

The Assam Rising

Projecting the best of Northeast India everyday

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Podemos defends push to change Spain's controversial 'gag law'

02

Exeter's Sam Simmonds leaves it late to crush Bath's hopes of a first win

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Farmers' tractor rally postponed

New Delhi, November 27 :

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of farmers unions, on Saturday (November 27, 2021) decided to postpone the tractor rally to Parliament, which was scheduled to take place on November 29, said farmer Darshan Pal Singh in New Delhi. The decision was taken after a meeting of farmers' unions to decide the future course of action as the Centre announced the repeal of the controversial farm laws. The farmers' body also called out the state governments and railways to nullify cases registered against protesting farmers.

Lalu Prasad admitted to AIIMS

New Delhi, November 27 :

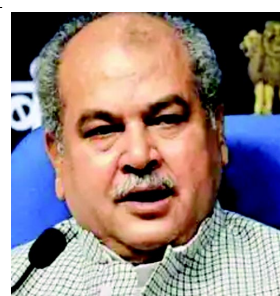
Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad Yadav has been admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) in New Delhi after he complained of fever, the sources said. He was admitted to the hospital on Friday. According to the sources, Lalu's health condition is stable. Lalu Prasad Yadav had returned to Bihar last month after over 3 years. The Jharkhand High Court, earlier in April, granted bail to Yadav. The former Bihar Chief Minister, who was undergoing treatment at Ranchi's Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences for two years, was shifted to All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi in January.

Children abandoned

Assam Rising, Reporter Guwahati, November 27 :

Two children were reportedly abandoned by their parents on the streets in Guwahati's Maligaon area. The two children have been identified as Suman Kumari (4) and Kajal Kumari (7). Later, they were handed over to Childline, after which the children were given refuge in Snehalaya in Noonmati by the Children Welfare Committee. As per a report, the girls were victims of domestic abuse by their father. The duo has not been able to give any information regarding their parents or the location of their house.

Now go home, says Union Agri minister; not so fast, say Farmers



New Delhi, November 27 :

On Saturday, Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar said that PM Modi has announced the consti-

APSC exams will be in Assamese language: CM Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma



Assam Rising, Reporter Guwahati, November 27 :

Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday announced that

from next year Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) exams will also be conducted in Assamese language. Addressing a press confer-

ence at Administrative Staff College in Guwahati, the Chief Minister said that if the IAS exam could be given in English then why ACS exam can't couldn't be conducted in Assamese. From next year, the APSC exam will be held in Assamese too, the chief minister said adding that all the subjects could be written in Assamese. He further stated that the students applying for ACS should be a permanent resident of the state. He also requested the English medium schools to teach Assamese. "It has come to our notice that Assamese

medium students find it difficult to write their exams in English which are barring them from cracking the exam. Yesterday in the evening I received a WhatsApp message requesting me that if the candidates for APSC can write their exams in Assamese language. I was shocked for a while because I had no idea about the issue." CM Sarma added. The Chief Minister said that if the IAS exam can be written in English then why ACS exam can't be written in Assamese. The CM said, "I made an immediate call to the APSC officials asking about the language barrier

and they confirmed me that the rules suggest that candidates can only write their exams in English which was quite surprising for me. IAS exams can be written in Assamese but for ACS exams candidates have to write their exams in English. So in the late night we came out with the decision of allowing candidates to write their exams in Assamese language from next year." He further stated that the students applying for ACS should be a permanent resident of the state. He also requested the English medium schools to teach Assamese.

Liquor Prices to Increase in Assam by 10-15 Percent

Assam Rising, Reporter Guwahati, November 27 :

Liquor prices in Assam to increase by 10-15 percent. The move came after the state government has taken the decision to hike excise duty to compensate loss from VAT reduction on petrol and diesel. The tax will be higher for costly liquor in Assam. The price of the costly liquor to increase up to 15 percent while that of the low price liquor will go up by 5 percent increase in prices. In fiscal 2001-02, the State government earned Rs 148-crore excise revenue against Rs 2,033 crore in 2020-21. In this fiscal, the

department has set a target of Rs 2,400-crore excise revenue collection. Official sources say that the State Government did not issue licences for liquor and wine shops after 2001. It, however, issued licences for bars during that period. Now the State Government has decided to issue licences for wine shops at a few locations. The state has 1,234 liquor and wine shops, 318 in Guwahati alone. The number of bars in the state is 996. People of Assam may rush to the wine shops in the bordering areas of the neighbouring states. It will

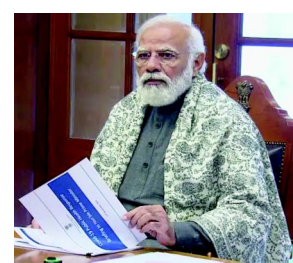
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New COVID-19 variant scare

PM Modi orders review of plans to ease international travel curbs

New Delhi, November 27 :

Days after the Centre announced the decision to ease curbs on travelers coming from foreign countries, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday (November 27) asked the top government officials to review the order. This comes amid the threat of the new COVID-19 variant 'Omicron' that was first reported in South Africa and was later found in countries such as Botswana, Belgium, Israel etc. In a statement after Modi's meeting with government officials



over COVID situation which lasted for almost 2 hours, the PMO said that he was briefed about the new 'Variant of Concern' 'Omicron' along with its characteristics and the impact seen in various countries. "PM spoke about the need to be proactive in light of the new vari-

ant. PM said that in light of the new threat, people need to be more cautious and the need to take proper precautions like masking & social

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Assam becomes poorest state in NE Region: NITI Aayog

Assam Rising, Reporter Guwahati, November 27 :

Assam has been listed as the poorest state after Meghalaya in the North-eastern region as per the first Multidimensional Poverty Index of NITI Aayog released on Friday. Among the North-eastern states, Assam ranks as the sixth poorest with 32.67%, followed by Nagaland (10th with 25.23%), Arunachal Pradesh (11th with 24.27%), Manipur (14th with 17.89%), Tripura (16th with 16.65%) and Mizoram (22nd with 9.80%). Meghalaya listed as 5th poorest states in India. Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have emerged as the poorest states in India, the report said while Assam listed as sixth among the poorest state. As per the report, 51.91% population of Bihar

is poor, followed by 42.16% in Jharkhand, 37.79% in Uttar Pradesh, 36.65% in Madhya Pradesh and 32.67% in Meghalaya. Kerala accounts for 0.71% while Goa (3.76%), Sikkim (3.82%), Tamil Nadu (4.89%) and Punjab (5.59%) have registered the lowest poverty across India. Among union territories (UTs), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (27.36%) is the poorest while Puducherry (1.72%) is the richest. Meghalaya with 37.05% also has the tenth-highest percentage of malnourished people among all the states. This list is headed by Bihar (51.88%) and followed by Jharkhand (47.99%), Madhya Pradesh (45.49%), Uttar Pradesh (44.47%) and Chhattisgarh (43.02%). Except for Assam (39.67%) other states of the North-east fare comparatively better than Meghalaya in the nutrition aspect. On the child & adolescent mortal-

ity aspect, Meghalaya (3.10%) occupies the sixth-highest position among states in the country. This list is headed by Uttar Pradesh with a mortality rate of 4.97%. Meghalaya also has the fifth-worst figure in the country with 31.70% of its women deprived of maternal healthcare facilities. Among the NE states, Nagaland (33.06%) has a figure worse than Meghalaya. The state is

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BHEJA FRY

See buddy! How the language culture of Assam has come to an end.

Omicron variant of Covid-19: What we know so far

New Delhi, November 27 :

On Friday, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified a new variant of SARS-CoV-2, currently circulating in South Africa, as a 'variant of concern'. It also named it Omicron. The Network for Genomics Surveillance in South Africa (NGS-SA) had identified the variant on Monday. It had detected a group of related SARS-CoV-2 viruses, which belong to a lineage named B.1.1.529. Early indications are that this variant is possibly even more transmissible than the highly infectious Delta variant, and that current

vaccines may be less effective against it. New variants continue to emerge as SARS-CoV-2 spreads, and the significance of each mutation becomes known after a period of time. But health authorities worldwide need to keep a constant watch to identify which ones are more important than others. It was as part of such an exercise that the NGS-SA detected B.1.1.529. From what is known currently, B.1.1.529 has multiple spike protein mutations, and preliminary analysis suggests it is highly infectious. South Africa has reported a four-fold increase in new cases over the last two weeks, coinciding with the emergence of B.1.1.529. On

Thursday, the NGS-SA said B.1.1.529 has rapidly increased in Gauteng province, which includes Johannesburg and Pretoria, and may already be present in most provinces. The NGS-SA has said the sustained increase in cases is possibly fuelled by cluster outbreaks. On the mutation profile of the new variant, the NGS-SA has said that B.1.1.529 has "very unusual constellations of mutations" - with 30 in the region that encodes the spike protein, which is responsible for the virus's entry in human cells. It has said that some of the mutations are well characterised with a known phenotypic impact, affecting



transmissibility and immune evasion. Some of these mutations have already been detected in the Alpha and Delta variants. But many other mutations, the NGS-SA said, have been "rarely observed until now and not well characterised". So, the full significance of these muta-

tions remain uncertain at this point. "More investigations are underway to determine the possible impact of these mutations on the capacity of the virus to transmit more efficiently, to impact vaccine

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French ex-minister Nicolas Hulot accused of rape and sexual assault

Paris, November 27 : A popular French environmentalist and former government minister faces new allegations of rape and sexual abuse after several women came forward in a TV documentary to testify that he had assaulted them. The claims come four years after Nicolas Hulot, 66, was first accused of rape by the granddaughter of the late Socialist president François Mitterrand. In an interview given just before the documentary was aired on Thursday, Hulot strenuously denied the accusations and accused the women of lying. He said he was withdrawing definitively from public life. The Paris public prosecutor, Laure Beccau, on Friday announced a preliminary inquiry would be launched into the allegations. Whatever its findings, such an inquiry would not lead to any formal charges as the alleged events happened outside the time limit for prosecution. Four women, described as unknown to each other, claimed on Envoyé spécial that they had been assaulted by Hulot. Sylvia - who did not give her second name -



broke down in tears as she described how Hulot forced her to perform oral sex in a vehicle in an open car park in May 1989 when she was 16. "I was young, I'd never done anything like that. I didn't understand what he wanted," she said. "I froze. I knew that what was happening shouldn't be happening, that it was bad ... I knew I was trapped and because I didn't want to do what he was trying to make me do, I tried to lean back in the seat." She recalled what she said were his last words to her as he dropped her off in Paris: "He said a phrase that that has haunted me for years,

he said: 'Redo your makeup a bit because people can see you've been doing something.' That's all he said to me." I left, I didn't know what had happened. Had I seduced him? Was it normal? Is that what adults do? I've kept this to myself for 30 years. I was a 16-year-old kid, he was Nicolas Hulot. Who was going to believe me?" Hulot stood as a presidential candidate in 2012 and later served as the ecology transition minister in Emmanuel Macron's first

government between 2017 and 2018. In 2018, when in his ministerial job, a magazine claimed he had raped the daughter of a high-profile figure, later revealed to be Pascale Mitterrand, the granddaughter of the late Socialist president. A few months later, Hulot resigned suddenly during a radio interview, citing a disagreement over the government's environmental policy. Mitterrand, who was in contact with Envoyé spécial but did not appear in the documentary, alleged to police that Hulot had raped her in Corsica in 1997 when she was 19 and a trainee photographer with the SIPA agency, whose founder is a close friend of Hulot. Because the allegations were made out of the legal time limit, the investigation was closed. Hulot, who was questioned by investigators, admitted he had sex with Mitterrand but said it was consensual. He began

defamation proceedings against the magazine, but later dropped the action. Another woman, named only as Cécile, claimed on Envoyé spécial that Hulot assaulted her in 1998 when she was 23 and was working at the French embassy in Moscow. She said she was sent to help Hulot - who told her he was a friend of the then president, Jacques Chirac - sort out a problem with customs officers when he arrived to make a documentary in Russia. Later she said she was in a taxi with Hulot when "he jumped on me, tried to kiss me". She said: "I slapped him. I did what I could. My 'no' was very clear. I made it very clear I didn't want sexual relations with that man." Asked if she had envisaged making a police complaint then, she replied: "In Russia, in Moscow, against a friend of President Chirac. No, I didn't even think of it. Of course not." A third woman, Claire Nouvian, who worked on one of Hulot's shows, was warned to avoid being alone with the presenter and to lock her cabin door at night when they were out in a boat filming in Costa Rica.



