introduction of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) in lieu of free electricity supply to farmers, he said that the requirement was for the formulation of a state-wide scheme with actual implementation in one district on a pilot basis by year-end. He said that additional borrowing of 0.15 per cent of GSDP was linked to this. A component was also provided for a reduction in technical and commercial losses and another for reducing the gap between revenues and costs (0.05 per cent of GSDP for each). This improves the finances of distribution companies, promotes conservation of water and energy and improves service quality through better financial and technical performance. The Prime Minister stated that 13 states implemented at least one component, while 6 states implemented the DBT component. As a result, Rs. 13,201 crore of additional borrowings were permitted, he added. "Overall, 23 states availed of additional borrowings of Rs. 1.06 lakh crores out of a potential of Rs. 2.14 lakh crores. As a result, the aggregate borrowing permission granted to states for 2020-21 (conditional and unconditional) was 4.5 per cent of the initially estimated GSDP, read PM Modi's blog. It further said, "For a large nation with complex challenges as ours, this was a unique experience. We have often seen that for various reasons, schemes and reforms remain un-operational often for years. This was a pleasant departure from the past where the Centre and States came together to roll out public-friendly reforms in a short span of time amidst the pandemic." PM Modi emphasised that this was made possible due to the Centre's approach of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas and Sabka Vishwas.' He stated that officials who have been working on these reforms suggest that without this incentive of additional funds, the enactment of these policies would have taken years. India has seen a model of 'reforms by stealth and compulsion', said PM Modi. "This is a new model of 'reforms by conviction and incentives'. I am thankful to all the states who took the lead in ushering in these policies amidst tough times for the betterment of their citizens. We shall continue working together for the rapid progress of 130 crore Indians," read the concluding lines of PM Modi's blog.

Auction at Jorhat : Pabhojan

Sharma and Pradeep Sharma, Directors of Tea World who purchased Hookhmol CTC from the platform at Rs 510 per kg, said, "With shorter cycle time, teas sold on the mjunction platform is the freshest. We are pleased to have bagged Hookhmol. We have our own packet with brand name Shree Mangalam since 2002, and we are committed to giving our customers best of Assam tea." Director of Real Assam Tea Industries, which supplied the Hookhmol CTC, Bhaskar Hazarika, said, "I congratulate mjunction for successfully conducting the Special Tea Auction to celebrate International tea day. Tea estate companies are the only private sector enterprise that has survived in Assam for two centuries despite all hostilities." "Assam tea estates have survived the nationalization bid, extreme regulation, Land Ceiling Act and agitations of all kind since 1947, but right now we are facing unprecedented challenges," he said. Hazarika said that the average price of tea in the primary market (auctions) has not increased from 2012 to 2019. "We normally see few decent prices during the second flush period otherwise tea prices remain very low for the most part because all kinds of teas are blended and sold as cheap commodity in the secondary (retail) market. We are very hopeful and happy to see that mjunction is trying to bring small retailers into the market who are willing to sell the best quality Assam tea in its true form and not as a cheap blend." Dr. Nazrana Ahmed of Diroibam Tea Estate, whose Green Tea was sold at Rs 1,000 per kg, said, "Today's special auction is of special significance to us, as we have received the highest bid for our Specialty Green Teas. We are happy with the professional approach of the mjunction team and the trust reposed on the platform by the buyers." Nilesh Divekar of Shangrila Enterprise, who purchased Pabhojan Orthodox at Rs 4,000 per kg, said, "I appreciate the efforts of the mjunction team to provide such a platform where best of the teas are available fresh and in small quantities without any hassles." Rakhi Saikia of Pabhojan TE lauded mjunction's efforts on the occasion. "I am very happy that Pabhojan has fetched a record price, and I hope the mjunction platform continues the good work," she said.

8 pygmy hogs released in Manas

range joined the captive breeding stock. Reintroduction of captive hogs in the wild began in 2008. Initially, three protected areas in their historical distribution range in Assam were selected for better protection and restoration of alluvial grasslands. Over the next decade, 35 hogs (18 male, 17 female) were released in Sonai-Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary, 59 (26 male, 33 female) in Orang National Park, and 22 (11 male, 11 female) in Barnadi Wildlife Sanctuary. "The reintroductions in Orang National Park have been particularly successful as they have multiplied almost two and a half times in number, and have spread to areas far from release locations," the statement said. As part of its rewilding strategy, the PHCP will continue to maintain about 70 captive hogs at its two centres in Assam and breed more hogs for release, it said. The pygmy hog (*Porcula salvania*) is the world's smallest and rarest wild pigs, which are highly threatened. It has been a tough year as the outbreak of both coronavirus and African Swine Fever have posed major challenges for the PHCP, and the successful release of the hogs. Nonetheless, this release is a landmark achievement and is the key step on the road to the establishment of a new sub-population of pygmy hogs in Manas National Park. It has been estimated that with the release of these 12 (5 male, 7 female) hogs in Rupahi grasslands in the Bhuyanpara range of Manas National Park, the total number of reintroduced hogs and their progeny may have reached 200 in the four release sites. Amal Chandra Sarma, field director, Manas Tiger Reserve said, "In recent years, Manas is really doing well in conservation and with the release of these hogs in Bhuyanpara range, the hog population will be increased, and this may attract more visitors to the Park." "Manas contains some of the largest remaining grassland habitats in the sub-Himalayan grassland ecosystems. Found only in these tall dense alluvial grasslands, pygmy hogs are incredibly shy and are almost never seen. Dr Parag Jyoti Deka, project director, PHCP, said, "Conservation of pygmy hog was initiated by famous naturalist Gerald Durrell and his organization Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust in 1971. "The pygmy hog was brought back from extinction by this excellent partnership effort, and now we are moving towards the establishment of a population across the entire range." During the outbreak of African Swine Fever, conservation practitioners of many endangered pigs were looking up to us. I think, we have created a history and hope for conservation world," said Deka. Dr. Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar, Manas landscape administrator of Aaranyak, a key partner of the programme, said, "The park authority and conservation partners are jointly managing grassland, and if released pygmy hogs start breeding, it will indicate the success of grassland management." "Pygmy hog, being a heritage attribute, will also help restore the past glory of Manas," he added. Dr. Dhritiman Das, field scientist of PHCP, mentioned, "Apart from regular monitoring of reintroduced and wild pygmy hog, the programme has attempted to design best practice for grassland management through science-based actions as well as community interventions in Manas with active cooperation of partners."

