

The Assam Rising

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Boy killed in grenade blast

Guwahati, May 11 : A 12-year-old boy has been killed in a grenade blast in eastern Assam's Tinsukia district. The victim, identified as Sujoy Hajong, was riding a bicycle when he found a grenade lying on the road at Kotha Sema village under Jagun police station area of the district. As per reports, the minor picked up the grenade from the roadside, after which it exploded. The victim was immediately rushed to Margherita Civil Hospital, where doctors declared him brought dead. According to the locals, an encounter had taken place in the village a couple of years ago between security forces and militants at the same location and the grenade might have been left behind during that time.

Money Laundering Case

New Delhi, May 11 : A case of money laundering has been registered against former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on the basis of the FIR filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The case was registered in connection with corruption allegations made by former Mumbai top cop Param Bir Singh earlier last month. The CBI had conducted a series of raids at Deshmukh's properties following the allegations that made headlines in the state as well as the nation. The FIR was filed under section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption Act (Public servant taking gratification other than legal remuneration in respect of an official act) and criminal conspiracy (IPC 120B). Soon after the allegations surfaced, Deshmukh had resigned from his post.

11 Killed In School Shooting

Moscow, May 11 : Shocker from Russia as at least 11 people were gunned down by unknown men in a school in the city of Kazan, several international media reported. Reports say the deceased include children as well as teachers. According to Russian news agency, one suspected teenage shooter was apprehended, while the other shooter was killed during a gunfight with authorities. Over 13 people were admitted to the hospital due to injuries. The incident took place in the city of Kazan, a city in the Republic of Tatarstan in Russia.

Rush gathered for Qazi's funeral, FIR lodged against people for violating COVID protocols in UP's Budaun

Budaun, May 11 : An FIR has been lodged against unidentified people for



violating COVID protocols during the funeral procession of a religious leader here, police said on Monday (May 10). Kaji Abdul Hamid Mohamud Salimul Kadri had died on Sunday (May 9) and thou-

sands of people had gathered to take part in his funeral. A video of the procession, which has gone viral on social media, showed several people without face masks and flouting social distancing norms. "An FIR has been registered against unidentified

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Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma allocates portfolios to his ministers



Guwahati, May 11 : Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi with newly sworn-in Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and ministers during the swearing-in ceremony at Srimanta Sankaradev Kalakshetra in Guwahati. A day after taking oath as the 15th Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday allocated portfolios to his

13 cabinet colleagues. Sarma has kept Home, Personnel, PWD departments himself. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Assam unit president Ranjeet Kumar Dass has given the responsibility of Panchayat and Rural Development, Public Health Engineering, Food and Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs ministries. Asom

Gana Parishad (AGP) president Atul Bora will handle Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary departments. Bora will also look after the Border Area Development and Assam Accord Implementation departments. The ruling BJP alliance is the first non-Congress government in the state to win the elections for the second consecutive term. Of the 126 assembly seats in Assam, the ruling alliance has secured 75 seats with BJP winning 60 while the AGP got nine seats and the UPPL six. Bimal Bora who represents the Tingkhong constituency is the new Sports & Youth Welfare, Cultural Affairs, Power, Tourism Minister in Himanta Biswa Sarma led-

Cabinet. Bimal Bora hails from Kecheruguri gaon, Tingkhong and he completed his B. A from JB College, Jorhat under Dibrugarh University in 1996. Ajanta Neog has been allocated the finance department in Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma-led cabinet in Assam. Neog, MLA from Golaghat is the first woman to head the finance department of the state. Like Nirmala Sitharaman at the centre, Ajanta Neog will look after the finance of Assam. An influential minister in the earlier Tarun Gogoi-led Congress governments, Neog had left the party to join the BJP last year. She will also hold the portfolio of social welfare. Pijush Hazarika who represents the Jagir road constituency is the new Water Resources, Information & Public Relations, Parliamentary Affairs Minister in Himanta Biswa Sarma led-Cabinet. Hazarika was Minister of State for Health and Urban Development in the Sarbananda Sonowal

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Gauhati High Court Extends All Interim Orders Till June 1



Guwahati, May 11 : The Gauhati High Court has extended all interim orders by various courts of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh till June 1 in view of the spike in COVID-19 cases. The full court of Gauhati High Court in its meeting on May 8 informally discussed issues arising out of restricted working due to the pandemic and decided to deal with the matter on its judicial side. Accordingly, the full bench of Gauhati High Court, comprising Chief Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia and Justices N Kottiswar Singh and Manash Ranjan Pathak, filed a suo motu PIL on Sunday and issued the orders on Monday. "Considering that there is a daily surge of COVID-19 cases in the State of Assam as well as in Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, the Chief Justice has constituted this Full Bench suo motu to tackle the plight of litigants caught in this extraordinary situation," the order uploaded on the official website said. The Gauhati High Court considered the difficulties faced by the litigants and lawyers in approaching the courts in these difficult times, particularly due to the restrictions, and passed a series of instructions under Article 226, read with Article 227, of the Constitution, the order said. "In all matters, where interim orders of this Court and of the Courts and Tribunals subordinate to it were in force till April 19, 2021, but have expired since then or are likely

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Maharashtra govt may halt vaccination for 18-44 age group due to vaccine shortage: Rajesh Tope

Mumbai, May 11 : Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Tuesday said that the state government is considering holding off the COVID vaccination drive for the 18-44 age group temporarily due to a shortage of vaccine doses. The COVID vaccine doses currently available with the state will instead be used to vaccinate people of 45 years and above as administering the second jab of these people is a priority, he said. Speaking to media persons, Rajesh Tope said, "There is a dearth of vaccines hence we are considering holding off vac-

cination drive temporarily for the 18-44 age group. 2.75 lakh vaccine doses left for this group, which will be used for 45 years and above group now. Administering the second dose is a priority." "Mucormycosis patients will be treated for free under Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Arogya Yojana. Over 2,000 cases have been reported



and 8 people have died of this infection in the

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CM holds meeting to review COVID19 situation in the state

Guwahati, May 11 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today held a meeting with the ministers Keshab

taken to contain the same. The Chief Minister directed for ensuring strict enforcement of restrictions to bring

the vaccination status, vaccine stock, availability of oxygen, essential medicines etc to effectively manage the situ-



Mahanta, Jogen Mohan and top officers at CM's conference room at Janata Bhawan to assess the situation arising out of the increasing COVID19 cases in the state and review the actions being

down positivity rate in the state. He directed the ministers and senior officers to extensively travel all corners of the state to contain the spread of the pandemic. The Chief Minister also reviewed

ation. Chief Minister Dr. Sarma also stressed on the

importance of creating mass awareness to ensure strict adherence to COVID19 protocols by all sections of the society to arrest the rising number of cases. He directed to ensure rapid vaccination in big cities to restrict the spread of the pandemic to the villages. Chief Secretary Jishnu Barua, DGP Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Samir Kumar Sinha, Principal Secretary of Health and Family Welfare Anurag Goyal, Principal Secretary of Revenue and Disaster Management Avinash Joshi, Additional Director General of Police (Law & Order) G.P. Singh, MD NHM Assam Dr. S. Laxmanan, DC Kamrup Metro Biswajit Pegu were present in the meeting.

Covid-19: Telangana imposes 10-day lockdown from May 12

Hyderabad, May 11 : Telangana government, led by chief minister K Chandrababhan Nara, on Tuesday, announced a 10-day statewide lockdown in view of the sudden surge in coronavirus disease (Covid-19) cases. The lockdown will be implemented from tomorrow (i.e. May 12, Wednesday) till May 22. However, there would be relaxation for all the activities from 6am to 10am daily, following which only essential activities will be allowed for the remainder of the Covid-19 lockdown, the Telangana chief minister's office (CMO) said. The complete guidelines regarding the Telangana lockdown shall be issued shortly, people familiar with the development said. The Telangana government on Tuesday held a high-level meeting to decide on whether a statewide lockdown was necessary, in view of the Covid-19 situa-

tion. For this purpose, top state officials, under the chairmanship of the chief minister, held a meeting to discuss arguments for and against a complete lockdown, the Telangana CMO said. Notably, the development comes days after the Telangana government said last week that it will not



impose a lockdown -- partial or total -- to contain the spread of coronavirus, as it will lead to the collapse of the financial system in the state. "The Telangana state cabinet meeting

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Twitter Donates ? 110 Cr To India For Covid Relief

New Delhi, May 11 : In an attempt to fight the devastating Covid situation in India, microblogging social media giant Twitter has donated \$15 million (or approximately Rs 110 crores) to three NGOs -- Care, Aid India and Sewa International USA. While CARE has been given \$10 million, Aid India and Sewa International USA have received USD 2.5 million each. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey tweeted. In a statement Twitter said, "This grant will support the procurement of lifesaving equipment such as oxygen concentrators, ventilators, BiPAP (Bilevel Positive Airway Pressure) and CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) machines as part of Sewa

International "s 'Help India Defeat COVID-19' campaign. "Equipment

will be distributed to government hospitals and COVID-19 care cen-



tres and hospitals," it said. Houston-headquartered Sewa USA raised USD 17.5 million towards its India COVID-19 relief efforts, while, CARE is a leading humanitarian organisation fighting global poverty. Twitter said the grant of USD 10 million will support CARE's urgent action to help address the deadly second wave of COVID-19 infections devastating India. "Funds will be used to supplement government efforts by setting up temporary COVID-19 care centres; providing oxygen, PPE kits and other critically needed emergency supplies for frontline health workers; and addressing vaccine hesitancy and

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NCP candidate congratulated the new Chief Minister

Guwahati, May 11: Once again establishing mass acceptance and recognition of hard and sincere work Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has set an example as soon as sworn as the 15th Chief Minister of Assam. During the worldwide pandemic his dynamic leadership would not only scale new heights to the growth and prosperity of the State, but also carry forward the momentum of the 'new journey' started by Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sarbananda Sonowal to a great extent in the next five years to transform Assam into one of the top five developing states of the nation. Offering warm and heartiest congratulations to the new Chief Minister, the

State General Secretary (media & organization) cum candidate 52 Dispur constituency of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in 2021 Election and Chairman of Asia Foundation, Chief Editor of Swarnalipi & North East Mail, Hridayananda Gogoi said that the role of the new Chief Minister would be much significant if his government devotes more time and kin observations in evolving effective measures to the challenges, priorities and plan of actions. The senior journalist and author Mr. Gogoi also said that the vast political experiences of the new Chief Minister would definitely help him in combating the critical situations and to address the needs and fulfillments of

the citizens and pledges made in the election in a time-bound manner. The dream of the new Chief Minister 'flood free Assam', 'employment generation', 'safest time for women' and 'effective long-lasting peace and progress' would only be realized if his government alarmingly puts maximum concrete efforts in all burning problems including law and order of the state. Appealing to take appropriate steps to release Ritul Saikia the third abducted ONGC employee, Mr. Gogoi expressed hope that in the land of assimilation and harmony the new Chief Minister would work seriously against unlawful activities, corruptions and communalism, stated in a release.

