

The Assam Rising

Projecting the best of Northeast India everyday

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Northern Ireland's unionist movement in turmoil as ...

03

Lewis Hamilton makes history by claiming 100th F1 pole at Spanish

07

NEWS IN BRIEF

Three poachers arrested

Guwahati, May 9 : The police have arrested as many as three poachers near the Kaziranga National Park in Karbi Anglong district in Assam. Huge cache of arms and ammunition have also been recovered from the arrested poachers. The poachers have been arrested while they were on their way to the Kaziranga National Park by the Karbi Anglong Police. Two AK series rifles have also been recovered from the arrested poachers. Also read: Assam: Himanta Biswa Sarma, Sarbananda Sonowal meet Governor Jagdish Mukhi, stake claim for Government formation. Special DG of Assam Police - GP Singh said: "A major mishap averted."

7 more cremation sites

Guwahati, May 9 : The Assam Government has designated 7 more cremation sites in Guwahati for the last rites of those who succumbed to COVID-19. The seven new cremation sites designated for COVID-19 victims are: Ulubari Electrical Crematorium, Basistha Cremation Ground, Bogthuli Cremation Ground in Panjabari, Jalukbari Cremation Ground, Garigaon Kabarthan, Jalukbari Kabarthan, and Kathabari Kabarthan. Earlier, there were only four cremation sites in Guwahati for COVID-19 victims - the Ulubari Cremation ground, Bhootnath Cremation ground, Athgaon Kabarthan and Islampur Kabarthan. The number of cremation sites in Guwahati had to be increased by the Government as the city has been registering a high number of daily deaths in recent times.

24 cattle seized

Guwahati, May 9 : Ahead of the Eid festival, the 74 Bn BSF of Tripura Frontier in a drive against the trans-border crimes along the Indo-Bangladesh border seized 24 cattle heads. Acting on a tip-off, the vigilant troops of BSF seized the cattle heads along with two motorcycles in the intervening night before May 9 from Kamthana border outpost under Kamalasagar police station in Sepahijala district of Tripura, said a BSF official. "If the BJP is voted to power, we will stop cow smuggling within 24 hours," was one of the most important election issues of the BJP in West Bengal Assembly election 2021. Before the election, central armed forces were very much alert against cattle smuggling in the Indo-Bangla border in West Bengal for few months and as a result the volume of smuggling reduced there. Ahead of the Eid festival, the greatest festival of the Muslim community, the demand of Indian cattle has increased in Bangladesh.

Himanta Biswa Sarma to take oath as Assam CM today at Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra



Guwahati, May 9 : BJP strongman in the Northeast, Himanta Biswa Sarma will take oath as the new Chief Minister of Assam tomorrow (Monday, May 9). The oath taking ceremony will take place at the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra in Guwahati for the

emany will take place at the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra in Guwahati for the swearing-in ceremony. The Kamrup-Metro district administration is ensuring that every SOP and COVID-19 protocol is being put in place for the swearing-in ceremony. "We are looking into that the ceremony is being done while maintaining every SOP, adhering COVID-19 protocols," Kamrup-Metro DC Biswajit Pegu said. Assam DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta also visited the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra in Guwahati and took stock of the security arrangements for the swearing-in ceremony. Notably, after a lot of suspense, senior BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma, an Amit Shah loyalist, was on Sunday chosen as the new chief minister of Assam. He will succeed Sarbananda Sonowal as the next Chief Minister of Assam. The decision to make incumbent finance minister Sarma as chief minister was taken at hectic parleys involving BJP president JP Nadda and home minister Amit Shah besides Sarma and Sonowal.

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Himanta Biswa Sarma meet Governor Jagdish Mukhi, claims for Government formation

Guwahati, May 9 : BJP leaders - Himanta Biswa Sarma and Sarbananda Sonowal on Sunday afternoon met Assam Governor

Jagdish Mukhi and staked claim for Government formation in the State. Other top leaders of the NDA partners including AGP president Atul



Bora, UPPL president Pramod Boro were also present in the meeting with the Governor at Raj Bhawan in Guwahati. Earlier on Sunday morning, Sarbananda Sonowal submitted his resignation as Assam Chief Minister

to Governor Jagdish Mukhi, paving way for Himanta Biswa Sarma to become the new CM of the State. The new Himanta Biswa Sarma-led Assam Cabinet will take oath on Monday. Assam: Himanta Biswa Sarma, Sarbananda Sonowal meet Governor Jagdish Mukhi, stake claim for Government formation. I BJP strongman in the Northeast, Himanta Biswa Sarma will take oath as the new Chief Minister of Assam tomorrow (Monday, May 9). The oath taking ceremony will take place at the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra in Guwahati.

"Can't Afford Leniency": Delhi To Have "Stricter Lockdown" This Week

New Delhi, May 9 : This would be the fourth week of the lockdown imposed in the national capital New Delhi: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has extended the lockdown in the city by another week, making the restrictions stricter. Even the metro services have been suspended this time. The lockdown will be on till 5 am on May 17.

dropped marginally. "The positivity rate has gone down but still we can't afford leniency. We need to extend to lockdown," Mr Kejriwal said. While the positivity rate, which stood at 35 per cent in mid-April, has dropped to 23 per cent, doctors say even this is very high and there is a need to completely break the chain of transmission. This would

Congress, AIUDF greet Assam CM-elect Himanta Biswa Sarma

Guwahati, May 9 : The opposition Congress and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) on Sunday conveyed their greetings to the chief minister-designate of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma and hoped that it will become one of the most developed states of the country under his tenure. Ending seven days of speculations, Sarma on Sunday was unanimously elected as the leader of the BJP Legislature Party and the NDA Legislature Party, clearing the stage for him to become the chief

minister of the only non-Congress government returning to power in the state for the second consecutive



term. "Many congratulations to @himantabiswa on being elected as the next Chief Minister of Assam.

Our only vision must be to work in tandem to make Assam one of the most developed states of India. Best wishes!" Assam Congress chief Ripun Bora tweeted. AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal also congratulated the

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36 crore Indians to get Russia's Sputnik V jabs by March 2022

New Delhi, May 9 : India will approximately get 361 million doses of Russia's COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V's by the end of March 2022 which can be inoculated an estimated 36 crore Indians, officials coordinating the entire vaccine measure in the country claimed. On May 1, India received the first consignment of 1.5 million doses of the vaccine, and the second consignment of the same number of doses will reach India soon. India will get 18 million ready-made Sputnik V doses - 3 million in May, 5 million in June, 10 million in July. Russian direct investment fund (RDIF)

which is the Russian sovereign wealth fund that has funded the vaccine has signed pacts with 5 Indian companies to produce 850 million doses. The doses will not only be produced in India but also, exported to third country. Between



June 2020 to March 2021, around 238 million doses will be produced in the country. India also expected to get 11 million doses in form of fill and finish. Sputnik V vaccine is the 3rd covid vaccine after covishield and covaxin that Indian regulatory authorities have given approval to. More than 60 Countries have given approval to Sputnik V and as of May 5, more than 20 million people globally have received the first injection of the Sputnik

V vaccine. Interestingly, a combination of vaccines like Sputnik and AstraZeneca for use is being talked about. With the announcement of Russia's single-dose covid vaccine Sputnik light, the volume of the vaccines which is a variant of Sputnik V is expected to increase. Sputnik Light will also be produced in India. "It will be produced in exactly the same countries where sputnik V will be produced. So it's India, Korea, and China," said Kirill Dmitriev, CEO of the Russian direct investment fund (RDIF) told reporters last week in a virtual presser. And it is

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South Africa detects four cases of the Indian variant of coronavirus

Johannesburg, May 9 : South African Health Minister Zweli Mkhize has said that four cases of the Indian variant of coronavirus have been detected in the country, but there was no



cause for panic as all such cases were quarantined. "The four cases of B.1.617.2 (Indian variant of coronavirus) have been detected in Gauteng (2) and

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Chinese Rocket Segment Plunges Back To Earth, Crashes Near Maldives

Beijing, May 9 : A large segment of a Chinese rocket re-entered the Earth's atmosphere and disintegrated over the Indian Ocean on Sunday, the Chinese space agency said, following fevered speculation over where the 18-tonne object would come down. Officials in Beijing had said there was little risk from the freefalling segment of the Long March-5B rocket, which had launched the first module of China's new space station into Earth orbit on April 29. But the US space agency NASA and some experts said China had behaved irresponsibly, as an uncontrolled re-entry of such a large object risked dam-

age and casualties. "After monitoring and analysis, at 10:24 (0224 GMT) on May 9, 2021, the last-stage wreckage of the Long March 5B Yao-2 launch vehicle has re-entered the atmosphere," the China Manned Space Engineering Office said in a statement, providing coordinates for a point in the Indian Ocean near the Maldives. It added that most of the segment disintegrated and was destroyed during descent. The US military's Space Command said the rocket "re-entered over the Arabian Peninsula at approximately 10:15 pm EDT on May 8 (0215 GMT Sunday)". "It is unknown if the debris impacted land

or water." Monitoring service Space-Track, which uses US military data, said that the location in

Saudi Arabia was where American systems last recorded it. "Operators confirm that

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Are our courts a playground for bullies? Just ask Catherine Belton

Welcome to London, the censorship capital of the democratic world, where you must watch your step and bite your tongue if you know what's good for you. Everyone here who writes or broadcasts about plutocratic power should be honest with you before getting down to business. We're pretty much free to say what we want about Boris Johnson, for example, or Dominic Raab. They're only our prime minister and foreign secretary, after all: nobodies when put alongside the big boys. However badly we think they govern, they won't hurt us. When we turn to the super-rich, well, that seems like a different story. And more often than not, a story we are strongly encouraged not to run. It's not just F Scott Fitzgerald's old line that "the rich are different from you and me". The costs and risks of our wretched legal system mean the rich can use it more easily than you and me. Before you read what follows, you should know that here at the

Took on the West. The Guardian called it "groundbreaking". The New York Times praised Belton's "elegant" account. Belton opens with a picture of a capital city that has grown used to Russian money paying "the rent and wages of London's well-heeled PR and legal firms". She says her book is presented as much about the west as Russia. The former Moscow correspondent for the Financial Times now faces a pile-on from Russian billionaires on a scale this country has never witnessed. Rosneft, the Kremlin-dominated oil producer (market capitalisation circa \$75bn) whose chief executive, president and chairman, Igor Sechin, began his rise to power as Vladimir Putin's secretary in the 1990s, has lodged an action for libel. No further details were available at the court at the time of going to press. Roman Abramovich, the Chelsea football boss (estimated net worth \$15.3bn) is suing

Nick Cohen

Fridman told the Financial Times they "had no contact with, and did not co-ordinate a legal strategy with, the other plaintiffs or their lawyers". Finally, there is a legal action by Shalva Chigirinsky, a former property tycoon (net worth unknown) with no details on record. They have brought their cases to dear old London town, with its quaint judges in 18th-century wigs and gowns and gothic courtrooms, and with laws that can look as if they are made to match, for all their claims to modernity. As Belton appeared to foresee, London's lawyers are hard at work. Carter-Ruck, CMS, Harbottle & Lewis and Taylor Wessing have a billionaire apiece in a kind of socialism of the litigious. Belton's publishers, HarperCollins, say they will "robustly defend" her. Putin's People remains available to buy and read uncensored - for now, at any rate. Rosneft and Abramovich are not only suing HarperCollins, they are suing Belton personally. If they are successful, they could strip her of what few assets she owns. You can see why journalists walk around on tiptoes. Last week, Raab promised to fight "with the staunchest resolve" Russia's "malign activities aimed at undermining other countries' democratic systems". If the foreign secretary is serious, perhaps he should take a look at London's high-class service sector for the super-rich. He is unlikely to be able to rely on the legal profession to ask the hard moral and political questions for him. I learned that in 2013 when I sat through a libel case arising from the death of Sergei Magnitsky in a foul Moscow prison. He worked for the Hermitage Capital fund and died suffering from horrible illnesses after he showed how former Russian officials and gangsters (a distinction without a difference if

ever there was one) stole about \$230m from the Russian taxpayer. His friend and boss at Hermitage, Bill Browder, began a successful global campaign to freeze the western holdings of corrupt Russians. One official, Pavel Karpov, sued Browder for libel in London. Browder won, but Karpov stayed in Moscow and refused to pay Browder's costs of £600,000. In other words, Russia, an actively hostile foreign power, appeared able to use the English legal system to impose the punishment of a huge fine on one of its most effective critics. Whatever the merits of the different cases against Belton, a free society must be free to examine the phenomenally wealthy without fearing the chilling effect of legal action. It should be alert to the possibility that at least some of what is unfolding in the courts could be Russian state action. Given the involvement of the Kremlin-dominated Rosneft, perhaps the thought is not too fanciful. Leaving that aside, the EU is under pressure to act against what Americans call strategic lawsuits against public participation. Slapp actions grant access to the courts to powerful individuals or organisations that are less interested in actual verdicts than the prospect of extraordinarily expensive legal costs browbeating critics. My friends at Index on Censorship tell me that Britain has shown no interest in following suit. On the one hand, the UK government promotes a global Media Freedom Coalition. On the other, the UK is denounced by the Foreign Policy Centre as "the most frequent country of origin" for foreign legal threats against investigative journalists. If the case of Catherine Belton does not interest Dominic Raab, perhaps he should reflect on what will happen when the Chinese Communist party realises what London has to offer.