Centre pressurising Alapan

are trying to pressurise him by pointing out that he tends to lose his pension & gratuity. It's a very mean step to take. "DoPT has also asked the former West Bengal chief secretary to submit a written statement in his defence and state if he desires to be heard in person within 30 days. Ministry has also said that in case of no reply from him, inquiry authority may hold inquiry against him ex parte. The Centre had on Monday initiated penalty proceedings against him for his alleged 'misconduct' and 'misbehaviour'. In a memorandum sent by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), the Centre has proposed to hold major penalty proceedings against him and sought his response within 30 days. The former Chief Secretary has been warned of major penalty proceedings that allow the Central government to withhold pension or gratuity, or both, either in full or in part, DoPT officials said. Rule 8 of the All India Services (discipline and appeals) deals with the procedure for imposing major penalties. "Whenever the disciplinary authority is of the opinion that there are grounds for inquiring into the truth of any imputation of misconduct or misbehaviour against a member of the Service, it may appoint under this rule or under the provisions of the Public Servants (Inquiries) Act 1850, as the case may be, an authority to inquire into the truth thereof," Rule 8 sub-section 2 states. On the other hand, Rule 6 of the All India Services (death cum retirement benefits) deals with the recovery of pension. "The Central government reserves the right of withholding pension or gratuity, permanently or for a specified time, if the pensioner has been found guilty of misconduct," Rule 6(1) states. Earlier, the Centre had issued a show-cause notice to Alapan Bandopadhyay under the Disaster Management Act, which entails imprisonment for up to two years, to explain his absence from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting at Kalaikunda in the state on May 28. Bandopadhyay in his four-page reply had said that he had to leave for a review of the cyclone-hit areas of Digha on the orders of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Bandopadhyay, a 1987-batch IAS officer of the West Bengal cadre, was set to retire as the Chief Secretary on May 31, but the state had sought and received permission for an extension of his tenure for three months as he played a crucial role in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. He was, however, sent a directive to report to the North Block in Delhi by the Centre, shortly after a row broke out over the Prime Minister's post-cyclone review meeting with Mamata Banerjee. The bureaucrat, instead of reporting to Delhi, chose to retire and was subsequently appointed as the CM's chief advisor.

IUML criticises Assam

tea tribe people in the proposed policy. "He (Sarma) has announced that families with more than two children, mostly Muslims, will have no right to get any government job nor will they receive any benefits from the government's welfare schemes nor will they be permitted to contest in the local body elections. But people belonging to scheduled castes and tribes and tea tribes are given exemption to have four to five children," he added. Sarma had announced that as per the population policy, the two-child norm will come into force in government jobs and will also be applicable in getting benefits of government schemes. He had earlier said that "immigrant Muslims" must adopt "decent family planning norms." Assam currently has a two-child norm, along with requirements of minimum educational qualifications and functional sanitary toilets, for contesting in gaon panchayat polls as per an amendment in 2018 to the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994.

Chief Minister Dr.Sarma visits spiritual icon Shri ShriMadhavdev's birthplace to review under-construction site of Madhavdev Kalakshetra

Guwahati, June 22: Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma today visited the under-construction site of Madhavdev Kalakshetra at Narayanpur in Lakhimpur district today along with MP Pallab Lochan Das and MLAs Dr. Amiya Kumar Bhuyan, Manab Deka and Utpal Bora. After taking stock of progress of work, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma directed the PWD Dept to complete construction of the Kalakshetra within a period of nine months. Dr. Sarma also asked local MLAs Dr. Amiya Kumar Bhuyan to regularly monitor progress of the work and ensure timely completion of the project. He also asked the executing agency to maintain the quality of the construction work.