BSF Apprehended 01 Indian Smuggler Along With 22.1kgs Cannabis From Indo- Bangladesh Border



Guwahati, May 11 : In yet another success in its crusade against smuggling activities, 38 Bn BSF under the aegis of Guwahati Frontier of Border Security Force apprehended 01 Indian narcotics smuggler along

with 22.1 Kgs Cannabis on 10th May 2021 from bordering area of village KismatKarala-I, PS Sahebganj, Distt- Coochbehar (West Bengal). 02. Acting on tip off, on 10th May 2021, BSF troops of Border outpost

(BOP) Karla of 38 Bn BSF carried out a special search operation in the house of Jayanta Barman, Distt- Coochbehar (West Bngal). During search the Party recovered 22.1 Kgs Cannabis from his house.

03. Details of apprehended narcotics smuggler is as under:- Jayanta Barman (25 Yrs), S/o Dhani Chandra Barman R/o Vill- KismatKarala-I, PO- Natkobrai, PS Shahebganj, Distt- Coochbehar (West Bengal).

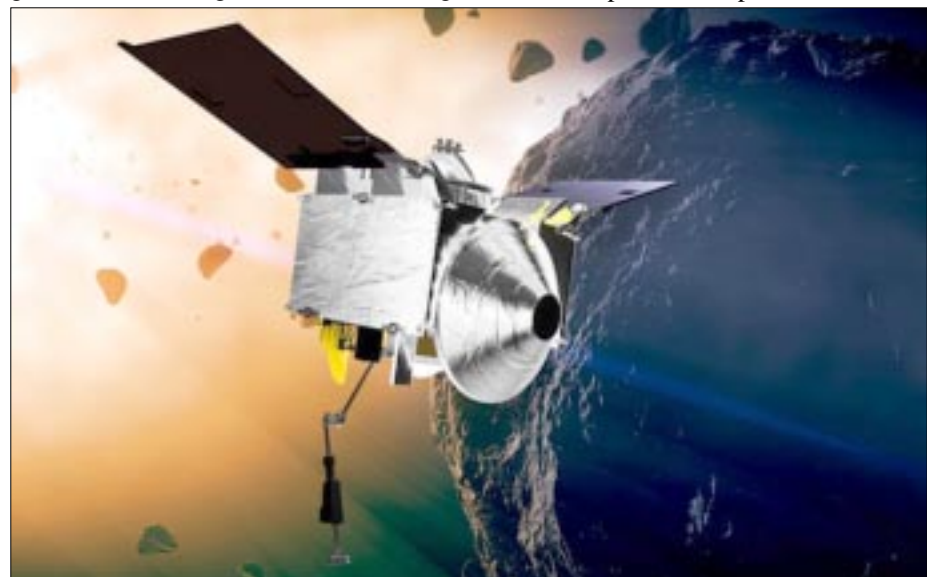
04. Apprehended Indian narcotics smuggler and seized cannabis have been handed over to P.S. Sahebganj, Distt.- Coochbehar (West Bengal) for further legal action.

05 Keeping in view of the vulnerability of border, heightened activities of the smugglers and anti-national elements on the border, BSF troops are always alert towards the issues of trans-border crimes & illegal infiltration and are making all out efforts to prevent commission of such trans-border crimes.

Nasa spacecraft leaves asteroid Benu with a belly full of space rock samples

Washington, May 11 : With rubble from an asteroid tucked inside, a Nasa spacecraft fired its engines and began the long journey back to Earth on Monday, leaving the ancient space rock in its rearview mirror. The trip home for the robotic prospector, Osiris-Rex, will take two years. Osiris-Rex reached asteroid Benu in 2018 and spent two years flying near and around it, before collecting rubble from the surface last fall. The University of Arizona's Dante Lauretta, the principal scientist, estimates the spacecraft holds between a half pound and 1 pound (200gr to 400gr) of mostly bite-size chunks. Either way, it easily exceeds the target of at least 2 ounces (60gr). It will be the biggest cosmic haul for the US since the Apollo moon rocks. While Nasa has returned comet dust and solar wind samples, this is the first time it's gone after pieces of an asteroid. Japan has accomplished it twice, but in tiny amounts. Scientists described Monday's departure from Benu's neighborhood as bittersweet. "I've been working on getting a sample back from an asteroid since my daughter was in diapers and now she's graduating from high school, so it's been a long journey," said Jason Dworkin, a Nasa project scientist. Added Lauretta: "We have gotten used to being at Benu and seeing

new and exciting images and data coming back to us here on Earth." Osiris-Rex was already nearly 200 miles (300km) from the solar-orbiting Benu when it fired its main engines Monday afternoon for a fast, clean get-away. Colorado-based flight controllers for spacecraft builder Lockheed Martin applauded when confirmation arrived of the spacecraft's departure: "We're bringing the samples home!" Scientists hope to uncover some of the solar system's secrets from the samples vacuumed last October from Benu's dark, rough, carbon-rich surface. The asteroid is an estimated 1,600 feet (490 meters) wide and 4.5bn years old. Benu - considered a broken chunk from a bigger asteroid - is believed to hold the preserved building blocks of the solar system. The returning pieces could shed light on how the planets formed and how life arose on Earth. They also could improve Earth's odds against any incoming rocks. Although the asteroid is 178m miles (287m kilometers) away, Osiris-Rex will put another 1.4bn miles (2.3bn kilometers) on its odometer to catch up with Earth. The SUV-size spacecraft will circle the sun twice before delivering its small sample capsule to Utah's desert floor on 24 September 2023, to end the more than \$800m mission. It launched from Cape Canaveral in 2016. The precious samples will be housed



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma is chairing the first meeting of the Council of Ministers of the new government at Janata Bhawan

Four die of COVID 19 at Nagaon, 311 test positive

NAGAON, May 11: Four COVID positive patients succumbed to the virus here at Nagaon today while 311 more people tested positive for COVID 19, taking the total current active COVID positive cases in the district to 2132. Sources claimed that total 19 COVID patients succumbed to the virus till date in the district while 1439 positive patients were recovered from the virus till filing of this report. Signifi-

cantly, 122 positive patients were recovered from the virus today, sources added. Among those who tested positive for COVID 19 today, 23 were immediately admitted to Nagaon COVID hospital while the rest were put in home quarantine, sources said adding further that rapid antigen test was conducted on 2545 people today while RTPCR test was conducted on 41 swab samples.

Covid tally in iswanath

Biswanath Chariali, May 11: The Biswanath district administration has conducted a total of 921 RAT and 94 RT-PCR tests on Tuesday out of these 63 cases tested Covid positive. With this the tally of Covid positives reaches 549 in Biswanath district.

KRSS appealed people to follow Covid protocols

Panigaon, May 11: By a press release, Koch-Rajbonshi Sangram Committee (KRSS) Central Committee Vice-president Rupjyoti Dutta and All Lakhimpur district KRSS President (i/o) Bikash Dutta, Vice-

president Hemanta Koch and Mintu Brah and General Secretary Nitul Saikia today appealed the general people of Lakhimpur district and also the people of Assam to follow the Covid protocols. They appealed the

people to maintain government guidelines like wearing face masks, using sanitizers frequently and sticking to the social distancing norms, and also to get vaccinated without any doubts.

Active Cases of Covid Crosses Thousand in Golaghat : Death Toll Rises to Fifteen

Golaghat, May 11: Golaghat District has crossed the mark of one thousand of Active Covid cases. As per the report received today total number of Active Cases of Covid in Golaghat is 1079. To-

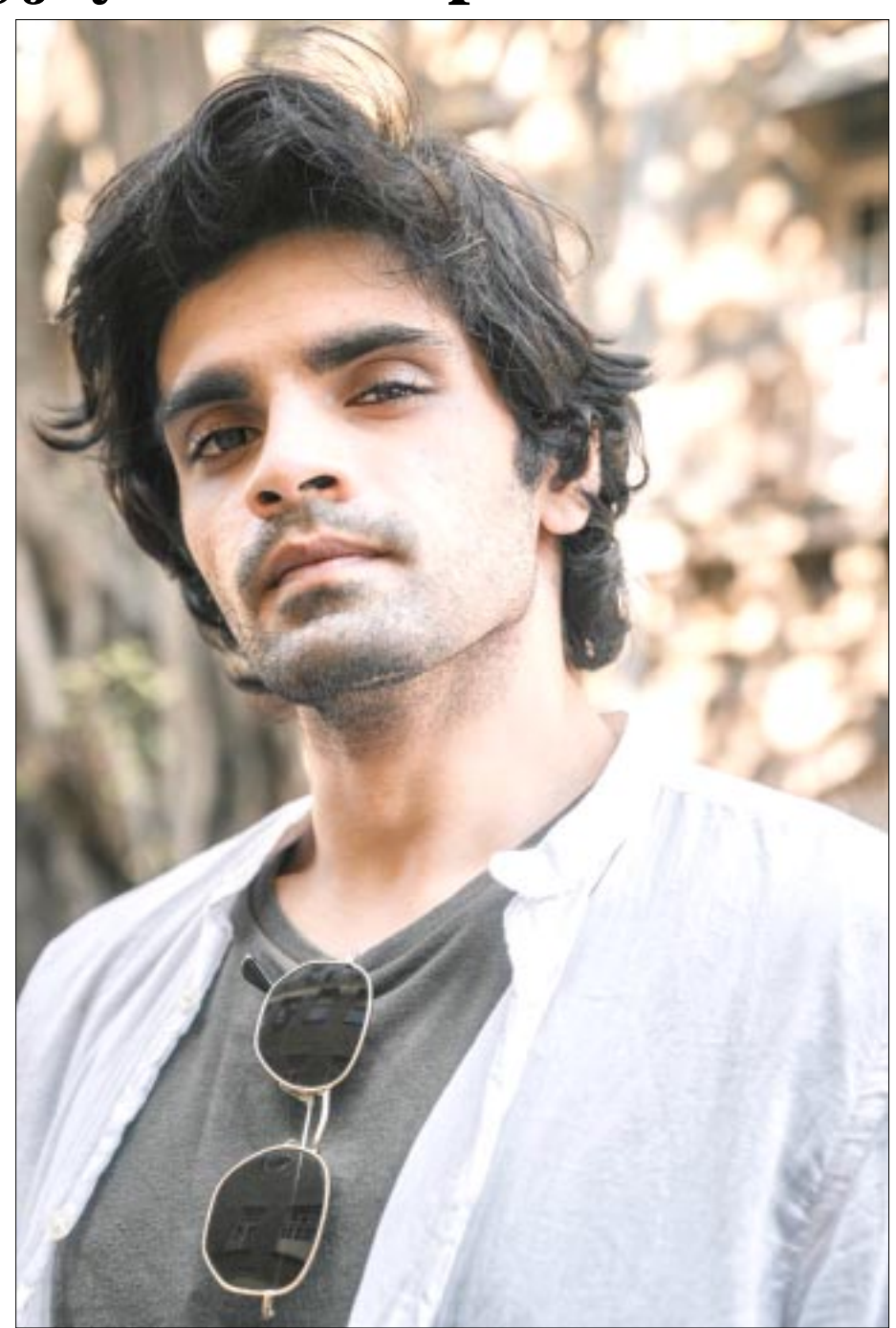
day 174 new positive cases were reported. However 25 persons were discharged today. Meanwhile two cases of Covid death were reported today. Rakheswar Konwar (57) from 2 No

Gondhkoroi village in Sarupathar and Mithu Dey (44) from Nalani, Sarupathar lost their lives due to Covid. With these two deaths total cases of Covid death in Golaghat rises to fifteen.