Observer we have been wondering what we can safely say about the cases of assorted Russian billionaires v Catherine Belton. Something? Anything? Nothing at all? Even in England, I think we are OK to tell you that the critics acclaimed her book, Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then

because of what he says are "false and defamatory" statements about his purchase of Chelsea FC. Mikhail Fridman, owner of Russia's largest non-state bank (net worth about \$15.6bn) is suing for libel. Fridman's business partner, Pyotr Aven, (net worth a paltry \$5.3bn) is suing for breach of data protection. Aven and

Houchenism - the brand of can-do Tory threatening the left and right old guard

After Thatcherism and Corbynism, welcome to Houchenism, the doctrine of Tees Valley mayor, Ben Houchen, and endorsed by a whopping 73% of Teesside voters. This 34-year-old northern loyalist is the

Teesside as a deregulatory free-for-all? Of course, if that means jobs and inward investment for his area. A green new deal? He is on it, proclaiming that a green industrial revolution is the avenue to hi-tech, well-paid, 21st-cen-

UK's hydrogen manufacturing hub. Wind farms? He is on them too, creating the

Will Hutton

Teesworks Offshore Manufacturing Centre, in which GE



Tory party's contemporary version of Michael Heseltine, the lone standard bearer at Thatcher's zenith of a willingness to intervene "at breakfast, lunch and supper". Houchen is today's Tory carrying the Heseltine torch, intervening to reinvent Teesside with the massive backing of his electorate. And a generation later, this Heseltine de nos jours has the backing, not the loathing, of the prime minister. It will not have escaped Boris Johnson's notice, a self-described Brexit Hezza, that Houchen's intervention is working big time, economically and politically. This do-it-if-it-works local Tory politician is reinventing the Conservative party as it attempts to deliver on its promise to level up. The string of initiatives Houchen has launched encompasses the ideological spectrum. Nationalisation? If that is the only way to keep and expand Teesside International Airport, of course, even if details of the public financing remain opaque. A free port for

tury jobs. Thus he has instigated the Net Zero Industry Innovation Centre, attracting the establishment of the National Hydrogen Transport Centre in partnership with Teesside University with the aim of making Teesside the

Renewable Energy has just announced it will create a plant to build state-of-the-art wind turbine blades. What Houchen is doing is a textbook example of a "super-cluster", turning Teesside into a self-reinforcing virtuous

circle of complementary industries in a public-private partnership, supported by the local university and FE colleges. OK, he has been backed to the hilt by Johnson, who insisted that his free-market-inclined chancellor and business secretary get with the programme, abandon their throwback, dead-end Thatcherism and write the cheques that make it all possible. There was general bafflement when Rishi Sunak announced that 750 Treasury jobs were going to Darlington and not the obvious centre in the north, Leeds. That missed the point. Darlington is part of Teesside and Houchen was being obliged. Teesside voters, and that includes Hartlepool, have noticed. They like what they see. It has imagination, verve and a vision. Of course they backed it on Thursday. Yes, it is true that the Blair government established One North East - one of the more dynamic regional development agencies that, for example, laid the foundations of the North East Technol-

ogy Park (NETPark) in Durham, where a space innovation centre is to be based - and which the coalition government criminally abolished in 2010. But Blair as a Sedgefield MP and Peter Mandelson as a Hartlepool MP abjured the kind of aggressive activism of Houchen, only becoming converts at the last. For as Teesside voters note, unlike them, Houchen was born locally, took his law degree at Northumbria University and cares passionately for where he lives and works. Equally, Labour's left, which has been urging Starmer and his shadow cabinet to adopt a leftwing vision to recapture Labour's red wall, embrace Brexit and fight the same old Tories with good, old-fashioned socialism, should take note. Whatever else, Ben Houchen is not a same old Tory, nor is any variant of socialism likely to appeal to Teesside voters who are watching a different alchemy deliver both a vision for the future and jobs alike.

To win back working people, Labour should learn from Joe Biden

A realignment is under way in British politics, and it is killing Labour. The Tories' crushing win in Hartlepool, along with gains in English council seats that were once painted deepest red, is proof that Boris Johnson's 2019

the first time. In the Brexit case, the break was even more profound. Labour was not just at odds with many of its core voters in 2016: it pointedly failed to heed their wishes in the years that followed. That is a rupture that takes more than 18 months to



victory was no one-off, no aberration. Put simply, working people in towns across England that once saw voting Labour as a defining part of their identity are now voting Conservative - and they are doing so in big numbers. An overused word, but the threat to Labour is existential. It cannot win and therefore cannot survive as a potential party of government by relying solely on those who are young, live in a city, have a university degree or are from an ethnic minority: there are just not enough of them. Labour needs the votes of the many millions of others still broadly defined as working class. The clue is in the party's name. And yet look at Labour's membership: 77% of them in social category ABC1, concentrated heavily in London and the south. One Labour MP says candidly: "There is a canyon between us and the working class." There is no shortage of diagnosis for the defeat in Hartlepool. Plenty credit the "vaccine bounce", arguing with some merit that the pandemic has frozen politics. One pollster who conducted a focus group of ex-Labour voters in the north-west this week summarises the mood this way: "It's like when your boiler breaks down. You don't want an argument over who's to blame, you just want it fixed." Johnson gets credit for sorting out jabs; and, for now, no one is listening to Keir Starmer. Other explanations break along factional lines. The Corbynites say Labour is paying the price for abandoning a programme that was popular, noting that the party held Hartlepool in 2017 and 2019. Witness Richard Burgon's insistence that Labour's recent manifestos were "backed by a large majority of voters", the former shadow minister apparently unaware of the outcome of the last two general elections. Meanwhile, the anti-Corbynites blame "long Corbyn", claiming that the loathing of the ex-leader that they encountered in 2019 - and which Lord Ashcroft's post-election survey found to be the number one reason for Labour voters switching to the Tories - lives on. Both analyses miss the longer, deeper shifts at work. Brexit may only have come up rarely on the doorstep in recent weeks, but it marks the turning point in this story. Hard though it may be for remainers such as me to accept, leavers have a point when they say that Labour did better in 2017 partly because the party appeared to be reconciled to the referendum result and worse in 2019 when the promise of a second vote threatened to overturn it. Just as voting yes to independence in 2014 broke the taboo on defying Labour for many voters in Scotland, allowing them to back the SNP a year later, so Brexit smashed that same psychological barrier for traditional Labour voters in England, acting as the gateway to supporting the Tories for

heal. But Brexit itself was more symptom than cause, a function of the culture gap between Labour and the people it once reflexively represented, a gap that has been growing wider for years. Put aside the specific question of leaving the EU. If Labour now stands for what can be easily caricatured as remain values (urban and "woke") while the Tories represent supposedly leave values (traditional and patriotic), that spells electoral disaster. There are far more leave-minded seats than remain ones. What's more, while the Conservatives have the leave brand all to themselves,

Jonathan Freedland

Labour has to fight for the smaller remain franchise against the Liberal Democrats, Greens and the nationalist parties. Labour could keep litigating these arguments with itself for years, if not decades, to come. But soon it will have to move from diagnosis to remedy. How can Labour hope to reforge the bond with working people that it took for granted for so long? A first move is to avoid walking into the culture-war traps Johnson and his allies are so eager to set. Starmer has tried hard to do that, but it will keep happening just so long as there is empty ground where Labour's vision should be. A clue to that vision might just lie across the Atlantic. The Labour MP Jon Cruddas says his party should be looking at Joe Biden, who has proved able to bridge the divide between the young, urban left and the traditional Democratic base by focusing on work. Biden casts every measure, including on the climate crisis, in terms of creating millions of well-paid, unionised jobs - and that's a message both kinds of Democrat can get behind. True, it has been easier for Biden to connect with working people than for Starmer: the president's roots, his story and his manner lend him an authenticity not easily replicated. And he was up against a genuine monster in Donald Trump. Johnson is a tougher opponent, governing as a social democrat in a blue rosette, willing to tax and spend big - "a Brexit Hezza," he called himself - and not in denial about Covid. But if Starmer were to adopt Bidenomics on jobs, "the Tories would never be able to go there," says Cruddas; ultimately their Thatcherite creed would hold them back. Labour would have that fertile ground all to itself. Who knows if that is the right answer, but it is surely asking the right question. There will always need to be an alternative to the Tories, but there is no law that says that alternative has to be Labour - or indeed from the left rather than the nationalist, populist right. If Labour keeps losing, the disaster will not be for the party alone - but for the country.

Putting Extinction Rebellion activists on trial isn't in the public interest, so let's stop

In the face of resistance by juries, surely there is a strong case to halt all the pending trials of Extinction Rebellion activists? With nearly a thousand trials still waiting to be heard in the courts, six members of the group were recently acquitted at Southwark crown court in XR's second trial by a jury. They had been charged with criminal damage against the oil giant Shell, yet the jury decided that all six were not guilty, despite the judge ruling that only one had any kind of defence in law. For the police, prosecutors and judge, this was doubtless a "perverse" verdict. But the warning signs had been there. In XR's first crown court trial in December 2019, in which the defendants also admitted their actions and pleaded not guilty, the jury stated they had only followed the judge's direction to convict "with regret". It seems that the law is out of step with the public, and that there could be many more such "per-

verse" verdicts by rebellious juries. The six acquitted defendants took action outside Shell's London headquarters during XR's first mass protests in April 2019. They blocked doors, climbed on to the entrance canopy, broke several windows and painted "Shell Knew", "Lies" and "Climate Criminals" on the outside of the building. Their action was reportedly designed to create more than £5,000 worth of damage, to ensure the case would be escalated to the crown court and heard by a jury, rather than in a magistrates court. Their hope was that on learning why they felt they had to break the law, a jury of their fellow citizens would reach the decision it did. It was a courageous and risky strategy - for they each faced a maximum five-year prison sentence or a £10,000 fine. In the two years it took for the case to come to trial, there's been a major shift in public awareness about the scale of the challenges we face from global heat-

ing and ecosystem collapse, not least as a result of XR protests, as well as strikes by school students and increasingly desperate warnings from scientists and public figures such as David Attenborough. The two-week Shell trial

Peter Hain

at Southwark was a case study in what can happen when environmental activists put their trust in the people. The defendants dismissed their lawyers and represented themselves, which allowed them to speak directly to the jury, explain the full facts about the climate crisis, and their reasons for taking the actions they did. This is a tactic I know something about, having done the same thing in 1972 when facing imprisonment in an Old Bailey conspiracy trial for disrupting tours by apartheid South African sports teams. I was also acquitted, like the Shell defendants, on a majority jury verdict. The Shell

jury, having heard the evidence, concluded that the damage done was a proportionate response to the damage Shell continues to do to the planet. Decades ago, Shell researched the causes and potential impact of global heating, but rather than move out of fossil fuels, it hired lobbyists to throw doubt on the science and frustrate action. It continues to evade justice for the damage it has done to ecosystems and people's lives and livelihoods around the globe. Meanwhile, its much publicised net zero strategy includes investment in new oil exploration and gas pumping of \$8bn (£5.8bn) a year, with only between \$2bn and \$3bn for renewables and an unrealistic reliance on tree planting and carbon capture technologies. This inadequate response recently caused the Methodist church, a major shareholder, to lose patience and pull out of the company. The Shell jury, a microcosm of the wider pub-



lic, suggests that once people are fully informed about the climate crisis, they may understand the urgency and support the radical action needed to address it. Of the estimated 2,000 XR prosecutions taken through the magistrates courts since April 2019, nearly 1,000 are still going on. In addition, a dozen more crown court cases are still pending. Maybe jury verdicts in these cases won't go the same way as the Shell case. But perhaps they will.

Chinese rocket debris crashes back to Earth, plunging into Indian Ocean - state media

Beijing, May 9 : The remnants of China's largest rocket have plummeted back to Earth, plunging into the Indian Ocean near the Maldives, according to Chinese state media, ending days of speculation



over where the debris would hit. Most of the debris burned up in the atmosphere, it reported, citing the Chinese Manned Space Engineering office. Parts of the 30-metre core of the Long March 5B rocket re-entered the atmosphere at 10.24am Beijing time (2.24am GMT) and landed at a

location with the coordinates of longitude 72.47 degrees east and latitude 2.65 degrees north, state media cited the office as saying. Space watchers around the world have been anticipating the

arrival of the Long March 5B space rocket since it started to lose altitude last week amid concerns it was out of control. It is one of the largest pieces of space debris to return to Earth and prompted the White House to call for "responsible space behaviours". China's foreign ministry

had said on Friday that most debris from the 30-metre long rocket would burn on re-entry and that it was highly unlikely to cause any harm, after the US military said that what it called an uncontrolled re-entry was being tracked by US Space Command. EU Space Surveillance and Tracking (EU SST) said on its website that the statistical probability of a ground impact in a populated area was "low", but noted that the uncontrolled nature of the object made any predictions uncertain. The Long March 5B - comprising one core stage and four boosters - lifted off from China's Hainan island on 29 April with the unmanned Tianhe module, which contains what will become living quarters on a permanent Chinese space station. The rocket is set to be followed by 10 more missions to complete the station. The empty core stage has been losing altitude since last week, and experts estimated its dry mass to be around 18 to 22 tonnes. Long March 5 rockets have been integral to China's near-term space ambitions - from the delivery of modules and crew of its planned

space station to launches of exploratory probes to the moon and even Mars. The Long March launched last week was the second deployment of the 5B variant since its maiden flight in May last year. In May 2020, pieces from the first Long March 5B fell on Ivory Coast, damaging several buildings. No injuries were reported. Debris from Chinese rocket launches is not uncommon within China. In late April, authorities in the city of Shiyan, Hubei Province, issued a notice to people in the surrounding county to prepare for evacuation as parts were expected to land in the area. "The Long March 5B reentry is unusual because during launch, the first stage of the rocket reached orbital velocity instead of falling down range as is common practice," the Aerospace Corporation said in a blog post. The core stage of the first Long March 5B that returned to Earth last year weighed nearly 20 tonnes, surpassed by debris from the Columbia space shuttle in 2003, the Soviet Union's Salyut 7 space station in 1991, and NASA's Skylab in 1979.



Children take part in a running race to commemorate the upcoming 76th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War in Minsk, Belarus

IMA tells Centre to 'wake up from slumber', calls for complete COVID-19 lockdown



New Delhi, May 9 : The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Saturday (May 9, 2021) urged the central government to impose a complete nationwide lockdown in India to break the COVID-19 transmission chain. The medical body also added that this decision will give some breathing time to the nation's healthcare infrastructure to recover and replenish for what lies beyond. Indian Medical Association in a statement said it has been urging the Centre to impose a well-planned pre-announced national lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus in the nation. The statement also added that the collective consciousness, proactive cognizance, and requests made by the IMA and other professional learned colleagues are put into the "dustbin" by the decision makers, "without realizing the ground realities". Lockdown will break the chain of devastating spread," said the IMA, a national voluntary organisation of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine in India. #PMOIndia #NITIAayog #LargestVaccineDrive #IMAIndiaOrg IMA demands the health ministry wake up from its slumber and responds to mitigate the growing challenges of the pandemic. [pic.twitter.com/70xKgLhi9Q](https://twitter.com/70xKgLhi9Q)

Myanmar junta labels opposition government of ousted MPs a 'terrorist' group

Yangon, May 9 : Coup leaders ban opposition national unity government, and contact with them, as they seek to quell ongoing protests. Protesters march with banners supporting Myanmar's opposition National Unity Government on 8 May. Myanmar's military rulers have branded a national unity government formed by MPs forced to flee in the wake of the coup a terrorist group and blamed it for bombings, arson and killings as part of a propaganda campaign in state-controlled media on Saturday. Myanmar's army overthrew the elected government on 1 February and detained elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking months of protests during which hundreds of people have been killed by security forces. In response, local militias have been formed to confront the army while anti-junta protests have continued across the south-east Asian country and strikes have paralysed the economy. Saturday's announcement follows the junta's crackdown on independent news outlets, raiding media outlets and most recently banning satellite dishes and threatening prison sentences for anyone who violates the measure. The national unity government (NUG), which was set up by pro-democracy politicians and operates under cover, itself

describes the army as a terrorist force. The NUG announced this week that it would set up a people's defence force. State television MRTV announced that the NUG, a committee of ousted lawmakers known as the CRPH and the new defence force would all now be covered by the anti-terrorism law, saying: "Their acts caused so much terrorism in many places." The anti-terrorism law bans not only membership of the groups, but also any contact with them. The junta had previously accused its opponents of treason. Protesters marched against the junta in dozens of places on Saturday. At least 774 civilians have been killed by security forces and 3,778 are detained, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners activist group. The junta says at least two dozen members of the security forces have been killed in protests. Fighting has also flared on Myanmar's periphery with ethnic armies that have been fighting for decades, some of which have rallied behind the protesters. State television said the army had advanced against the Kachin independence army in northern Myanmar, but there was no independent confirmation. In western Myanmar, the newly formed Chinland defence force said it had overrun an army camp.