Ajmal CSR launches new programmes for Students

Students keep your Zeal high, a sea of Opportunities awaiting:: Sirajuddin Ajmal

Hojai, June 22: Sirajuddin Ajmal, Managing Trustee, Ajmal Foundation, MLA Jamunamukh LAC and Former MP Barpeta while addressing a press conference here in Hojai on Monday said that, "After grand success of 'Ajmal Super 40' programme, Ajmal Foundation and entire Ajmal CSR family have decided to launch some new programmes to fulfill the wishes and aspirations of the students as well as their guardians." Ajmal informed that, "We are going to launch Ajmal Super 40 Digital programme (online), Ajmal Super 40 new Centre in Dhubri, After college coaching in Hojai and Dhubri and 50% scholarship on course fees for SC, ST & Tea Tribes students in integrated and repeaters program." On the context of cancellation of HSLC and AHSEC Exams 2021, he said it is unfortunate but the Government has no other option at the meantime of ensuing pandemic. "He further urged the students community to keep their zeal always high and prepare accordingly as it is not the end of the world." Ajmal added. Khasrul Islam, Director of Ajmal Foundation said, "Every year entire Ajmal Family sponsors 40 boys and 40 girls who are meritorious but poor, with free two years coaching at Ajmal Super40 for Medical, Engineering and other competitive exams. Apart from these eighty students, fee concessions are provided to very poor meritorious students as a result of which Ajmal Foundation has to spend more than Two Crore rupees every year. In addition, this year onwards there will be 50% concession on fees at Ajmal Super40 for the students who belong to SC, ST and Tea Tribe Communities." "In the mean time a new branch of Ajmal Super 40 at Ajmal College of Arts and Science, Dhubri, the admission date for the above institute will be notified soon. Also a quite number of aspirants have failed to be enrolled in Ajmal Super 40 due to seat limitations. Hence, to mitigate this problem and to accommodate more number of students in Ajmal Super 40 program, we have launched an "On-Line Digital Course" of Ajmal Super40. All the aspirants of class IX, class X, class XI, class XII and class XIII passed students can now avail the opportunity of this course through an application to prepare themselves for the engineering and medical entrance exams. In this program, like physical classroom teachings, the students will get ample opportunity to interact with teachers. With a very affordable course fee the students will be able to avail the opportunity. There is a heart warming news for the eleventh and twelfth standard students who are seeking to join medical and engineering courses. Ajmal Super40, now onwards will conduct After-College Program for Medical and Engineering Coaching in Maryam Ajmal Women's College of Science & Technology, Hojai, Ajmal College of Arts, Commerce and science, Hojai and Ajmal College of Arts & Science, Dhubri. Students of both Ist and 2nd year of these respective Colleges and other colleges as well can avail this opportunity at a very minimal course fee. For the students of class XI and XII, it will be PCB (Physics, Chemistry and Biology) or PCM (Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics) classes." Islam added.



7th International Yoga Day observed at Nagaon

NAGAOON, June 22: Nagaon district administration observed the 7th International Yoga Day at two COVID Care Centres set up at Nagaon Anandaram Dhakial Phookon College and Nagaon Polytechnic respectively today. Additional Deputy Commissioner Prasanta Kumar Boruah, nodal officer of Polytechnic COVID Care Centre Dr Pankajyoti Boruah, president, Nagaon District Patanjali Yoga Samitee Tapan Kumar Dey and project director to Adarsha Somaj Kalyan Somitee, Akshay Kumar Saikia graced the occasion and encouraged the COVID patients to continue yoga practices in the centre during the period of COVID treatment, a release issued by district information and public relations office added. Meanwhile Nowgong Govt Boys' HS School and 8th Assam Battalion, NCC, Nagaon also observed the 7th International Yoga Day in virtual mood today. In synergy with ministry of Ayush, the message of 'Be with yoga, be at home' was sent to maximum people through its cadets. The cadets were encouraged to do yoga at home and encouraged their family members as well as their friends to participate maintaining the social distancing, a release added. In the release, it was stated that the cadets participated in the jingle competition and also took part in an online quiz organized by the ministry of Ayush. Besides, the cadets participated in the common yoga protocol. On occasion of International Yoga Day, a webinar under NCC was also organized by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva Vishwavidyalaya today where the organizers issued e certificates to all participants.



Successful Chital fish seed production by Fisheries department

Guwahati, June 22: The Fisheries department has successfully conducted Chital fish seed production at the Jungal Balahu Fish Farm at Raha in Nagaon district. An attempt is being made very systematically for production of Chital fish seed in the fish farm at Raha by the Fisheries department through natural cum confined environment since April this year. "The Chital tank of the farm is given a congenial environment for spawning by the Chital brooders," said Fisheries Development Officer, Pratul Deka. Strict observation was made from the first week of May whether Chital brooders mated each other and have had released eggs in the rough-substrate already placed in the tank for such breeding activities. On May 19 collection of Chital eggs at the rate 5000 numbers as stick to rough surface was observed and immediately released to the happa - a specially designed mosquito type net - installed at the breeding pool of the farm hatchery unit. "During this period, 24x7 hours showering was done in the breeding pool where adhesive Chital eggs were kept. After 10 days, eggs started hatching gradually and started to take food specially boiled eggs. Muster oil cake solutions in the form of feed were also used and accepted," said Deka. Specially designed coconut leaf structured material was used as adhesive and sheltering material in the breeding pool. "In the next ten days, only fish spawn feeding was done in happa which showed very good results without much mortality of Chital early fry and they attained fingerling size approximately in one month," added Deka. Fingerlings @ 1105 numbers were distributed among the progressive fish farmers by Thekera Beel Fishermen Cooperative Society on Friday. "Continuous efforts are on for successful operation of induced breeding of Chital fish in complete controlled environment," said District Fisheries Development Officer, Nagaon, Dr. Ramendra Chandra Barman, adding second batch of Chital seed sale will be done shortly.