KunalBhan's social media videos bring joy amid the pandemic

Actor KunalBhan, who is best known for playing Dr Rahil Shekhar in the medical drama Sanjivani (2019), has been trying to help people cope during these tough times in his own unique way. The actor has been posting some fun videos on social media for sometime now. While it started off as humorous videos made for fun while at home, the inspiration behind putting them up now is something more.

Initially Kunal started making content for the purpose of staying busy creatively and hopefully to entertain people. But considering that these are really tough times for everyone especially for those suffering from Covid-19 or recovering in isolation, it's important for them to find something they can hold on to and laugh. Kunal's videos are doing exactly that. He has been receiving numerous messages from people about how his videos reduce their stress from the situation we all are in, which in turn has motivated him to make even more content. He now believes that escapism via entertainment might just be the remedy we need to cope and persevere.



Britain's overgrown Eton schoolboys have turned the country into their playground

Over the past fortnight, the news from Westminster has rather resembled a weird play about pre-revolutionary France, or Tsarist Russia circa 1916. In some parts of the country, the rate of unemployment runs at 15%. Six million people are now reck-

oned to be on universal credit. I was in Birmingham this week, where I heard lots of talk about the impossibility of finding work, and local businesses hanging on by their fingernails. But every time I switched on the radio, I

whose basic unseriousness is not just toxic, but extremely dangerous. Part of the English disease is our readiness to as-

cribe our national disasters to questions of personal character. But the vanities of posh men and

John Harris

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China's population growing at slowest rate in generations

London, May 11 : China has reported the slowest population growth since the early 1960s, despite scrapping the one-child policy in 2015 to encourage more births and stave off a looming demographic crisis. On Tuesday, the Chinese government released the results of its once-a-decade census, saying the overall population of China grew to 1.41178 billion in the 10 years to 2020, up by 5.38%. The increase reflects an average annual rise of 0.53%, down from 0.57% reported from 2000 to 2010. The data showed China avoided an early population peak, which had been feared by some



analysts, but had also missed its growth target set in 2016, to reach 1.42 billion people by 2020. The census also found the proportion of citizens aged over 65 increased from 8.9% in 2010 to 13.5%, while the proportion of children grew by just 1.35% and the working population stayed steady, highlighting China's rapidly ageing population and associated economic concerns. Ning Jizhe, deputy head of the census leading group, acknowledged there was a "moderation" in population growth. "The number of women of childbearing age... was declining, and there is a postponement of childbearing and the rising cost of child raising," said Ning. "All of these are reasons behind the decline on newborns. That is a natural result of China's economic and social development." At the "Two Sessions" meeting of China's key government apparatus in March, premier Li Keqiang confirmed the country would phase in a raising of the retirement age, which has remained unchanged for four decades at 60 for men and 55 for women. He also said Beijing would "promote the realisation of moderate fertility" and work to achieve "an appropriate birthrate". On Tuesday officials said the adjustment of fertility policies had "achieved a positive result", noting the higher proportion of 0-14-year-olds, and a "steadily improving" gender imbalance. But the annual growth rate

of 0.53% is the lowest since the early 1960s when China was dealing with the aftermath of tens of millions killed by famine, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. Between the last census and this one, the Chinese government also scrapped its infamous one-child policy, lifting the limit to two, but it's had little impact. The two-child limit was "cheap policy", said Dr Ye Liu, a senior lecturer in international development at King's College London. "Government lifted the birth quota without any commitments, so they basically shifted responsibilities to individuals,

particularly women." Tuesday's figures could provide an opportunity "to think outside the box and take a proactive and wholistic approach", Liu said. The government had to address the intersecting factors behind the low birthrate, which include rampant workplace discrimination against women of childbearing age and "scandalously low" public childcare funding, Liu said. Working mothers rely on parents and in-laws for childcare, but with a higher retirement age, those grandparents are going to be less available. Liu's suggestions echoed those made by China's central bank, which in April called for an end to all birth limits, to "fully liberalise and encourage childbirth", and remove difficulties for women. Some things can't be changed. Yen-hsin Alice Cheng, an associate professor at Academia Sinica in Taiwan, said east Asian societies such as China's industrialised so rapidly that social changes couldn't keep up, and now generations coexisted with wildly different expectations about gender roles, and how to balance work and family. "It's parental pressures on the younger generation's life course. But the younger generations feel they're facing a whole different set of uncertainty and risk and difficult competitiveness from the labour market. It's not that they don't want to have families, but it's getting difficult," said Cheng. People walk in the subway as the outcome of the seventh national population census by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, are released in Beijing. The only way to address that was with time, she said, noting that young people still feel filial piety and are uneasy about going against their parents' wishes. "In academic jargon we call it demographic

metabolism, but literally it means we wait until the older generation has passed away for things to change," said Cheng. Tuesday's census data also revealed an increase in population movement to urban centres, and a decrease in the average household size to 2.62 persons, which Ning said reflected "increasing population mobility" and improved housing allowing young people to move out of home. Professor Carl Mizner, Fordham University law professor and Chinese governance expert, said the data was in line with China's rapid urbanisation, but there were concerns about whether the moving population would become "second class citizens". "The real question is will they enjoy social services and education on same level as urban residents." The census results were based on data gathered by 7 million census takers who began going door to door in November 2020. The release of China's census data had been delayed by more than a month, without explanation, sparking rampant speculation and rumours, including that there were deficiencies in the data because of the impact of Covid, or that birthrates had moved in a direction unaligned with government plans. "For Chinese authorities population is getting increasingly sensitive and when numbers get sensitive, like you saw with GDP data, that's where you see possibilities for data getting massaged, and I think you have to flag that as a potential question," said Mizner. Antonia, a legal sector worker in Shanghai, realised she didn't want children about six or seven years ago. The 34-year-old likes kids and as a young girl always imagined she's have one of her own, but as she grew up life began to look increasingly unfair, and she started pushing back on the pressure of family, society, and government to become a mother. "More and more I thought: this is not the life I want. I had a choice," she said. Antonia, who describes herself as a feminist and from the labour class, is not having children for reasons which align to the broad factors noted by analysts: Social mobility is stalling, costs of living are high, public childcare is rare, and workplaces discriminate. Women are rejecting the higher cost that parenting puts on their bodies, careers and personal lives compared to what it puts on men's. "Honestly I think if the government wants people to have more children, their job is to get us to live more comfortably," said Antonia. "It's not our obligation to have children."



Rescuers assemble at the opening ceremony of an emergency rescue drill in Fuzhou, capital of southeast China's Fujian

Israel launches airstrikes on Gaza Strip after Hamas rocket attacks

Gaza, May 11 : Tensions between Israel and the Palestinians escalated dramatically on Monday as militant groups in Gaza fired rockets into Israel and Israel responded with strikes on the Palestinian coastal territory following a police raid on the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem that left hundreds injured. The rocket attacks were launched just minutes after the passing of a Hamas-issued ultimatum for Israel to withdraw security forces from both the Jerusalem compound that is home to the al-Aqsa mosque and the Old City's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. The two locations have been the scene of increasingly violent confrontations in recent days between Israeli security forces and Palestinians that have drawn mounting international concern. Anger had been growing for weeks among Palestinians before a now-delayed Israeli court ruling on whether authorities were able to evict dozens of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and give their homes to Jewish settlers. Jerusalem residents reported hearing air raid sirens shortly after 6pm local time, when the ultimatum was due to expire, and the sound of explosions. Sirens were also reported near the coastal city of Ashkelon and in other areas close to the Gaza border. The Israeli army said there was an initial burst of seven rockets, one was intercepted, and rocket fire was continuing in southern Israel. The Gaza health ministry said 20 Palestinians, including nine children, were killed in Israeli airstrikes in the Palestinian

territory after the barrages against Israel. An Israeli military spokesperson said it had started to attack Hamas military targets in Gaza. The rocket strikes signalled a significant escalation and raised the likelihood of a tough Israeli response. Israel's defence minister, Benny Gantz, said: "Palestinian terrorism must be fought with an iron fist," while opposition leader Yair Lapid called for a "strong and determined action to restore deterrence" raising the prospect of further military action. The rocket attacks, and retaliatory air raids, followed a day of rapid escalation that came after Israeli police stormed the compound early on Monday, firing stun grenades and teargas and clashing with Palestinians inside, who threw stones. The clashes left more than 500 Palestinians and 21 police officers injured. Footage from the scene showed crowds of people running in front of the mosque through clouds of smoke. The incursion raised tensions significantly given the huge historical sensitivity over the site, not least during the holy month of Ramadan. Seven of the injured from Monday's clashes were in serious conditions, with local media reporting that a seven-month-old Israeli child had been injured by stones thrown at her family's car. In an apparent attempt to avoid further confrontation, Israeli authorities had changed the planned route of a contentious march by nationalist Jews through the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. Palestinian residents of the Old City have long complained that the flag march, to mark Israel's capture of the

Jerusalem and its Jewish holy sites in 1967 during the six day war, is deliberately provocative. The marchers were ordered to avoid the area and sent on a different route circumventing the Muslim Quarter on their way to the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray. Hamas's military wing claimed responsibility for the first wave of rocket fire in a statement saying it struck Jerusalem in response to Israel's "crimes and aggression in the Holy City, and its harassment of our people in Sheikh Jarrah and al-Aqsa mosque". "This is a message that the enemy should understand well," said a spokesperson. Islamic Jihad in Gaza also claimed to have launched its own rocket attacks. The growing tensions followed the most serious clashes in the city since 2017. Hundreds of Palestinians and several dozen police officers have been hurt in recent days in clashes in and around the Old City, including the sacred compound, which is known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary - or Haram al-Sharif. The latest violence occurred as the UN security council held closed consultations on the situation in Jerusalem and was considering a proposed statement calling on Israel to cease evictions and calling for "restraint" and respect for "the historic status quo at the holy sites." Addressing a special cabinet meeting before Jerusalem Day, the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said Israel "will not allow any extremists to destabilise the calm in Jerusalem. We will enforce law and order decisively and responsibly". The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said the rocket attacks from Gaza against Israel should stop "immediately," and he urged all sides to take steps to de-escalate the situation. "All sides need to de-escalate, reduce tensions, take practical steps to calm things down," Blinken said as he met his Jordanian counterpart in Washington. Israel has faced mounting international criticism of its heavy police response and the planned evictions. Last week a UN rights body described the expulsion of Arabs from their homes as a possible war crime.