Customers line up for the opening of Macy's at Westfield Old Orchard Shopping Mall in Skokie of Greater Chicago Area, Illinois

Ethiopian PM on battlefield, says state-affiliated TV

London, November 27 : A state-affiliated Ethiopian TV channel has broadcast footage purporting to show the country's Nobel peace prize-winning prime minister on the battlefield of the country's year-long war against Tigray forces, four days after he announced he would direct the army from there. Wearing military uniform, Abiy Ahmed claimed in the footage that the war was "being

conducted with a high level of success" and referred to locations on the border between the country's Amhara and Afar regions, which neighbour Tigray. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the war that erupted in November 2020 between Ethiopian forces and the Tigray forces who had long dominated the national government before Abiy took office in 2018. The government declared a state of emergency this month as Tigray fighters moved closer to the capital, Addis Ababa, and the US and others have told their citizens to leave immediately. Foreign media have been barred from Tigray for much of the war, with communications links severed. Late on Thursday, Ethiopia's government issued an order seeking to restrict media reporting of the war, forbidding the sharing of non-official information on "military-related movements, battlefield results and situations". The statement, which applies to everyone in the country, also says that "supporting the [rival Tigray forces] directly or indirectly in the name of freedom speech should cease immediately". It strongly warned against calls for the formation of a transitional government. Security forces would "take measures" against violators, it said, without elaborating. Mediation efforts by the UN

and the African Union in pursuit of a ceasefire and talks have made little apparent progress. The war in which witnesses have described gang-rapes, mass expulsions and deliberate starvation, has included atrocities committed by all sides, though Ethiopian forces and their allies from neighbouring Eritrea have been blamed for most of the abuses. The war has created a huge humanitarian crisis in Africa's second most populous country, with 6 million people in the Tigray region under a months-long government blockade. Many in the neighbouring Amhara and Afar regions remain beyond the reach of aid as the Tigray forces fight their way towards Ethiopia's capital. They say they are pressing the government to lift the blockade but also have warned they want Abiy out, by force if needed. "Today, 9.4 million people are living their worst nightmare" in northern Ethiopia, World Food Programme spokesman Tomson Phiri told reporters in Geneva on Friday. The United Nations agency also said 35 aid trucks had arrived in the Tigray capital, the first such aid to arrive in the region since 18 October, when Ethiopia's military resumed airstrikes against the regional capital. A hundred aid trucks are needed each day to meet the urgent needs in Tigray, the UN has said.

Boris Johnson's plan for Irish Sea bridge rejected over £335bn cost

London, November 27 : Boris Johnson's proposal for a bridge or tunnel linking Scotland to Northern Ireland has been rejected by a feasibility study as vastly expensive - £335bn for the bridge or £209bn for the tunnel - and fraught with potential difficulties. Released alongside a wider so-called union connectivity review, which called for investment in road, rail and domestic aviation to better connect the four UK nations, the fixed link report found either a bridge or tunnel would be at the very edge of what could be achieved with current technology. The tunnel would have to be so long and deep that it could only accommodate trains for safety reasons. It would take at least 30 years for either of the links to open. A particular problem, which was raised by engineers when Johnson proposed the link in 2019, is Beaufort's Dyke. The seabed trench is up to 300 metres deep and more than two miles wide at its broadest point, and is also filled with million tonnes of munitions dumped in the 1970s. A tunnel would have to be constructed at depths of about 400 metres below water level, exerting

significant pressures and requiring a 25-mile climb in either direction given a maximum rail gradient of one in 100. By comparison the Channel tunnel is just over 23 miles long, with a maximum depth of 75 metres. Beaufort's Dyke would also prove "a challenge" for the bridge because the construction would have to pass over the trench, with a span of at least 2.5 miles and foundations set back from the edge, said the study, which was led by a small team of civil engineering experts. No suspension bridge with a span that long has yet been built, the report said, although there have been some design concepts with similar lengths. In an introduction to the feasibility report, Sir Peter Hendy, the chair of Network Rail, who led the connectivity review, said the study had concluded both projects were possible. "A bridge crossing, however, would be the longest span bridge built to date," he wrote. "A tunnel would be the longest undersea tunnel ever built given the limited gradients on which trains can operate, the route it would need to take and the depths it would need to reach."

London, November 27 : The leader of Spain's Podemos party has defended the coalition government's push to change its predecessor's "gag law", calling it "the greatest blow to civil and political liberties" since the country's return to democracy. Ione Belarra, who serves as the minister for social rights in the Socialist-led minority government, said the public security legislation had eroded basic democratic rights since it was introduced by the conservative People's party (PP) six years ago. The so-called gag law - which has been criticised by UN experts, journalists and human rights groups - allows authorities to fine journalists and media organisations who distribute unauthorised images of police, sets strict limits on where and where protests can be held and imposes hefty financial penalties on offenders. The PP, the far-right Vox party and dozens of policing groups are opposing the changes, claiming they will impede officers' ability to do their job and tilt things in favour of

criminals. Speaking to the Guardian, Belarra said change was long overdue and suggested the legislation had been deliberately engineered by the PP to clamp down on dissent as Spain endured the socioeconomic effects of the 2008 financial crisis. "I think it's certainly the greatest blow to civil and political liberties since the transition [to democracy], and I don't think that's an exaggerated view," she said. "It's also clear that the People's party undertook this reform during a brutal economic crisis and that it was done specifically to stop people protesting against ... measures such as the cuts to public services." Belarra acknowledged that the Unidas Podemos alliance - the junior partners in the coalition - would have liked the amendments agreed with the Spanish Socialist Workers' party (PSOE) to have gone further, but said the bloc



was satisfied with the deal. One area of disagreement - the contentious issue of the pushback of migrants and refugees - was left out of the reforms. "There are measures in the amendments that are good news: you don't need to give notice of [spontaneous] demonstrations, and they're going to reduce the fines and base them on people's different economic capacities so as not to deter people from exercising their civil and political rights on financial grounds," she said. "And people will no longer be punished for taking and sharing images, which has really limited freedom of information in Spain and seen

the repression of journalists who were doing their jobs legitimately and legally." But the proposed changes have received short shrift from many rank-and-file officers and from the Spanish right. According to the Jupol union, they will leave officers "having to face violent people with their hands tied". The PP leader, Pablo Casado, joined police at a protest in Madrid on Wednesday, as did Santiago Abascal, who leads Vox. Another demonstration is due to be held in central Madrid. Casado said he would take the matter to Spain's constitutional court if the changes were passed. "We're not going to put up with this outrage when it comes to protecting those who protect us," he said. "There's no freedom without security and the Policía Nacional and the Guardia Civil are the ones that guarantee our freedoms. If the reforms in this law go through, they're going to end up being totally sold out to the criminals."

Madonna criticises Instagram for taking down nipple photo

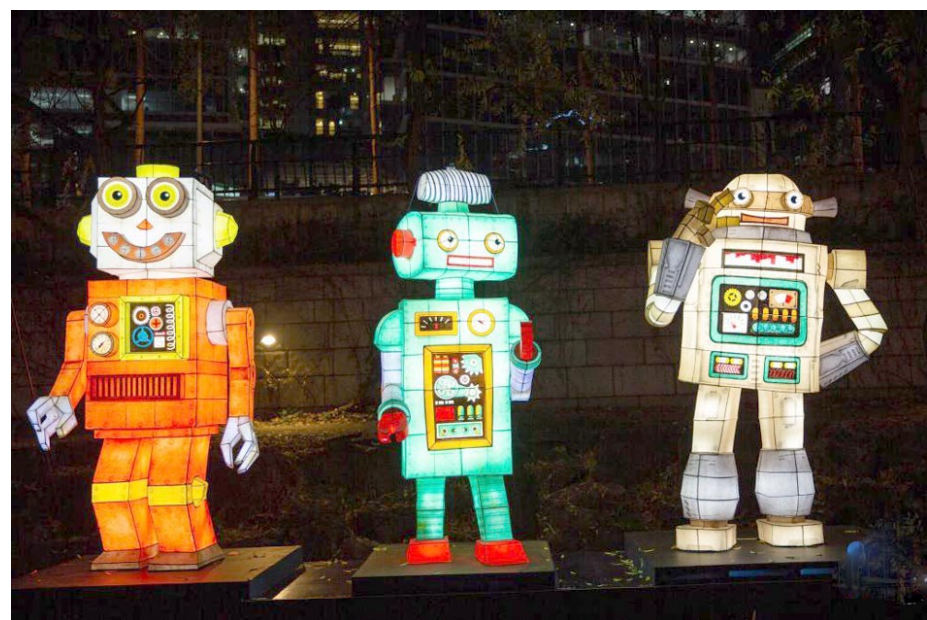
New York, November 27 : From her infamous corset bodysuit with conical bra cups to her bondage-inspired outfits at the Met Gala and MTV video music awards, Madonna has never been shy of causing a stir with her looks. But now the international superstar has come up against an unlikely and powerful foe:

Mark Zuckerberg's social media empire. On Thursday, the singer criticised Instagram for taking down photographs in which her nipple was exposed, telling her 17 million followers she was grateful she maintained her sanity "through four decades of censorship ... sexism ... ageism and misogyny". She added it was "perfectly timed with the lies we have been raised to believe about the pilgrims peacefully breaking bread with the Native American Indians when they landed on Plymouth Rock! God bless America." The 63-year-old had earlier this week shared risque images of herself on and underneath a bed, wearing a cut-out bra, a thong, fishnet tights and high heels. Re-sharing the images, this time with emojis covering her nipple, Madonna explained the original posts had been taken down by Instagram, saying it was "astounding" that women



could show any part of their body except their nipples. This article includes content provided by Instagram. We ask for your permission before anything is loaded, as they may be using cookies and other technologies. To view this content, click 'Allow and continue'. "I'm reposting photographs Instagram took down without warning or notification," she said. "The reason they gave my management that does not handle my account was that a small portion of my nipple was exposed." She added: "It is still astounding to me that we live in a culture that allows every inch of a woman's body to be shown except a nipple. As if that is the only part of a woman's anatomy

that could be sexualized. The nipple that nourishes the baby! Can't a man's nipple be experienced as erotic?!! And what about a woman's ass which is never censored anywhere." Giving thanks that I have managed to maintain my sanity through four decades of censorship ... sexism ... ageism and misogyny. "Instagram's guidelines ban "photos, videos and some digitally created content that show sexual intercourse, genitals and closeups of fully nude buttocks". The company says this "also includes some photos of female nipples", though photos of mastectomy scarring and women actively breastfeeding are allowed. For years, artists and activists have put pressure on Facebook and Instagram to treat female and male nipples equally. The #FreeTheNipple campaign has since 2012 challenged the general convention of allowing men to appear topless in public while considering it sexual or indecent for women to do the same.



Lanterns are displayed during the 2021 Seoul Lantern Festival in downtown Seoul, South Korea

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Legal Awareness held



Assam Rising, Aalo Nov 27:

Along with the rest of the India, Office of the Legal Aid Clinic at the premises of Additional District & Sessions Court-cum-Chairman, District Legal Services Authority, Upper Subansiri District, Camp: Basar, A.P has conducted legal awareness campaign to celebrate India's 75th year of independence as the "AZAADI KA AMRIT MAHOTSAY" in commemoration of the adoption day of

our Constitution as SAMVIDHAN DIVAS (CONSTITUTION DAY) at the Panchayat Hall, New Dari village, Dari, Leparada District, A.P on November 26. Tage Halley, AD&SJ cum Chairman, DLSA, U/Subansiri District, Camp: Basar dwelt at length on Synergy between Customary Law (Assam Frontier Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945 and The Arunachal Pradesh Civil

Courts Act, 2021, Mijum Doko, Advt.— Indian Adoption Law cum Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and POCSO Act, 2012. Ito Riram, Advt. cum Retainer Lawyer, Legal Aid Clinic, Basar— The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985. The representatives of village authority/Head Gaon Burah and Gaon Burahs, Women Organization, Panchayat Members, Self Help Group, Youth Forum and other general public of entire Dari Circle, Leparada District comprising of 05 females and 39 males in total have participated on the occasion.

Rice Variety Cafeteria under APART held at Borchapori village of Morongi

The Assam Rising Golaghat, Nov 27:

A Participatory Varietal Field Day of Rice Variety Cafeteria under Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project (APART) organised by Office of the District Agricultural Officer of Golaghat and APART:ATMA-Golaghat was held yesterday at Borchapori village of Morongi Development Block under Morongi ADO Circle. The Participatory Varietal Field Day of Rice Variety Cafeteria was inaugurated by Sr. ADO (Agro) cum District Nodal Officer of APART, Ranjan Boruah in presence of ADO cum Convenor of Morongi Dev. Block, Shanghamitra Sarmah; District Environmental Coordinator of APART, Dr Banasree Sharma; Jr. Researcher of International

Rice Research Institute, Ankita Sahu; Agricultural Extension Assistants of Morongi & Golaghat ADO Circle; Block Technology Manager of Morongi Dev. Block, Diganta Gohain; Assistant Technology Manager of Morongi Dev. Block, Jyaosi Roy; Research Technician of APART, Abhishek Singha; Local farmers and Villagers. At the RVC, a total of 10 varieties of rice, including hybrid as well as local, were exhibited. The Rice Varietal Cafeteria, which is managed by Rajib Chetia, has been grown in a plot of 2000 sq. metres. A total of 35 farmers from different locations were present in the programme. The farmers voted based on the phenotypic characteristics

which resulted in the variety Ranjit Sub I (STRV) as 1st, Konjha (Premium Quality Rice) as 2nd and Kajal (LPV) as 3rd. The significant programme was concluded by a vote of thanks by ADO cum Convenor of Morongi Dev. Block, Shanghamitra Sarmah.