England's Mount and Chilwell isolating after Scotland's Gilmour tests positive

London, June 22 : Gareth Southgate's plans for England's final Euro 2020 group phase tie against the Czech Republic at Wembley on Tuesday night were thrown into turmoil after two of his expected starters - Ben Chilwell and Mason Mount - were forced to self-isolate. The Football Association took the measure as a precaution after the pair were deemed to have been in close contact with the Scotland midfielder Billy Gilmour, who returned a positive Covid test on Monday morning. The contact is believed to have taken place in the Wembley tunnel after last Friday's 0-0 draw. All three play their club football at Chelsea. "It would be something to do with chatting after the game but I have no idea of all the detail," Southgate said. Mount was a certain starter for the Czech game and it is understood Southgate had been ready to bring in Chilwell for Luke Shaw at left-back. England must beat the Czechs to advance as group winners but they will qualify even if they lose after Monday's results went in their favour in terms of the third-placed finishers in other groups. It was unclear on Monday night whether Chilwell and Mount would be cleared to play, having returned negative PCR tests on Sunday - along with the rest of the England squad - and negative lateral flow tests on Monday. The FA was in discussions with Public Health England about, as Southgate put it, "what would classify as being contact", but the manager admitted that a change to his lineup was "looking a high possibility". If Chilwell cannot play, Shaw would be expected to start while Mount's absence could open the door in midfield for Jude Bellingham, who briefly became the youngest player to feature at a European Championship when the 17-year-old came off the bench in England's



opening game against Croatia, which ended in a 1-0 win. Southgate is also set to recall Kyle Walker at right-back and the fit-again Harry Maguire in central defence. "We haven't confirmed the team yet and we will wait until the morning when we are really clear on the final situation with the two boys [Chilwell and Mount] and where we stand," Southgate said. Gilmour has begun a 10-day period of isolation - a huge blow for Scotland for their must-win final group game against Croatia at Hampden Park on Tuesday night. On what had been only his third Scotland appearance, the 20-year-old gave a man-of-the-match performance against England as his country got a result to give them hope of a first ever qualification to the knockout rounds of a major tournament. "Billy would have started the game and now he won't," the manager, Steve Clarke, said. "So it's a chance for someone else to come into the team and make themselves a national hero. Billy's upset, as you would expect. He's asymptomatic. Today's training was a little bit disrupted but the bulk of the work has been done over the pre-camp." The news of Gilmour's positive test broke at 10.30am and it reached Southgate as he wrapped

up his morning training session, in which all of his players had been involved. According to Southgate, the FA oversaw a "belt and braces" round of lateral flow tests for the squad - all of which were negative - and it was decided to remove Chilwell and Mount. "If there is any risk with these two players, then we've got to make sure we don't put any other players at risk," Southgate said. It was unclear who flagged Chilwell and Mount as having been in close contact with Gilmour, with Southgate unable to say whether it was an independent observer at the game. Public Health England has made it clear that it was the FA's decision to move Chilwell and Mount away from the squad. "I can't say it isn't disruptive," Southgate said. "We don't really know at this point whether they might be OK for tomorrow or they could be out for 10 days so there are a lot of unknowns, frankly, at this moment in time." My biggest hope is for the two boys - that they're not going to miss 10 days of a European Championship. That would be a massive blow for us, but for them as well. I'm not angry or pissed off, really, and certainly not with the players. Not with anybody. It's just the fact of the world we're living in at the

moment. "One of the strange things is that nobody in the Scotland squad has been deemed as a close contact of Gilmour and told to isolate. "I don't want to cause a drama for Scotland but if you're all in the dressing room together where does everything stand?" Southgate said. "I really don't know how all that works. All I know is that we are in the situation we're in and we're complying with Public Health England and there's nothing else we can do. I don't want to make life difficult for Steve [Clarke]. I want him to do well, he's a great guy." The biggest fear is that the virus can take a short while to grip after the initial exposure. "We know these things can appear four or five days down the line so that's what we've been living with all year in a football sense," Southgate said. "We've been living on edge with that. As yet, we haven't had a positive test in one of our camps but we know there's an element of good fortune within that. Every round of testing ... you're waiting and wondering if you're going to have to make a change to your team and this is the first time it's happened to us."

Jos Buttler frustrated to miss England Tests but has 'no perfect answers'

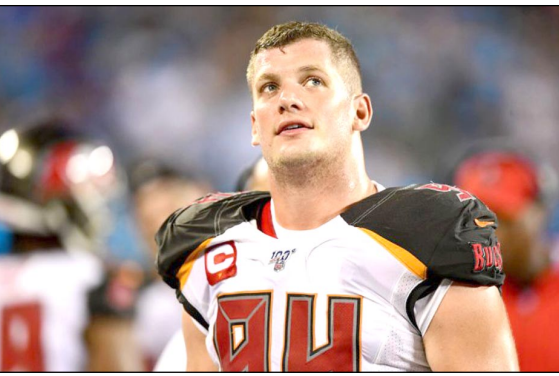
London, June 22 : Jos Buttler has said there are no perfect answers to the scheduling overkill that has led to him missing five of England's eight Test matches this year in order to rest and with Twenty20 cricket seemingly prioritised. A centrally contracted player for England in all three formats, Buttler's itinerary thus far in 2021 sums up much of the wider frustration with the team's rotation policy, having left the Test series in India for a scheduled break with the side 1-0 up and following back-to-back victories in Sri Lanka. Joe Root's side have lost four of their five Tests since - the 3-1 defeat by India was followed by a 1-0 series loss at home to New Zealand - while Buttler has featured in all eight of the white-ball team's fixtures and played in the Indian Premier League before its cancellation at the start of May. "I don't think there are any perfect answers," said Buttler, who, having turned out for Lancashire in the T20 Blast, will be back in action on Wednesday when Eoin Morgan's Twenty20 side begin a three-match series against Sri Lanka in Cardiff. "Of course it's always frustrating to miss games. You wish you were available for everything. But in the current climate with all the complications of Covid etc, I do think we have to look after our people." Asked if too many fixtures are being scheduled - England play 16 Tests this year, along with 28 white-ball matches and a T20 World Cup - Buttler replied: "That's probably a really good

question for all the administrators, isn't it? We play a hell of a lot and we understand it's a short career and you want to be available and play as much as you can. But at certain times I don't think it is possible - and I think Covid has complicated that even more." Buttler



insists he wants to be the best player he can be in all formats but, despite averaging 50 with the bat in Test cricket since the start of last summer, acknowledges that his white-ball game is superior at present. It is something which makes his deployment this year all the more curious. Few are questioning the need for rest periods, given the current logistical difficulties and the strains of living in biosecure bubbles, more when these take place given the relative strengths of the two England sides. Looking ahead he describes playing all five Tests against India this summer and the full Ashes tour in the winter as "the dream", even if the fixture list remains "daunting" and there is uncertainty whether families will be able to travel with players to Australia, given the current border restrictions.