Top Russian doctor at Navalny clinic found after disappearance

Moscow, May 11 : The former chief physician of the hospital where the Russian protest leader Alexei Navalny was first treated for novichok poisoning has been found alive days after disappearing into a Siberian forest. Alexander Murakhovsky emerged from a forest in the Omsk region on Monday three days after vanishing while on holiday, abandoning an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) miles from a hunting lodge where he was staying with friends. "Everything's normal, I feel good," he told one Moscow news site on Monday after undergoing a medical checkup at a local hospital. "I'll keep how I survived to myself. How it happened: I didn't orient myself correctly in the forest. Tomorrow's a work day." Baza, a Russian investigative news site, reported that Murakhovsky had slept one night in an abandoned railway car, tried and failed to hail a passing helicopter, and been fortunate not to attract the attention of bears in the forest. The doctor was accused last year of covering up Navalny's poisoning with a novichok nerve agent, saying in media interviews that the opposition leader may have instead lost

consciousness due to a metabolic disease causing low blood sugar. He had also initially refused to give permission for Navalny to be evacuated to a clinic in Berlin for treatment, a transfer that was eventually authorised by Vladimir Putin. The impasse led to a tense standoff at Omsk's emergency hospital No 1, where close aides to Navalny said that Russian hospital officials were trying to delay tests that would show Navalny had been poisoned. Murakhovsky has since been promoted to health minister of the Omsk region, drawing criticism from the opposition leader. "If you lie, cheat, are ready to falsify to suit the leadership - then you get a promotion," Navalny wrote in a tweet last year. Murakhovsky's brief disappearance drew conspiracy theories related to a number of recent deaths of doctors at the Omsk clinic where Navalny was treated. Deputy chief physician Sergei Maximishin, 63, who Navalny aides said was directly involved in the opposition leader's treatment, died in February. Rustam Agishev, 63, another doctor at Omsk's emergency hospital No 1, died of complications from a stroke in March.



shows embroidery craftwork on display during the first China International Consumer Products Expo in Haikou

Golden Globes backlash: Tom Cruise hands back awards and NBC drops broadcast

Washington, May 11 : Tom Cruise has returned his three Golden Globes in protest after criticisms levelled at the Hollywood Foreign Press Association continue to create problems in the industry. The actor, who won for Born on the Fourth of July, Jerry Maguire and Magnolia, is one of many to stand up against the HFPA, the small group of international journalists who vote on the awards, after an exposé highlighted failings. NBC has also announced that it will not be airing the 2022 Golden Globes. The HFPA has been under fire since the Los Angeles Times revealed allegations of corruption and impropriety as well as a lack of any black members. "We continue to believe that the HFPA is committed to meaningful reform," a statement from the network read. "However, change of this magnitude takes time and work, and we feel strongly that the HFPA needs time to do it right. As such, NBC will not air the 2022 Golden Globes. Assuming the organization executes on its plan, we are hopeful we will be in a position to air the show in January 2023." In response, the HFPA released a detailed timeline of proposed changes and a statement. "Regardless of the next air date of the Golden Globes, implementing transformational changes as quickly - and as thoughtfully - as possible remains the top priority for our organization," it read. "We invite our partners in the industry to the table to work with us on the systemic reform that is long overdue, both in our organization as well as within the industry at large." The network has shown the Golden Globes since 1996, paying about \$60m a year for rights. The most recent ceremony, which saw Nomadland win big, saw a 60% drop in viewers. The last week has seen studios, publicists and stars continue to distance themselves from the HFPA. Netflix, WarnerMedia and Scarlett Johansson



have all urged the industry to take action. "Unless there is necessary fundamental reform within the organization, I believe it is time that we take a step back from the HFPA," Johansson said. Nearly 100 PR firms representing the film industry said they would "continue to refrain from any HFPA-sanctioned events, including press conferences, unless and until these issues are illuminated in detail with a firm commitment to a timeline". On 4 May, the HFPA announced changes to improve diversity and credibility, including diversifying members and an end to members taking "promotional items" from studios. But the Time's Up

organisation criticised the reforms as "window-dressing platitudes". An open letter added: "Our community of vibrant creatives across all racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds deserve better." The Los Angeles Times ran two investigations in the lead-up to this year's ceremony, detailing many "ethical lapses" that have seen members courted by studios as well as barriers faced by black journalists. Since the article was published, the HFPA's former president Phillip Berk was expelled for sharing an article with other members that referred to Black Lives Matter as "a racist hate group".

US ship fires 30 warning shots after Iranian vessels approach fleet

Washington, May 11 : Coast guard vessel takes action after 13 Iranian fast boats come within 150 yards in strait of Hormuz. Iranian warships are seen during a joint naval exercise with Russian navy in the Indian Ocean in February. A US coast guard ship fired about 30 warning shots as a group of 13 Iranian fast boats sped toward US navy vessels in the strait of Hormuz, in what the Pentagon called "unsafe and unprofessional" maneuvers by the naval arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGCN).

REQUEST FOR QUOTATION (RFQ) FOR "EMANELMENT OF AGENCIES FOR HIRING OF VEHICLES ON MONTHLY BASIS FOR O/O THE MISSION DIRECTOR AND ALL RESPECTIVE FIELD OFFICES, JJM, ASSAM"

Sealed offers from interested parties having relevant experience and expertise as mentioned in the RFQ documents are invited to submit their offer within **03.00 P.M. of 09.06.2021**, through courier/post super-scribing **Request For Quotation (RFQ) No. 06 of 2021-22 for "Empanelment of Agencies for Hiring of Vehicles on Monthly basis for O/o The Mission Director and all respective field offices, JJM, Assam"**. The details of this RFQ will be available in www.jjmassam.in from **12.05.2021 upto 03.00 P.M. of 09.06.2021**. Future correspondence, if any, shall be given only in the website www.jjmassam.in

Chief Engineer (PHE), Water, Assam
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Additional Mission Director, JJM,
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THE ASSAM RISING

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New age of pandemics

The governments of India and South Africa petitioned the World Trade Organization to issue a temporary waiver on the Trips agreement and ensure the "unhindered global sharing of technology and know-how ... for the handling of Covid-19". Back then, no vaccine had been approved for the prevention of the spread of the virus. But the 100 countries that joined the October petition over the following months knew then what has become apparent to everyone now: the system of pharmaceutical patents is a killing machine. There is now broad and growing support for the Trips waiver – among doctors, Nobel laureates, senators and a large majority of the US public. On Wednesday, the Biden administration finally announced its intention to support some version of the proposal, changing course amidst a global surge of Covid-19 cases. "The extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic call for extraordinary measures," said US trade representative Katherine Tai, committing to "text-based negotiations at the World Trade Organization". But a temporary waiver is only a temporary solution to a permanent crisis in the global health system. When Aids exploded across the world in the 1990s, calls for affordable generic antiretroviral drugs to stem the pandemic in Africa were met by threats and lawsuits from pharmaceutical corporations. And the Covid-19 pandemic is certainly not the end of this crisis: from Sars and Ebola to mutant strains of Covid-19, epidemiologists warn that we have entered a new age of pandemics. To learn the lessons of a year lost to Covid-19 – and to prepare for a long century of recurring health emergencies – the temporary Trips suspension must give way to a total transformation of the pharmaceutical patent system. Pausing the gears of the killing machine is not enough. Our obligation is to dismantle it. That obligation belongs to the US more than any other country. The US government has played both architect and enforcer of the intellectual property regime, threatening sanctions against countries like Brazil, Thailand and South Africa for daring to promote the generic production of life-saving medicines. Yet an overwhelming majority of US voters support a more radical transformation of the pharmaceutical patent system. A new poll from Data for Progress and the Progressive International finds that 59% of US voters support waiving all patent protections to produce generic versions of life-saving medicines for critical diseases, from Covid-19 and HIV/Aids to heart disease and diabetes. These preferences are not expressions of charity. The citizens of the United States are some of the chief victims of the patent system: according to a recent poll, one in four Americans cannot fill their prescriptions due to astronomical drug prices. The Covid-19 vaccine may have been provided to US citizens free of charge this time, but there is no reason to expect that the government will continue to foot the bill when drug-resistant strains creep back into the country and send millions of uninsured families to the hospital for treatment. Pharmaceutical corporations will lobby our representatives to say that they are best placed to manage these pandemics – that what is good for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) is good for America. "More than any other time in history, society is seeing and benefiting from the innovation supported by intellectual property," they wrote in a letter to Joe Biden urging him to reject the Trips waiver at the WTO. But US voters – whose tax dollars funded the medical breakthrough behind Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine, just as UK voters funded AstraZeneca's – are calling BS. Asked whether the US government should compel Moderna to share its vaccine technology with manufacturers around the world, 59% of US voters approved to just 27% who opposed, according to the new poll by Data for Progress and the Progressive International. The new findings reflect a growing frustration with the primacy of profit in the public health system – not only the profits of the pharmaceutical corporations in the course of this pandemic (Pfizer made \$3.5bn on its vaccine in the first quarter of 2021 alone), but also the refusal to invest in life-saving medicines that do not yield these massive returns. "When prices are so low they preclude profits, companies leave the market," the WHO reported in 2017. The pharmaceutical industry may claim that rolling back patent protections will hinder future drug production. But it is governments that have had to intervene to catalyze vaccine production – and the public that has shouldered the risks. There can be no illusions about the prospects for such a radical reorientation of US foreign policy. While Biden's domestic agenda has sought to break with past dogmas of fiscal discipline and public disinvestment, his foreign policy has largely preserved the frameworks that he inherited from Donald Trump and Barack Obama before him. This is not a coincidence: the architecture of global governance was designed to be insulated from democratic pressures. Jan Tumlir, architect of the UN General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, described the project most clearly: "International rules protect the world market against governments." But power concedes nothing without a demand, and in moments like these – when the paradigm is shifting, and the US president appears willing to push against the old third rails of American politics – the identification of the right demand is as important as its articulation. Suspension of Covid-19 patents may be an essential first step. But as US voters appear to understand, the path out of this pandemic is long. We will need great leaps to get there.

Labour's lost voters clamour for belonging -but will the party answer them?