NETA promoted Assam tea at International trade fair

Assam Rising Reporter Guwahati, Nov 27:

North Eastern Tea Association (NETA), in collaboration with the Industries & Commerce Department of Govt of Assam, successfully promoted Assam Tea at the India International Trade Fair (IITF 2021) held at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi from November 14 to 27. An exclusive stall for Assam Tea was set-up at the Assam Pavilion where all varieties of top quality Assam tea was served. Visitors to IITF thronged the stall to have a taste of fresh authentic Assam tea. On an average, about 500 cups of tea were served daily in hygienic

food-grade cups. The whole purpose was that people should have the real taste of Assam tea in its natural form and thereby increase the per capita consumption of tea in India. It needs mention here that the Tea board had engaged M/s. Deloitte Touch? Tohmatu India LLP to do a study on "Domestic Consumption of Tea in India" and as per the Deloitte report of June 2018 - "Apparent Annual per capita consumption of tea in India stands at 0.78 kg. per person in comparison to other countries in the world, Turkey (3.2 Kg), Morocco (1.86 Kg), UK (1.58 Kg) and even neighbouring countries like Pakistan (0.81 Kg) and China (1.31 Kg)". NETA in association with Hotel Vivanta, Guwahati,

organised a tea brewing session on 25th Nov, which is a first of its kind event. Water is the mother of tea. Good tea and good water match perfectly. A satisfactory cup of tea depends to a great extent on the quality and temperature of water, the tea-water ratio, and how long tea is steeped, besides the quality of the tea itself. The Assam Tea Stall at IITF 2021 was visited by the Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly Biswajit Daimary, Principal Secretary of Govt of Assam Dr K K Dwivedi, Principal Resident Commissioner Rajeev Chandra Joshi, Cartoonist Jagjeet Rana and many other dignitaries.

PAD conducts Training Covid-19 awareness

Assam Rising Reporter North Lakhimpur, Nov 27:

People's Action for Development (PAD), a prominent NGO of Assam organised a Youth Group Training program on Ecological Rights and Awareness on COVID-19 at Bahgora Dhunaguri Gaon Panchayat under Bihpuria constituency today where a total number of 23 youths participated. Advocacy

Manager of the NGO Namita Bilung gave the welcome address in the program. The first session of the training program was facilitated by a college teacher Monuj Gogoi who talked about the career of today's youth mentioning about aim/goal and its purpose to live a successful life. A task was assigned to the participants into four groups on the identification of issues related to youths. Every group completed their task and gave a presentation where they brought up issues like child labour, excess use of plastics, lack of playground for games, consumption of alcohol, no library, flood, poor transportation system, dropout etc. Trainer Monuj Gogoi elucidated each issue taking its causes and consequences due to lack of awareness in the rural areas. Livelihood coordinator of PAD John Turkey said to the trainees, "Youth needs to take initiatives to protect the environment and aware people of their locality to make a clean and healthy

place. To fulfill the needs and aspiration of youth. You need to apply your thoughts into action for a bright future ahead." Deputy Director of PAD Philipson Sona said in the event, "We need to empower ourselves with knowledge of our rights so that we can fight for it. To build self-esteem and social participation in taking initiative as a leader is very important. Therefore, learning should not stop, it must go on till our last breath and act on it positively." When feedback was taken from the participants, they said, "Youth Group Training is an eye-opening for them where they learn to identify the issues related in their locality which they had never thought earlier that it can be solved together as a team. They have come to know about ecological rights, school safety and importance of career."

Nagsankar High school celebrates NCC day

The Assam Rising Biswanath Chariati, Nov 27:

The 73rd raising day of NCC was celebrated at Nagsankar High school with a day-long programme on Saturday. The programme began with hoisting of flag by Baneswar Bora, former NCC officer; Nagsankar High school followed by march-past by NCC cadets. The open session began with Labanya Devi; Headmistress of Nagsankar High school in the chair. The meeting began with a borgeet performed by Nayan Jyoti Nath. Nayanmoni Saikia, ANO, Nagsankar High school briefed the objectives of the meet-



ing that followed a patriotic song by Nikita Kalandi. Anjan Baskota, Care Taker officer of Dakshin Nagsankar High school graced the occasion as a chief guest who had highlighted on the significance of

NCC day and its importance. Dhananjay Sutradhar, CTO; Kusumtola Anchalic HSS graced the meeting as an invited guest and addressed the gathering. In between the proceedings of the meeting

many cultural events were performed by NCC cadets and the students of the school. Baneswar Bora, former NCC officer of Nagsankar High school addressed the gathering and briefed about the

value and importance of NCC in student life. Nayanmoni Saikia conducted the proceedings of the meeting. The NCC cadets performed a demo of folk musical instruments in the end of the days programme.

Golaghat shines in Muaythai Championship

The Assam Rising Golaghat, Nov 27:

In the 16th All Assam Muaythai Championship 2021 Golaghat team was able to get the 1st Runner up Trophy. The Championship was held at CKB Commerce College Indoor Stadium in Jorhat from November 18 to November 20. In the Elite 23 Male 63.5-67 kg Category Binod Gogoi and Anubrat Saikia bagged gold medal, in the

23 male 67-71 kg category Nilutpal Neog bagged silver, in the 54-57 kg category Sarfaraz Nawaz Ahmed got bronze and Shiva Prasad Baruah got bronze in 60-63.5 kg, in 75-81 kg category Gouranga Gogoi bagged gold while in the 81-85 kg category Abul Hussain and Pariksheet Phukan bagged gold and silver medals respectively. On the other hand in the 23 female 45-58 category Nobonikha Saikia

got silver medal and in the 42-45 kg category Sangita Duarah got bronze medal. Meanwhile seven Muaythai players from Golaghat will represent the Assam Team in the National Muaythai Championship 2021 to be held from December 16 to 20 at Imphal in Manipur. They are Binod Gogoi, Gouranga Gogoi, Abul Hussain, Anubrat Saikia, Nobonikha Saikia, Sangita Duarah and Tridisha Phukan.

Scuffle between customer and manager of Bank of Baroda

Assam Rising Reporter Nagaon, Nov 27:

The branch manager of Bank of Baroda, Nagaon branch at Haibargaon on Wednesday last got involved in a verbal spat with a customer named Manish Maheshwari when he went to query in connection with a cheque bounce case. Showing arrogance, the manager of the bank allegedly threw the necessary papers in anger and called the security guard of the bank and instructed to take

the customer out. The scuffle between the customer and the bank manager started when the customer, Manish Maheshwari, wanted to know why his cheque was bounced. Significantly, the manager R K Sinha instead of clearing his doubt, told him to ask the Punjab National Bank when he went to query in connection with a cheque bounce case. Showing arrogance, the manager of the bank allegedly threw the necessary papers in anger and called the security guard of the bank and instructed to take

Besides, the money was available in the account. It was however confirmed by other bank officials of the branch that it all happened due to the mistake of the bank. Hence, the customer claimed that the cheque bounce charge which was deducted from his account was reversed back to his account. Taking this simple question the manager got involved in an unnecessary argument with the customer and called the security guard and instructed the customer to take him out and threw the papers in his hand in anger. When the customer wanted to record the incident, the manager asked him to turn off the camera and tried to snatch the mobile from the customer's hand. Later, other bank officials handled the matter.

Quiz competition held

Assam Rising Reporter Nagaon, Nov 27:

The students of tenth standard of Golaghat Jatiya Vidyalaya today organized a quiz competition among the students of seventh, eighth and ninth standards of the same school. Total sixteen teams took part in the preliminary round of the quiz competition out of which six teams qualified for the finals. Today the quiz competition was held at Jogen Punyaprabha auditorium of Golaghat Jatiya Vidyalaya. The competition was conducted by an ex-student of the school and

now a popular quiz master Kulajeet Das and he was assisted by Abhilash Bharali. Earlier both of them were facilitated by the organisers. The six teams were named after some world famous personalities in the field of Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics like Einstein, Newton, Hawkins, Mendel, Darwin and Pascal. Total five rounds were held and at last Team Darwin was able to secure first position while Team Mendel and Team Hawkins secured second and third positions respectively. Winners were awarded with books.

LOST

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Constitution Day celebrated at West Siang



Assam Rising Reporter Aalo, Nov 27:

West Siang District Aalo Celebrated Constitution Day at various Administrative Headquarters, Govt College Kamki and various

Schools and Govt departments. At D.C Office Aalo, Liyi Bagra ADC Aalo read out the Preamble of the Constitution. He elaborately explained the importance of the Constitution of In-

dia to the Officers and Officials of DC office Aalo. More than 3000 Persons including Student took part during the Day. Quiz competition was held at Govt UPS Panya on the Day.

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THE ASSAM RISING

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New Covid variant

In the absence of mass vaccination, Covid is not only spreading uninhibited among unprotected people but is mutating, with new variants emerging out of the poorest countries and now threatening to unleash themselves on even fully vaccinated people in the richest countries of the world. On Thursday, the UK's Department of Health, which has placed a travel ban on southern Africa, warned that the B.1.1.529 "Omicron" variant was the most "complex" and "worrying" seen so far. And yet with 9.1bn vaccines already manufactured and 12bn expected by the year's end - enough to vaccinate the whole world - this was the "arms race" that we could have won. No country should be facing yet another winter with the uncertainty of a new wave of Covid hanging over us. On Monday, the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of the World Health Organization, will meet in a special session. They will hear that vaccination rates in the six countries now subject to UK travel bans are still dangerously below the 40% target that was set for December. In Zimbabwe, only 25% have had a first vaccine and just 19% of the population are fully vaccinated. In Lesotho and Eswatini, which have had the Johnson and Johnson single-shot vaccines, just 27% and 22% respectively have been vaccinated. In Namibia the figure is even lower: 14% vaccinated with only 12% fully vaccinated. While South Africa has achieved 27% vaccination rates, its rural areas are often in single figures, and the whole of the continent is justifiably angry because their own efforts to vaccinate have been impeded for months by the neo-colonialism of the European Union. Even as the gap between the vaccines haves of Europe and the vaccine have-nots of Africa mushroomed, the EU insisted on commandeering millions of South African-produced Johnson & Johnson one-shot vaccines and sending them out of Africa into Europe. In June, Boris Johnson promised he and the G7 countries would use their surplus vaccines to immunise the whole world. In September, at a summit chaired by President Biden, a December target of 40% vaccination was set for the 92 poorest countries. Two and a half months on, there is little chance of this target being met in at least 82 of them. By Thursday the US, which to its credit has been responsible for half the vaccines donated, had still delivered only 25% of the vaccines that it promised. The arithmetic of failure in the rest of the world is even more embarrassing. According to Airfinity, the European Union has delivered only 19%, the UK just 11% and Canada just 5%. China and New Zealand have delivered over half of what was promised, but their pledges amounted to just 100m and 1.6m respectively. Australia has given just 18% of what it offered and Switzerland just 12%. The result is that even now only 3% of people in low-income countries are fully vaccinated, while the figure exceeds 60% in both high-income countries and upper-middle-income countries. Every day, for every vaccine delivered as first vaccines in the poorest countries, six times as many doses are being administered as third and booster vaccines in the richest parts of the world. This vaccine inequality is the main reason why the WHO is predicting 200 million more cases on top of the 260 million so far. And after 5 million deaths to Covid, another 5 million are thought to be possible in the next year and more.

Be a Citizen Journalist

Are you against of violence or corruption? Do you really want revolution in the social, educational, political or economical system? Do you have any questions for the Government, political or non political parties? Don't worry, be a part of The Assam Rising family. Be a citizen journalist and write to us about your problem and we will take the responsibility to publish your voice. We will give you a platform to raise your voice, because your simple voice can change society.

Editor,
The Assam Rising
G.N.B. Road, Chandmari Colony,
Guwahati, PIN 781003
E-mail Id : assamrising@gmail.com

Letter to The Editor

You can send us your self-composed article, story, poem, letter to the editor or any other creative work done by you. We are responsible for publishing it in The Assam Rising. We will also find out one best contributor/writer every week and an attractive prize will be given to encourage him/her. So, without any further delay mail us your own work with full name and address to assamrising@gmail.com.

Editor,
The Assam Rising
Guwahati, Assam

The new variant is worrying-but it doesn't change how we tackle Covid



Many of the world's leading Covid-19 experts are raising the alarm about a new variant which has been described as "horrific" and "the worst ever". Authorities are understandably worried. But it's important to place their concerns in context. We have detected variants before that looked worrying but never took off. It's early days for a variant that wasn't on anyone's radar until only last week. Much about the new variant is still unknown. The very fact we have detected this new variant early is good news, and shows that the global surveillance system is working. But the high number of mutations detected in its genome are concerning. This is the primary reason scientists around the world are warning it must be taken seriously. Every time a virus replicates, it has the opportunity to mutate. The more opportunities the virus has to replicate, the larger the number of mutations, and the higher the chances of new variants emerging - that much is simple mathematics. Most mutations will go unnoticed and have a neutral or negative impact on the resulting virus. Occasionally we will see mutations that fundamentally change the nature of the virus and what it is able to do. There are typically three things that dictate how worried we

should be about an emerging variant:

does it spread faster? Is it more deadly? And does it evade our existing immunity? We are still at the beginning of the race to understand this new variant, B.1.1.529, which was first detected in southern Africa. But if the answer to any of these questions is yes, then it could be a serious threat - and we will need to do whatever we can to limit its spread. Based on preliminary data, this variant seems to be out-competing other variants, growing faster even than Delta, which quickly rose to global dominance earlier this year. This assessment is based on a small number of cases in South Africa, and there is still a great degree of uncertainty over how transmissible it is. Some of the mutations that B.1.1.529 has acquired have been previously associated with higher transmissibility in other variants. This has scientists worried about its ability to spread. Beyond the relatively limited case data, the small number of sequenced genomes are perhaps a bigger cause for concern, due to the sheer number of mutations that have been discovered in this new variant. As well as mutations associated with increased transmission, some of the mutations in B.1.1.529 have been associated with changes to the spike

protein that might make it unrecognisably different to the version of Covid our vaccines were designed to target. This potential for immune evasion is the most worrying aspect of all. It's why nations are currently scrambling to prevent the variant from arriving on their shores. Despite being among the first countries to limit travel from southern Africa, Israel has already found a case of the new variant in a traveller returning from the region. Whether this will tip over into community spread remains to be seen, but Israel is taking few chances: it has already quarantined two other returning travellers who are suspected to be infected with the variant. The new variant is also believed to have reached Europe, with Belgium confirming the continent's first case. As the situations in Israel and Belgium dem-