Raiders' Carl Nassib becomes first active NFL player to come out as gay



London, June 22 : Carl Nassib has become the first active NFL player to come out as gay, making the announcement in a video posted to Instagram on Monday. "I'm at my house here in West Chester, Pennsylvania," said Nassib, a defensive end for the Las Vegas Raiders. "I just wanted to take a quick moment to say that I'm gay. I've been meaning to do this for a while now but finally feel comfortable enough to get it off my chest. I really have the best life, I've got the best family, friends and job a guy can ask for." In the video, which comes during Pride Month, he continued: "I'm a pretty private person so I hope you guys know that I'm really not doing this for attention. I just think that representation and visibility are so important. I actually hope that like one day, videos like this and the whole coming out process are not necessary, but until then I am gonna o my best and

do my part to cultivate a culture that's accepting that's compassionate." Nassib, 28, also announced a \$100,000 donation to the Trevor Project, which works to prevent suicides among LGBTQ+ youth in America. Roger Goodell, the NFL commissioner, applauded Nassib's bravery in a statement. "The NFL family is proud of Carl for courageously sharing his truth today. Representation matters," Goodell said. The Raiders tweeted "Proud of you, Carl". In an additional written statement posted alongside his video, Nassib wrote: "Sadly, I have agonized over this moment for the last 15 years. Only until recently, thanks to my family and friends ... did it seem possible for me to say publicly and proudly that I'm gay." I am also incredibly thankful for the NFL, my coaches and fellow players for their support. I would not have been able to do this without them. I feel especially thankful to have had so much support when many who came before - and many even now - do not. "NFL players and coaches were quick to welcome Nassib's announcement. "I learned a long time ago what makes a man different is what makes him great," Raiders coach Jon Gruden told ESPN. Meanwhile, the New York Giants star running back Saquon

Barkley, who played alongside Nassib in college at Penn State, tweeted: "Much respect brudda". Former players also hailed the announcement. Hall of fame quarterback Warren Moon tweeted: "Really proud of Carl Nassib. The first active football player to ever do so. I played with several guys who never were comfortable enough to go public. They were great teammates, & obviously very talented." Entering his sixth NFL season, Nassib was a third-round draft pick in 2016 by the Cleveland Browns. He spent two seasons with the Browns (2016-17), followed by two with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (2018-19) before signing a three-year, \$25.3m contract, including nearly \$16.8m in guarantees, with the Raiders in March 2020. In 73 career games (37 starts), Nassib has 143 tackles (36 for loss), 20.5 sacks, 16 passes defended, one interception, three forced fumbles and a fumble recovery. Nassib is on track to become the first openly gay player to play in a regular-season game. The defensive end Michael Sam came out as gay in 2014 before the St Louis Rams drafted him, but he did not make the final roster. "I hope everyone can understand that I am just one person," Nassib concluded. "I am a lanky walk-on who is living his dream. I owe it to my team, coaches and Raider fans to be completely locked in and at my best for the upcoming season. Thank you everyone for your support. Happy Pride Month and Go Raiders."

Jamie George confident Saracens' Lions contingent can make immediate impact



London, June 22 : Jamie George believes Saracens' British & Irish Lions contingent will make an immediate impact after bolstering the ranks in Jersey thanks to a specially tailored fitness regime at their club, with the England hooker set to be put straight into the squad to face Japan at Murrayfield. George arrived at the Lions pre-tour camp in Jersey on Monday, along with clubmates Owen Farrell, Maro Itoje, Mako Vunipola and Elliot Daly, 24 hours after cementing Saracens' return to the Premiership. Finn Russell also arrived on Monday while Kyle Sinckler and Tom Curry joined up on Sunday, leaving Exeter's quartet as the only players still absent. Warren Gatland will on Tuesday name his side for the warm-up match against Japan on Saturday in what will offer the first insight into his plans for the tour of South Africa. The majority of the 23-man squad is set to be made up of players who arrived in Jersey eight days ago but George is also poised to feature, most likely from the bench. With Luke Cowan-Dickie still absent, Ken Owens was the only hooker in the touring party taking part in Jersey until George's arrival. Gatland called on Ireland's Ronan Kelleher to assist in training but it is understood he will not be involved against Japan, paving the way for George to come straight into the squad. Either Russell or Farrell is also expected to be part of the 23. George and the rest of the Saracens contingent were below par during England's dismal Six Nations campaign, raising questions over

their readiness for the Lions tour. After Saracens lost their first match of the Championship campaign, however, all five played far more minutes since March than first expected. And George believes the second tier has produced physical challenges akin to those awaiting in South Africa, revealing the Saracens performance director, Phil Morrow, who was seconded to the Lions for the 2017 tour of New Zealand, has also ensured they departed for Jersey in prime condition. "I said all along that many of the games [in the Championship] are as physical as many of the games we are going to play - especially in the front five forwards," said George. "We have been really lucky to have someone like Phil Morrow. He heads up our performance and was on the previous Lions tour. He knows what it takes to get yourself physically and mentally right to go on that tour. We have been really lucky that he has been tailoring our programme to make sure we hit the ground running. The main thing will be getting up to speed in terms of the lineout calls and plays but we are on a Lions tour, I am going to do my homework and be as ready as I possibly can be." The Lions defence coach, Steve Tandy, is also confident the Saracens quintet will not be undercooked after a season in the Championship and expects them to soon get up to speed. "The Saracens players have got experience from Lions tours, winning European Cups and Premiership, and know what it takes to connect the group," he said. "No doubt they'll be prepared. They