People carry an injured child at a local hospital in Kabul, capital of Afghanistan.

Cyber-attack forces shutdown of one of the US's largest pipelines

New Jersey, May 9 : One of the largest pipelines in the US has been shut down after an apparent cyber-attack, its operator has said. Colonial Pipeline said it had shut down its 5,500 miles of pipeline, which carries 45% of the east coast's fuel supplies and travels through 14 southern and eastern US states, after the breach of its computer networks. The pipeline transports gasoline, diesel and jet fuel. The company's website says it carries some 100m gallons of fuel each day and services seven airports. The attack, which took place on Friday, included ransomware according to the Washington Post. In a statement, the company said: "Colonial Pipeline is taking steps to understand and resolve this issue. At this time, our primary focus is the safe and efficient restoration of our service and our efforts to return to normal operation. This process is already under way, and we are working diligently to address this matter and to minimize disruption to our customers and those who rely on Colonial Pipeline." A third-party cybersecurity firm was hired to investigate the attack and federal agencies and law enforcement were

informed. The precise nature of the attack was unclear, including who launched it and what the motives were. A Colonial Pipeline spokesperson declined to say whether the company had received a ransom demand, as is common in attacks from cyber criminal syndicates. Ransomware works by scrambling a victim organization's data with encryption. The criminals leave instructions how to negotiate ransom payments and, once paid, provide software decryption keys to undo the damage. While there have long been fears about US adversaries disrupting American energy suppliers, criminal ransomware attacks are much more common and have become increasingly common. The attack comes after news of the Biden administration's 100-day plan to protect the nation's critical infrastructure against cybersecurity threats. The US's Department of Energy, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and the electricity industry are working together to "confront cyber threats from adversaries who seek to compromise critical systems that are essential to US national and economic security".

Northern Ireland's unionist movement in turmoil as UUP leader steps down

London, May 9 : Political unionism in Northern Ireland has been thrown into further flux after the leader of the Ulster Unionist party announced his resignation. Steve Aiken's move comes 10 days after the Democratic Unionist party leader Arlene Foster was forced to quit after an internal heave against her. The announcement from the South Antrim MLA, who will remain as leader until a successor is chosen, was also prompted by mounting discontent within the party over his stewardship. With Aiken's decision coming so soon after Foster's, unionism is set for a significant realignment ahead of next year's Assembly election. The broader unionist and loyalist community in Northern Ireland has been significantly unsettled by the emergence of Brexit's Irish Sea border and their political representatives acknowledge the election could be pivotal for the pro-union cause. And if the political turmoil ends up destabilising the power-sharing administration in Belfast, the election could come sooner than scheduled. Aiken, a former submarine captain, was elected UUP leader unopposed in 2019. Many are tipping the Upper Bann MLA Doug Beattie as a likely successor. He was viewed as a serious leadership contender back in 2019 when the last vacancy arose but he ultimately chose not to stand, leaving Aiken with a clear path to the job. In a letter to the party chair, Danny Kennedy, Aiken said he believed he

had taken the party as far as he could. "To achieve our goals, we now need new leadership," he wrote. Aiken said he would remain in politics and continue as a South Antrim MLA. Discussing his time as leader, Aiken said he took pride in the party's



decision to take on the challenging health minister portfolio when Stormont was restored in 2020. He said his party colleague and former leader Robin Swann had been successful in his efforts to tackle the pandemic. "However, despite our successes, it has become clear to me that if we are to achieve the breakthrough in the forthcoming Assembly elections, we will need to drive further ahead," Aiken wrote. "To represent the brand of unionism that builds on hope and not fear, and provides a clear, modern alternative that will be both the future of our party and Northern Ireland, will require strong leadership." He said unionism needed positive, hopeful and

progressive leadership. "The last few months have been a momentous time for our Union and for Northern Ireland," he wrote. "It is also a time when unionism, more than ever, needs positive, hopeful and progressive leadership; leadership which I strongly believe only the Ulster Unionist party can provide." Our party has delivered for the people of Northern Ireland for many years and in the centenary of Northern Ireland continues to do what is right - not just for unionists, but for everyone. "In a written reply to Aiken, Kennedy said he "regretfully" acknowledged his decision to resign. "On behalf of the officers and the entire party I want to express my deep appreciation for the service you have rendered as leader and pay tribute to your unstinting efforts to promote our raison d'être - the maintenance and preservation of Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom," he wrote. Beattie was among those paying tribute to the party leader. "The loneliness of leadership is never easy," he tweeted. "The cruel comments are a measure of those unwilling to put their heads above the parapet." As my party leader, my colleague and my friend I want to thank Steve for his service past, present and in the future. "Swann tweeted: "I want to thank @SteveAikenUUP for his leadership, it is oft time both a rewarding and challenging position to hold." But most of all I thank him for his support and the trust he placed in me when he nominated me as health minister."

Secret Service extension for Trump's adult children cost \$140,000 in a month

Washington, May 9 : Donald Trump's adult children reportedly cost taxpayers \$140,000 in Secret Service security in the month after the clan's patriarch left the White House in January. Ordinarily, family members of a president lose their security detail when they leave office. But in the case of the four Trump siblings and two of their spouses, the former president issued a directive to extend post-presidency protections by six months. The costs, obtained by the watchdog group Citizens for Ethics, do not include security protections at Trump properties in New Jersey, Palm Beach and Briarcliff, New York. With those factored in, the total would likely be far higher, according to the group. According to the watchdog, records reveal that the Trump children maintained a "breakneck speed of travel, and racked up significant hotel and transportation bills for the Secret Service". Transport costs alone amounted to \$52,296.75, and hotel costs totaled at least \$88,678.39. If that schedule is maintained, the group estimates, post-presidency protection costs could nearly \$1m. The group has previously calculated that the Trump family made 12 times as many trips in three years as the Obamas made in seven. The arrangements, however, are not unique: former presidents Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and George W Bush also

sought protection extensions, though in the case of Clinton and Obama their children were by then at, or close to, college-age. The Washington Post, which reported on Trump's directive in January, found that extensions to Secret Service protections were also

After a month in Miami, they stayed at Trump's Bedminster golf property for three days in late February. Eric and Lara Trump spent much of February at Trump's Briarcliff property, interspersed with trips to New York, Miami and Palm Beach, at a cost of



extended to former treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin, former chief of staff Mark Meadows and former national security adviser Robert O'Brien. Under federal law, Trump and his wife Melania are entitled to protection for their lifetime; their teenage son Barron receives his until he turns 16. The watchdog found that Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump went from their jobs at the White House to a 10-day vacation in Utah, racking up hotel costs of \$62,599.

\$12,742. Donald Trump Jr also spent time in New York City, on Long Island, and in upstate New York, racking up bills of \$13,337. But Citizens for Ethics said the Secret Service did not provide records of spending at Trump businesses. "While it may be tempting to put the story of the Trump family's profiteering in the past, we cannot until they have actually stopped directing taxpayer money into their own bank accounts," the group said.

IMA insisted that dedicated experts shall be designated to study this and propose mitigation measures at the earliest. Indian Medical Association also asked the authorities to revamp the entire health care administration with Indian Medical Service (IMS) cadets, who are well versed with the technical and administrative skill for effective execution of health care, adding that, a new integrated Ministry shall be set up to serve in this pandemic with a dedicated, proactive, vibrant, innovative, and altruistic Minister and alleviate the fear of people by leading from the front.

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A possible Disaster

Launched on 28 April, China's Long March 5B rocket was intended to put into orbit a core module of the country's new Tianhe space station. While its primary mission was successful, the task of ensuring that the rocket's debris falls back to Earth in a pre-identified, unpopulated area is cause for panic now. The rocket's core stage is expected to re-enter the Earth's atmosphere on 8 May and parts of the debris will apparently crash-land in locations that are difficult to predict. But India isn't saying, 'So, this is how the Chinese light their fire' and is not openly relishing in its neighbours' failure. As American writer-philosopher Will Durant once said, "To say nothing, especially when speaking, is half the art of diplomacy." As per international law, specifically the 1972 Liability Convention, China will be "liable to pay compensation for damage caused by its space object on the surface of the earth or to aircraft in flight" if, worst-case scenario, the Long March 5B's space debris causes widespread damage. This is not the first time a Long March 5B launch from China has resulted in potential damage to other countries or led to international scrutiny. Last year, then-NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine criticised China after a Long March 5B rocket's empty core stage "fell uncontrollably" to Earth and some of the debris crash landed in Cote d'Ivoire. No matter what becomes of China's space debris, this turn of event makes the timing and nature of that Sina Weibo post doubly unfortunate, and represents egg on the face of Guo Shengkun, a prominent CCP official and head of Zhongyang Zhengfawei. The vigilant sections of Chinese social media users deserve a great deal of credit for their efforts to nip this potential diplomatic incident in the bud. This pushback showed that such insensitivity is not as widely shared across the country's populace, even the government, unlike what many commentators would have you believe. It also speaks to how attempts at social media diplomatic schadenfreude are not only unhelpful to the situation, but they can also blow up in one's face, worst of all when it comes from public officials. It's best to leave Twitter-happy fingers - or Weibo-happy in this case - to the Trumps of this world. Perhaps China should remind the people behind the Zhongyang Zhengfawei Weibo account about a Chinese proverb that says, 'A good neighbour is a priceless treasure.' Part of a huge rocket that launched China's first module for its Tianhe space station is falling back to Earth and could make an uncontrolled re-entry at an unknown landing point. The 30-metre high core of the Long March 5B rocket launched the "Heavenly Harmony" unmanned core module into low Earth orbit on 29 April from Wenchang in China's Hainan province. The Long March 5B then itself entered a temporary orbit, setting the stage for one of the largest ever uncontrolled re-entries. Some experts fear it could land on an inhabited area. "It's potentially not good," said Jonathan McDowell, Astrophysicist at the Astrophysics Center at Harvard University. "Last time they launched a Long March 5B rocket they ended up with big long rods of metal flying through the sky and damaging several buildings in the Ivory Coast," he said. "Most of it burned up, but there were these enormous pieces of metal that hit the ground. We are very lucky no one was hurt."

India's COVID-19 crisis: Flat-footed communication strategy, risk-averse bureaucracy add to distress

A flat-footed communication strategy and debilitating red-tapism that focuses on risk-aversion and indecision at the cost of efficiency is adding to the distress of India's already severe Covid crisis. It is also spilling over onto the strategic space. The pandemic has already challenged India's 'regional power' status. New Delhi has been forced to overturn a 17-year-old policy to accept foreign aid. As the virulent second wave continues to pummel India, the strategic consequences of the pandemic coupled with a ham-handed crisis mitigation approach may further constrain India's foreign policy choices. An unsavoury controversy erupted this week when foreign embassies reached out to India's opposition party for critical medical equipment via social media. One such post on Twitter by a staff member of the New Zealand High Commission in New Delhi on Sunday, requesting help from the Congress party's youth wing for procuring an oxygen cylinder, became immediately viral and gave rise to a huge political row. The tweet was subsequently deleted but the Indian Youth Congress members delivered the cylinder and made sure that everything is recorded and splashed widely across all social media outlets in all available formats. The New Zealand High Commission sent out an apology for triggering a political controversy, stating that "we are trying all sources to arrange for oxygen cylinders urgently and our appeal has unfortunately been misinterpreted, for which we are sorry." We are trying all sources to arrange for oxygen cylinders urgently and our appeal has unfortunately been misinterpreted, for which we are sorry. New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern told a local media outlet that the High Commission in India should have used proper channels to seek assistance than requesting the IYC on Twitter to help in providing an oxygen cylinder. "They should have been using those normal channels and protocols," Ardern was quoted, as saying by media outlets in New Zealand. "The High Commission themselves have removed that tweet and acknowledged that wasn't the process that should have been used. They've done that, they've corrected that." She clarified that a local staff member, an Indian national, within

the embassy's compound in India was "very unwell." However, she added that "there are other means and channels" because the commission was "very well supported by the Indian government" through the pandemic. The Covid crisis has hit not only the New Zealand embassy but according to reports in the media, the entire diplomatic community in New Delhi's Chanakyaपुरी is in danger with several embassies battling rising Covid cases within their premises. The Hindu reports that "a significant number of staff in the Royal Thai Embassy have been affected" along with embassies of Singapore and Vietnam, among others. The report says that "some embassies have resorted to helping themselves with oxygen from whoever can give them." The Print reports that the embassies of the US, Germany, Israel, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sweden and Nepal are also battling Covid cases and quotes an unnamed European diplomat, as saying, "There is no help coming from the government. They are having their hands full and have no time to look after the diplomatic community especially. We understand it is a crisis situation but we need some priority services." An image emerges that of helpless embassies left to fend for themselves amid a raging pandemic by a crisis-ridden government, notwithstanding Prime Minister Ardern's clarification that staff members at the High Commission in India have been "well supported by Indian government". These contradictory signals intensified with a very public spat between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh over Indian Youth Congress's oxygen supply to another foreign embassy - that of the Philippines. Ramesh referred to a tweet by IYC where they showed to have reached the Philippines High Commission with a cylinder, and asked the EAM: "While I thank @IYC for its stellar efforts, as an Indian citizen I'm stunned that the youth wing of the opposition party is attending to SOS calls from foreign embassies. Is the MEA sleeping @DrJaishankar?" While I thank @IYC for its stellar efforts, as an Indian citizen I'm stunned that the youth wing of the