 Kit Yates

onstrate, it is possible that the variant is already here in the UK. As of yet, no cases have been detected. The government has reacted quickly, placing Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe on England's red travel list. Managed hotel quarantine, however, does not come into force until Sunday, and arrivals between now and then are asked to undertake the less reliable measure of isolating at home. And even with managed isolation from listed countries in place, there are still concerns about the variant being imported from countries that aren't on the red list, where it has spread but not yet been detected. The potential for loopholes, including people travelling via a third country in order to bypass quarantine measures, also presents a possible route for the new variant to spread. These loopholes need to be tightened quickly. Moreover, if and when the variant starts spreading among people in the country, we will need enhanced contact testing and tracing - including the testing of those who have come into contact someone who is Covid-positive before or after their in-

fection was detected. This would help to stamp out potential outbreaks as they emerge. Surge testing should also be on standby in case the variant is found to be spreading in the community. The new variant doesn't change the fundamentals of how the UK should be tackling Covid. We should still be encouraging people to get the vaccine and their booster shots. As the winter draws in and people spend more time socialising indoors, we need to focus on better ventilation in communal spaces. We should be taking mitigation measures to prevent spread in schools, where pupils are again seeing the highest rates of Covid among any age group. We should be updating our messaging on Covid symptoms so that people know when to get tested, and we should be redoubling our efforts to get in touch with close contacts of infected people so they know to get a test themselves. Masks should be made mandatory again in enclosed public spaces, on transport and in supermarkets, and businesses should be encouraging people to work from home where they can. In short, we must be doing all the things that we should have been doing all along to prevent the spread of Covid-19. What the emergence of this new and potentially dangerous variant highlights more than ever is that we, in the UK, are not immune to Covid in other countries. It doesn't make sense for the UK government to talk about being first to exit the pandemic. By its very definition, the pandemic is a global problem that will only truly be solved with global solutions. Worldwide vaccinations will be vital in order to reduce Covid cases around the world and limit the potential for novel variants that could undo all our hard work. Up to this point, rich nations have not been doing enough to achieve this goal. The emergence of this new variant reinforces the message that should have always been the overriding mantra of our pandemic response: nowhere is safe until everywhere is safe.

Be reassured: the world is not as divided as we might think

Today's widely accepted narrative is that we live in historically divided times. Voters are routinely described as "polarised", while analysts compete to identify the essential schism of the age, whether this is metropolitan versus traditionalist, people versus democracy or anywhere versus somewhere. For a third year running, however, the YouGov-Cambridge Globalism Project supports a different interpretation: that extreme views are given greater visibility by social media, which in turn creates an especially dynamic climate of opinion - in that, for example, it can change quickly - but one whose underlying forces are defined more by cohesion than division. Released annually by the Guardian, the Globalism Project is an international survey and the largest of its kind on the public relationship with globalisation, produced by YouGov in partnership with academics at Cambridge University. Its findings have consistently challenged popular stereotypes of public opinion in this so-called polarised

age. It turns out, for instance, that there is no deep divide between the mindsets of "open versus closed" societies. In fact, few voters support radically open or closed societies, while most tend to favour varying degrees of continued integration with the wider world. Academic theorists of "authoritarian populism" may perceive a new, mass disdain for liberal pluralism, but we found little evidence of this in public sentiment. Instead, majorities around the world maintain a determined belief in the superiority of democracy, with little partisan difference on the issue. Nor has modern society been overwhelmed by demographic schisms. When we compared those who feel generally more permissive or restrictive towards net migration, for example, we found some discernible patterns on average - between younger and older, metropolitan and provincial, graduates and school-leavers - but hardly to the extent of rival demographic blocs, or splintering, parallel societies. This is not to doubt that many countries have experienced

an intensifying atmosphere of partisanship over the past decade. Strange as it might sound, however, partisanship and substantial division on policy can be two quite different things, as the Guardian recently reported. For example, in Britain, most respondents who described themselves as either leftwing or rightwing said they dislike others for identifying with the opposite camp

 Stephan Shakespeare

(87% and 73% respectively). The same kind of partisan divide extended to other labels of political identity: a majority of leftwingers considered themselves feminist (62%) while a majority of the right did not (70%); or on the subject of Black Lives Matter, most of the left were favourable (70%) while most of the right felt the opposite (69%). Yet when it comes to opinions on underlying issues, a different picture emerges. The same respon-

dents were next shown a list of three jobs - cleaner, nurse and politician - and asked if each one was more suited to either women or men, or equally suited to all genders. This time, overwhelming portions of the left and right agreed, answering "equally suited" for every job (94% and 89% for cleaner; 90% and 74% for nurse; 88% and 83% for politician). Majorities on both sides also shared the view that it is unacceptable for a man to whistle at a woman he doesn't know in the street (85%, 58%), and that "promoting equality for women" should take some level of priority in modern society (98%, 88%). A similar pattern was evident for other progressive objectives of "combating racism of all kinds" and "moving the economy away from carbon-intensive industries towards greener alternatives". In other words, when we compare these groups by their attitudes to specific issues,

rather than by markers of identity, we find a considerable amount of common ground, rather than polarised clusters of opinion or clashing visions of what contemporary society should look like. In political science, this is being increasingly recognised as the gap between "issue-based" versus "affective" polarisation, and supports a thesis that the latter is decidedly more prevalent than the former in numerous western publics. Indeed, the study finds comparable patterns outside the UK, where notable levels of partisan antipathy coexist with significant overlap in views on gender and race equality and decarbonising the economy. This was found to be true among the rival voting camps of: Joe Biden versus Donald Trump in the United States; Emmanuel Macron versus Marine Le Pen in France; the Greens versus Alternative for Deutschland in Germany; the Left versus the Law and Justice party in Poland; Vox versus Podemos in Spain; and New Democracy versus Syriza in Greece.

No more pandemic excuses - this Thanksgiving we are going to a party

One of the hardest things about adjusting to life in late-stage Covid has been the making and seeing through of plans. A sniffle - or, more probably, a child's sniffle - can get you out of anything and, far from looking like an excuse, still be presented as selfless deference to public health. I have been out twice this week, to Broadway and the Metropolitan Opera, and on both occasions have had to fight the urge to cancel at the last minute. Now it's Thanksgiving and 53 million Americans - only a fraction fewer than pre-pandemic numbers - are expected to be on the move. It's a celebration, a reunion, and given the

atrophied state of our social muscles, also kind of a drag. For many of us it is strange, simply, to have plans. On the morning of Thanksgiving, my kids and I are travelling 45 minutes north of our home in New York for lunch with friends and extended family. My dad has flown in from London. Other guests are travelling from the midwest, and returning from college campuses. It is the first time we will have attended a party in someone's house for almost two years, and in the days running up to it, figuring out the rules - or rather, remembering there are rules to figure out - has been hard. Last year, no one was vaccinated. This year, most of the

adults present will have had three vaccinations and even the six-year-olds have had one. We're over the line. Aren't we? As has been the case since the beginning of the pandemic, there are multiple overlapping realities, not only in terms of what constitutes risk, but of what risk one is willing to tolerate. It was odd, on Saturday night, to attend a play on Broadway and find the theatre jammed to capacity and the streets outside thick with crowds. At the opera on Tuesday, we walked into a world apparently largely unchanged. I don't usually go to the opera, but a friend had tickets for Eurydice and since the Met is a few blocks from my house, it seemed churlish to say

no. Without consulting each other, she and I both turned up in jeans to be greeted, in the foyer, by crowds of people in black tie and evening gowns. It was weird. Making an effort seemed so pre-pandemic. This is a good thing, I guess; no good can come of lethargy. But as a spectacle it also seemed faintly ludicrous. At

 Emma Brockes

intermission we stood in the bar, watching in amazement as large numbers of people in what looked like period costume sailed by. Perhaps we would have felt this way even before the pandemic; the opera crowd is so very particular. But after months of not going out, and in our generally degraded physical state - I finally

detangled the rats' nests out of my kids' hair, but none of us have had haircuts for more than 12 months - the whole scene looked outlandish. Who were these groomed and put-together people, dressing to make an impression? "I wish I could be like that," said my friend, wistfully. And so to Thanksgiving. With almost 20 million Americans - 91% of pre-pandemic levels - set to pass through airports this week, things are almost back to normal, but not quite. Two days before the holiday, it occurs to our hosts that there are protocols to observe. My children's school currently

has three open Covid cases, and one class is isolating at home. A neighbour's child has been home for 10 days, isolating after a case in his class. It seems sensible that, in the case of the partially vaccinated kids, we should get Covid-tested. Last year, this would have been a no-brainer. This year, it's an 11th-hour addition to the running order and, two days before Thanksgiving, we race around trying to find a test site that isn't overwhelmed. All the city sites are booked. Private test clinics are charging \$99 for a test with a 24-hour turnaround, and -

incredibly - \$389 for results in two hours. The at-home test kits at the pharmacy are sold out. We have one last hope, the free mobile clinics that dot the neighbourhood. So, after ripping the kids out of school on Tuesday morning, I turn up, expecting to find a line around the block. As it is, there's only a smattering of people. Meanwhile our hosts have sent a message that, depending on where you stand on all this, is either sensible, reckless, or a cheerful indication that we are returning to an idea that animates our basic existence - living is risky and the risks here are small: "If it's too much bother, don't worry."

NIF announces Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay NIF Book Prize 2021 longlist



The New India Foundation announces the longlist for the fourth edition of the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay NIF Book Prize, recognizing and celebrating excellence in non-fiction writings on modern and contemporary India. This longlist of 12 books reflect a compelling picture of the diverse narratives which embody independent India's cultural, political, and social milieu in showcasing the finest non-fiction writing from and about the Indian subcontinent.

The Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay NIF Book Prize celebrates high-quality non-fiction literature published in the previous calendar year by emerging writers of all nationalities. Instituted in 2018, the prize carries a cash award of INR 15 lakhs and a citation. The longlisted books cover decades of modern Indian history, nourish creative and

conscious conversations around the Indian polity, and display a diversity of approaches and themes. Many of these works mirror India's heterogeneity and intricately blend the country's complex past with aspirations for its future. This year's longlist was selected by an eminent Jury including political scientist Niraja Gopal Jayal, entrepreneur Nandan Nilekani, historian Nayanjot Lahiri, entrepreneur Manish Sabharwal, and historian Srinath Raghavan.

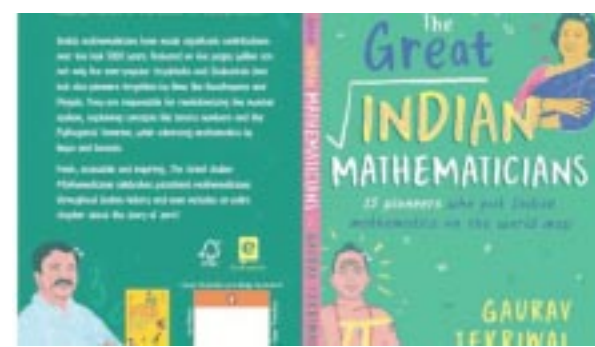
The 2021 Longlist is: Muscular India: Masculinity, Mobility & the New Middle Class by Michiel Baas (Context, Westland) The Death Script: Dreams and Delusions in Naxal Country by Ashutosh Bhardwaj (Fourth Estate, HarperCollins Publishers) India's First Dictatorship: The Emergency, 1975-77 by Christophe Jaffrelot & Pratnab Anil (HarperCollins Publishers) Brand New Na-

tion: Capitalist Dreams and Nationalist Designs in Twenty-First-Century India by Ravinder Kaur (Stanford University Press) India's Founding Moment: The Constitution of a Most Surprising Democracy by Madhav Khosla (Harvard University Press) Sebastian & Sons: A Brief History of Mrdangam Makers by T.M. Krishna (Context, Westland) The Greater India Experiment: Hindutva and the Northeast by Arkotong Longkumer (Stanford University Press) I Could Not Be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS by Bhanwar Meghwanshi; Trans. Nivedita Menon (Navayana) Naoroji: Pioneer of Indian Nationalism by Dinyar Patel (Harvard University Press) Gandhi in the Gallery: The Art of Disobedience by Sumathi Ramaswamy (Roli Books) The Coolie's Great War: Indian Labour in a Global Conflict 1914-1921 by Radhika Singha (HarperCollins Publishers) Jugalbandi: The BJP Before Modi by Vinay Sitapati (Penguin Random House) The Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay NIF Book Prize builds on the New India Foundation's mission of sponsoring high-quality research and writing on all aspects of the world's largest democracy.