played in the Six Nations as well so there's no doubt they'll be fully ready to go." Meanwhile, Bundee Aki is also hopeful of being selected on Tuesday after he was among the surprise inclusions in the initial 37-man squad. In his late teens Aki called time on his career, taking up a job at a bank to provide for his family in his native New Zealand, but he is now set to represent the British & Irish Lions after he was convinced to return to the sport 10 years ago.

Talking Horses: uplifting Royal Ascot points to a bright future for racing

London, June 22 : Perhaps it was just an aural illusion after a year on racecourses with no one there, but it felt as if 12,000 daily spectators at Royal Ascot last week made as much noise as two or three times as many. The return of a five-figure crowd at a racecourse for the first time since March 2020 was an immensely positive and uplifting experience for all concerned, ensuring this was a week that even the weather could not spoil - despite its very best efforts on Friday morning, when a first abandonment at the Royal meeting since 1964 could be backed at 2-5 on Betfair. It was still drizzling as the last of the spectators drifted away on Saturday evening, but even in the gathering gloom it was possible to sense a much brighter and happier future, both for racing as a whole and also for the Flat's showpiece event. Most immediately, the final day of Royal Ascot 2022 will form part of the celebrations for the Queen's 70 years on the throne, with a renamed Platinum Jubilee Stakes being run in front of 75,000 spectators. Her very own King's Lynn, perhaps, could set off as favourite, having run so well in both the King's Stand Stakes and the Wokingham. There were also glimpses last week of how Royal Ascot might look and feel a fair bit further into the future. In 2031, perhaps, in a post-Frankie Dettori era in which a 35-year-old Oisín Murphy remains the man to beat in the race to be the top rider at the meeting, a decade on from his debut success. Murphy's was only the fourth different name on the

top-jockey prize since 2007, and he was the first rider to enjoy a debut success since Ryan Moore 2010. His five winners underlined a definite sense at Ascot all week that a younger generation is slowly but firmly starting to push past its elders, as no fewer than eight jockeys registered a first success at the Royal meeting. In the case of riders such as Cieren Fallon and Marco Ghiani - the current leader in this year's apprentice championship - it is highly likely that their wins on Oxted (King's Stand Stakes) and Real World (Royal Hunt Cup) will be the first of many, while in the training ranks too there were several breakthrough moments. Behind John and Thady Gosden, the first partnership to win the top trainer prize, David Menuisier, Johnny Murtagh and David Loughnane were among the trainers who saddled their first Royal winner. They admittedly have a long way to go to catch Sir Michael Stoute, however, as the 75-year-old all-time record holder for winners at the meeting sent out his 82nd, as Dream Of Dreams finally landed the Diamond Jubilee, while Aidan O'Brien, who had an unusually low return of just two winners, moved to 76. One of O'Brien's winners, though, was Love, whose successful return to action in the Prince of Wales's Stakes was one of the highlights of the week and put her firmly on course for the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe in October. A likely opponent there is Menuisier's Wonderful Tonight, whose win against male horses in the Hardwicke Stakes on Saturday was the

"breakthrough" moment of the meeting and the latest sign that her trainer is very much on the rise. This was also a Royal meeting, of course, where the Queen herself was largely absent, making her only trip to the course - her first since 2019 - on Saturday. It is impossible to even start to calculate the benefit, in terms of its standing and public profile, that the sport has enjoyed over nearly seven decades thanks to her lifelong passion for racing and breeding. And even the staunchest republican would probably concede that it did not feel quite the same without her on the first four days last week. But all the other familiar formalities and traditions, from the races themselves and the outfits to the post-race sing-song at the bandstand, meant it still felt like a



Why I love keirin - one of the most exciting events in any Olympics

Tokyo, June 22 : That was the final piece of advice Ryo Okuhara gave me as, with a gentle push, he sent me on a gingerly paced lap of a velodrome on a steel-framed bicycle with no brakes, my feet strapped into pedals that never stopped turning. I had pootled around an indoor wooden track a couple of years earlier, but this was my first outing on one of the vast "banks" familiar to fans of keirin - a track cycling event invented in Japan after the second world war. The object of the exercise was to stay upright on the steep slopes at either end of the 400m track, before swooping down on to kinder, flatter surfaces in the home and back straights. Having written a book in about the history and culture of keirin, it seemed only natural, if a little reckless, to gauge if anything I had learned could see me safely around the forbidding gradients of Kawasaki's concrete surface. I was a relative keirin novice when James Spackman, the founder of Pursuit Books, a London-based cycling imprint, suggested telling the story of the sport's transformation from entertainment for Japan's war-weary masses to an Olympic event that has made stars of British cyclists Chris Hoy, Victoria Pendleton and Jason Kenny. Initially held to raise taxes on gambling to fund Japan's postwar reconstruction, keirin now generates billions of dollars in sales, with the best riders earning millions. The rules are simple enough. In a typical men's race, a pacemaker leads nine cyclists around several laps before leaving them to battle it out. Along the way they clash heads - and sometimes crash - as they reach speeds of up to 70 kph in the final stretch. My research began with a trip to Kokura, an industrial port city in Japan's south-west, to uncover the origins of the country's most important contribution to track cycling, but for which, I would discover, most people - even those connected to the sport - seemed compelled to apologise. Kokura, which had escaped nuclear annihilation but not heavy conventional bombing, hosted the world's first keirin race on 20 November 1948. Over four