In the wake of Labour's terrible, soul-destroying election defeat in 2019, the need to "listen" to the red wall constituency voters who had deserted the party became an instant truism. In the trauma of the moment, there was a genuine desire to understand why so many of the places that had sustained the labour movement for so long had voted for the enemy. But the ability to listen well is a rare and difficult skill. The great German philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, who devoted his intellectual career to the art of understanding what others mean, defined it beautifully. The good listener, said Gadamer, "does not go about identifying the weaknesses of what another person says in order to prove that one is always right, but one seeks instead, as far as possible, to strengthen the other's viewpoint so that what the other person has to say becomes illuminating". As the first electoral test of Keir Starmer's leadership approaches this week, how much of that kind of listening can truly be said to have taken place? Labour may yet hold on to Hartlepool in a byelection freighted with red wall symbolism, though the polls do not look good. The electoral windfall of Tory sleaze stories may help shore up the vote in local elections, but a weekend YouGov poll predicting a nine-point northern swing to the Tories is cause for trepidation. A year and a half on from that dramatic December night, the Tories

still have more reason than Labour to be optimistic about their prospects in non-metropolitan England. What is it that the left is not hearing? There were clues in a recent report by UK in a Changing Europe, titled Comfortable Leavers, which analysed the views of relatively prosperous Brexit voters. The study highlighted the way that a shared pride in Britain – its national identity, public services and industry – held together a coalition stretching from the comfortable shires to the red wall Labour-voting towns. A "nostalgic optimism" about Britishness united well-off Tories who moaned about the workshy working class with the type of blue-collar workers the Labour party was founded to represent. The collapse of the red wall in 2019 was confirmation of the potency of this cultural alliance, which has not disintegrated now Brexit is "done". Engaging with it is fundamental if Labour is to progress beyond its city and university town re-doubts. Valuing forms of belonging that absorb the individual into something greater than themselves, the nostalgic optimists are united by a desire for a politics that has large horizons. But rather than seek "illumination" and insight, many sections of the left have reverted to instinctive disdain and distrust. When a leaked Labour strategy presentation ham-fistedly sought to prioritise "the

use of the [union] flag, veterans, dressing smartly", it was disproportionately monitored by critics who see pride in Britishness as the gateway to xenophobic nationalism. The relevance of the class dimension of the red wall defection from Labour has been hotly contested: why should the opinions of a young Deliveroo rider in London be considered less authentically working class than those of a retired blue-collar worker in Leigh? Why should Labour privilege the patriotism of a homeowning social conservative in their 50s over the cosmopolitan liberalism of an urban, renting and indebted thirtysomething? This championing of those who did vote Labour in 2019 is often accompanied by a warning that they may not do so in future, if the party "wraps itself in the flag". Among some who fear that Starmer is attempting to resurrect Blairite centrism, the typical denizen of a red wall seat is presented as a kind of northern successor to Basildon man in the 1990s, when Tony Blair moved Labour rightwards in order to woo aspirational voters in the south. There is no legitimate parallel. Basildon man was an upwardly mobile son of Thatcherite individualism. For most of the working-class voters who have turned their back on Labour over the last 20 years, ideas of Britishness, England, place, pride, honour and industry have nothing to do with the right. They are a way of talking differently about values of the left; of excavating a buried but still felt communitarian dimension to life. A fascinating paper published last year in the Journal of Working-Class Studies argues that much of the red wall rebellion was driven by a memory of the "mutual bonds and feelings of togetherness that were engendered by industry and industrial work". These traces of the past, crucially, outlive the economic context that generated them. They are "reinforced rather than dissipated by the contemporary absences of industry and industrial work". Anyone who lives in or has visited the mill

towns of West Yorkshire or the villages of the Durham coalfield will know how true this is. More than half of Labour's priority target seats in England and Wales are "standalone" towns that are not part of a wider city conurbation – places like Darlington, Lincoln or Wrexham. If Labour fails to work with the romantic desire for stronger collective attachments and identities, it will find that the Conservative party does the job for it. The New Social Covenant unit recently set up by Boris Johnson's political secretary, Danny Kruger, has planted its flag on this terrain. Introducing its aims, Kruger wrote: "The purpose of politics is to strengthen the family, community and nation so they can exercise their beneficial influence on individuals." Kruger is an Old Etonian, and the Guardian reader can be forgiven a reflex rolling of the eyes. As it should, the liberal left will always interrogate such language for the power relations which that trio of warm nouns conceals, asking questions about who might be excluded from their communitarian embrace. Immigrants, ethnic minorities and single mothers, for example. But if it wishes to win back hearts and minds in the constituencies it has lost, the left cannot simply write this language off as the intellectual property of the right. From Victorian New Liberals such as TH Green to the great Marxist historian of the English working class, EP Thompson, British progressive thought has a venerable tradition of defending the rights of community against capitalism, the market and individualism. But for fear of creating insiders and outsiders, most of Labour has ceased to think deeply about the "we" and the "in common". As the totemic Brexit debate over freedom of movement illustrated, its deepest moral concern is to promote the rights and freedoms of the individual. The tension between liberalism and communitarianism could be creative, if both sides of the debate were given a fair hearing. But across too much of the left, for too much of the time, the longings of Labour's lost voters are still not being listened to.

As the UK inches towards normality, those with long Covid must not be forgotten

From the vaccine rollout to the re-opening of pubs, this stage of the pandemic could be characterised as the hope of a return to normal. I can't help but think of one group who are struggling with that: the estimated 1.1 million people in the UK who, according to the ONS, have been suffering from long Covid recently. Long Covid is defined as experiencing symptoms four weeks or more after first getting coronavirus. It's important to stress that not everyone who experiences long Covid will go on to have long-term chronic illness, but almost 700,000 people said that their symptoms were adversely affecting their day-to-day activities, and 70,000 people have had it for at least a year. The condition is also a wide umbrella term: the most common symptoms are fatigue, breathlessness and pain, but patients report others including partial hearing loss and numbness. And yet the message of the ONS figures is dauntingly clear: hundreds of thousands of people in this country are experiencing debilitating illness, all at once, with very little idea how to treat it, or when or if it will end. Ministers appear to be sleepwalking into a public health crisis. It took health secretary Matt Hancock until



last week to go on BBC Radio 4 to warn about the issue of long Covid, one year on from the first wave. The risk of long-term disability, meanwhile, has been nonexistent in coronavirus health messaging, in part because few politicians or scientists understand it. The focus throughout the pandemic has understandably been on the number of deaths and hospitalisations from coronavirus, but the long-term impact of illness from the virus should have received as much attention. Long Covid is not just an issue for individuals but for society at large, particularly because of its effect on the workforce. There are already reports that patient care in the NHS is being hit because many of the healthcare staff struggling

Frances Ryan

with the condition are able to work only part time, if at all; this is an issue that will probably hit teaching and other key professions in the coming months. Disabled people have long campaigned for flexible working patterns, and long Covid may be the trigger for employers to finally make more adjustments to help their chronically ill staff stay in work. The normalisation of working from home shows that change is more than possible when there is the will. The government, for its part, must ensure a proper safety net for those unable to work at all. The social security system is too often ill-equipped to support people with long-term conditions, and this is even more the case for those with fluctuating

symptoms such as fatigue. Few steps will be more important than providing sufficient healthcare. In October, with much fanfare, NHS England announced a network of clinics for long Covid patients. But a recent survey revealed that about 90% of people with long-term symptoms have been unable to access clinical help, and there are many reports of a "postcode lottery" regarding the availability of support. Long Covid must play a bigger part in both public health messaging and planning. A cross-party group of MPs and peers have rightly urged Boris Johnson to start regularly publishing data on the number of people with long Covid, so it can help shape future government policy towards the pandemic. The vaccination programme is likely to do wonders to reduce hospitalisations, but long Covid will also require a focus on minimising transmission. After all, many of those now struggling with chronic symptoms had only a mild form of the virus to begin with. Part of this means targeted messaging to young people. "Don't kill your granny" campaigns in the first and second wave in some ways falsely suggested coronavirus mainly hurt older people, and yet the ONS data shows long Covid rates are highest among 25- to 34-year-olds.

'Reconnect with nature' by all means - but don't forget its lethal power

It was a near-perfect day on the south coast – blue sky, blue sea, enough breeze to offset the heat of the sun. The beach may have been a little full, but it wasn't long before I was in the water. I'm an OK swimmer and struck out easily for a couple of hundred yards. With an offshore breeze, there wasn't much in the way of waves. It was lovely being away from people, at ease in the undemanding, light-shot sea, my body moving in the slight surge of an old swell. Then I turned to head back in. And the mood changed. With the wind behind me the waves had felt trivial, but now, further out, they were lifted by the breeze. Small they may have been, but they were steep-sided, each

with its own little kick. One after the other they hit me in the face. I didn't have goggles on, my eyes were stinging and I was having trouble seeing where I was going. Every so often I took a mouthful of water. I didn't seem to be getting anywhere – what I could see of the shore remained stubbornly out of reach. I started to fight panic, as well as the waves. During lockdown we have been enjoined to connect – or reconnect – with nature. For the sake of our mental health, we are urged to leave behind a world mediated by screens, get out into the green stuff, breathe some air, see some horizons. Wonderful advice it is too, and I have heeded it. In successive lockdowns I discovered the unlikely

charms of the river Wandle, twisting its way from its source in Croydon, through the burbs and light industry of south London before discharging into the mud of the Thames. Likewise, Mitcham Common – several hundred neglected acres of slightly feral, down-at-heel scrub butting up against the Wandle. But for all the exhortations about connecting with nature, there is a paradox. We are in the middle of the single biggest global upheaval since the second world war. Its purpose: precisely to disconnect us from nature, or from that tiny fragment of it known as Sars-CoV-2. The nature we are invited to connect with is ordinarily a small, picturesque and

Julian Sheather

highly managed subset of the wild world. In the UK, the chances are it resembles parkland or farm country. These are places where any threat to us has largely been removed. There will be footpaths to facilitate access, neighbouring car parks, proximate pubs and cafes. Along with scrub butting up against the Wandle. But for all the exhortations about connecting with nature, there is a paradox. We are in the middle of the single biggest global upheaval since the second world war. Its purpose: precisely to disconnect us from nature, or from that tiny fragment of it known as Sars-CoV-2. The nature we are invited to connect with is ordinarily a small, picturesque and

it is effectively nature as garden. When I finally made it back to shore on that lovely summer's day, shaken, relieved, slightly embarrassed, it was after having tussled with another kind of nature. This is nature as blind and indifferent process, that sum of forces, animate and inanimate, at work in the physical world. This version of nature is operative within and without us. This is the nature we encounter in earthquakes and landslides, but also in cancer, the anopheles mosquito and Sars-CoV-2. It is also the nature that Darwin famously recoiled from in parasitic wasps, those graceful insects that paralyse their hosts before laying eggs inside them to ensure living meat for their emergent

young – precisely the nature that shook his belief in a "beneficent and omnipotent God". In Ash Before Oak, Jeremy Cooper's slow and subtle account of a "nature cure" in the Quantock Hills, the narrator describes how a sheep farmer friend found "on her morning round of inspection a ewe on its back, alive, its blooded udder eaten by a fox, the lamb standing at its mother's side bleating". The nature that cures can also shock and horrify. "Nature" is among the trickiest words in the language. A single noun to cover quantum mechanics, tsunamis, the Ebola virus and bluebells will have its work cut out. Lockdown has shown many of us the benefits of green spaces.