Book Review: 'The Great Indian Mathematicians' offers a unique vantage point of India's contribution to the field

If you have a keen interest in either mathematics or history, perhaps both, Gaurav Tekriwal's new book is right up your alley. Titled 'The Great Indian Mathematicians: 15 Pioneers Who Put Indian Mathematics on the World Map', it has been published by Puffin Books. Apart from being an educator and author, Tekriwal is also the founder and president of the Vedic Maths Forum India. This should explain his tremendous passion for the subject that he writes about. I did not grow up enjoying mathematics, so I am always a bit puzzled when people wax eloquent about how fascinated they are by this subject, its real-life applications, and its connections to philosophy and aesthetics. I guess a good teacher in one's early years makes a huge difference and helps cultivate an appreciation for mathematics and its mysteries. Tekriwal's book called out to me because it looks at Indian history from a unique vantage point - the contributions of Indian mathematicians spread out over 5000 years. Antra K's sketch of ace mathematician Shakuntala Devi on the book's front cover reminded me of Anu Menon's wonderful biopic Shakuntala Devi (2020) star-

ring Vidya Balan. Therefore, I decided to plunge in, and learn about some of the other geniuses who came before her and after. "We, as a nation, were colonized for over 200 years and our perception of the history of Indian maths and mathematicians was distorted and corrupted. We started losing faith in our own culture and heritage and started looking at things from a Western standpoint," writes Tekriwal in his introduction to this book. He adds, "Many concede these resources that were believed to have originated from the English-speaking world were discovered in India." If this sounds like a tall claim, you might want to take a look at the bibliography towards the end of the book. It offers a chapter-wise list of sources that the author has drawn on while researching and writing. The list includes books, newspaper reports, YouTube videos, and websites. Some of the chapters also contain QR codes that readers can scan if they want to access supplementary audio-visual resources and enrich their understanding of concepts. After reading Tekriwal's book, I am excited to watch The Story of Maths (2008) - a television series narrated by mathematics professor Marcus Du Sautoy - apart from Matt Brown's film The



Man Who Knew Infinity (2015) featuring Dev Patel, and Vikas Bahl's film Super 30 (2019) with Hrithik Roshan. Tekriwal recommends these resources to get acquainted with three outstanding mathematicians from India - Madhava, Srinivasa Ramanujan, and Anand Kumar. Madhava, who was also an astronomer, laid the foundation for the Kerala School of Mathematics that flourished between the late 14th century and the 18th century. Tekriwal writes, "He made groundbreaking discoveries by moving away from the traditional finite processes of algebra to infinity with its implications on the future development of calculus - a vital tool for measuring time, making almanacs and finding directions at sea." Tekriwal tells the story behind the so-called Hardy-Ramanujan number and the collaboration between this Indian mathematician and his British mentor GH Hardy at Cambridge University. Ramanujan achieved a lot in his short life. He was 32 when he died. To honour him and continue his legacy, the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Italy has instituted the ICTP Ramanujan Prize for Young Mathematicians from Developing Countries. Tekriwal also makes a brief mention of the Ramanujan Museum in Chennai, which I knew

nothing of until I read this book. It is located in the premises of the Avvai Cultural Academy in Royapuram, where the mathematician's photographs, memorabilia and correspondence are preserved for the benefit of people interested in learning about his stellar achievements. I hope to visit this place of historical importance the next time I make a trip to Chennai. Anand Kumar from Patna, who is an internationally renowned mathematics educator, runs the Ramanujan School of Mathematics. He is best known for initiating the Super 30 programme that provides high-quality and free coaching to "students from economically impoverished sections" for the Indian Institute of Technology-Joint Entrance Examination (IIT-JEE). They are also provided with food, lodging and study material for a whole year. The most intriguing chapter in Tekriwal's book is the one about the Indus Valley Civilization. He writes, "If you were at the site of the Indus Valley excavation, you would find that the city roads intersect with each other perpendicularly (at right angles) like a grid. The houses were made with bricks that maintained the ratio of 4:2:1 for the length, width and height...there was a standard system of weights and measures in place in the entire civilization." While going through

this book, it is important to remember that territorial boundaries and political realities have changed a lot between 3000 BCE and today. The Indus Valley Civilization, for instance, is a shared heritage of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, because it stretched over a large landmass that is now divided into different nation-states. Tekriwal discusses the decimal ruler found by archaeologists in detail. It is also known as the Mohenjo-Daro ruler because of the place where it was discovered. He writes, "This ruler was divided into units corresponding to 1.32 inches and these markings are done with amazing accuracy to within 0.005 of an inch. This length has thus been named the Indus inch." In this book, you will get to exercise your mental muscles by solving various mathematical problems and also meet mathematicians such as Baudhayana, Pingala, Aryabhata, Brahmagupta, Varahamihira, Bhaskaracharya, Narayana Pandita, Sridharacharya, Mahaviracharya, Swami Bharati Krishna Tirthaji, Manjul Bhargava, among others. All of them have contributed richly not only to the history of mathematics but to the history of India. I wondered why Shakuntala Devi, called "the human computer", is the only woman in the book. Surprisingly, there is no mention of Anita Rampal and Parvin Sinclair, who are accomplished scholars and math educators. They have been associated with India's National Council of Educational Research and Training and other academic institutions. If Tekriwal addresses these gaps in the next edition, that would be a welcome addition to a fine book.

Book excerpt: In 'Guilt', a woman confronts a horrific incident from her past

Writer Mitra Phukan translates the short stories of Sahitya Akademi Award winning author Harekrishna Deka from the Assamese in *Guilt* and *Other Stories*. The stories present a searing vision of the human condition while also brining alive Assam through unforgettable images.

The following excerpt is from the story 'Guilt' where an old woman, the sole eyewitness to a crime, is forced to confront a chilling memory from her past. This excerpt is being reproduced with permission from the publisher Speaking Tiger Books. A few handfuls of dhokia lie in front of Durgeburhi, their fronds wilting in the heat. It looks as though there is little hope that these last few bunches of fiddle-head ferns will be sold today. Durga sits in the shade of Badan's shop. Like her, a couple of others also sit by the roadside and hawk simple country vegetables and greens such as bamboo shoots, dhokia greens and kosu tubers. The railway crossing is nearby. The shuttle-train that passes on the tracks twice each day, morning and evening, usually pauses at this point for a couple of minutes. The passengers who alight from the train sometimes buy a few things from the hawkers here. Her face is wrinkled, her sight has dimmed, yet Durgeswari cannot really be called 'old'. She is only about fifty. But

in this neighbourhood, everybody calls her Durgeburhi, Old Durga. Some rowdy students of a nearby college come and sit on the gate of the railway crossing and create a huge commotion every day. They harass everybody in sight, and nobody can escape their unkind tongues. They plague one and all so badly that decent people avoid going on that road if those students

no need to arrive so very soon. But she appears before anybody else does to reserve for herself the prime spot where shopkeeper Badan's roof casts its shadow on the ground. These days it is not really vital for her to come here and hawk vegetables. Her son, a strapping youth who has never seen his father's face, works as a peon in an office near their house. But Old Durga cannot give

tential customers, she looks up, and gets an unpleasant shock. Three men, dressed in khaki, are standing in front of her. Durgeburhi quakes inwardly whenever she sees men in khaki. However, screwing up her face to present a brave front, she mutters, I'm going, I'm going, after all I haven't built my house here, have I? She gathers up the green fronds and puts them into

body, sliced clean by the wheels of a passing train. The old woman is about to answer, but something makes her pause.

Three college boys pass that way. They yell out lustily,

'In Shiva's matted hair, Is Durgeburhi's lair!'

Durgeburhi begins to tremble. Is it caused by anger, or by some other emotion?

Certainly, the old woman had seen the corpse. And not just the corpse, she had also seen other events that had taken place. On that day, she had got up at cock-crow, as usual, and, gathering together the leafy mustard greens that she had collected the previous day, had walked the two miles to this spot. On the way, she had crossed the community Puja pandal. There had been just a few days left for the Puja festival to begin. She had seen an image-maker busy painting the image of the goddess. He must have woken early in order to finish the remaining work on the image before the festival started. She had gazed with fixed intensity, not at the goddess, but at the ferocious aspect of Mahishasura, and at the clay likeness of the severed bull's head. Durgeburhi always found it difficult to believe that the severed, lifeless head of the bull, and the great Asura, were two facets of the same living being. She had, however, been gratified to see the wicked Asura's approaching death, caused by the wound in his breast inflicted on him by the goddess.



happen to be around. Old Durga, too, has not escaped their attention. Actually, it is these students who are the authors of the epithet 'old' in front of her name, given to her even though she is only middle-aged. Once, one of them had mischievously taunted her. Durgeswari had given chase to the gang, cursing them and their ancestors mightily all the while. But after this incident, their ragging of her had become even worse. And now, every time they see her, they yell,

'In Shiva's matted hair, Is Durgeburhi's lair!'

From the time of that incident, Durgeswari has been generally known as Durgeburhi. Durgeswari appears at this spot very early every morning, though there is seemingly

up her habit of selling vegetables in the market. With the money that she earns in this manner, she hopes to bring home a wife for her son one day. When the sun gets stronger, the shade afforded by the roof of Badan's shop shrinks in size. Still, it is not possible to follow the shadow and sit closer to the shop: Badan will be displeased. And who can sit in the fierce glare of this sun? The shuttle train has, in the meanwhile, left, so there is very little hope that these last handfuls of dhokia will be sold now. The fronds cannot be stored, either, so Durgeburhi will have to utilize them for her own meal. As Durgeswari prepares to leave, three shadows come to rest on her wares. Thinking perhaps the shadows belong to po-

her cotton bag. At this, Constable Kalita speaks, 'Hey, old woman, wait a minute, our A.S.I. Babu has not come to evict you from here!' Still, Durgeburhi does not feel at ease. What other motive can this daroga have for searching her out, if not to evict her? But the mystery of the policeman's presence there is soon explained. 'Old woman, do you remember the corpse that was found on the railway tracks over there, just about a hundred yards from where you are sitting now? Well, tell us - did you see the corpse?' The old woman remembers. Yes, a corpse had indeed been found on the tracks very early in the morning, just the other day. The head had parted from the rest of the

Abhirup Dhar probes the paranormal in new book Ghost Hunter Gaurav Tiwari

Gaurav Tiwari, a young paranormal investigator and popular television personality passed away mysteriously in 2016. Five years later his life and his work have been turned into a book by the writer Abhirup Dhar. In a conversation with Firstpost, Dhar tells us about the challenges of approaching such explosive material, Gaurav's legacy and what he believes about the existence of ghosts. This book could have been about so many things - Gaurav's life, his cases, the history of this society or your own experiences knowing them - and yet it is a mixture of everything. Why that approach?

When I got in touch with the Indian Paranormal Society and learnt that a book on Reverend Gaurav Tiwari had never been written, it came as quite a shock to me at first. I had personally followed his works through the various shows he was a part of and like many others, his passing away in 2016 had left me both shocked and disturbed. Which is why, when we decided to work on a book about him, I wanted to touch upon various aspects of his life including the cases he investigated.

This is when I thought I should stick to a non-linear storytelling format for this book. You will observe three narratives running in parallel in the book.

As a writer, how do you approach something that is fascinating, as it is also suspended by belief - how do you distinguish between what is worth noting down and writing about and what isn't?

In the context of Ghost Hunter: Gaurav Tiwari, a lot of research was done and noted down. I had frequent discussions with his team as

approach which they follow to determine the truth and the results are unquestionable. But mentioning the same thing in all chapters would make the reading experience a tad monotonous.

You briefly touch upon Tiwari's life in between chapters, his marriage etc. Who was Gaurav as a person, as an intimately known friend? And what are some myths about him that you have come to realise just aren't true?

The idea was to intermittently touch upon his



well as many others he worked with, both in India and abroad. But when it comes to writing a book, and more importantly, a non-fiction work with a narrative, it becomes important for the readers to relate to it. For instance, I couldn't keep repeating the paranormal investigation process in the same manner in all the chapters as readers would get bored. Indian Paranormal Society has a robust scientific

life in between the real-life cases he and his team investigated together. But it's not only his personal life that I emphasized. The many obstacles he faced in establishing the first professional paranormal research society and the further hassles in running it are also crucial points in the narrative. I must tell you writing this book has taken me the most effort so far and it will always be very special.

Contd. From Page 1

Omicron variant of Covid-19

effectiveness and evade immune response, and/or to cause more severe or milder disease," the Africa Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has said. The NGS-SA has said that a cluster of mutations, known as H655Y + N679K + P681H, is associated with more efficient cell entry, indicating enhanced transmissibility. There is also a deletion, nsp6, which is similar to a deletion in the Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Lambda variants. The NGS-SA says this may be associated with evasion of innate immunity, and could enhance transmissibility. Again, the new variant carries the mutations R203K+G204R - also seen in Alpha, Gamma and Lambda - and which are associated with increased infectivity. The WHO said on Friday that its technical advisory group met to review the new variant and designated it as a variant of concern. This effectively means that Omicron has been demonstrated to be associated with one or more of the following changes: increase in transmissibility; and decrease in the effectiveness of diagnostics, vaccines, therapeutics. Earlier in the day, Maria Van Kerkhove, Covid-19 Technical Lead at WHO, had said in a statement: "This variant has been detected and reported to us by our colleagues in South Africa. There are fewer than 100 whole-genome sequences that are available. We do not know very much about this yet. What we do know is that this variant has a large number of mutations. And the concern is that when you have so many mutations, it can have an impact on how the virus behaves." The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) of South Africa has said that currently, "no unusual symptoms" have been reported following infection with the B.1.1.529 variant. It has highlighted the fact that, as with other infectious variants such as Delta, some individuals are asymptomatic. Omicron's epidemiological and clinical correlation is not fully established. Without that, scientists cannot establish a direct linkage to any surge. South Africa has started to examine the immune escape potential of B.1.1.529 in a laboratory setting. This will also indicate the performance of current vaccines. It has also established a real-time system to monitor hospitalisation and the outcome associated with B.1.1.529. The data will reveal if the mutation is associated with disease severity, or if it may affect the performance of therapeutic medicines being administered in hospitals. The South African NICD has said B.1.1.529 has a deletion within the S gene that allows for rapid identification of this variant. "However, most other targets (including the N and RdRp genes) remain unaffected from specimens tested in over 100 specimens from testing laboratories in Gauteng so it is unlikely that overall PCR test sensitivity is affected. These PCR tests typically detect at least two different SARS-CoV-2 targets, which serves as a backup in the case of a mutation arising in one," the NICD said. All the expert bodies have stressed that vaccination remains critical, especially to protect groups at high risk of hospitalisation and death. Real-time data have shown that high vaccination rates also significantly reduce the strain on health systems. The emergence of the new variant shows once again that the pandemic is far from over - and Covid-appropriate behaviour is critical for breaking the chain of transmission: masking, social distancing, good ventilation in all shared spaces, and washing or sanitising hands and surfaces regularly.