days, more than 50,000 people, mostly working-class men who had been in military uniform a few years earlier, watched hastily assembled lineups of amateur men and women compete on a vast outdoor track. More than 70 years later, keirin continues to occupy an uneasy place in the Japanese sporting firmament because of its association with gambling. As one of only four sports - along with horses, motorboats and a form of speedway - on which it is legal to wager money in Japan, keirin has spent much of its history battling to defend its reputation. The year-end grand prix - with a million-dollar prize at stake - is one of the few occasions when the sport attracts the attention of the public broadcaster NHK and reports appear in broadsheet newspapers as well as sport tabloids. By the end of the meet in Kokura, spectators had gambled unimaginable sums, a portion of which went on the city's postwar redevelopment, as intended by the sport's founders. Suburban velodromes sprouted up in dozens of other Japanese towns and cities, as moral objections to gambling were temporarily set aside amid the rush to raise desperately needed revenue. Keirin's early years were marred by race-fixing scandals and the involvement of the yakuza, Japan's crime syndicates. Velodromes could be violent, unwelcoming places, where the mere suspicion that a rider had given anything less than 100% sparked unrest among well-oiled, mostly male punters. The history of keirin is bound up in Japan's postwar development. Its chaotic origins re-

flected the turmoil of the postwar years, yet it was to survive political assaults and thrive during a time of rising incomes and Japan's economic transformation, before the bursting of the country's asset-inflated bubble plunged it into its own version of the "lost decade", in the early 1990s. Over several months, I travelled from Fukushima in the north to Fukuoka in the south to watch races and interview an eclectic cast of keirin characters: up-and-coming riders and journeymen in their late 40s; veteran frame builders and historians, journalists and coaches, and, of course, the men - and a much smaller number of women - who enjoy a flutter on the bikes. I watched prospective cyclists being put through their paces during 11 gruelling months at a training school near Mount Fuji, and spent a shochu-fuelled evening with Koichi Nakano, a keirin legend and one of the greatest track cyclists of all time. Keirin has weathered storms throughout its history. Today, it still generates billions of dollars in betting receipts and, in setting aside cash for public services and infrastructure, has stayed true to its philanthropic origins. Punters watch a race on the betting screens in 2015. The races are still huge among Japan's gambling fraternity. Even so, it was surprising how few Japanese friends greeted the news that I was taking unpaid leave to write a book about keirin with genuine enthusiasm. Most thought I had taken leave of my senses. Some confessed they had no idea what I was talking about. That is partly why War On

Wheels became a book not about cycling, but about Japan, viewed through the prism of its exhilarating cycling subculture. A blue-collar Japan "hidden" from the rest of the world for the best part of a century, centred on a community of sportsmen and women who ply their trade in the shadows. I completed the manuscript convinced that to broaden its appeal and last another 70 years, keirin must open up to the rest of the world, beyond the biennial competitions between professional riders from Japan and South Korea, the only other country with a professional circuit. And much more could be done to promote the women's sport, starting with a name change. Keirin continues to make demands on my time and finances. I am hooked on the speed and physicality, and follow the fortunes of my favourite riders online, in the tabloid press and on social media. I read keirin manga and books, and seek out references, however brief, in films and on TV. What began as a modest collection of keirin paraphernalia - towels, jerseys, mugs, keyrings - now fills a stack of plastic drawers. Slips of paper revealing unsuccessful bets that should have been discarded in disgust fill a shoebox; a keirin frame I ride around Tokyo - with brakes - takes pride of place in my apartment. The same obsession had brought me to Kawasaki velodrome for my meeting with Okuhara, a professional racer who kindly slowed down as he waved his novice companion through to complete the final lap, which ended with bicycle and rider intact. It was a far cry from Izu velodrome, where in just a few weeks Japanese riders will take time away from professional meets to compete in the keirin at the 2020 Olympics. A Japanese medal of any colour would boost the sport's profile in the country of its birth. But even if the host nation's riders fail to bring keirin full circle in Tokyo this summer, the newly crowned Olympic champion should join cycling fans in pausing to thank the forgotten men and women on bikes who lined up in a war-torn Japanese city 73 years ago.

Trans weightlifter Laurel Hubbard backed by Australian rival and New Zealand PM

London, June 22 : Transgender weightlifter Laurel Hubbard has won the support of her Australian Olympics rival, Charisma Amoe-Tarrant, as the Kiwi's selection for Tokyo reignites debate around the highly sensitive and complex issue of inclusion and fairness in women's sport. The New Zealand prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, said all parties had "followed the rules" in allowing Hubbard to

advantage, and that physical differences between athletes mean there is never truly a level playing field. Ardern offered Hubbard her full support. "All parties here have simply followed the rules," the New Zealand prime minister said. "That's the case for Laurel but also the team in New Zealand, they have followed the rules." The sport minister, Grant Robertson, said on Tuesday that "she de-