Yamaha Strengthens Presence in North-East India; Unveils fourth 'Blue Square' Outlet in the region



Guwahati, May 11: Continuing with its commitment to strengthen the retail footprint in the Indian market, India Yamaha Motor (IYM) Pvt. Ltd. today announced the opening of its third "Blue Square" outlet in Assam, and fourth in North-East India. Launched under the banner of 'Yamaha Drome' in Sonai Road, Silchar, the latest "Blue Square" outlet is a unique concept-driven showroom to institute Yamaha's racing DNA of excitement, style & sport in the region. The "Blue Square" drives forward Yamaha's strategic focus to unleash the brand's presence in the region. It embodies Yamaha's racing DNA through the visual and exhibitory outline of showroom design on the exterior porticos of the outlet, blue-themed interior ambience inside the outlets while having an exciting display of Yamaha motorcycles & scooters, and genuine Yamaha spare parts. A line-up of apparel and accessories is also the prime focus of the company for "Blue Square". Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Ravinder Singh, Sr. Vice President, Yamaha Motor India Sales (YMIS), said, "The Blue Square showrooms are designed to offer a sense of community, create a space for customers to connect with the ethos of the brand. Epitomising operational efficacy, convenience, and technological advancement,

"Blue Square" outlets are established in sync with customer preferences and the need of the hour to provide customers compelling 'digital' experiences. These outlets offer a communication spot for customers to interact with the brand, access information along with exploring accessories and apparel thereby offering them an enriching and premium experience." The other two Blue Square shops in Assam are in Tinsukia and Guwahati. The company has also opened the premium outlet in Imphal in Manipur. The expansion of the "Blue Square" is part of Yamaha's 'The Call of the Blue' brand campaign, which started in the year 2018. Progressively moving forward with the theme and passion of Yamaha's racing DNA, it aims to provide a more immersive experience to Yamaha customers, creating a space for Yamaha enthusiasts to interact with the brand and get up-close with the performance legacy that Yamaha carries. Yamaha launched its first "Blue Square" showroom in Chennai in 2019 and has currently expanded its "Blue Square" network to 25 stores across India. Further, Yamaha plans to expand to 100 'Blue Squares' by end of 2021 on a pan-India basis.

Indian industry will welcome resumption of India-EU FTA talks: CII

Mumbai, May 11 : The proposed Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) between the two sides has been stalled since May 2013 as both sides are yet to iron out differences over several issues. The BTIA is a kind of comprehensive free trade agreement being negotiated by the two sides. India's exports to EU member countries stood at about USD 54 billion in 2019-20, while imports aggregated at USD 52 billion. Implementation of the proposed free-trade agreement between India and the European Union (EU) will benefit both the sides and the domestic businesses will welcome the resumption of formal negotiations on the long-stalled pact, industry body CII said on Saturday. The proposed Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) between the two sides has been stalled since May 2013 as both sides are yet to iron out differences over several issues. The BTIA is a kind of comprehensive free trade agreement being negotiated by the two sides. How India is leading by example with its faceless E-assessment system for income tax/Forex reserves/Forex reserves surge by \$3.91 billion to \$588.02 billion. Speaking at the EU India Business Roundtable, CII Director-General Chandrajit Banerjee said that BTIA will really benefit the EU with better access to the huge and rapidly growing Indian market and India with technology and innovation access. "Several rounds (of talks) held until 2013, but the negotiations could not be completed as differences remain over some key issues. But Indian industry will welcome a resumption of formal negotiations for the BTIA and is ready to support the negotiations in any way possible," he said. He also said that both the regions need to focus on investment facilitation and protection. Speaking at the function, Markus J. Beyrer, Director General of Business Europe Confederation of European Business, said he completely agreed with CII Director General on resuming the FTA talks. Confederation of Portuguese Business President Antonio Saraiva informed that CII has inked an MoU with them to increase business cooperation between the two countries.

TRIPS waiver for COVID-19: WTO chief urges proponents to submit revised proposal soon to start talks

Mumbai, May 11 : In October 2020, India and South Africa submitted a proposal suggesting a waiver for all World Trade Organization (WTO) members on the implementation of certain provisions of the agreement in relation to the preven-

tion, containment or treatment of COVID-19. This waiver would ensure that the intellectual property rights (like patent, design, and copyrights) do not restrict rapid scaling up of manufacturing and do not hinder equitable and affordable ac-

cess for vaccines and treatments throughout the globe. WTO Chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has urged the proponents of the proposal for temporary waiver of certain provisions of TRIPS agreement for prevention and treatment of COVID-19 to submit the revised document "as soon as possible" so that text-based negotiations can begin. Welcoming the statement of US Trade Representative Katherine Tai on the issue, the Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has said she "warmly" welcomes Tai's willingness to engage with proponents of a temporary waiver of the TRIPS agreement to help in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. The two sides also agreed to launch negotiations for two key pacts on investment protection and geographical



Fintechs pick up MDR tab, enjoy merchant's float

Mumbai, May 11 : Industry sources said BharatPe and Paytm are among the companies offering this form of settlement. Emails sent to the two companies did not elicit responses till the time of going to press. To be sure, merchants would opt for a waiver of the MDR, typically 2-3% on the value of the purchase, only if they are severely strapped for cash. Else, it would not make sense for them to give up the float. In a push to expand their merchant networks, fintech intermediaries have come up with an innovative settlement scheme by which they waive the merchant discount rate (MDR) on offline card transactions. This allows offline merchants to opt for a delayed settlement of a transaction by not shelling out the MDR rather than settling it on a next-day basis. The payment intermediary has access to the merchant's float until the transaction is settled. To be sure, merchants would opt for a waiver of the MDR, typically 2-3% on the value of the purchase, only if they are severely strapped for cash. Else, it would not make sense for them to give up the float. Economy likely to rebound by Q4 of FY22, Bandhan Bank bullish on meeting targets: Chandra Shekhar Ghosh. National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL), NARCL, Banking and finance, ndian Banks' Association Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Sunil Mehta, NPAs, finding higher valuation of an NPA on sale. National Asset Reconstruction Company to be operational next month: IBA CEO. Industry sources said BharatPe and Paytm are among the companies offering this form of settlement. Emails sent to the two companies did not elicit responses



till the time of going to press. Mohit Gopal, senior VP and strategy head, PayU India, said that the practice is not necessarily wrong. "On the offline side, this does happen. As long as it makes business sense between the fintech and the merchant, it's fine. If it's a merchant with strong cash flows, then this is an acceptable thing to them," he said. An executive with a fintech, which offers this facility, explained that when the card is swiped by the customer the merchants have two options: Opt for a regular settlement or receive the money within 15 days, by using the app. "Beyond 15 days, we have waived off the MDR charge. We pay the charge to the concerned bank for all transactions," the executive said. His company believes MDR on card-based transactions is heading for a 2% level, except for Rupay, where MDR is already zero. Sachin Shettigar, EVP, (merchant onboarding, risk and settlement), Mswipe, told FE the company does not offer merchants a deferred settlement facility but pays all its merchants on a T+1 basis and, for

QR transactions, on the same working day. "This is in line with the RBI 2009 directives for merchant payments by intermediaries," Shettigar said. The only exception

is for online transactions where payments can happen on a T+1 basis with the T depending on the agreement with the merchant. Since RBI's 2021 guidelines on the regulation of payment aggregators and payment gateways are not applicable to offline players, fintechs can use their discretion for settlement practices. Emailed queries sent to the RBI on its stance on the 15-day offline settlement option remained unanswered. A former RBI executive said that the innovation bears marks of a credit product. "If this is happening then it's quite surprising because it will also involve banks and the card networks who are prone to be more compliant than fintechs. I don't think the RBI will look upon this kindly," he said.

Covid Blues: Second wave could give economy a jolt

Mumbai, May 11 : While the balance sheets of companies in the organised sector would be affected very slightly, lakhs of small enterprises, in the informal sector, will once again be in deep distress and many even go extinct. The second wave of the pandemic could jolt the economy much harder than is being anticipated. Sectors such as retail, hospitality, tourism and aviation, which have already taken a big hit during the first wave, will be even more badly bruised with more than two-thirds of the country having imposed curfews or partial lockdowns. States like Karnataka have imposed a full lockdown for two weeks and others might follow. This time around many more well-to-do households - numbering in all roughly 250 million - have been impacted which could hurt consumption demand, albeit temporarily. Also, the second wave has affected rural areas and could result in demand staying suppressed for a few months. The economy right now is somewhat sluggish - growth in the services sector particularly is slowing - but demand for both goods and services should bounce back around September as the festive season begins. Savings - at least in the form of bank deposits - are growing, indicating either the inability to spend or extreme caution. The discoms seem to be taking full advantage of the Electricity Late Payment Surcharge Rules, 2021, by which penalty for late payments was reduced to a "base rate" which is 500 basis points more than SBI's marginal cost of funds-based lending rate. Discoms taking longer to clear their dues. Jagdish Fofandi, national president of the Seafood Exporters Association of India (SEAI) "We might

see a further drop of 10% in exports from the performance of FY21." While the balance sheets of companies in the organised sector would be affected very slightly, lakhs of small enterprises, in the informal sector, will once again be in deep distress and many even go extinct. The dichotomy seen in the recovery following the first wave will get exacerbated; additionally, many more low-income households are likely to get hit. Joblessness is already running high; the CMIE data showed unemployment has hit 8% and ten million salaried persons have lost their jobs. Moreover, researchers at the Azim Premji University have found that while a big chunk of workers did find work again, after having lost them in the first wave, the remuneration was much lower. The monthly per capita income for an average household of four members in October 2020 was a fifth lower than what it was in January 2020, at 4,979. Joblessness and reduced income have meant labour's share of GDP dropped from 32.5% in Q2FY20 to 27% in Q2FY21. The demand for jobs in April under MG-NREGS, both at the household as well as the individual level, has been the highest compared with any previous April since 2013-14. Unfortunately, fresh capex is unlikely in big measure for a few years, which will be a dampener on job creation.

CSB Bank reports highest-ever net profit of Rs 218.40 crore for FY21

Mumbai, May 11 : Total income of the bank during the period rose to Rs 609.45 crore from Rs 475.49 crore in the -ago period. CSB Bank on Saturday reported a net profit of Rs 42.9 crore in the fourth quarter of FY21 largely on higher interest income. The Thrissur-based lender had reported a net loss of Rs 59.7 crore in Q4 FY20 and a net profit of Rs 53 crore in the third quarter of the last fiscal year. CSB reported the highest-ever net profit of Rs 218.40 crore for the full financial year 2020-21 as against a net profit of Rs 12.72 crore in FY 2019-20. Net interest income of the lender is seen higher by 75% year-on-year (y-o-y) to Rs 275.7 crore for the fourth quarter of FY21, while non-interest income grew by 30% y-o-y to touch Rs 112.3 crore. Total income of the bank during the period rose to Rs 609.45 crore from Rs 475.49 crore in the -ago period. 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. Bandhan Bank Q4 profit falls 80% to Rs 103.03 crore on higher provisions. In value terms, the gross NPAs stood at Rs 1,083.44 crore, significantly higher than Rs 631.51 crore in the year-ago period. DCB Bank profit rises 13pc to Rs 78 cr in January-March. VR Rajendran, managing director & CEO of the bank, said the bank can now fully focus on growth in FY 22 without any baggages of the past. "While the industry grew by approximately 12% in deposits and 6% in advances, we could outperform by recording 21% and 27% growth in deposits and advances respectively. In terms of overall business, the bank has grown a fourth of the total business it grew in past 99 years. We could also open 101 branches in this 101st year of existence," he added. The bank has plans to open 200 branches in the current fiscal. Gross non-performing assets (NPA) as a percentage of gross advances is seen at 2.68% from 1.77% in the preceding quarter and 3.54% in the year ago period.