Khela Habe, TMC eyes on Arunachal

Party of Arunachal, JD(U) leaders, businessmen and other influential dignitaries to fulfill interests. Sources confirm that the leaders are in talks to make a strategic shift to the Trinamool Congress. Interestingly, Saraf who is very close to TMC general secretary Abhishek Bannerjee eyeing mining prospects in Upper Subansiri & West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh, has been meeting senior has been meeting senior unhappy ruling BJP leaders and other disgruntled leaders. Now in the political circle of Arunachal Pradesh and other NE states it has been discussing that will similar picture will emerge in politically known as unstable state Arunachal Pradesh. Will Arunachal Pradesh Congress & other leaders also go Meghalaya way? Mamata Bannerjee led Trinamool Congress after massive victory in the West Bengal assembly election against Prime Minister Narendra Modi led ruling BJP started to increase its foothold in many other states in the country. The party is targeting main Opposition party Congress has been trying state their stalwarts to TMC fold. TMC has started its root in Goa and of late they started their new entry in the north eastern states. Recently in Meghalaya two time chief minister and Congress leaders Dr Mukul Sangma along with eleventh MLAs out of seventeen from Congress joined the TMC. Chakrat Aboh, widow of late MLA Tirong Aboh who was assassinated brutally by militants on January 1, 2021 joined All India Trinamool Congress.

Poster row: controversial Pradip

smearing incident. Roy said that the front didn't plan to smear the hoardings and it was done without his consent. He, however, lodged an FIR against the director of Jal Jeevan Mission and deputy commissioner of Cachar district for alleged violation of the language act of the state. Last month two members of All Bengali Youth and Students Organisation (ABYSO) of Assam were arrested in Cachar district for defacing hoardings advertising the Central government's Jal Jeevan Mission, written in the Assamese language. Those arrested was identified as Samar Das (38) and Raju Deb (37), both are residents of Silchar town. However, secretary of ABYSO, Rathindra Das said the duo was not involved in the act of smearing the hoardings. "They just extended support to the protest. Police on Tuesday initially called them to get some details but later arrested them. We are moving for bail today," Das said. He added that his organisation "does not support acts of disrespect to any language" and it "strongly condemned" such behaviour. Members of the youth wing of newly formed political party, Barak Democratic Front, have been citing the amended Assam official language act to demand that all official communication including Central government hoardings are written in Bengali language instead of Assamese in the Barak valley. The Assam Official Language Act, 1960, which mandated Assamese as the official language of the state, was amended in 1961 after mass protests by Bengali speaking people, especially in the Barak Valley, led to the death of 11 people at Silchar station on May 19, 1961. The amendment provided for the use of Bengali as the administrative language in Bengali-majority Barak Valley comprising Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts. The members of BDF argue that the protest against the hoardings was to reinforce the Assam Official Language (Amendment) Act of 1961, which was overlooked by local administration time and again.

PM Modi orders review of plans

distancing," said PMO in a statement. "PM highlighted the need for monitoring all international arrivals, their testing as per guidelines, with a specific focus on countries identified 'at risk'. PM also asked officials to review plans for easing international travel restrictions in light of the emerging new evidence," it added. PM was apprised of the progress in vaccination and the efforts being made under the 'Har Ghar Dastak' campaign, said PMO, adding "PM directed that there is a need to increase the second dose coverage and that states need to be sensitised on the need to ensure that all those who have got the first dose are given the second dose timely." The meeting was attended by Rajiv Gauba, Cabinet Secretary, Dr VK Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog, AK Bhalla, Home Secretary, Rajesh Bhushan, Secretary (MoHFW), Secretary (Pharmaceuticals), Dr Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary (Biotechnology), and Dr Balram Bhargava, DG ICMR etc.

Liquor Prices to Increase in Assam

make excise revenue drainage to the neighbouring states from Assam. Also Read - Phase-I of MFI scheme to cost Rs 2,000 crore To plug such excise revenue loopholes, Assam and Meghalaya have decided to hike wine prices simultaneously. Dispur will hold such talks with Arunachal Pradesh as well. Plugging loopholes or revenue leakages has led to the rise in excise revenue earnings in the state. Assam has reduced value-added tax (VAT) on petrol and diesel by Rs 7 per litre. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma earlier tweeted, Heartening to learn Central Govt decision to reduce excise duty on petrol and diesel. In consonance with the decision of Honble PM @narendramodi, I am pleased to announce that Assam Govt will also reduce VAT on petrol and diesel each by Rs 7/- with immediate effect In February this year Assam reduced VAT on petrol and diesel by Rs 5.

Now go home, says Union Agri

of MSP. Their other demands include withdrawal of the draft Electricity Amendments Bill, 2020/2021, withdrawal of criminal cases against farmers and removal of provisions in the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas Act 2021 that allow the possibility of penal action against farmers for stubble burning. On Saturday, Narendra Singh Tomar said, "Farmer organisations had demanded decriminalization of stubble burning by farmers. Government of India has accepted this demand as well." Farmers' unions, led by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, have rejected Narendra Singh Tomar's proposal. The farmers said, "Government should initiate talks first and discuss all pending issues with farm leaders across the table." Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Gurnam Singh Charuni said, "We need more clarity. What will be the timeline followed by the [MSP] committee? By when will the government make MSP a law?" "All our demands need to be addressed," he said.

Make public No. of Covid deaths

immense problems in getting ICUs and ventilators in hospitals in different places of Assam. Many people lost their lives due to the lack of proper planning by the government. Instead of providing courage to the general people to fight against the pandemic, an atmosphere of fear was created through propaganda, leading to suicides by a large number of people. A total of 3243 people in the state opted for suicide. According to statistics, there was an increase of 36 percent in suicides from 2019 to 2020. The Assam government should answer as to what situation forced people to commit suicide. The state government has not publicly disclosed how many people were infected by Covid, how many died and which hospitals were careless in providing treatment. During the tenure of the former BJP-led government, the then health minister and present Chief Minister Sri Himanta Biswa Sarma had admitted the economic inability of the government to fight against Covid and appealed for donations by establishing 'Assam Arogya Nidhi', following which people from different strata of society had donated hundreds of crores. But no details were provided as to how much money was collected, how much was spent and where the money was spent. Many individuals and organization have been demanding answers. Where has this huge amount of money gone? The then health minister Sri Himanta Biswa Sarma had announced at that time that 5 advanced hospitals would be established for Covid patients with the 'Assam Arogya Nidhi' funds. The BJP government should make public where the hospitals were set up. The BJP government should also make public which businessmen were given supply orders for PPE kits, various medicines, injections, saline, hospital beds for patients and temporary treatment centres and whether tenders were called for. Many families losing a member to Covid have not received any money from the government. Why? The Congress party demands that the family of every person dead from Covid in the country as well as in Assam should immediately be given financial assistance of Rs 4 lakh. The BJP central and state governments are trying to hide the total number of people who died due to Covid. The Congress demands to know the actual figure. The BJP-led government did not provide relief to the people during the total lockdown due to the Covid situation. Instead, the people were made to suffer through indiscriminate rise in prices of essential commodities. Khaleque also said that Assam government should reveal the steps taken to bring the economy of Assam back on track, especially for the hard-hit small and medium businessmen.

Assam becomes poorest state

second to Bihar when it comes to percentage of population deprived of years of schooling, eghalaya's figure stood at 19.71% against Bihar's count of 26.27%. In terms of the percentage of population deprived of school attendance the state has the ninth-highest figure in the country with 5.40%. Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar in his foreword said, "The development of the National Multidimensional Poverty Index of India is an important contribution towards instituting a public policy tool which monitors multidimensional poverty, informs evidence-based and focused interventions, thereby ensuring that no one is left behind." Kumar further said this baseline report of India's first ever national MPI measure is based on the reference period of 2015-16 of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). The national MPI measure has been constructed by utilising 12 key components which cover areas such as health and nutrition, education and standard of living, he said. "While this report is an indispensable first step in mainstreaming MPI, it is based on a dataset which is five years old. The success of numerous development interventions in the recent past have resulted in progress in key parameters on health, education, and standard of living," it added.

India seeks to block most cryptocurrencies in new Bill

10 points on Cryptocurrency Ban

New Delhi, November 27: The Indian government is likely to bring a bill in the ensuing winter session of Parliament to bar all but a few private cryptocurrencies and create a framework to regulate digital currency issued by the RBI. It can be noted that on March 4, 2021, the Supreme Court had set aside an RBI circular of April 6, 2018, prohibiting banks and entities regulated by it from providing services in relation to virtual currencies. 1. The Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021, is listed for introduction in the Lok Sabha in the winter session, scheduled to begin from November 29.2. The bill seeks to "create a facilitative framework for the creation of the official digital currency to be issued by the Reserve Bank of India. 3. It also seeks to prohibit all private cryptocurrencies in India, however, it allows for certain exceptions to promote the underlying technology of cryptocurrency and its uses".4. Currently, there is no regulation or any ban on the use of cryptocurrencies in the country. 5. Against this backdrop, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, earlier this month, held a meeting on cryptocurrencies with senior officials, and indications are that strong regulatory steps could be taken to deal with the issue.6. Recently, there have been a rising number of advertisements, featuring even film stars, promising easy and high returns on investments in cryptocurrencies in recent times, amid concerns over such currencies being allegedly used for luring investors with misleading claims.7. Last week, the Standing Committee on Finance, chaired by BJP member Jayant Sinha, met the representatives of crypto exchanges, blockchain and Crypto Assets Council (BACC), among others, and arrived at a conclusion that cryptocurrencies should not be banned, but it should be regulated.8. The Reserve Bank of India has repeatedly reiterated its strong views against cryptocurrencies, saying they pose serious threats to the macroeconomic and financial stability of the country and also doubted the number of investors trading on them and their claimed market value.9. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das too had earlier this month had reiterated his views against allowing cryptocurrencies, saying they are a serious threat to any financial system since they are

unregulated by central banks. The RBI had announced its intent to come out with an official digital currency in the face of the proliferation of cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, about which the central bank has had many concerns.10. Private digital currencies/virtual currencies/cryptocurrencies have gained popularity in the past decade or so. Here, regulators and governments have been sceptical about these currencies and are apprehensive about the associated risks.

J-K assembly elections 2022 likely to be conducted before Amarnath Yatra

Srinagar, November 27: With the assembly elections likely to be held by May-June next year, various political parties in Jammu and Kashmir have started increasing their foothold on the ground the first time after August 5, 2019, when article 370 was scrapped. Top sources indicate that the delimitation commission has completed its draft report of new and re-alignment of some old assembly seats in J&K. The commission is headed by retired Supreme Court judge, Ranjana Desai. "The draft report is ready. It will now be shared with the associate members, including three Lok Sabha members from the National Conference (Farooq Abdullah, Hasnain Masoodi and Akbar Lone) and the BJP's Jitendra Singh and Jugul Kishore Sharma", top sources told IANS adding that the commission has already been communicated that there would be no further extension of its time period which ends in March 2022. All major political players including leaders of the National Conference (NC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Indian National Congress (INC), J&K National Panthers Party (JKNPP), J&K Apni Party, Peoples onference (PC) and other smaller groups have started public interactions through meetings and rallies. Close on the heels of PDP chief, Mehbooba Mufti's visit to the Chenab Valley, NC Vice President, Omar Abdullah started his visit of the region on Saturday (November 27). The BJP has already told its party cadre that the assembly elections would not be deferred further and these are being held next year before the annual Amarnath Yatra which begins in the last week of June each year but was called off due to the pandemic this year. Sources close to the senior leaders of NC, BJP, PDP, Congress and others indicate that none of these parties believes that it could get the majority in the new assembly of its own. "Whatever the senior leaders of these parties say in public or to the media, the fact is that none of them believes to get an absolute majority on its own", said a former bureaucrat believed to be close to the NC. After the fresh delimitation, the assembly is likely to have 90 seats. In the previous assembly there were 87 seats, four of which belonged to the Ladakh region which is a separate UT now. The Valley had 47 and the Jammu region had 36 seats. Sources indicate that at least 6 seats would be added to the Jammu region and 2 new assembly constituencies would be carved out of the existing ones in the Valley. In addition to this, assembly constituencies would be reserved in J&K for tribals, scheduled caste etc which is likely to throw up a different political map for the UT. In the last state assembly, PDP had 28, BJP 25, NC 15 and the INC 12 seats. Both the PDP and the NC have lost a sizeable chunk of their public support in both the Valley and the Jammu region. The BJP is also not the same as it was during the 2014 assembly elections. Most of its local leaders have disappointed their voters. None of the existing local BJP leaders can today claim unchallenged victory in