opposition party is attending to SOS calls from foreign embassies. Jaishankar, in reply, said: "MEA checked with the Philippines Embassy. This was an unsolicited supply as they had no Covid cases. Clearly for cheap publicity by you know who. Giving away cylinders like this when there are people in desperate need of oxygen is simply appalling." He added another tweet, saying: "Jairamji, MEA never sleeps; our people know across the world. MEA also never fakes; we know who does." MEA checked with the Philippines Embassy. This was an unsolicited supply as they had no Covid cases. Clearly for cheap publicity by you know who. Giving away cylinders like this when there are people in desperate need of oxygen is simply appalling. This spat continued with Ramesh this time forwarding another tweet by the Congress party's youth wing where it said: "We got a request for an urgent requirement of Oxygen Cylinders for 2 Covid patients in Philippines Embassy. The Cylinders were delivered at the embassy on a much-solicited request. Post delivery embassy thanked us on Facebook. All screenshots attached with names and number masked." MEA checked with the Philip-

pine Embassy. This was an unsolicited supply as they had no Covid cases. Clearly for cheap publicity by you know who. Giving away cylinders like this when there are people in desperate need of oxygen is simply appalling. Finally, the MEA came out with a statement, saying: "The Chief of Protocol and Heads of Divisions are in continuous touch with all High Commissions/Embassies and MEA is responding to their medical demands, especially those related to Covid. This includes facilitating their hospital treatment. Given the pandemic situation, all are urged not to hoard essential supplies, including oxygen." The episode raises several questions and points to a communication gap that is giving rise to speculations and varied statements leading to more confusion. Instead of a dense and terse bureaucratic statement that fails to reconcile contradictory reports and statements, the government of India should have put in place a channel of communication where queries on this sensitive issue - that may trigger misunderstanding in bilateral ties - could have been effectively addressed. Similar and avoidable confusion has surrounded the distribution of foreign supplies pouring in from different parts of the world. What makes this controversy more damaging is that questions are being raised by foreign media on the accountability of the aid sent to India and of the last-mile distribution mechanism. During a recent US Department of State media briefing, questions were raised on the "planeloads of material" that is being sent to India. The journalist wanted to know if there was any website or "transparent system" where people may get information on the aid because this in voles "accountability for the US taxpayers' money." In reply, deputy spokesperson Jalina Porter said: "as far as a specific website when it comes to tracking, we have nothing to read out or announce at this time." Similar queries were raised by Indian media and the Opposition. According to government data, around 300 tons of foreign aid including 40 lakh relief supplies landed in India since 25 April. And yet, till Tuesday (4 May) afternoon, there was no communication by the government on the whereabouts and distribution of these supplies. Congress said, "The people of this country have a right to know where the relief material is coming from and where it is going." AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owasi posted on Twitter: "Many countries are sending India a lot of aid, it is meant for all Indians, not for @PMOIndia alone, why don't we know how much material has come and gone where?" A Delhi High Court bench "took strong exception to the delay in clearance of life-saving equipment by the Customs Department," reports India Today. It may be a gigantic, once-in-a-



century crisis but trust the Indian bureaucracy to tie it in red tape. While trying to gather information on details the foreign aid, India Today reported that "while some have said that the (Union) ministry of health will look into the distribution, highly placed officials in the health ministry have pointed to the ministry of external affairs (MEA)." The report further notes that "there is an 'Empowered Group', headed by the transport secretary, which is supposed to coordinate distribution. But, when asked there, no ministry has been able to offer clarity on details about the consignments." In another report, India Today observes that "while the first consignment of COVID-19 assistance arrived in India on April 25, the Centre took seven days to frame the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of distributing these life-saving medical supplies among states even as hospitals begged for oxygen and people succumbed to the deadly disease." The report seemingly jolted the government into action. It issued a rejoinder on 4 May, refuting the India Today report as factually incorrect and "totally misleading", and pointed out that while the SOP for allocations was issued by the Health Ministry on May 2, "the work for receipt, allocation and distribution to the States

and UTs through the Central and other Health Institutions started immediately." The release added that a "coordination cell under additional secretary [health] was created in the Health Ministry on 26 April, 2021, and started work instantly. On the same day, the Union Ministry of Health issued a long press note, stating that 40 lakh relief supplies have been distributed to 38 Institutions across 31 states and Union Territories. The statement said goods are given high priority for clearance by the Customs, gave a detailed account of the logistics of the distribution procedure. The health ministry claimed a "streamlined and systematic mechanism for allocation of the support supplies received by India has been put into place, for effective distribution of the medical and other relief and support material" though one look at the system makes it apparent that the multi-layered procedure is anything but "streamlined". The government also clarified from the SOP (arrived at on 2 May) behind the allocation. According to the statement, "since such grant in aid would be limited in quantity, therefore it has to be optimally utilized by allocating it to high burden states... Spreading such grant in aid thinly each time, over a large number of states may not bring forth the desired results. It will also lead to small packages travelling large distances, high turn-around times and possible wastage of resources." The statement notified that basic customs duty and health cess on goods identified for defending Covid have been waived and IGST has also been waived when imported free of cost and distributed freely. These rules were simplified and IGST waived off after media reports emerged of "a cumbersome clearance process and the IGST rates that saw even after reaching India, several consignments of oxygen concentrators were lying at airports due to IGST rules," according to another India Today report. And therein hangs a tale. If even emergency Covid aid has to pass through a torturous bureaucratic process then it speaks of a system that puts risk-avoidance ahead of efficiency. If true streamlining and fast decision-making is held up over fear of future controversies, then at least a communication mechanism should be put in place for disseminating authentic information so that needless controversies over the distribution of aid may be avoided. What stopped the Union health ministry from releasing daily updates on the status of the aid that started arriving since last week? In absence of such communication, the gap was filled by speculative reports. Effective communication goes a long way in preventing misinformation and battling Covid. That is invaluable in a crisis.

Pandemic can't be allowed to devastate nations because of sophisticated, one-sided WTO rules

After months of indecision, the United States has finally announced its support for waiving COVID-19 vaccine patents, answering a request by India, South Africa and a hundred other countries at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It's a significant move in all its manifestations. Credit must go to strong and persistent advocacy by Democratic Party progressives and advocates of patient rights and to Indian and South African diplomats for consistently flagging the issue. Two Indian American members of the House of Representatives deserve special mention for their public statement in favour of the waiver-Congressman Ro Khanna and Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal. For President Joe Biden to take a stand against pharmaceutical companies is no small matter. His presidential campaign was the near sole beneficiary of pharma largesse in 2020 to the exclusion of Donald Trump. Therefore, for Biden to strike an opposite pose can have political and

democratic call for extraordinary measures." They do. Rules and arguments of yesterday don't apply. Rest assured, the profits of Pfizer, Moderna and others will still be secure and plenty. One may question what is "plenty"- US \$7 billion, which Pfizer predicted would be its profit on 2021 revenues of US \$26 billion or a smaller or bigger figure? The pharmaceutical industry will argue there should be no reasonable cap on profits because that is the paradigm best suited to its mindset and people come second. But governments have to look after people and a large enough segment of the Democratic Party supports this most fundamental contract with them. With the American decision, the ball moves to the European Union (EU), Britain and Japan, countries that will no doubt hold out in the WTO. Germany will prevaricate given Chancellor Angela Merkel's true feelings on the matter, which recently came out. She seemed to

countries will nickel and dime, narrow the provisions and delay the process in Geneva. They must be made to feel the pressure of a very simple premise - no one is safe until everyone is vaccinated. The world needs a consensus and a genuine coming together if all countries are to conquer this pandemic that has engulfed them for no fault of their own. The one country that is at fault is doing quite well while others are on their knees. There is also a geopolitical argument here - if the western world is serious about maintaining its current status vis-à-vis China, it must do everything in its power to get back to normal as soon as possible and get economies humming. The pandemic cannot be allowed to rage and devastate countries because the sophisticated one-sided WTO rules can't be changed quickly enough. Vaccine production and delivery have to be scaled up massively. Thus far, 1.21 billion vaccines have been administered worldwide but 83 percent of the shots have gone into the arms of people in upper and middle-income countries. In other words, vaccines have benefited mostly western countries. Africa has the slowest vaccination rate of any continent. No wonder the Africans call it "vaccine apartheid." This must end for the world to function again. The "me-first" policy is untenable and Americans have begun to realise that. Hoarding and blocking free availability of ingredients to those companies in the developing world that want to get online and start producing is the logical next step. Big pharmaceutical companies argue that developing countries don't have the wherewithal to produce sophisticated vaccines because they lack even the technical know-how that isn't protected by patents. Plus, they need regulatory approvals and funding to build facilities. All that is true, and no one is expecting doubling of vaccine production tomorrow, but

the current situation doesn't promise much either. A WTO waiver will provide a measure of certainty to manufacturers and governments to start investing in new facilities and develop cold storage chains. Even if it takes a year or more to get going, it is better than the current scarcity because vaccine availability today holds no promise for the poor. Additional capacities have to be added. This pandemic is unprecedented in the scale of devastation and spread. No one doubts that. If it takes a year or more for capacity to develop and vaccine volumes to increase, so be it. Big pharma has failed to deliver the number of vaccines required even to the rich countries. The argument about a waiver inhibiting future innovation and investment in research and development by private companies is fake. Firstly, much of the R&D has come from government-funded institutions in the United States, which has then been capitalised by the private sector. Secondly, US government scientists shared the spike protein technology with Moderna, which it commercialised to great profits for its COVID-19 vaccine. While the Biden Administration discusses the waiver with European partners and Japan, it should also assert the US government's actual stake on the intellectual property over spike protein technology. Those who say that the WTO agreement on intellectual property protection already contains enough flexibility haven't read the fine print - it is time-consuming, exhausting and on a per-country basis. Which poor and COVID-ravaged country has the energy to get into long, complicated negotiations against the battery of big pharma's highly paid lawyers? As Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, "On the current trajectory, if we don't do more, if the entire world doesn't do more, the world won't be vaccinated until 2024." He is right. The world needs to be vaccinated sooner rather than never.



financial costs. But, in the end, the moral imperative to help developing countries in an unprecedented situation prevailed over arguments about how granting a waiver might prevent future innovation and research and development by the private sector. As the US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in her statement, "The extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pan-

feel that Europe had "allowed India to become such a large pharmaceutical producer in the first place" that there had to be a "rethink" of policies. Merkel's statement goes against everything her reputation might have indicated. It would be up to the NGOs, advocacy groups and civil society leaders in those countries to take the ball forward because forward it must move. European

Genderless Gems: Accessorising has gone a step ahead with gender-fluid jewellery the hot new trend

Mumbai, May 9 : Last year, luxury label Louis Vuitton introduced LV Volt, a collection of unisex jewellery featuring the iconic LV initials on bracelets, rings, pendants and bangles in both

Marchand, Swedish Oscar-winning actor Alicia Vikander, French artist Sharon Alexie, and Chinese model XiaoXing Mao. By bringing out gender-fluid jewellery, the iconic brand is



silver and gold. Rich with ultra-graphic lines and liquid fluidity, the statement-making collection was designed by Francesca Amfitheatrof, Louis Vuitton's artistic director for watches and jewellery, who is also a creator for Thief & Heist, a unisex jewellery brand. The campaign film featured a diverse group of people - Paris Opera Ballet's principal dancer Hugo



just keeping up with the times. Today, accessorising is in no way different from the way we dress up and so many brands and labels are offering new-age design sensibilities in pieces like chains, bracelets, rings, etc, blending masculine and feminine fashion. Coronavirus India Live, Covid-19 Cases in India, Coronavirus in India Live News: India reports over 4 lakh

new Covid-19 cases for fourth day in a row; 4,092 deaths India records 4,03,738 new COVID-19 cases, 242,362 deaths Not just Louis Vuitton, Italian luxury jewellery and watch brand Bvlgari's new collection, titled B.Zero1 Rock, is also a genderless one, inspired from gas pipes and the Colosseum of Rome. "Why should jewellery be segregated by gender?" asks Delhi-based Eishita Puri, the founder of homegrown jewellery brand Eurumme, which has a range of gender-fluid accessories. "The same chain, for example, can be worn by all genders, if designed mindfully," she adds. There are brands galore across the globe today that offer choices in gender-fluid jewellery. Miami-based Eliou, the brand adorned by American model Gigi Hadid, is the brainchild of Duda Teixeira and Cristina Mantilla. It offers handmade and personalised necklaces in beads, pearls and shells, as well as a unique range of hand-embroidered earrings in a sophisticated casual collection suitable for all age groups. Closer home, we have Delhi-based brand Outhouse, which offers modern and minimal gold jewellery and has an interesting take on necklaces, which can be seen in their many commercial campaigns worn by both men and women. Kolkata-based Perthro, founded by Ritumanti Mondal, too, has