RIL, Amara Raja Batteries, Bandhan Bank, Godrej Properties, Zydus Wellness ArcelorMittal stocks in focus



Mumbai, May 11 : Nifty futures were trading 146.75 points or one per cent higher at 15,006.80 on Singaporean Exchange, suggesting a positive opening for BSE Sensex and Nifty 50 on Monday. On a weekly chart, Nifty/Sensex gained 400/1,200 points from the lowest levels, said an analyst. In the previous week, the Nifty-50/Sensex closed above the crucial resistance of 14800/49000. "Based on it, Nifty/Sensex would climb to a minimum of 15000/15050 levels. However, the market would pick up the momentum, if it crosses 15150 levels. On the downside, 14600 and 14500 would be major supports. The bank-nifty closed below the psychological barrier of 33000 that would keep the financial sector selective," said Shrikant Chouhan, Executive Vice President, Equity Technical

Research at Kotak Securities. Zydus Wellness, JMC Projects: A total of 22 BSE-listed companies including Artemis Medicare Services, Chambal Fertilisers & Chemicals, Dai-ichi Karkaria, DE Nora India, Escorts Finance, Ganges Securities, Gayatri Tissue & Papers, Sangam Renewables, Satia Industries, Suryalakshmi Cotton Mills, TTI Enterprise, Yenky's (India) and Zydus Wellness are scheduled to release their January-March quarter earnings on May 10. Economy likely to rebound by Q4 of FY22, Bandhan Bank bullish on meeting targets: Chandra Shekhar Ghosh. 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. Bandhan Bank Q4 profit falls 80% to Rs 103.03 crore on higher provisions. Amara Raja Batteries: Amara Raja Batteries said it has resumed operations at its plants at Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh. The company has resumed operations at its plants at Nune Gundlupalli and Karkambadi in Chittoor district with effect from May 8, after High Court of Andhra Pradesh granted an interim suspension. Bandhan Bank: Bandhan Bank MD & CEO Chandra Shekhar Ghosh is hopeful that the economy will rebound by the third and fourth quarters of the current fiscal, enabling the lender to meet its targets. He said the bank had exercised caution amid the COVID-19 pandemic and made additional provisioning in the last quarter of 2020-21. RIL: Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Retail Ltd has been ranked second fastest-growing retailer in the world in the 2021 ranking of global retail powerhouses by Deloitte, down from the top rank secured the previous years. Godrej Properties: Godrej Properties expects its sales booking this fiscal to surpass the last year's record Rs 6,725 crore despite the outbreak of second wave of COVID-19 and hopes to cross Rs 10,000 crore mark in the next financial year. ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel: ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India along with the Odisha government has initiated a feasibility study for its proposed 12 million tonne per annum (MTPA) integrated steel plant in Kendrapara district of the state.

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Gauhati High Court Extends

to expire by June 1, 2021, such orders shall unconditionally stand extended and/or deemed to have been extended till June 1, 2021. "This shall include all such orders of the Outlying Benches and the Courts and Tribunals subordinate therein," it said. The GHC also kept in abeyance any decree for eviction, dispossession or demolition passed by any court, tribunal or authority during this period, except for any specific order for a given case. It also directed that in cases where the accused or convict is on interim bail, short term bail or anticipatory bail which expired before April 19, 2021 to June 1, 2021, the person may not surrender and his or her bail orders will be effective till May 31, 2021, the Bench said. The litigants may, however, approach the concerned court or any order on vacation of stay in an individual case in an extremely exceptional situation, the litigants and parties may approach the concerned court. The full bench has fixed May 31 as the next date for hearing on the matter. In order to control the spread of coronavirus in the courts, the HC had earlier taken a few decisions restricting the working with minimal staff across the four states, report said. "Now by our own orders, we have restricted the functioning of all courts, which are now functioning to deal with extremely urgent matters alone. Under these circumstances, there may be cases where great and irreparable harm may be caused due to the obvious hindrance to the access to justice," it said. In the order, the Bench said that the entire world is facing the worst pandemic in its living memory and the second wave of COVID-19 has been many times more severe and devastating than the first. "It has crippled our daily life. Like many other institutions, the judiciary is also battling with this crisis and trying new means and methods to keep the courts functional under these strange and difficult times," it added.

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma

ministry. Hazarika passed his H.S.L.C (Matric) from Central Dharamtul Motiram Borah Higher Secondary School, in 1993. He passed his Class 12 (Higher Secondary) from Nagoan Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan College in 1995 and did his B.A from Arya Vidyapeeth College in 1998. Sanjoy Kishan who represents the Tinsukia constituency is the new Welfare of Tea Tribes, Labour & Employment Minister in Himanta Biswa Sarma led-Cabinet. Born on 26 January 1970 in Dhekialhat, Kishan is a resident of Bordoloi Nagar in Tinsukia. Jogen Mohan who represents the Mahmora constituency is the new Health & Family Welfare, Science & Technology, Information Technology Minister in Himanta Biswa Sarma led-Cabinet. Mohan was also a minister in Sarbananda Sonowal led Government. Jogen Mohan is a resident of Jyotipur village in the Sivasagar district of Assam. Ranaj Pegu who represents the Dhemaji constituency is the new Education, Welfare of Plain Tribe & Backward Classes (non-BTC) Minister in Himanta Biswa Sarma led-Cabinet. Ranaj Pegu is the former chief executive member of the Missing Autonomous Council. Aged about 59 years, Pegu has an MBBS degree from Gauhati Medical College. He is a resident of Chauldhua Baligaon in Dhemaji district of Assam. Ashok Singhal who represents the Dhekiajuli constituency is the new Guwahati Development, Urban Development, Irrigation Minister in Himanta Biswa Sarma led-Cabinet. Born on 29th December 1968. Singhal is a resident of Kumarpara, Guwahati. He is a Commerce graduate from the Gauhati Commerce College. He also has a Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM). Chandra Mohan Patowary who represents the Dharmapur constituency is the new Transport, Industries & Commerce, Skill Development, Welfare of Minorities Minister of Assam. Patowary was also the transport minister in Sarbananda Sonowal led-Cabinet. Chandra Mohan Patowary is a resident of Danguapara in Nalbari of Assam. He is the son of Late Lankeswar Patowary. His age is about 65 years. He is married to Rita Chowdhury who is a poet and novelist. The couple is blessed with a daughter named Kristie Kashyap and a son named Abhiruk Patowary. Former United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) president and Former Rajya Sabha Member Urkhao Gwra Brahma is the new Handloom & Textile, Soil Conservation, Welfare of Plain Tribe & Backward Classes (BTC) Minister of Assam. UG Brahma, who represents the Chapaguri constituency is the Sahitya Akademi Awardee and former All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) president. Urkhao Gwra Brahma is 57 years old, a resident of Kokrajhar Town. He is a Bachelor in Arts from Kokrajhar College. Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) president Atul Bora who represents the Bokakhat constituency is the new Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Border Area Development, Implementation of Assam Accord, Cooperation Minister of Assam. Bora was born on April 7, 1960, in Borahi Gaon of Golaghat. He is married to Bulbuli Baruah and they have one daughter, who is studying in Delhi. In the past, he did bodybuilding and weightlifting as well. He also likes farming. Assam BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Dass who represents the Patacharkuchi constituency will be the new Panchayat & Rural Development, Public Health Engineering, Food & Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs Minister in Himanta Biswa Sarma led-Cabinet. Dass took oath as Cabinet Minister on Monday. Ranjeet Kumar Dass, 54 is the son of Late Arabinda Das of Barpeta. Ranjeet Kr Dass is a resident of Sorbhog under Barpeta district. He is married to Anju Rani Baishya Das. He is an MSc pass from Gauhati University, 1990 batch. Keshab Mahanta who represents the Kaliabor constituency is the new Health & Family Welfare, Science & Technology, Information Technology Minister in Himanta Biswa Sarma led-Cabinet. Mahanta was also a Cabinet Minister in Sarbananda Sonowal led-Cabinet. Keshab Mahanta was born on the 6th of July, 1959. He is the son of Late. Kamal Mahanta and is a resident of Teliagaon (Balisatra), Kaliaborin Nagaon district. He is 61 years old. He is married to Chayanika Mahanta and they have two daughters, Dibisa and Lulakshi. Keshab Mahanta did his HSLC from Kuwori Tol High School, Nagaon, in the year 1976. He then went to Kaliabor College to do his Pre-University (Class XII), in Nagaon under Gauhati University in 1978. He also did his graduation from Kaliabor College before joining Gauhati University for his Master's in the year 1990.

Maharashtra govt may halt

state so far. We are making special wards for these patients," he said. The state health minister said that the decision regarding extending lockdown in Maharashtra will be taken in the cabinet meeting tomorrow. Earlier on May 7 (Friday), while addressing a press conference, Rajesh Tope had requested the central government to provide more COVID vaccine doses to the state, indicating that he would be forced to shift the vaccine allocation to 45 years and above due to the COVID vaccine deficit. "Almost 4 lakh people of 45 years and above are waiting for their second dose. There is no supply of Covaxin and if we don't get the supply, we have to transfer vaccines allotted to 18-44 years to 45 years and above age group," said the Health Minister. In Maharashtra, the third phase of the vaccination drive nominally commenced on May 1 even after a shortage of vaccine doses in order to mark Maharashtra Day's celebration. The state government has promised to provide free vaccines to those between the age group 18-44 years so as to combat the second wave of COVID-19. As per the official data, Maharashtra has 593150 active COVID-19 cases, 24,920 new cases and 549 related deaths were reported in the state over the last 24 hours.

Covid-19: Telangana imposes

discussing the pros and cons of a statewide lockdown will be conducted at 2pm at Pragathi Bhavan," the chief minister's office (CMO) had earlier said. Top state officials in Telangana discussed the recent surge of Covid-19 cases and take a decision in favour of or against the imposition of a complete lockdown, according to the Telangana CMO. Delhi runs out of Covaxin for 18-44 age group, 125 centres to be shut: AAP Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA delegation meeting Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari over Maratha quota issue on Tuesday. Will meet PM Modi soon on Maratha reservation issue: Uddhav Thackeray In view of this, the State Cabinet would discuss the pros and cons of imposing lockdown including the adverse impact, if any, on the ongoing procurement of Paddy. The Cabinet will take a decision after the necessary deliberations. Telangana Fights Covid19 Highlighting the matter of the Telangana lockdown, the CMO's official Twitter handle posted, "The opinion is divided among people on the question of imposing a lockdown. Some reports suggest that the number of Covid-19 cases has not come down in some of the Indian states despite the clamping of lockdown whereas some sections argue in favour of lockdown."

Jayanta Malla Baruah Appointed

coordination among the party members. "The Chief Minister will sit in a meeting with the district Presidents, party workers every month to monitor the works. He also reiterated about conducting meetings with the former members," Dass informed.

Rush gathered for Qazi's funeral

people for breaking COVID protocol and gathering in large numbers in the procession. FIR was lodged under IPC 188 (violating prohibitory orders), Epidemic act and relevant sections of IPC," Superintendent of Police, Sankalp Sharma said. He further added by saying that, "a case has been reported from Badaun district where people gathered in huge numbers for the funeral procession of a religious leader. An FIR has been registered under Sections 144, 188 and other relevant sections at Kotwali police station. A team has been constituted under Additional SP to take action against all those found guilty." He said strict action will be taken against the guilty and the offenders are being identified with the help of video footage of the procession.