the constituencies they comfortably won in 2014. Sources in the central leadership of the party say this reality has already been taken care of by the BJP's top leadership in Delhi. "Don't be surprised if most of the BJP leaders, who were fielded in 2014, find themselves out of the hustings." There are genuine emerging faces in the local leadership and the high command has decided to field majority of them in the 2022 assembly elections", said a source in the central leadership of the party. In addition to the idea of doing a major overhaul in the list of candidates, BJP's trump card, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi is still the most popular leader in the Jammu region. The persona of Modi is something the BJP rivals might not be able to dismantle despite the growing unpopularity of the party's local leadership. In the Valley, the NC and the PDP are likely to face challenges both from each other and other political parties like the PC headed by Sajad Gani Lone and the Apni Party headed by Syed Altaf Bukhari. The PC and the Apni Party might still be far away from creating the type of ground level cadre as the NC and the PDP might have, but there is no doubt that these two parties can upset some of the hitherto foregone ground realities and thereby play as a very big spoilsport for the two traditional parties, the NC and the PDP. The PDP has already lost most of its support because of many reasons. It used to be the unchallenged winner in south Kashmir districts of Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopian and Pulwama. "No longer today. Undoubtedly, because of her hectic recent political activities, Mehbooba Mufti appears to have gained some of her party's lost ground, but it is still far below what the party could aim at in 2014", said a former PDP leader who left therapy after the death of its patron, Multi Muhammad Sayeed. The NC has tried to maintain a very hard anti-BJP and anti-centre posture since the abrogation of article 370 and yet its best supporters do not believe the party could get enough seats to claim power after the 2022 elections. The INC is smitten by an internal leadership feud between Ghulam Nabi Azad and G.A. Mir, the state president of the party. Mir is supported by the senior party leadership including Rahul Gandhi, but Azad has far greater reach and support on ground in J&K. If Azad continues to remain disenchanted with the central Congress leadership, as he is at present, the Congress would be the worst sufferer in J&K assembly elections. If Azad is forced to leave the party, he is likely to form a dissident Congress party that would fight the 2022 assembly elections on its own. There is no doubt that Azad is highly respected in the Chenab Valley region that includes the districts of Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar and Reasi. His departure or disenchantment with the Congress would create a parallel political force that could become the "King maker" if the 2022 elections deliver a fractured mandate. Given these realities, there is a strong possibility that 2022 assembly election results would compel major political parties to descend from their high pedestal and look for support from smaller parties to cobble up a political government. The days of the unparalleled kingship seem to be over in J&K forever.

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Carlsen and Nepomniachtchi draw chess world title opener after flag furore

Dubai, November 27 : Simmering tension on the board, unexpected drama off it. Magnus Carlsen's defence of his world chess title in Dubai began with a 45-move draw against his Russian challenger Ian Nepomniachtchi - and a surprise intervention by the World Anti-Doping Agency. The first game of the 14-match encounter, which has a prize fund of \$2m, was eagerly followed by hundreds of thousands of spectators online - another sign of the chess boom that accelerated at the start of the pandemic and again after the Netflix series The Queen's Gambit. It proved to be an intriguing opening day, which began hours before the first move when Wada warned chess's governing body, Fide, that it must change Nepomniachtchi's flag or it would be violating the rules of international sport. Since December 2019, Russia's flag, anthem and "name in any form" are banned from being shown in any world championship events for two years. It meant that Nepomniachtchi's flag, which initially said "Chess Federation of Russia", was deemed to be illegal and had to be hastily changed to the initials CFR. Fide's president, Arkady



Dvorkovich, later confirmed Wada's intervention to the Guardian, adding: "Yes, we are in contact. We checked several times with them. Maybe at some point our team understood that we could have the full name but then they said 'no, it should be an abbreviation'. It's as simple as that." When the game started Carlsen, the highest-rated chess player in history, and Nepomniachtchi, who is a big underdog here, quickly bashed out their first few moves in a Ruy Lopez. As early as move eight, Carlsen sprang a surprise by playing Na5 which offered a pawn sacrifice. Yet his Russian opponent refused to blink and immediately replied by taking the pawn. This is the way of modern chess: with players using chess engines and supercomputers to discover fresh poisons to inflict on their opponents - and to find

active users on its site. Now it has more than four million. Another popular site, Lichess.org, said it expected an audience of between 1.5 and 2 million spread across the entire three weeks of the match, across its various content mediums. Meanwhile Chess24 - which is owned by Carlsen - is also investing significantly in the coverage of the world championship this year with a TV studio production, multiple broadcasts for beginners as well as advanced chess players. Those watching certainly saw an intriguing buildup to the match. When the Guardian asked Nepomniachtchi about the ban on his flag, which came about after Wada ruled that Russia had deliberately erased and manipulated doping data stored in a Moscow laboratory to stop its athletes being punished for taking banned drugs, he admitted he was disappointed. "The whole

situation is really frustrating," he said. "The country is technically not banned but the anthem and flag has to be replaced. So this is quite sad. But at the same time my patriotic feeling comes from inside." The ruling applies to chess world championships because Fide is recognised by the International Olympic Committee as the supreme body responsible for the organisation of the sport. Breaching the ban could have serious consequences for Fide. However Nepomniachtchi, who is ranked fifth in the world, said he was happy enough to start the first game with a draw despite having the advantage of playing with the white pieces. "I was very slightly optimistic during the whole game because this was quite a curious line from black," he said. "But while he was down a pawn in the endgame it was very hard to win something for white."

Remastered ready to make most of Newbury softening up



London, November 27 : Storm Arwen is expected to deposit the most significant rainfall for several weeks on Newbury racecourse before the Ladbrokes Trophy Chase on Saturday, which adds an extra layer of uncertainty to the task of sifting a value bet from a long list of possibilities. Second-season chasers have a strong recent record in this historic handicap, though, and it seems likely to go to an up-and-comer again this year with at least half a dozen plausible candidates towards the top of the betting. Now the crowds are back, and in significant numbers too - and the first response from both sides is apparently to train their sights on the BHA. Those include Eklat De Rire, with just four chase starts in the book, who will attract plenty of support to give Henry de Bromhead and Rachael Blackmore another big Saturday winner. The seven-year-old was still travelling well when he unseated Blackmore at the 12th fence in the three-mile Grade One novice chase at last season's Festival meeting, and made a satisfactory return from his summer break in a four-runner Listed event at Wexford in October. Today's race is a very different test, however, and Eklat De Rire has also done all his winning so far on heavy ground, so at the likely odds, Remastered (3.00) makes more appeal. David Pipe's eight-year-old was a Grade Two winner as a novice last season in the Reynoldstown at Ascot, gets weight from most of the market leaders and has the useful Fergus Gillard taking off another 3lb. Like several recent winners of this race, he also likes to race up with the pace and looks overpriced at around 14-1. Newbury 1.15: Kalooki has not seen a track since March, but he was an easy winner first time up last season over this track and trip and remains on a fair mark. Newcastle 1.30: Cooper's Cross made plenty of ground to win last time and looks overpriced at around 7-2 against likely favourite Valleres. Newbury 1.50: The bare form of Black Mischief's easy win at Newton Abbot in July is backed up by the clock and he is a solid each-way bet at around 14-1. Newcastle 2.05: The Ferry Master should improve for his comeback run earlier this month and was a cosy winner over course and distance - from a 4lb lower mark - on this card 12 months ago. Newbury 2.25: Nicky Henderson is going for a hat-trick in this race and his recent Ascot winner, Captain Morges, gets 18lb from likely favourite Soaring Glory. Newcastle 3.15: Monmiral is an interesting new opponent for former Champion Hurdle winner Epatante but Nicky Henderson's mare gets 7lb from the four-year-old and should make the most of it.

Lleyton Hewitt slams organisers for 'selling soul' of Davis Cup

London, November 27 : Lleyton Hewitt has expressed his dismay at the state of the Davis Cup following the news the tournament could be held in Abu Dhabi from 2022. Hewitt, the captain of the Australian team, said the current format is "not what Davis Cup is about", an event he believes once stood as the pinnacle of the sport. "Davis Cup was held in the highest regard because it was up there with the pinnacle of our sport in men's tennis, which was five sets. Grand slams and Davis Cup, they are the only ones that played five sets. We threw that out the door, and now we are throwing the home and away out the door, as well," Hewitt said as Australia prepared to face Hungary in Turin, having lost their opening match in this year's finals to Croatia. He continued: "So if they are going and selling the soul of the Davis Cup to the Middle East for another five years, I think it's ridiculous, and they are really killing the competition." A proposal for Abu Dhabi to host the 2022 Davis Cup finals will be voted on at an International Tennis Federation board meeting in Madrid next week. Asked whether he thought the Davis Cup captains and leading players should have more input in the development of the competition, Hewitt



shrugged and said: "We didn't have input four years ago. I'm not sure it's going to matter much now. It's been run by a soccer player and his company. So it's totally different to anything that tennis has been through in the past and such a big event." As Great Britain prepared to begin their finals tournament in Innsbruck, the captain, Leon Smith, took a more measured approach by stating that he did not know enough about the new proposal to give his full opinion. Earlier in the week, before the news about the 2022 location, Smith said he wanted there to be more communication between the organisers and players. On Friday, he reiterated his belief that it should be one of the biggest events on the calendar. "When all is said and done, look, I'm biased, this has been a huge part of what I've gone through in the last decade," Smith said. "A lot of players here have either grown up

around it, played in it, being part of it. Everyone loves playing. No matter what we think, we just want this competition to be the best it can be. I don't know what that looks like or what may happen in the future, but we love this. You love it more when it feels like a big event, it feels like a big deal, it's in front of a lot of fans." His team will face France on Saturday and then the Czech Republic on Sunday as they look to advance from their group and reach the knockout rounds. This is the second Davis Cup Finals since Kosmos, the investment group cofounded by the Barcelona defender Gerard Piqué, joined the ITF to run the Davis Cup in a partnership. The group stage of this year's event is spread across Innsbruck, Turin and Madrid, where the final two rounds will be held. In Austria, matches will now be played behind closed doors due to the lockdown there.

Exeter's Sam Simmonds leaves it late to crush Bath's hopes of a first win

London, November 27: The Gallagher Premiership season is more than three months old and a despondent Bath still cannot buy a win. They came agonisingly close here but ultimately could not quite seal the deal, a well-taken 77th-minute try from their number eight Sam Simmonds securing Exeter a scrappy, hard-earned victory. Bath are now up to eight games without a win and trail the field by eight points with their fixture list offering little prospect of quick relief. Next weekend they must travel to Northampton, 36-20 winners just down the A4 at Bristol, with question marks still hanging over their ability to turn youthful promise and occasional moments of attacking potential into the all-important currency of precious league points. Exeter were by no means at their best, but when it mattered they had the composure to launch the game's killer move, having turned down an equalising penalty kick at goal in favour of an attacking scrum in the shadow of the home posts. With the outcome in the balance Simmonds had already been held up over the line and tackled inches short but this time there was no stopping him as the

England squad member sprinted off the base to break Bath's hearts. Until that point, despite the return of Dave Ewers for the first time since mid-October and Henry Slade being back from his productive autumn with England, Exeter did not have things all their own way. The Chiefs, as their director of rugby Rob Baxter acknowledged afterwards, are still not firing on all cylinders and their sixth successive win beside the River Avon was as much a product of persistence and patience as anything else. Bath, with Sam Underhill, Charlie Ewels, Will Stuart and Josh Bayliss all back from Test duty to reinforce their pack, had established a 10-3 lead by the end of the first quarter thanks to a close-range line-out drive finished off by Miles Reid and the right boot of Orlando Bailey. Scrum-half Ben Spencer, featuring for only the second time this season, was making a conspicuous difference too. Slade kept Exeter in touch with a couple of well-struck penalties but Bath supporters were less than impressed when play was waved on after Tom De Glanville, chasing his own chip ahead, tripped over after contact from the retreating Stuart Hogg. Neither side



was particularly oozing confidence and the late withdrawal through illness of Sean Lonsdale had also forced Chiefs to put Don Armand in the second-row in the absence of more recognised locks such as England's Jonny Hill and Scotland's Jonny Gray. The change of ends, though, seemed to galvanise the visitors. Within three minutes Bath found themselves under pressure close to their own line and this time the Chiefs were not to be denied, their hirsute Kiwi prop Josh Iosefa-Scott completing a successful close-range drive to put his side ahead for the first time. Slade's wide-angled conversion compounded the pain for Bath, who had also lost Reid with a painful-looking shoulder injury. How much did Bath have left in the tank? Bailey squeezed over another penalty to tie the scores once more and Slade mis-hit a chance to regain the advantage.