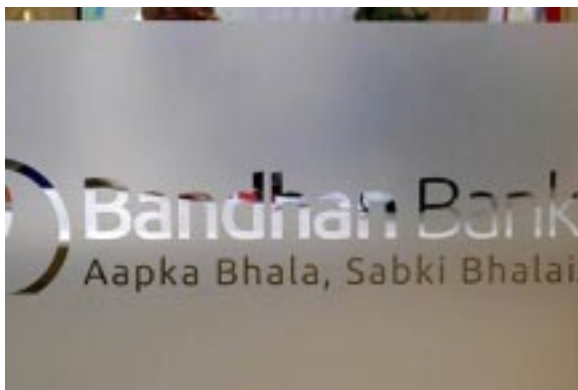
minimalistic dainty designs. Then, of course, there is Mia, a lightweight trendy jewellery collection from Tanishq. One of its pieces is a clear-cut, moulded bejewelled diamond brooch or lapel pin in the shape of a dragonfly. It is suited for denims, jackets, coats and saris. What's even more interesting is that the design and contours of the sassy silver piece are not segregated by gender. There are several other non-binary pieces on offer that are either size-agnostic or can be ordered in a wide range of sizes, conforming to the core design codes of being lightweight, minimal and internationally-styled. So what do designers keep in mind while designing such jewellery? According to Puri, gender is a social construct and one needs to keep the basic tenets in mind for a unisex design. "While designing a gender-fluid piece, I try not to think about which gender I'm designing for... instead, I think about the individual I'm creating for. Some days one may feel masculine, other days feminine... to each their own! The key point is that the piece must have actual usability for all genders," asserts Puri, who launched Eurumme in 2015. The brand's pieces are often adorned by celebrities, including actors Sonam Kapoor Ahuja and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. The boom in the trend can

be credited to men, especially those in the public eye, who have dared to push the envelope, breaking stereotypes and making fashion statements. "The concept of gender-fluid jewellery has had a huge push in recent times due to a fresh perspective in fashion expression and style of younger television and entertainment idols like Harry Styles, Ranveer Singh, etc, to name a few," shares Mumbai-based Percy Visaria, designer-founder, Soulful, a unisex classic fusion brand. "Gender-fluid pieces in gold, brass and other metals are making a strong style aesthetic for 2021 and the demand in India is definitely growing, as easy-to-style pieces have a higher demand than vibrant statement pieces," she adds. Odisha-born and New York-based fashion designer Bibhu Mohapatra agrees: "The style has been mainly led by young artists and entertainers like American actor Timothee Chalamet and Canadian singer Shawn Mendes. The all-gender and versatile pieces in natural diamonds, pearls, necklaces, stud earrings, bracelets, collar pins, tuxedo stud sets are equally adorned by men and have become some of the biggest trends, now permeated into the mainstream," says Mohapatra, who launched his first fine jewellery collection Artemis, in collaboration with Forevermark, a De Beers group of company, in 2016. The designer is known for his signature dresses and sharply-cut jackets, which became collector's pieces, drawing the attention of powerhouses such as Lupita Nyong'o, Gwyneth Paltrow and former First Lady Michelle Obama, who wore an original Bibhu Mohapatra for her first visit to India. Industry insights from The Knight Frank Luxury Investment Index, in the 12-month period ending December 2020, has jewellery as the most preferred passion-led investment, followed by art, watches, wine and classic cars from the Indian UHNWIs' vantage. The first-ever jewellery trend report (2021) by Natural Diamond Council (NDC) also suggests how men and women are wearing the same pieces today, but in a very individualistic manner and that's what gender-fluid jewellery is all about. "Last year has been difficult for all and it changed the way we seek happiness and most importantly our purchase decisions. Things that are meaningful and last forever hold value for us. Owing to this sentiment, our report showcases

natural diamonds like never seen before and hold importance in the future of jewellery," says Richa Singh, managing director, NDC India. However, men's jewellery is still in its infancy with just a few brands offering it. Contemporary men's jewellery is also a completely untapped sector. "Necessity is the mother of invention," says Delhi-based Armaan Narang, founder of Amyr, a bespoke jewellery brand curated exclusively for men, "I'm not saying that fine jewellery is a necessity, but India boasts of one of the largest gems and jewellery industries in the world, yet fashionable jewellery is completely untapped." Amyr offers bold designs for Gen Z and modern-day youngsters. Narang feels the need is to tap the Instagram-obsessed, clout-hunting hype beasts who want versatility and personalisation. "Their buying decisions aren't just based on price, but a brand's differentiating factor, something unique which will complement and enhance their personality," he says. As far as gender-fluid jewellery is concerned, the growth is slow but steady as more and more brands embrace the trend. "It'd be inaccurate to say that there's huge demand, but there's certainly growing demand in this space. The trajectory is slow but steady," says Puri of Eurumme. Amazon Fashion, which houses an array of gender-fluid jewellery, ranging from around 2,000 styles in precious to 40,000 styles in imitation jewellery, has seen good demand. "We have seen an increase in the share of gender-neutral customer intent by ~41% y-o-y from Amazon customers in Q1 2021. We believe that there is a great deal of potential and most of the demand is going to shift towards eliminating the gender label altogether," says Saurabh Srivastava, director and head, Amazon Fashion, which has styles spread across products such as rings, earrings, bracelets, pendants, chains and more, featuring unique selections from 100-plus top brands. The demand for gender-fluid jewellery is steadily on the rise in India, believes Shyamala Ramanan, business head, Mia by Tanishq. "It goes beyond just pieces of jewellery and is today becoming a movement, whose expression is often aided by fashion as a device. Mia, in keeping with today's consumers, helps them make a statement on inclusivity and dissolving biases. Designing differently defeats the very purpose of this trend," says Ramanan.

Bandhan Bank Q4 profit falls 80% to Rs 103.03 crore on higher provisions

Mumbai, May 9 : During the period under review, gross NPAs as a percentage of total loans increased 569 basis points quarter-on-quarter to 6.8% from 1.11% during the third quarter last fiscal. Net Interest Margin (NIM) stood at 6.8%, down 129 bps from 8.1% for the last quarter of FY20. The bank said NIM in Q4FY21 was at 8.8%, excluding one time interest reversal on NPA and interest on interest. Private sector lender Bandhan Bank on Saturday reported an 80% year-on-year fall in net profit for the quarter ending March, to Rs 103.03 crore on the back of additional provisions on non-performing assets (NPAs). The Kolkata-based bank had posted Rs 517.28 crore net profit in the fourth quarter of FY2019-20. The lender's total provision and contingencies during the fourth quarter of FY2020-21 rose 92.7% y-o-y to Rs 1594.30 crore from Rs 827.36 crore in the same quarter previous fiscal. Yes Bank, Axis bank, FPIs, LIC, yes bank



Bandhan Bank, Adani Ports stocks in focus today During the period under review, gross NPAs as a percentage of total loans increased 569 basis points quarter-on-quarter to 6.8% from 1.11% during the third quarter last fiscal. The bank's proforma GNPA had stood at 7.12% in Q3FY21. During Q4FY21, net NPA

ratio rose by 325 bps q-o-q at 3.51%. Chandra Shekhar Ghosh, MD and CEO, Bandhan Bank, said a very challenging year ended on a positive note with growth and collection coming back to normalcy. "With accelerated provisioning and write off, we are now well placed as we enter FY22. We remain cautious but confident as we deal with the Covid 19 second wave," Ghosh said. During the fourth quarter, the bank wrote-off Rs 1930 crore worth of loans, where Rs 1876 crore was from the microfinance segment. "Our bank did not restructure any loan in the microfinance segment, while Rs 617 crore of housing finance was restructured," Ghosh said. In microfinance segment, the lender's collection efficiency, including NPA and written-off borrowers, at the end of March 31, 2021, stood at 95% as against 92% at the end of December 31, 2020. At end of the last quarter of FY21, collection efficiency,

excluding NPA and written-off borrowers, was 98% as per value. Net Interest Income (NII) for the quarter grew 4.58% to Rs 1757.01 crore as against Rs 1,680.04 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous year. Net Interest Margin (NIM) stood at 6.8%, down 129 bps from 8.1% for the last quarter of FY20. The bank said NIM in Q4FY21 was at 8.8%, excluding one time interest reversal on NPA and interest on interest. During the last fiscal, total advances grew 21.2% to Rs 87,042.9 crore as against Rs 71,846 crore as on March 31, 2020. "Our customers got experiences from the first wave of Covid. Now, they know how to deal with the pandemic situation and lockdowns. Compared to the nationwide lockdowns last year, this time we are having state-wise and region-wise lockdowns to combat Covid second wave. So, we expect this time customers' businesses would not be impacted that much as compared to the last year," Ghosh said, adding thus, for the bank, FY22 would be better compared to FY21.

How India is leading by example with its faceless E-assessment system for income tax

Mumbai, May 9 : Over the past few years, one of the key focus areas of the Union government reforming taxes initiating from GST as a great transformation in indirect taxes, waving towards Direct taxes in Assessment Procedure is by introducing a faceless e-assessment system for income tax. In fact, India is one of the few countries in the world to adopt such a system. E-assessment will bring an epitome shift in taxation by expelling the human touch in the tax assessment of the Income Tax system.

dent is required to file an Income Tax Return only if his total income, from all sources (after giving effect to exemption in respect of income from NRE account) exceeds maximum amount not chargeable to tax (i.e. Rs 2.5 lakh). Your Queries - Income Tax: Gains from share trading taxed under business profit, file ITR 3/4 Govt extends timelines for tax compliance, ITR for FY20 can be filed till May 31 In short, this scheme is a manner of conducting trials in an automated way that involves dynamic authority. This



Cases for scrutiny are transferred to assessment units in a random manner, using automated algorithms which are generated by computer. Then, notices are issued electronically by a Central Centre, the National e-Assessment Centre, without disclosing the identity of the assessment officer. The NeAC is the single point of faceless contact between the taxpayer and the I-T Department and follows a team-based approach. non-resi-

scheme removes the unwanted methods that appear when there is a chance for individual biases and subjective judgment. The anonymous nature of the method can discourage high-pitched assessments and result in objective, truthful and simply assessment orders, which may be finalised in a very short time. The ministry of finance has notified a revised Form 26AS, which has additional details on taxpayers' high-value finan-

cial transactions, like cash deposits/withdrawals and property purchases undertaken during a financial year. This can facilitate validation of all offered data facilitating the seamless implementation of the primary section of the faceless assessment. Under the new system, taxpayers won't be needed to go to territorial jurisdiction tax officers or the I-T Department on receiving tax scrutiny or assessment notices, preclusive the necessity for face-to-face interactions. This can bring an end to any doable harassment of honest taxpayers. The system is additionally expected to evoke a considerable increase in trust within the system by creating the method transparent and taxpayer-friendly. The theme is about to evoke a hassle- and harassment-free faceless assessment for the honest taxpayers and can foster some non-adversarial & contributive tax surroundings. Broadly, The Central cell shall serve a notice on the assessee specifying the issues for selection of his case for assessment. In response to that notice, the assessee may file his response within 15 days from the date of receipt of notice. NeAC would assign cases to specific assessment units through an automated allocation system, thus involving dynamic authority. At any stage where a modification prejudicial to the taxpayer is proposed, NeAC shall give opportunity of being heard to the taxpayer to explain its perspective before the judgement conclusion. This could include representation through video conferencing. Once the assessment is completed, the Central cell will transfer all electronic records to the authorised tax officer for penalty imposition, prosecution pro-

ceedings, recovery of demand, etc. The most important aspect of new procedure is coverage of 'Best judgement assessment' in faceless Assessment Scheme. Earlier, best judgement assessment in cases of non-cooperating taxpayers could be done only by jurisdiction AO. Territorial AOs might someday be aware of taxpayers and contact/Convince them to get together with tax authorities to punctually complete the assessment proceedings, particularly in cases where taxpayers would miss the notices unknowingly. Now, even in those cases, wherever payer doesn't abide by at intervals given timeframe, best judgement may be done beneath directions of NeAC, which can lead to adverse best judgement for taxpayers. Therefore it's better for the sake of taxpayers to punctually fit notices given during this scheme. Over the last few years, the Income Tax Department has undergone a revamp in its approach, from being just a revenue-collecting concern to becoming a more citizen-centric one. The faceless e-assessment system is another step in this direction and takes forward the government's drive towards improving the taxpayers' perspective towards IT department by making available various functionalities online. The system comes at a very apt time, wherein the digital nature of the process ensures continuity in period of the Covid-19 pandemic. If it gets implemented successfully, India can be an example for the rest of the world in leveraging technology for curbing undesirable practices and offering better services to its tax-paying citizens.

India, European Union to resume FTA negotiations after 8 years

Mumbai, May 9 : As part of the agreement, India and the EU will move towards finding solutions to long-standing market access issues and launch negotiations on a stand-alone investment protection agreement. The two sides also agreed to launch negotiations for two key pacts on investment protection and geographical indications. India and European Union (EU) on Saturday agreed to enhance the bilateral trade and investment relationship through the resumption of negotiations for a balanced, ambitious, comprehensive and mutually beneficial trade agreement, eight years after its suspension, the external affairs ministry said. The two sides also agreed to launch negotiations for two key pacts on investment protection and geographical indications. India's exports to EU member countries stood at about USD 54 billion in 2019-20, while imports aggregated at USD 52 billion. Indian industry will welcome resumption of India-EU FTA talks: CII How India is leading by example with its faceless E-assessment system for income tax These decisions were taken during a virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the heads of state or governments of all the 27-member states of the European bloc with a focus on expanding overall cooperation in trade, investment and connectivity. The move to end the stalemate over the trade talks that were frozen in 2013 due to differences on key issues such as market access and mobility of professionals and resume the dialogue, was announced in a joint statement launched at the EU-India virtual summit in Porto. The summit was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leaders of all the 27 member coun-

tries of the EU, Charles Michel, President of the European Council and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission. Modi also called out to the EU to support the vaccine patent waiver. The EU leaders also expressed solidarity with India on the ongoing crisis triggered by upsurge in Covid 19 cases and deaths. As part of the agreement, India and the EU will move towards finding solutions to long-standing market access issues and launch negotiations on a stand-alone investment protection agreement. The



two sides agreed to create a joint working group to intensify regulatory cooperation on goods and services, including but not limited to the green and digital technologies. This would be complemented by the agreement to set up a joint working group on resilient supply chains, building on the experience gained from the Covid-19 pandemic. To further strengthen coordination on global economic governance, notably in the WTO and in the G20, India and the EU agreed to set up an EU-India senior officials' dialogue to deepen bilateral cooperation on WTO issues, under the supervision of the High-Level Dialogue on Trade and Investment. Another important outcome, India and the EU launched a sustainable and comprehensive 'Connectivity Partnership' that will promote rules based connectivity based on a level playing field for economic operators.

Contd. From Page 1

Himanta Biswa Sarma to take oath as Assam CM today at

in New Delhi on Saturday. Senior BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma has been chosen as the chief minister of Assam for the first time. Sarma, who was chosen for the top job replacing outgoing CM Sarbananda Sonowal, has an image as a dynamic minister. He is one of the most influential political leaders in the Northeast right now and known as the key strategist and trouble-shooter of the BJP in the region. Sarma, who is also the convenor of the North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), a BJP-led umbrella organization of the regional parties in the Northeast, played a key role in containing the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the state last year. By taking a lot of pro-active measures to curb the pandemic, Sarma as a health minister managed to change the impression of the people towards the BJP-led government, the popularity of which was eroded following the CAA movement. Sarma, a four-time minister, was first elected to the Assam Assembly from the Jalukbari seat in 2001 when he defeated AGP candidate Bhriku Kumar Phukan. He went on to win all the subsequent elections by huge margins of votes from Jalukbari. Sarma, who switched to the BJP from the Congress, is credited as the architect who played a key role in making the BJP inroad in the Northeast. 52-year-old Sarma had quit the Tarun Gogoi-led Congress government in 2015 and subsequently joined the BJP. Except for home, Sarma handled almost all the key portfolios including finance, PWD, health and education in the Sarbananda Sonowal BJP government. Born on February 1, 1969, in Guwahati to Kailash Nath Sarma and Mrinalini Devi, Sarma did his schooling at the city's Kamrup Academy School. He completed his graduation and post-graduation from Cotton College. He was general secretary of Cotton College Student's Union (CCSU) from 1991 to 1992. Sarma did LLB from Government Law College and obtained Ph.D. degree from Gauhati University.