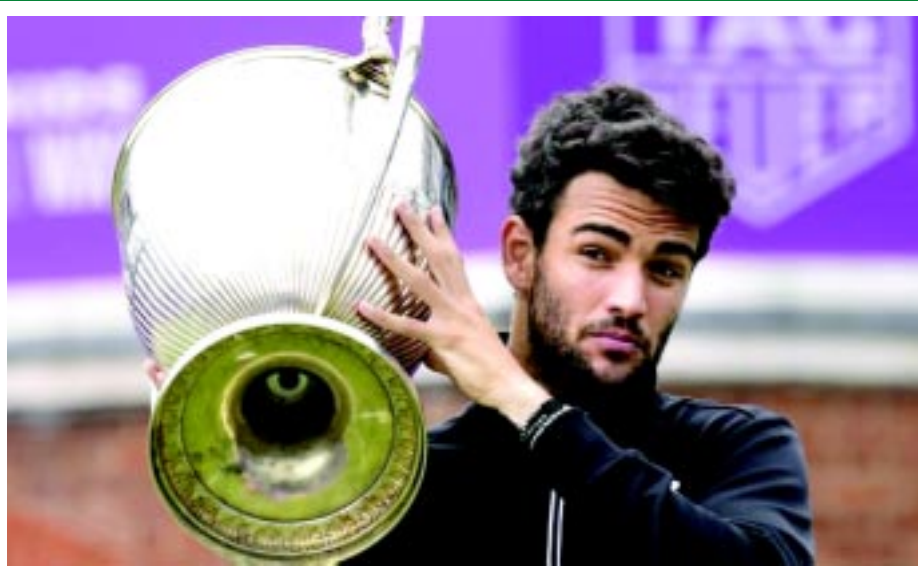


become the first transgender athlete to compete at an Olympic Games. The 43-year-old met strict eligibility standards set by the International Olympic Committee and the New Zealand Olympic Committee. Nevertheless, her selection on Monday polarised international opinion over whether trans athletes hold an unfair advantage over other women. But Amoe-Tarrant, who has been selected to represent Australia in Tokyo and will compete against Hubbard in the 87kg-plus super heavyweight category, had no problem with her inclusion. "I have so much respect for her and wish her and the other lifters the best and hope we can all come together and enjoy the Olympics," the 22-year-old said. "Because this Olympics right now is quite different compared to others. I've competed with her previously and always had good chats with her, I just wish her well." In 2015, the IOC issued guidelines allowing any transgender athlete to compete as a woman provided their testosterone levels were below 10 nanomoles per litre for at least 12 months before their first competition. Some scientists have said the guidelines do little to mitigate the biological advantages of those who have gone through puberty as males. Advocates for transgender inclusion argue the process of transition significantly decreases that

serves to be there and we'll be supporting her", while the conservative opposition leader, Judith Collins, said she was in awe of all Olympians and Hubbard "is who she is and she is trying to do her best". "I'd hate to see any bullying or any horrible comments about Laurel because she's doing what she wants to do," Collins said. Save Women's Sport Australasia, a group opposed to transgender women competing in women's sports, said Hubbard's selection was allowed by "flawed policy from the IOC", while Australian Deborah Lovely Acason, who competed against Hubbard in the same weight class at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, this year wrote she believed her inclusion risked driving girls away from the sport. Hubbard herself is media-shy and rarely gives interviews. She did speak after badly injuring her elbow at the Commonwealth Games, describing the Australian crowd on the Gold Coast as "an incredible environment ... they have lived up to the mantra of humanity, equality and decency". After her selection on Monday, she released a statement saying she was "grateful and humbled by the kindness and support that has been given to me by so many New Zealanders". "The mana of the silver fern comes from all of you and I will wear it with pride," she said.

Berrettini had won his previous 45 service games this week

London, June 22 : Cameron Norrie's bid to become the king of Queen's Club was ended in three sets by the big-serving Italian Matteo Berrettini in the final of the Cinch Championships. Norrie, 25, was attempting to become only the second British player to win at Queen's Club, after Andy Murray, since the second world war. But Berrettini, the world No 9 and top seed, proved too strong in a 6-4, 6-7 (5), 6-3 victory. Berrettini, also 25, became the first debutant to triumph at Queen's Club since Boris Becker in 1985 - who went on to win Wimbledon a couple of weeks later. Following his third defeat in a final this year, Norrie said: "All credit to Matteo and your team. A great week for you and just too good today." "I've really enjoyed my tennis here and if you'd told me before the tournament, I'd have signed up for the final. It's great to have tennis back in the UK, back in London and back on the grass." Berrettini had beaten Murray and Dan Evans earlier in the competition with his booming serves which regularly touched 140mph. Key for Norrie was to do the business with his



own serve and then hope to eke out a chance or two on Berrettini's, or strike in the tie-break. So it was a huge setback when two double faults gifted Berrettini a break in the opening set, which he went on to take with yet another unreturnable serve. Norrie saved two break points before moving 5-4 ahead in the second and had a glimpse of an opening at 6-5, 15-30 on the Berrettini serve, but it was quickly snuffed out. However, in the tie-break the plan worked to perfection, Norrie nicking the mini-break, racking up three set points and taking the third on serve when Berrettini floated a backhand long. Two more break points were fended off by Norrie at 2-3 in the decider but in his next service game he blew a 40-0 lead, netting limply to hand Berrettini the chance to serve for the championship. Berrettini had won his

previous 45 service games this week, and he made it 46 to love to land his fifth ATP title and the biggest of his career. Norrie can console himself with a £72,000 payday and a rise in the rankings from 41 to 34, which should be enough to see him among the seeds at Wimbledon. "It's obviously special to be seeded at Wimbledon," Norrie said. "I'm obviously disappointed not to get the title but we'll keep pushing for more and hopefully there'll be many more chances to come." Berrettini, the first Italian to secure the Queen's Club title, said: "It's been an unbelievable week and to think of Boris Becker's name and my name is crazy. I have been watching the tournament since I was a kid and this is a dream come true to win it." "Cam is a great player and this year he has shown how he can play on all the surfaces.





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