Chelsea's attacking brilliance without a striker could delay Lukaku return

London, November 27 : Thomas Tuchel was in his element when Chelsea smashed Juventus 4-0 on Tuesday. Forced to improvise after losing Kai Havertz to a hamstring injury, Tuchel seized the chance to think outside the box, his tactical mind whirling as he looked at his options in attack and decided that the best way to hurt Matthijs de Ligt and Leonardo Bonucci was essentially to give them nobody to mark. It



was a night for the little guys. There was an unfamiliar central role for Christian Pulisic, who made up for his lack of impact in possession by contributing in other areas, his energy off the ball a feature of Chelsea's high press. There was a fine playmaking display from the slender Hakim Ziyech and on the left there was maturity and skill from Callum Hudson-Odoi, who made it 3-0 when he finished off a flowing move in the 58th minute. Ben Chilwell holds his right knee after injuring it during Chelsea's Champions League win at home against Juventus. This, it seemed, was Tuchelball in all its glory, the tempo relentless, the movement bewildering, the threats coming from all angles as the blue wave overwhelmed Juventus. Strikers? Who needs them? Chelsea were fine without one against Juventus, just as they

sustained against Malmö on 20 October is welcome, but he is not returning as a saviour. Lukaku, who is 28, was an unused substitute against Juventus and, given that Chelsea have responded to his injury by rattling in 23 goals in seven and a half games, Tuchel is under no pressure to start him against United tomorrow. There is no need to rush. Havertz is fit, Pulisic could start again, Mason Mount could return and Timo Werner scored after coming on against Juventus. Whichever way you spin it, the league leaders are in a luxurious position. The goals are flying in from every angle, with defenders stepping forward and the wing-backs playing more like No 10s. The reliance on a No 9 is minimal. Reece James, the right wing-back, is Chelsea's top scorer with five goals and Marcos Alonso will be an able deputy on the left for Ben Chilwell, who must

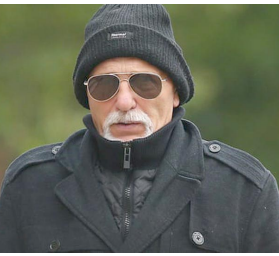
wait six weeks before finding out whether he needs surgery after sustaining anterior cruciate ligament damage against Juventus. Chilwell has been a key part of Chelsea's versatile attacking. In total there have been 16 goals from defenders and, for the time being, the challenge for Lukaku simply has to be proving that he deserves to be the main man up front. It has not been easy for the striker since his £97.5m move from Internazionale, although Tuchel is not panicking yet. He accepted that signing Lukaku would make Chelsea's attack less mobile. Tuchel wanted more variety after winning the Champions League in counterpunching style last season and Lukaku, who had fired Inter to the Serie A title, seemed the perfect fit. He arrived as the final piece in the jigsaw and scored four goals in his first four games. Since then, however, the doubts have grown. Lukaku had not scored in six games before facing Malmö and Chelsea had become a slightly static attacking force, the fluidity returning only once they were back to playing without a traditional target man.

Southampton, November 27 : A string of missed opportunities allowed the predatory paedophile Bob Higgins to sexually abuse scores of schoolboy footballers while he worked as a coach at Southampton, a damning report by the children's charity Barnardo's has concluded. Higgins, regarded as a

"god-like" star-maker by youngsters who dreamed of a career in football, was able to operate "seemingly undetected" at Southampton from the mid-1970s until the late 1980s and continued to work elsewhere in the sport until 2016. The report concluded: "It is an unavoidable fact that adults in Southampton

Football Club during the time Higgins worked for them or on their behalf did not consider the welfare and wellbeing of the boys involved with the club as their prime consideration." The impact of and damage caused by Higgins' abuse of children in his care during the time he was employed by Southampton Football

Club is incalculable. The damage to their physical and mental health as they grew up, their relationships, their families and even their ability to confidently parent has been devastating. "It is these individuals who, in our view have paid the price for what seems to be the inertia of board members who failed to ensure that young



boys, in contact with Higgins, were as well protected as they should

have been. "We do not believe there was any deliberation or malign intent by these individuals, it is our view they simply did not consider the wellbeing of boys as their responsibility and once Higgins had left their employ saw no reason to alert anyone about the allegations that had been made against him."

Teófimo López: 'I don't get nervous. I've learned to flow like water'

London, November 27 :

Just hours after he became a father, Teófimo López, the most charismatic fighter on the planet and one of the best pound-for-pound boxers at work today, leans back in his car in Las Vegas and talks about joy and adversity, babies and tattoos, depression and love. The roof of his car is rolled open and sunshine lights up his face despite the shadows of the past. Early on 17 November 2021, and describing the birth of baby Teófimo the night before, the world lightweight champion brims with happiness. His family history is traumatic but his son, Teófimo López V, does more than continue a tangled lineage stretching from Spain to Honduras to the US. The arrival of the youngest López gives the new father a fresh start after a year in which he contemplated ending his life. This low was a worrying echo of the acrimony, volatility and tragedy linking one López generation to another. But on Saturday



night in New York, the 24-year-old returns to the ring for the first time since he dominated Vasily Lomachenko and shocked boxing last October. The Ukrainian was considered by many to be boxing's pound-for-pound best fighter - but López won a comprehensive victory on all three scorecards as he fulfilled his Ali-esque predictions and became the undisputed world lightweight champion. Life since then has been complicated. His mandatory defence against George Kambosios, from Australia, has been postponed three

times over the past nine months - but, finally, the simmering bitterness between them will be settled at Madison Square Garden. López might be weary after a night of little sleep but he sounds content when I ask what he has learned during this tumultuous year. Teófimo López trains in Las Vegas in October. He will defend his lightweight belts against the mandatory challenger George Kambosios on Saturday. "Patience is a blessing," he says with unusual tenderness. "It's a virtue. Time always keeps flowing so we need pa-

tience. The dark times are testing. Some days are really heavy but those are character-building days. You have to find ways to look within yourself and face the problems. "I've learned how to take a step back and not try to make everyone else happy. That never works. Just work on how do I become the best version of me? How do I become the greatest version of my father to my son? This year has been difficult from me having Covid [just before one of his scheduled bouts against Kambosios in June] to my fight being sabotaged twice and pushed back constantly. But it gave me a better outlook - no, in look, of my purpose. "López compares this new serenity to his composure against Lomachenko. "I don't get nervous any more," he says with another crinkled smile. "Before that fight I was calm, cool, collected. I was so determined, thinking: 'Now is the time to back up everything I've said.' After the win it was

such a relief. I deal with pressure all the time but I've learned to flow like water. "He lifts his right arm so I can see the skin usually hidden from the sun on our Zoom call. "Be water, my friend," is tattooed on his inner arm. I recognise the old Bruce Lee quote. "Of course," López exclaims. "After Lomachenko I was able to flow, like water. I was able to breathe. Beating Loma definitely changed my life. It was negative at one point [amid all the postponements and wrangles with the new promotional company Triller which had made an outlandish bid for the Kambosios fight but soon hit trouble] but I turned it into a great positive. "I met López in person earlier this month. Eddie Hearn was in Las Vegas as he had won the purse bid for this fight against Kambosios. The bout will be screened on Dazn, the giant streaming network with which Hearn works so closely, and a media afternoon had been set up for López in a gym off the Strip. When I walked in

there was noise and clamour but, strikingly, it was all being made by one man, Teófimo López III, the riot of a father to the boxer we had come to see. López Jr, the world champion, stood quietly as his hands were wrapped. He would soon illuminate the room but, then, he kept his head down and his mouth shut as his father and trainer hollered into one microphone and camera after another. I noticed how often López Sr shouted "we" or even "I" when he celebrated victory over Lomachenko or predicted the destruction of Kambosios or a long line of prospective opponents for his son. Now, listening to López Jr talk about his dad's painful past, I temper my judgment. It seems better to pay attention to a riveting but troubled saga which begins with the birth of the fighter's grandfather, Teófimo López II, in Spain in 1916. López II was immensely strong, and could grapple a bull to the ground. But he was restless after the second world war and emigrated to Honduras.



'If cricket can have spectators, why not football?': Fans ask before Kolkata Derby

Kolkata, November 27 :

The Kolkata Derby is back and it brings its festive fervour along with it. Emotions are running high once again as intense pressure builds around the two clubs - you guessed it right - the fans. Supporters of both the clubs in a packed Salt Lake stadium, weaving a sea of red-and-yellow and green-and-maroon, on the backdrop of the age-old Bangal-Ghoti (East and West Bengal) rivalry, is a sight to behold. But all of it is missing this time and divided they may be in their support but together, fans of both the clubs are distraught that they will have to sit in front of television screens and watch the contest. With the COVID-19 pandemic raging last year, it was the first derby in the history of Indian football, where the two teams faced each other without the crowd. Hence, this time, hopes were really high that they will be allowed in the stadiums to watch live-action. Especially after fans were allowed to return to Eden Gardens for the recent T20I encounter between India and New Zealand. However, the match will be held behind closed doors in Vasco, Goa on Saturday. "The Kolkata Derby is not the same sans the fans. What I cannot understand is why allow spectators to enter stadium to watch one sport and not the other. Does COVID-19 differentiate between cricket and football? We are not trying to make this cricket versus football but we would love to know if anyone can provide a rational experience," said Shreya Bannerjee, an avid supporter of East Bengal. Hrisav Bhowmick, member of East Bengal Ultras (an East Bengal club fan group) said that

this move reeks of step-brotherly treatment. "We feel that cricket gets a preferential treatment compared to Indian football. Durand Cup and CFL matches were held with fans and then Durga Pujos happened in the city but when it comes to football there is this differential treatment. All-India Football Federation (AIFF) and ISL also seem least interested," he said. "The feeling of watching the game inside the stadium is never the same as compared to sitting in front of a screen," he added. "The league should at least allow 50 per cent attendance of fans vaccinated with one or two doses," voiced Siddharth Bhunia, a supporter of Mohun Bagan. "Indian football has now been reduced to that poor cousin of Indian cricket," rued Goutam Ghose a die-hard football fan. Parth Jindal, owner Bengaluru FC, had spoken his mind and tweeted: "Is there a reason why in the same country cricket can be played in front of packed crowds and football is being played in front of empty stands? How is Indian football going to grow? Home and away needs to be brought back as that's the football way." It is worth noting that during the India-New Zealand T20Is, the crowd capacity was around 50,000. The Durand Cup held in Sep-Oct had witnessed a crowd of more than 30,000 (knockouts) and CFL final (held in Kolkata) saw a crowd of more than 40,000. However, when it comes to decision-making, it does seem like in the same country, there are two different boards with two different mindsets, with two different approaches to the game. While the AIFF feels it is still unsafe to allow spectators to return to the stadia, the BCCI thinks it is okay. With fans unable to be present at the stadium, many of them have taken it upon themselves to bring back the festive spirit and will watch the derby along with fellow supporters.

England face Jamaica with high hopes and an eye on netball title defence

London, November 27 :

After a historic series win against New Zealand in Christchurch in September the latest challenge for England on the way to their Commonwealth title defence next summer is three Tests against Jamaica on home soil, beginning on Sunday at London's Copper Box Arena. If expectations were already high for the Roses after defeating the world champions in their back yard two months ago, the first time England have won a series in New Zealand, then the squad named by the head coach, Jess Thirlby, has only raised them even more. With Jo Harten, Stacey Francis-Bayman, Natalie Haythornthwaite and Helen Housby all home from Australia's Super Netball League and in the fold, the England team that will take to the court will be their strongest since they won bronze at the 2019 World Cup in Liverpool. It may also explain the confident talk in the England camp and why they are targeting nothing less than a clean sweep. "We want to get 3-0 on home soil," says Sonia

Mkoloma, England's assistant coach and a former international. The challenge, as ever with England's netball regime, is ensuring that those who compete in the Australian league mesh with the players from the UK's Vitality Netball Superleague. The primary focus of Thirlby's tenure so far has been maximising the upward pressure exerted by those coming through on the more established players. Mkoloma knows that when it comes to getting that balance right, the buck stops with them. "Everybody's position is being challenged," Mkoloma says. "As coaching staff, it's exciting and it's a bit of pressure on us because you've got to make sure you're selecting the right players to do the right job at the right time. For many years England didn't have a lot of depth. So, the fact that we have now players who are homegrown ... and we've got the players that are sitting in one of the top leagues returning, I think it just adds extra excitement for us as coaches." The inclusion of the 19-year-old Funmi Fadoju in the 16-



strong squad is a perfect example of that quest for balance and of the confidence England have in their local players. "When there's talent, there's talent," Mkoloma says of Fadoju. "For her, it's just a great opportunity to keep getting better and better. "But when belief is elevated scrutiny quickly follows, and the big sticking point for England pivots around their mid-court. Haythornthwaite remains the only specialist wing attack named in the team. Laura Malcolm and Sophie Drakeford-Lewis, the two others who offer the position, can play there but

wing attack is certainly not their first-choice role. Concerns then abound that there is an obvious weakness in the Roses lineup. Throw in to the mix that the thrust of Jamaica's might can be found in both bookends - Jhaniele Fowler, the world's greatest shooter in one circle, and Shamera Sterling, the world's best keeper, in the other - and it becomes clear the battle for ownership of the mid-court will be critical. It's little wonder Mkoloma identifies it as an area of "excitement". Critics might identify a glaring imbalance in having eight wing defenders and three

wing attackers, but Mkoloma sees opportunity. What better way is there to challenge your depth than where you know the battle is going to be greatest? "For me, it's going to be exciting to see how we match up against their mid-court," says the former technical director of the New South Wales Swifts. "We do have a lot of mid-court players, which allows us to have a lot of options and that gives us the opportunity to test players. It's about what our mid-court can do against the Jamaican mid-court." Chuck them in to the deep end in the portion of

the court where the game will probably be won and lost, and the cream will surely rise. Is it genius? Time will tell. It's an experiment that will reveal how prepared England are for what lies ahead. Jamaica's team are now more well-rounded than those England have faced before. Their ranks boast reinforcements that only further support their star players. The defending end, though missing Jodi-Ann Ward, will have other tried-and-tested Super Netball players Latanya Wilson and Kadie-Ann Dehaney, the latter having won the premiership in Australia with Melbourne Vixens in 2020. The "test" in this Test series needs no underlining. The last time the two met, in January 2020, Jamaica won 70-66. After London the series moves to Nottingham for the final two matches on 4 and 5 December. "They're a massive threat," Mkoloma concedes, and with the Commonwealth title defence looming next year, the netball world will be watching to see how the Roses fare against their oldest rivals.

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