Congress, AIUDF greet Assam CM-elect Himanta Biswa Sarma

convenor of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), the NDA's version in the region, on being elected as the BJP's Legislative Party leader. "I hope Dr. Sharma with his experience and dedication will pull out Assam from the critical juncture it is at. I wish him a successful tenure (sic)," the Lok Sabha MP said in a Twitter post. The Congress had formed a "Grand Alliance" with the AIUDF and several other parties to contest the assembly election. Out of the 126 Assembly seats in Assam, the ruling alliance has secured 75 seats. The BJP has won 60 seats, while its alliance partners, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) got nine and six seats respectively.

Himanta Biswa Sarma meet Governor Jagdish

Kalakshetra in Guwahati on Monday at 12pm. Along with Himanta Biswa Sarma, who will take oath as the new Chief Minister of Assam, several other MLAs are also likely to be sworn-in as cabinet ministers. According to reports, Himanta Biswa Sarma is likely to keep the portfolios of Home, Finance and Health with himself. Meanwhile, allies of the BJP – the AGP and the UPPL have also extended their support to Himanta Biswa Sarma as the new chief minister of Assam. Preparations are underway at the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra in Guwahati for the swearing-in ceremony. The Kamrup-Metro district administration is ensuring that every SOP and COVID-19 protocol is being put in place for the swearing in ceremony. "We are looking into that the ceremony is being done while maintaining every SOP, adhering COVID-19 protocols," Kamrup-Metro DC Biswajit Pegu said. Assam DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta also visited the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra in Guwahati and took stock of the security arrangements for the swearing-in ceremony.

"Can't Afford Leniency": Delhi To Have "Stricter Lockdown"

hospitals to their knees and pushing patients and doctors to look to social media for help amid a huge crisis of oxygen, beds and drugs. "During the lockdown we utilised the time to enhance our healthcare infrastructure. The main issue in Delhi was oxygen shortage. With Centre's help, the condition is better now," the Chief Minister said. Amid a bitter fight with the Centre over oxygen availability in the Delhi High Court, the Supreme Court, which had taken up the issue, ordered the formation of a 12-member National Task Force to assess availability and distribution of medical oxygen. "We expect leading experts in the country shall associate with the Task Force, as members and resource persons," the court had said in its final order on Friday. Many states have also been hobbled by the shortage of vaccines, which have emerged as the key hope as the country grapples with the second wave of the virus. The Chief Minister said he was hopeful that the Centre will "help us deal with the vaccine shortage". While vaccines may not be able to entirely keep away the virus -- which has undergone several mutations -- they can markedly reduce the severity of the disease and consequently the pressure on hospitals and bring down the mortality rate, doctors have said. India recorded 4,03,738 fresh Covid cases and 4,092 deaths over the last 24 hours, taking the overall case count to 2.22 crore, showed data from the health ministry. This is the fifth time in a week that the country has reported over 4 lakh daily infections.

Amid COVID-19 crisis, 42 countries pitch in to help India with

has increased from 5700 MT to 9480 MT but it needs to be supplemented. From international assistance, India has got 20,000 oxygen cylinders, 11,000 oxygen concentrators, 30 oxygen tankers and 75 oxygen generator plants. Out of the 30 Oxygen tankers, only 9 have reached and the remaining 21 tankers are yet to be delivered. The Ministry of External Affairs can assist to get global players to set up 50,000MT plants. A total of 1172 oxygen tankers are being put in place, 102,400 oxygen cylinders are being procured, 1 lakh oxygen concentrators are being procured. When it comes to Remdesivir, the aim is to produce 1 crore in the country or around 3 lakh per day. American biopharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences on Saturday sent 1.5 lakh vials of Remdesivir. From Egypt-based Eva Pharma, India will be getting 4 lakh doses of Remdesivir. India has got quotations from Bangladesh, Germany, Uzbekistan, and UAE. All in all, India will get 16 lakh vials of Remdesivir from these sources. Focus also on the alternate antiviral drug tocilizumab, with Switzerland-based Roche increasing its supply by 60 times. India is getting 11,000 vials, and 21,000 more vials are expected of tocilizumab, usually given in the initial stages of covid. India is getting favipiravir from Russia, RoActemra from other sources. India's missions and posts are coordinating efforts of procuring as well as making sure that the assistance by foreign countries reaches the country as it battles the covid pandemic. As the 2nd wave hit the country, the ministry of external affairs's COVID cell was reactivated. The COVID cell formed last year, has around 15-20 IFS officers, mostly young officers, and is headed by Damnu Ravi who is the Additional Secretary coordinating all issues under it. Naveen Srivastava and Vinay Kumar are the other 2 MEA officials, who are part of the entire coordination effort against covid. While Naveen represents MEA at the empowered panels on coordinating against COVID, Vinay deals with vaccine efforts like Vaccine Maitri and others. While a lot of support has come in from across the globe, many leaders have recalled how India had reached out to the world community when they needed medicines and other essentials. US President Joe Biden recently said, "when we were in a bind at the very beginning, India helped us." In 2020, India had sent HCQ to the US when it was battling the covid pandemic. Charles, Prince of Wales, the heir apparent to the British throne in a message for India said, "As India has helped others, so now must we help India". Even as International assistance helps to bridge the short-term capacity constraints, the Centre aims to ramp up capacity.

Chinese Rocket Segment Plunges Back To Earth, Crashes Near

the rocket actually went into the Indian Ocean north of the Maldives," it tweeted. The segment's descent matched expert predictions that any debris would have splashed down into the ocean, given that 70 percent of the planet is covered by water. Because it was an uncontrolled descent, there was widespread public interest and speculation about where the debris would land. American and European space authorities were among those tracking the rocket and trying to predict its re-entry. Objects generate immense amounts of heat and friction when they enter the atmosphere, which can cause them to burn up and disintegrate. But larger ones such as the Long March-5B may not be destroyed entirely. Their wreckage can land on the surface of the planet and may cause damage and casualties, though that risk is low. Last year, debris from another Chinese Long March rocket fell on villages in the Ivory Coast, causing structural damage but no injuries or deaths. That, and the one that came down Sunday, are tied for the fourth-biggest objects in history to undergo an uncontrolled re-entry, according to data from Harvard-based astronomer Jonathan McDowell. The uncertainty and risks of such a re-entry sparked accusations that Beijing had behaved irresponsibly. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin suggested last week that China had been negligent, and NASA Administrator Bill Nelson echoed that after the re-entry on Sunday. "Spacefaring nations must minimize the risks to people and property on Earth of re-entries of space objects and maximize transparency regarding those operations," Nelson said in a statement. "It is clear that China is failing to meet responsible standards regarding their space debris." To avoid such scenarios, some experts have recommended a redesign of the Long March-5B rocket -- which is not equipped for a controlled descent. "An ocean reentry was always statistically the most likely," McDowell tweeted. "It appears China won its gamble (unless we get news of debris in the Maldives). But it was still reckless." Chinese authorities had downplayed the risk, however. "The probability of causing harm to aviation activities or (on people and activities) on the ground is extremely low," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said Friday. Beijing has poured billions of dollars into space exploration to boost its global stature and technological might. The launch of the first module of its space station -- by the Long March rocket that came down Sunday -- was a milestone in its ambitious plan to establish a permanent human presence in space.

36 crore Indians to get Russia's Sputnik V jabs by March 2022

just not that Sputnik V in the focus, India is looking at Moderna and the Quad Vaccine initiative under which vaccines will be produced in the country. When it comes to constraints for raw material for vaccines from the US, the issue has been resolved with Washington making an announcement on it days ago. But perhaps the biggest breakthrough has been the US extending support to the proposal for waiver of intellectual property rights on COVID vaccines. Being termed as something that will make a "huge difference" on the ground, it will help in the production of covid vaccines at a huge scale as removes legal impediments. For example, India's serum institute can make vaccines under the license by AstraZeneca, and these vaccines can be exported to some geographic areas. The matter was raised by PM Modi with US President during their talks on 26th April. According to officials, the Indian PM had told President Biden that it an opportunity to make a difference.

South Africa detects four cases of the Indian variant of coronavirus

KwaZulu-Natal (2) and all have a history of a recent arrival from India. All cases have been isolated and managed according to the national COVID-19 case management guidelines and contact tracing has been performed in order to limit the spread of this variant," Mkhize said in a statement on Saturday. The minister's statement was released amid growing concerns in the last fortnight about the Indian variant spreading after the crew of two ships travelling between the two countries tested positive for the virus. "We reiterate that there is no need for panic, as the fundamentals of the public health response (testing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine) have not changed," Mkhize said. "It is important to emphasise that variants can develop at any time in any country so they do not have to be imported. The world is still grappling with the coronavirus pandemic, with surges in one territory bound to spill over into other territories." We are all deeply concerned about the threat of 'variants of concern' and these reports demonstrate that the issue is complicated," the minister said. Mkhize said travel restrictions will need to be balanced against the scientific realities in order to protect the economy. "These findings are urgently being processed by the government and announcements pertaining to travel regulations will be made after all appropriate consultations have been undertaken by the Cabinet," he said. Mkhize did not specify if any of the four Indian variant cases were among the crew of the ships which recently returned from India. One of the ships has been docked in Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. The other ship has been docked in Gebeherba (formerly Port Elizabeth), where police are investigating possible charges against the Ship Captain for falsely declaring that there were no ill crew onboard. Eleven cases of the B.1.1.7 variant, first detected in the UK, have also been identified in South Africa. "The B.1.1.7 (strain) has been detected in community samples and this, therefore, suggests that community transmission of B.1.1.7 has already set in," Mkhize said. "As the epidemic progresses, the detection of new variants is inevitable. The work of genomic surveillance assists us to detect the variants and understand their behaviour and to refine vaccines so they remain effective," he said. The B.1.351 strain, which was first detected in South Africa, has been found in a traveller from Bangladesh. "There are a number of other samples from cases with a history of recent travel into South Africa that are currently being sequenced and results are expected over the next few days," Mkhize concluded. The coronavirus has so far killed 54,687 people in South Africa, along with over 1.59 million confirmed cases, according to John Hopkins University. The Indian variant is believed to be largely behind the current surge in infections in India, which is experiencing a deadly second wave of the pandemic.

17.56 crore COVID vaccine doses provided so far, over 72 lakh jabs

vaccine doses (72,42,014) are still available with states and UTs to be administered. States with negative balance are showing more consumption (including wastage) than vaccine supplied as they have not reconciled the vaccine they have supplied to the armed forces," the ministry said. Furthermore, more than 46 lakh (46,61,960) vaccine doses will be received in addition by states and UTs within the next three days, it said. Vaccination forms an integral component of the five-point strategy of the Centre's plan for the containment and management of the pandemic (including Test, Track, Treat and COVID-appropriate Behaviour), the ministry said.

Mali woman has given birth to nine babies, says health ministry

Morocco, May 9 : Halima Cisse was expected to have septuplets but apparently gave birth to very rare nonuplets - five girls and four boys - at a hospital in Morocco. Halima Cisse, who is from Mali, gave birth to nine babies in hospital in Morocco. She and the babies are 'doing well'. A woman in Mali has given birth to nine babies - two more than doctors had detected inside her womb - according to the country's health ministry, joining a

small pantheon of mothers of nonuplets. Halima Cisse, 25, had been expected to give birth to seven babies, according to ultrasounds conducted in Morocco and Mali that missed two of the siblings. All were delivered by caesarean section. The pregnancy of Cisse has fascinated the west African nation and attracted the attention of its leaders. When doctors in March said Cisse needed specialist care, the country's transitional leader,

Bah Ndaw, ordered that she be sent to Morocco, where she gave birth to five girls and four boys, according to Mali's health ministry. "The mother and babies are doing well so far," Mali's health minister, Fanta Siby, told Agence France-Presse, adding that she had been kept informed by the Malian doctor who accompanied Cisse to Morocco. They are due to return home in several weeks' time, she added. However, Morocco's health

ministry spokesman Rachid Koudhari said he had no knowledge of such a multiple birth having taken place in one of the country's hospitals. Doctors had been concerned about Cisse's health, according to local press reports, as well as her babies' chances of survival. Nonuplets are extremely rare. Medical complications in multiple births of this kind often mean that some of the babies do not survive.

Following COVID norms, vaccination main defence against all future waves: Experts

New Delhi, May 9 : Even as India reels under the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns over about a possible third wave, experts claimed that if people keep following COVID-appropriate behaviour and more people get vaccinated the next wave could be less severe. Many experts opined that the complacency in approach towards the virus after the dip in cases during the first wave could be a possible reason for the pandemic rearing its ugly head again, though others are blaming the new virulent, mutated variants of the coronavirus. "Early this year, as the new cases receded, people started interacting as if there was no virus. The immunity had already started declining. They organised mass gatherings, they stopped wearing masks, giving the opportunity to the virus to strike again," Dr Anurag Agarwal, director, Institute of Genomics and Integral Biology was quoted. While some experts believe that every mutation cannot be a cause of concern and genome sequencing of a virus is done to keep a track of any mutation that can make a virus more dangerous. Dr Saumitra Das, Director, National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG), Kalyani, and professor, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore said, "What concerns us is whether a mutation is making it more transmissible, or virulent; whether a mutation has the potential to make the existing medicines or vaccines ineffective against the virus. If so, the mutant is classified as a variant of concern (VoC)." Last week, K VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser, had said that the third wave was inevitable and it was necessary to be prepared for new waves, but clarified two days later that the "insidious asymptomatic transmission" can be stopped if prescribed guidelines about precautions, surveillance, containment, treatment and testing are followed. "If we take strong measures, the third wave may not happen in all places or indeed anywhere at all. It depends on much how effectively guidance is implemented at the local level in the states, districts and cities everywhere," he said. Experts have warned that in a few months people would have developed immunity naturally or with the help of vaccination and when that fades the virus will strike again and the only thing that can stop the virus from bouncing back is how people are guarding themselves. Meanwhile, India recorded 4,03,738 fresh COVID-19 cases pushing the country's cumulative tally to 2,22,96,414, while the death toll climbed to 2,42,362 with 4,092 daily deaths, on Sunday morning as per data released by the Union Health Ministry.

Nirmala Sitharaman responds to Mamata Banerjee's letter on COVID-19 tax

New Delhi, May 9 : She further said that if Integrated GST (IGST) Rs 100 is collected on an item, Rs 50 accrues to the Centre and the States each as Central GST and State GST respectively. Further 41 percent of the CGST revenue is devoted to States. So out of a collection of Rs 100, as much as Rs 70.50 is the share of the states. Currently, domestic supplies and commercial imports of vaccines attract a 5 percent Goods and Services Tax (GST), while it is 12 percent in the case of COVID drugs and oxygen concentrators. She further said that if Integrated GST (IGST) Rs 100 is collected on an item, Rs 50 accrues to the Centre and the States each as Central GST and State GST respectively. From the GST collected on vaccines, half is earned by the Centre and the other half by the States. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said GST exemption to domestic supplies and commercial import of COVID drugs, vaccines and oxygen concentrators would make these items costlier for consumers as manufacturers would not be able to offset the taxes paid on inputs. Currently, domestic supplies and commercial imports of vaccines attract a 5 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST), while it is 12 per cent in the case of COVID drugs and oxygen concentrators. "If full exemption from GST is given, vaccine manufacturers would not be able to offset their input taxes and would pass them on to the end consumer/citizen by increasing the price. A 5 per cent GST rate ensures that the manufacturer is able to utilise ITC and in case of overflow of ITC, claim refund. Hence exemption to the vaccine from GST would be counterproductive without benefiting the consumer," Sitharaman tweeted. She further said that if Integrated GST (IGST) Rs 100 is collected on an item, Rs 50 accrues to the Centre and the States each as Central GST and State GST respectively. Further 41 percent of the CGST revenue is devoted to States. So out of a collection of Rs 100, as much as Rs 70.50 is the share of the states. From the GST collected on vaccines, half is earned by the Centre and the other half by the States. Further, 41 per cent of the Centre's collections also get devolved to the States. So states end up receiving almost 70 per cent of the total revenue collected from vaccines. "In fact, a nominal 5 per cent GST is in the interest of the domestic manufacturer of vaccines and in the interest of the citizens," Sitharaman said. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee earlier in the day wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking exemption from GST and customs duty any donations of oxygen concentrators, cylinders, cryogenic storage tanks and COVID related drugs from organisations or agencies. The Finance Minister tweeted her response to the Chief Minister's letter, saying these items are already exempted from customs duty and health cess. Besides, Integrated GST (IGST) is also exempted on all COVID relief material imported by the Indian Red Cross for free distribution in the country. Also, IGST exemption has been given in case of goods imported free of cost for free distribution in the country by any entity, state government, relief agency or autonomous body on the basis of a certificate issued by a state government. "In order to augment the availability of these items, the government has also provided full exemption from basic customs duty and health cess to their commercial imports," Sitharaman said. The government has already exempted from customs duty import of a host of COVID-related relief materials, including Remdesivir injection and its APIs, Inflammatory diagnostic (markers) kits, medical grade oxygen, oxygen therapy-related equipment such as oxygen concentrators, cryogenic transport tanks, etc, and Covid vaccines. Besides, effective May 3, the government exempted IGST on import of COVID-relief material received as donation for free distribution in the country, a move which helped speed up customs clearances of such imports. This exemption would be subject to nodal authorities, appointed by the state governments, authorising any entity, relief agency or statutory body, for free distribution of such relief material. The said goods can be imported free of cost by a state government or any entity/relief agency/statutory body, authorized in this regard for free distribution anywhere in India.

There are no easy answers to how football tackles its unloved billionaire owners

Barcelona, May 9 : Whether you see in the demonstrations at Old Trafford last week an outrageous affront to law and decency or a legitimate mode of dissent, a public expression at last of long-held grievances, it is clear, perhaps for the first time in English football, that there is a real sense of militancy among fans. With the super-clubs in retreat, the possibility of change appears real - or at least more real than it has been for years. In which case fans should probably work out what they want. Already it is notable that the serious protests have been focused at the two super-clubs who have most reason to be frustrated with their owners. The mutinous mood of the past few weeks feels multi-layered. Manchester United and Arsenal fans both have specific issues with their American billionaire owners that go far beyond a lack of success on the pitch, feeding into a broader sense that football is being taken away from its roots and the people to whom it used to "belong". This is happening in a country beginning to emerge from lockdown into intense financial uncertainty; there is a lot of pent-up energy which may dissipate as life returns to something like normal - or it may not, particularly if the economic situation worsens. Rows over procurement may be too abstract really to ignite public fury; the way football clubs, great unprotected social institutions, have been taken over by hedge funds, oligarchs and sheikhs is perhaps a more immediate example of modern capitalism. Football, suddenly, is an active political topic in a way it has not been in Britain for years - and that happens at a critical point, just as it seems domestic broadcast rights may have peaked. There has been a lot of talk about Germany's 50+1 model, which guarantees the influence of fans. Nobody, surely, thinks greater fan representation would be a bad idea but that is only one part of the problem, demonstrated by Bayern's domestic



dominance. Fan representation is of limited importance without a new financial settlement. This is not straightforward. Change the system in one area and you rapidly create an imbalance elsewhere. Take, for instance, the hard salary cap introduced in Leagues One and Two last August and subsequently scrapped after a challenge from the Professional Footballers' Association. Broadly speaking, the smaller clubs voted in favour and the larger clubs, feeling they were being artificially handicapped, were against it. The regulations were intended to protect clubs pushed to the brink by the pandemic but, had they remained in place for any protracted period, would have opened a gulf between League One and the Championship. What was right for Accrington Stanley was not right for Sunderland. A show of defiance on the Old Trafford pitch made headlines but to what extent would fans be prepared to sacrifice that for a more equitable model? Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images So let's go back to basics. Presumably most fans would accept some kind of elite: the idea of 92 league teams with precisely equal resources is not merely impractical but boring. Big clubs have glamour. Everybody relishes playing - and having the chance to beat - Manchester United and Arsenal;

golden memories are not made of triumphs over Generic Team of Roughly Equal Ability XLVI. But how many elite clubs should there be, and how elite should they be? Historically, English super-clubs have been less elite than elsewhere. Manchester United are the most successful club in league history but have won only 20 titles, approximately 16% of the total possible. That compares with Bayern, who have won more than half of all Bundesliga titles, Juventus with 38% of Serie A titles and Real Madrid with around the same percentage of La Liga titles (although in all leagues the trend is increasingly to a small elite). That is only one measure of competitiveness. There have, say, been 24 different champions in England, more than twice as many as in Italy, Germany or Spain - although the English league is much older than the other three. In the past 20 years 14 different sides have finished in the top four in Spain, 13 in Germany, 12 in Italy and 10 in England. What is optimal? There probably is no right answer. Having a Big Two or Four or Six seems unhelpful. Championship clubs overspend to bridge the gap to the Premier League, and parachute payments exist to ease the passage of teams going in the other direction, which itself elevates the Championship a significant level above League One. But there is a

fundamental problem here: success will always tend to be self-perpetuating. A team that wins earns more prize money, generates larger gate receipts, earns more in television revenues. They can buy better players which in turn makes them more attractive to fans, generating more money to be invested. If there is not to be a self-perpetuating elite, there has to be subsidy. That is why, until 1983, home clubs in England gave 25% of gate receipts to away sides, a form of redistribution that helped mitigate the advantage enjoyed by clubs with big stadiums. The foundation of the Premier League was the final break from that model which recognised the responsibilities of the big clubs to the small. The elite could take a greater share of available revenues and stop worrying about what the likes of Rochdale or Cambridge thought. It is easy to scorn the Premier League but the investment its advent made possible has radically improved facilities and the quality of football. To what extent would fans be prepared to sacrifice that for a more equitable model? How much say should Mansfield have over the affairs of Manchester United? Would saving Bury have been worth the elite being less able to challenge Barcelona? The presence of externally wealthy owners, who in effect mean clubs do not need to generate their revenues through football, complicates matters further. But the issue of redistribution is key. There has been a lot of talk of solidarity but, unless the problem of the tendency of success to self-perpetuate is tackled, unless fans of the super-clubs face up to the question of subsidy and redistribution, the disaffected are essentially just hoping to exchange these billionaire owners for better ones. The bigger problem is that billionaire owners are needed in the first place.

Manchester United lose £200m training kit deal over fans' anti-Glazers campaign

Manchester, May 9 : Manchester United have missed out on a proposed new training kit deal worth £200m over 10 years after the

Manchester-based company The Hut Group had concerns about the supporters' campaign to boycott the club's commercial partners in protest



at the Glaziers' ownership, the Observer understands. Richard Arnold, United's group managing director, was told on Friday that THG had pulled out of a contract which was due to start on 1 July. The branding of Myprotein, a Cheshire firm owned by THG, was due to appear on United's training kit and replace the branding of AON, sponsors of the club's Carrington training centre. Last Sunday's supporter protest against the Glaziers outside Old Trafford led to United's game with Liverpool being postponed until the coming Thursday. THG, it is understood, was taken aback by the subsequent social media and online backlash against United's partners. An anonymous United fans group with the hashtag NOTAPENYMORE launched an online campaign to boycott the club's major partners, which include Adidas, TAG Heuer

and Cadbury, and wrote an open letter to them vowing to target their products. It is understood THG, a multibillion pound company with offices near Manchester Airport, was concerned that as a local business it would be targeted by disaffected fans in Greater Manchester. AON's agreement expires on 30 June, which means United may struggle to strike a new deal of similar value to that proposed with THG. The Glaziers' move to join the now defunct European Super League heightened the supporter opposition towards the American family. There was also some disillusionment and embarrassment within the club at senior level about how the ESL breakaway was presented. Both THG and United declined to comment, with those familiar with the deal at Old Trafford confirming there are no ongoing talks.

Manchester United review security plan with further fan protests expected

Manchester, May 9 : Manchester United are reviewing their use of the Lowry hotel before home games and their other security arrangements after last Sunday's protests caused the postponement of their match against Liverpool. United stay at the Lowry, in the city centre and a 20-minute drive from Old Trafford. While it is understood that the club has been contacted by other hotels in the area to offer their services, United are taking advice from Greater Manchester police and their own security staff. United's next home match is Tuesday's visit of Leicester City before Thursday's rearranged fixture with Liverpool when fans are planning another protest outside the stadium. Last Sunday's disturbances reflected deep disaffection with the club's American owners, the Glaziers, and resulted in a number of individuals breaking into Old Trafford and injury to police officers. The protest was widely condemned, and

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, United's manager, was asked if the club are considering different arrangements for the Leicester fixture. "We want to keep it as normal as possible of course, because you like to prepare for games in a certain manner," he said. "It's impossible to prepare as we normally do with only one day in between the games. So the prep will be different but the off-field stuff hopefully we'll keep it as normal as possible." Because of the Liverpool game being rescheduled, United face a hectic schedule of four matches in 10 days starting with Sunday's trip to Aston Villa and ending with Fulham's visit on 18 May. After their league

season ends against Wolves on 23 May, United face Villarreal in the Europa League final three days later, having sealed aggregate victory over Roma on Thursday. While Solskjaer did not criticise supporters, he said the hostility towards the Glaziers is an issue: "It makes it more difficult for me and more difficult for the players." We have to focus on getting results and we've come a long way. We've got to a final now and we just want to focus on doing what we do but doing it better. And hopefully the fans will see that we are working in the right way. "I want us all to come together and unite and get up the table and that is my responsibility. I will do what I can to get us one step further in Europe and one step further in the league." He hopes to end the club's four-year trophy drought against Villarreal: "We've had a long spell with no trophies and no finals and now we've got a chance and I feel that the team is ready for it."



Lewis Hamilton makes history by claiming 100th F1 pole at Spanish GP

London, May 9 : Lewis Hamilton was unable to hide his delight as he celebrated his 100th pole position in Formula One with the same unbridled joy that marked his first. In claiming the top spot for Sunday's Spanish Grand Prix this was a unique century for a unique driver, the first time any F1 driver has reached the century as yet another milestone fell to the world champion. Hamilton has never chased records but it was clear from the moment he climbed from his cockpit and celebrated that this felt special. It is said a batsman reaching a ton on this form is seeing the bowler's ball "like a beachball". Hamilton has his eye in and has long been wielding his car in imperious style. Flawless again, he beat Red Bull's Max Verstappen into second by three-hundredths of a second at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya and his Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas into third. What a rollercoaster ride it has been for the 36-year-old Briton now in his 15th season in F1. He took his first pole in his debut season in 2007 when he was 22 for McLaren at the Canadian GP. It was the first time he had been given the same weight of fuel as his then teammate, the double world champion Fernando Alonso, and the fresh-faced rookie made his point decisively, putting almost half a second on the Spaniard. "In 2007 that was special and it felt amazing that I was able to do what I did back then. Here we are 100 poles later and it still feels young. I feel good to keep going," he said. "It is crazy that it's 100 but it felt like one of the first. I don't feel like I can compute it right now, it is such a huge number. It's hard to express just how crazy it is and how amazing it is." Hamilton thought his lap here had been great but his career has been lit by some stellar poles. His lap in Singapore in 2018 remains one of the most sublime qualifying runs in F1. Threading the needle through the barriers of the street circuit, he was untouchable. The margins were enormous by F1 standards, three-tenths up on Verstappen in second and a full six-tenths on Sebastian Vettel. At the Styrian GP last year, in treacherous conditions he pushed to the limit and no one could come close, with Verstappen second, 1.2sec down. Then there was

Korea in 2011 in the McLaren, with a perfect piece of driving against the odds in Yeongam. Hamilton was the only non-Red Bull driver to claim pole that season. At Silverstone in 2013 there was a similarly special run, finishing almost half a second up on Vettel, and at Monza in the wet in 2017 conditions some had described as undrivable were simply a spur to Hamilton, who rode the spray on a knife edge to finish over a second up on the field. There are countless more and he has made the exceptional look like something that comes with ease. However, his record is testament to rigorous self-analysis. He has made a concerted effort to improve his single-lap form and in a discipline decided



by inches, across micro-seconds, Hamilton has become adept at finding the most marginal of gains. Nor can his success be dismissed with the tired refrain of simply driving the fastest car. He has scored at least one pole in every season in which he has competed in F1 and that includes 26 for McLaren in often a far from a dominant car and a competitive field. In 2017 Ferrari largely had the quicker car yet Hamilton outscored Vettel by 11-4 that year and similarly in 2018 by 11-5. Hamilton does not follow the numbers but when he considers them later they can only be cause for satisfaction. He has his ton from just 270 meetings and has opened a yawning chasm to two of the sport's greatest drivers. Michael Schumacher took 39 more meetings than Hamilton to claim his 68 poles, while Hamilton's childhood hero Ayrton Senna scored 65. Like the true greats he has been both relentless and compelling in amassing a tally that is hard to imagine ever being matched - and for the moment at least, Hamilton has every intention of batting on for more.

Arsenal's squad needs changing, admits struggling Mikel Arteta



London, May 9 : Mikel Arteta expects to be backed heavily by the Kroenke family in his efforts to reverse Arsenal's slide and accepts significant changes to a floundering

squad will be required over the summer. Arsenal host West Brom on Sunday in what is virtually a dead rubber, with the sides having purely mathematical chances of

qualifying for Europe and escaping relegation respectively. Thursday's Europa League semi-final exit to Villarreal has put Arteta in a deeply uncomfortable position and only a handful of his core first-team players seem assured of a place in his long-term plans. In trouble from top to bottom: chaotic Arsenal are failing in all areas "The squad needs changing," he said. "There were already a lot of changes in December, something that has not been done in years, but it tells us where we were. Things are going to have to change and the owners are going to back it up." Asked whether the owners had promised a sizable budget in order to carry out those alterations, Arteta nodded. Arsenal stand to lose a hefty eight-figure sum after missing out on European football in 2021-22 and, having announced a £47.8m loss in March, are braced for an even bigger financial hit next year. But the under-fire Kroenkes have suggested they are ready to help the club reverse what Arteta described as a trend of losing ground with their rivals. "Time is catching up right now," he said. "It's a trend, it's years now that this has been happening. If the distance and the margins with the rest become too big, then it's almost impossible to do it. We are still on time and we have put some very strong pillars and foundations in the last few months to do what we have to do." Arteta's job security has come under severe scrutiny in recent days but Arsenal are understood to be in no mood for a change.

Mark Selby accused of gamesmanship but faces Shaun Murphy in final

London, May 9 : Mark Selby battled past Stuart Bingham 17-15 to reach the World Snooker Championship final but was accused of gamesmanship by his opponent after their marathon match. In the other semi-final Shaun Murphy shrugged off criticism of his "theatrical" celebrations and vowed to entertain his way to a second Crucible crown after sweeping aside Kyren Wilson 17-12. Selby had been warned for slow play on Friday, then was forced to complete his win in an unprecedented period of overtime. With Selby up 16-15 as the afternoon session ticked beyond six o'clock, the pair were hauled off to make way for the return of Murphy and Wilson - the first time in the tournament's history that a semi-final has been interrupted. Bingham, the 2015 champion, who had to qualify for this year's event, said: "It was gruelling. It's tough to lose a close game like that. Funnily enough, it's the same sort of player, time in, time out, who plays slow. Does he do it on purpose or what?" "I want a free-flowing game. Everyone knows there was one shot which took three minutes. It's close to gamesmanship. I thought he had more respect but to celebrate before game ball, well I lost a bit of respect. I wouldn't do that. I don't expect anyone else to do it. It has put a sour taste in the mouth." The gruelling

progress did not bother Selby, who said: "I'm just out there to do a job and as long as I get to that magic number I couldn't care less how I play. If I need to get to 17 first I'd be out there for five days if I needed to, it wouldn't bother me one bit. Obviously you want to go out there and play well, and if you play well you are entertaining the crowd anyway." Murphy won five frames in a row in the concluding session to turn what was at one stage a 10-4 deficit into a dominant 17-12 victory over Wilson, last year's runner-up. Murphy's frequent fist-pumps did not go down well with Wilson, who accused his opponent of being "a bit over-the-top and theatrical", but Murphy retorted: "We are in a theatre and we are putting on a show. We are in the entertainment business. Everybody's been locked up and isolated for the past year and they want to see a show, and it's our job to put on a show and entertain them." There is more to winning major snooker events in front of live audiences than just hitting the cue ball in a straight line. There's a lot more that goes into it than on-the-table theatrics, and maybe that's a stone Kyren hasn't looked under yet. "Murphy, playing some of his best snooker at the venue since he sailed to the title as an unfancied qualifier in 2005, had won the final three frames of the morning session to level at 12-12.

Emma Hayes leans into lessons from geese to find Chelsea a V for victory

London, May 9 : Emma Hayes has been showing her Chelsea team films of geese flying in V formation and, by way of proving the point, does a decent impression of the birds honking encouragement to each other. Quite apart from enlivening a Zoom-enabled media address, the manager can think of no better way to limber up for Sunday's Women's Super League title denouement than reminding her formidable squad about the importance of teamwork. "I've shown the players geese videos," says Hayes whose WSL leaders are two points clear of Manchester City before their final game at home to Reading. "I've shown them why geese fly in V formation, what everybody's role is, how geese support each other and, most importantly, why

you fly further together. That's the bottom line. Geese wouldn't be able to migrate to the sun without all travelling together. It's the same for us." Although Chelsea's goal difference is slightly superior to that of Gareth Taylor's side - who visit West Ham - Hayes is adamant victory remains imperative. A win on Sunday will not merely guarantee a second successive title but serve as an ideal warm up for next Sunday's Women's Champions League final against Barcelona. Among the reasons Chelsea are soaring is that Hayes's band of internationals is studded with not only natural leaders but players capable of ensuring that leading roles on the pitch are regularly rotated. Geese take turns to head the V and by bearing the brunt of the wind resistance, make

life easier for those flying behind. In a similar vein, Chelsea have relied on assorted individuals including the forwards Fran Kirby and Sam Kerr, the defender Magda Eriksson and the goalkeeper Ann-Katrin Berger to do the heavy lifting at various points this season. "Sometimes different people take the lead but ultimately, to get where we want to go, everyone has to play a part," says Hayes. "With geese, the front runner takes the wind resistance, making those behind more energy efficient. Then, depending on energy levels, you take turns to change position. The honking geese each other up, it's encouragement." It's important different geese lead the formation at different times and take the wind resistance for the rest. Changing leaders is something that's pretty normal in our environment and, as with geese, everyone's always extremely loyal to the cause. "Bethany England, Chelsea's player of the season last year, may have been reduced to comparative bit-part status this term, but Hayes believes the England striker could soon be leading from the front once again. "Beth had some setbacks but she's crucial to us; Beth was the single defining reason why we won the double last year," Hayes says. "I know that, in this last part of the season, she could have a huge role in pushing the team over the line." She has similar words for the

little used midfielder, Drew Spence. "Drew's never been more important to us," Hayes says. "She's a voice of dressing room reason." Geese always support each other. When a goose gets injured two birds always accompany it down to the ground. Just as geese do, we must support each other. My message to the players is honk hard at the person in front. In goose culture, that makes them speed up. "Hayes believes "the only psychologist in the dressing room is the coach" but anger very rarely features in a mental toolbox big on emotional intelligence. "Emma's a very rational, original, human being and she's also very warm," says Eriksson. "She understands how to deal with us. She'll let us know if she doesn't think it's good enough. But Emma's not an angry person. She reads situations and, if we need to be more motivated, or be calmer, she gives us what we need." Chelsea's manager has warned Eriksson and company to be wary of one Reading player in particular. England's most-capped international, 37-year-old Fara Williams, will be playing her final game in midfield before retirement. "I know Fara's a Chelsea fan and it's fitting that she finishes her career at the club where she started it," says Hayes. "Fara will be an outstanding coach. She's got a great football mind, a great understanding of tactics. I admire her immensely."



Louis Rees-Zammit doubles up as superb Gloucester rout Northampton

Northampton, May 9 : It is not supposed to be like this. No relegation is meant to leave those losers languishing at the bottom of the table with nothing to play for. No jeopardy, no point. Nobody told Gloucester. The Premiership's 10th-placed team journeyed to the lair of a side one win away from the play-offs and administered a royal spanking that may have put paid to Northampton's hopes of finishing in the top four. Professional athletes always want to win, it turns out. Just as perplexing, though, was the abject form of the Saints after their invigorating display to win at local rivals Leicester in the previous round. They could find no energy and no accuracy, their set-piece dismantled and their handling all over the place. Worse, they lost Dan Biggar in the first half to a brain injury, which we must hope will not have any impact on his Lions tour. Instead, it was the Welsh Lion on the other side, Louis Rees-Zammit, who set proceedings in motion, scoring the first and last of Gloucester's four tries. Warren Gatland was watching but will not have liked what he saw at the end of the first quarter. A horrible collision between Biggar and Billy Twelvetrees, as both slid across the sodden turf after a loose ball, left the Welshman sprawled on the turf and possibly out cold. In the end he was up and about and apparently

lucid, but he failed the head injury assessment. If Northampton were looking out of sorts, the loss of their fly-half did nothing to lift the fug. By then they were already in trouble, Rees-Zammit's opening try having just opened up a 10-0 lead for the visitors. To say they have nothing to play for might be overstating the situation; a place in the top eight should be good enough for Europe next season and this win takes them to within three points of Leicester, who currently hold that position. Rees-Zammit reassured Gatland of his class, finishing with deadly speed for the one highlight of the first half, Gloucester's first try. A beautiful inside ball by Mark Atkinson released Santiago Carreras, who put his fellow winger away. Gloucester rode that 10-0 lead to the break before extending it a few minutes into the second half. George Furbank, now at fly-half for Biggar, tried an audacious cross-kick in his own 22 that was bound to fail on a day like this for Northampton. Sure enough, the excellent Jordy Reid grabbed it for Gloucester and Twelvetrees and Carreras sent Ed Slater off on a gallop to the line. Twelvetrees missed the conversion, but landed the second of his three successful penalties a few minutes later, and Jack Singleton finished a lineout and drive for Gloucester's third just before the hour. Then Rees-Zammit claimed his second just past

it. He brought up the bonus point in rather less imperious fashion than he had scored his first, taking advantage of Matt Proctor's fumble of a box kick. His try sparked a brawl for no

obvious reason, with both sides losing a player to the sin bin. Three minutes later Gloucester were reduced



lineout. But by then the score was 28-0, and it was Northampton who had nothing to play for.

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Schalke fans hurl eggs, chase players after club suffers Bundesliga relegation

London, May 9 : Schalke 04 players and staff were attacked with eggs and were threatened by their own fans lineout. But by then the score was 28-0, and it was Northampton who had nothing to play for.

season. Upon their return to the Schalke stadium early on Wednesday they were met by about 500 to 600 fans and were scheduled to briefly discuss the situation with them. "Within the framework of this meeting there were some still unidentified individuals who clearly stepped over lines that are non-negotiable for Schalke," the club said in a statement. Gelsenkirchen police said

fans had already started lighting fireworks and flares around the stadium immediately after the end of the game. "Once the team arrived and stepped off the bus there were severe protests," police said in a statement. "Eggs were thrown at the players who were also verbally attacked. It said a strong police presence on site was mobilised to avoid any escalation. Schalke are among

the most fiercely supported clubs in Germany and typically draw more than 60,000 fans to home games." While there is understandable frustration and anger for the relegation, the club will never accept it when the physical integrity of its players and staff is put in danger," Schalke said. "The club sharply condemns this behaviour and naturally supports its staff."

Sergio Agüero's rush of blood gives Thomas Tuchel a day to savour

Manchester, May 9 : Oh, Sergio. A reminder from Mr Guardiola to all boys - particularly those who are leaving the Etihad Campus at the end of the year. Term is not over. The final exam is not yet passed. And this really isn't the moment to start having fun. This was an odd, increasingly gripping game. A 2-1 Chelsea win only delayed the inevitable title celebrations for Manchester City. But it carried a genuine significance for Thomas Tuchel, firming up the likelihood of a top four finish and ensuring his future employment to

looked vague all afternoon. On the touchline Guardiola could be seen striding towards the tunnel, limbs stiff with rage, hood bouncing primly. His mood will have been further darkened by Marcos Alonso's late winner, and by the fact City should have had a penalty shortly before as Kurt Zouma challenged Raheem Sterling clumsily from behind. At the tail-end of a season where penalties were at one stage being given for halitosis, unkind remarks and the mere possession of fingers and arms, it looked like a refereeing mistake. But Guardiola will also



shall we say? - at least November. Whatever happens from here, the last half-season has been a startlingly assured and lucid period of coaching-on-the-hoof from a man who really does look and sound like he's enjoying himself to an indecent degree right now. It took a while to get there. At times in the first half Manchester City and Chelsea seemed to be dishing up the kind of weekend fare we might have witnessed under the Super League regime - players rested, feints and bluffs in play, a game with another game on its mind. At which point a football match broke out, pegged around an act of unexpected slapstick in first-half injury time from a man who has 182 Premier League goals to his name and has earned a degree of balls-of-steel arrogance. With 44 minutes gone Raheem Sterling scored the opening goal, made by a fine surging run from Gabriel Jesus. His cross evaded the cover. Sergio Agüero produced an unintended assist, his clumsy touch taking the ball to Sterling, who finished easily. At that moment City looked to be entering that place, the podium zone. All the more so as they were awarded a penalty in stoppage time after more fine, ferret work from Jesus. Agüero took the ball with a chance to kill this game, to kill the title race, and to ease the whirling in his manager's mind over rest and downtime and game management. At which point, Agüero decided to go for the panenka. "It was his decision," Pep Guardiola shrugged, doing a decent, if unconvincing impression of a man who is, like, totally cool with this kind of thing - details, whatever - and hey, it's just a game. It was a poor panenka - caught with embarrassing ease by Édouard Mendy - and a poor decision from a man who

have found some clarification of his own as both teams look towards that end point in Istanbul (or similar). Nathan Aké and Benjamin Mendy will not form City's defensive right flank, where Timo Werner was once again a source of incision. Sterling scored his second goal at the Etihad since 5 December. He still looks keen - a man constantly trying to fight his way back to that other place, the version of his own reality where the game becomes easy and the ball is once again his friend. He isn't there. But his movement is a weapon against this back three. Then there was Agüero, who has been a rapier for so long but didn't look anywhere near the level of that starting team for the season finale. Mainly this was Tuchel's day. In the FA Cup game Chelsea had found space behind City's full-backs. Guardiola fielded a counter-move of his own here, the great midfield fetishist going cold turkey and picking a starting team with five defenders. City still played a high line, and at times Chelsea's high press caused problems. Werner loitered high up the field, spending much of his time in a role that can only be described as "offside". There was a point to this. In that space he is a constant scattergun danger. He gave the assist for the winner. He worked, as Tuchel said, "like a dog". With better timing - or indeed any timing - in his runs he could have scored a couple himself. Chelsea's equaliser with an hour gone came down that familiar channel of interest, this time on the right, Hakim Ziyech burying his shot expertly past Ederson's left hand. Guardiola has a problem to solve there. And so on we go, a little closer to the endgame. City will be a different team in three weeks' time. But this was a significant step for Tuchel on several fronts.

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