Twitter Donates ? 110 Cr To India

helping ensure that people get vaccinated, particularly in remote, marginalised communities in India," Twitter's statement said. "This grant will help under-resourced communities identify COVID symptoms, prevent spread, access care and treatment, benefit from medical equipment including oxygen, oximeters, thermometers, protective gear and vaccination, survive lockdowns, regain livelihoods and will strengthen hospitals and NGOs that serve rural and low-income communities," Twitter added.

India COVID crisis: International assistance delivered at AIIMS, Safdarjung, Lady Harding, RML, ITBBP, DRDO

New Delhi, May 11 : Even as international assistance pours into India, authorities have been to deliver it to various end-users-- hospitals spread across the country. The top recipient of the assistance has been to AIIMS spread across the country, Safdarjung Delhi, Lady Harding, RML Hospital in Delhi, ITBP, DRDO. The ministry of external affair's covid cell is working 24x7 and contacting Indian missions and a mechanism or standard operating procedure has been set up to smoothen the early delivery of assistance. So far, 11,000 items of over 3000 tons have been dispatched all over the country with the Indian Air force and Indian navy playing an important part in transporting material. The first flight of assistance came on 27th April from the UK. 80 oxygen concentrators from the UK went to DRDO Patna, 100 to DRDO Delhi, 100 to DRDO Ahmedabad, 120 to Lady Hardinge Medical College, Delhi with RML and Safdarjung getting 50 ventilators each. UK's assistance of Oxygen concentrators has been sent to states like Goa, Bihar, UP, Jharkhand. Australia had sent 43 Oxygen concentrators which have been delivered to West Bengal while 1056 ventilators sent by the country have been delivered to Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam, and Bihar. 2 Liquid Oxygen container that arrived from Bahrain has been given to DRDO. France had sent 200 syringe pumps, 500 machine filters, 500 anti-bacterial filters, 28 Ventilators all of which have been delivered to Lady Hardinge Medical College. Germany had sent 120 ventilators of which 40 were given to Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi, 45 to RML in Delhi, and 35 to AIIMS, Jhajjar. Assistance from Ireland went to AIIMS Patna, AIIMS Rai Bareilly, AIIMS Chandigarh, AIIMS Rishikesh, AIIMS Jodhpur, AIIMS Bhopal, AIIMS Delhi, AIIMS Jhajjar, Safdarjung Delhi, and several northeastern states. One Oxygen Generation Plant and 20 ventilators sent by Italy went to ITBP hospital, Noida. The plant that was installed within 48 hours was "switched on" by the Italian Ambassador to India Vincenzo de Luca himself. The plant will supply oxygen to more than 100 beds at a time to the Covid19 patients admitted at the centre. Romania had sent 80 Oxygen concentrators, of which 40 went to AIIMS, Jhajhar, 40 to Lady Harding and of the 75 Oxygen Cylinders, 40 went to Safdarjung, 35 to lady Harding. 150-bed side monitors, 75 ventilators, 20 Oxygen concentrators from Russia went to Lady Harding. 200 Oxygen concentrators sent by Mauritius went to AIIMS Mangakagiri (20), AIIMS Nagpur (60), AIIMS Raipur (50), JIPMER Puducherry (70). New Zealand sent 72 oxygen concentrators, all of which went to army Base Hospital, Delhi Cantt. US supplies went across the country--from Remdesivir to Assam, Goa, MP, Bihar, West Bengal, Delhi, PGI Chandigarh, AIIMS Kalyani, AIIMS Bhopal to Rapid detection kits to Delhi, Punjab, One Oxygen generation plant to ESIC Faridabad, Oxygen concentrators to Punjab, Kerala, Maharashtra. 256 Oxygen cylinders sent by Singapore were distributed to AIIMS Ranchi, Raipur, Patna, Lady Harding, with each getting 64 cylinders. Thailand had sent 30 Oxygen concentrators, with 15 going to Safdarjung, Delhi, 15 to CGHS, Delhi. Taiwan's assistance of Oxygen concentrators (150) went to Mizoram (15), Punjab (50), Haryana (35), National Institute of Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases, Delhi (50), and Oxygen Cylinders (500) to Mizoram (15), Himachal Pradesh (185) and Uttarakhand (300). UAE's mega assistance went across the length and breadth of the country--the 1707600 masks were distributed to Aims Kalyani, Manglagiri, Rai Bareilly, Jodhpur, Patna, Deogarh, Rishikesh, Delhi, 157 ventilators to DRDO Dehradun, Ventilators to various AIIMS, DRDO, ITBP. The West Asian country, with which New Delhi's partnership has grown in the past few years also sent 72000 goggles which went to Safdarjung (11000), Lady Harding (11000), RML (10000), AIIMS Rishikesh (10000), Jhajjar (20000) and Jodhpur (11000). The ministry of external affair's covid cell's chief Dammu Ravi has assured that the international assistance sent to India by various countries is being distributed to various locations in real-time to bring immediate relief as the covid crisis wrecks the country. Dammu Ravi, Additional Secretary of MEA's COVID Cell at a presser said, "not even one consignment has remained at the airport or the seaport. They have been directly loaded at the airport to distribution location in real-time, it goes and gets distributed and given to that location for the right use, immediate use" He explained, "most of the consignments have reached the destination. some may be in transit, for a logistical reason and every consignment is tracked and ensured that it is properly used in those locations." 10000 doses of Remdesivir that was given by Bangladesh will be given to North-Eastern states of Meghalaya, Manipur, Sikkim, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences and North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS). They were formally handed over at the Petrapole border checkpoint between India and Bangladesh on the 5th of May. Belgium had also sent 9000 vials of Remdesivir which have been delivered to the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, UP, Rajasthan. 20,000 doses of Favipiravir sent by Russia was sent to Lady Harding, Safdarjung, RLM, and AIIMS--Jodhpur, Rishikesh, Rai Bareilly, Delhi, Jhajjar. So far, 4468 Oxygen concentrators, 13 Oxygen plants, 3417 oxygen cylinders, 3921 Ventilators, and 3 lakh Remdesivir have been dispatched or delivered as of 5th May. According to govt data, 235 items were dispatched on 27th April, 456 items from 28th April, 355 items, and 2 lakh strips of medicines on 29th April, 3595 items on 30th April, 30 items on 1st May 2926 items, and 1.3 lakh vials of Remdesivir on 2nd May, 225 items on 3rd May 1233 items and 1.6 vials of Remdesivir on 4th May 1782 items on 5th May. The distribution of allocation that has been made is shared by foreign governments, both by Indian envoys abroad and MEA in Delhi so that they are fully aware of how their donation is used by India. Ravi highlighted that "we are deeply appreciative of the generous offer coming from abroad, both by foreign governments, individuals, private entities, NGOs who have expressed solidarity and support with India" and "Internationally recognition of the fact, that this crisis is not that of India alone, and it is a global crisis requiring collective actions and collective strategies" The international assistance is coordinated with a cell at the health ministry, in which MEA plays an important role since all the goods come via them. The group meets every morning at around 9.30 am to coordinate the entire process.

Widely used in India, WHO warns against use of ivermectin for treatment of COVID-19

New Delhi, May 11 : A day after Goa's Health Minister Vishwajit Rane recommended Ivermectin to all above 18 to combat Covid in the state, the World Health Organisation on Tuesday has warned against its use. "Safety and efficacy are important when using any drug for a new indication. @WHO recommends against the use of ivermectin for #COVID19 except within clinical trials," Soumya Swaminathan, the global health body's chief scientist, said in a tweet. The Goa state government on Monday (May 11) cleared a new Covid treatment protocol which recommends all residents above the age of 18 to take five tablets of the ivermectin drug, in order to prevent the steep and sometimes fatal viral fever, which accompanies a Covid-19 infection. Rane, while speaking to reporters, said that the ivermectin drug would be made available at all health centres in the state and should be taken by all residents, irrespective of whether they have Covid-19 symptoms or otherwise. Last week, peer-reviewed research had claimed that global ivermectin use can end the Covid-19 pandemic, as the medicine significantly reduces the risk of contracting the deadly respiratory disease when used regularly. The peer review, which included three US government senior scientists and was published in the American Journal of Therapeutics, touted the common anti-parasitic ivermectin as a miracle cure for Covid-19 by doctors and campaigners the world over. In her tweet, Swaminathan also attached a warning issued by the German health care and life sciences giant Merck. "Scientists continue to carefully examine the findings of all available and emerging studies of ivermectin for the treatment of Covid-19," read the statement from Merck. "...to-date, our analysis has identified: No scientific basis for a potential therapeutic effect against Covid-19 from pre-clinical studies; No meaningful evidence for a clinical activity or clinical efficacy in patients with Covid-19 disease, and; A concerning lack of safety data in the majority of studies," the statement added. The WHO had, in March, issued a similar warning against the use of ivermectin in treating Covid patients. The global health agency said that there was a "very low certainty of evidence" on ivermectin's effects on mortality, hospital admission and getting rid of the virus from the body. Rane also stated that expert panels from the UK, Italy, Spain and Japan, found a large, statistically significant reduction in mortality, time to recovery and viral clearance in Covid-19 patients treated with ivermectin. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had also, in April last year, recommended against the use of ivermectin in treating Covid patients. Besides, the Union ministry of health and family welfare had also reportedly opted out from including Ivermectin in its official Clinical Management Protocol for Covid-19 last year.

PM Narendra Modi speaks to CM Uddhav Thackeray, lauds Maharashtra's efforts to fight COVID-19

New Delhi, May 11 : Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday (May 8) over the COVID-19 related situation and praised the state's efforts to fight the virus. According to a statement from the CMO, Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the call enquired about Maharashtra's efforts in the fight against COVID and said that the state was fighting a good battle against the second wave. The Chief Minister informed PM Modi about the state government's planning to face the third wave of novel coronavirus. "The Prime Minister and the Union government have been guiding the state in the war against coronavirus from the very beginning and it is being put to good use by the state government," Thackeray said during the conversation, news agency ANI reported. Earlier, Thackeray has also written to the Central government seeking permission to develop a separate app for COVID vaccination in the state. In a letter, he described various issues including complaints of frequent glitches in CoWIN platform. Meanwhile, according to the Union Health Ministry, Maharashtra was among the ten states that reported 71.81 per cent of new COVID-19 cases in the country on Friday. The state reported the highest daily new cases at 62,194. The state was among the twelve states that cumulatively accounted for 81.04 per cent of India's total active cases and had 6,41,281 active cases of the virus.

Nagaon Lions Club held annual session in virtual mood, new committee formed for next session

NAGAON, May 11: Due to prevailing COVID situation, Nagaon Lions Club held its annual session through virtual mood recently.

The session was chaired by its sitting president Pralay Shaha. In the session, the new committee of the club for the next session was also formed which would be headed by retired teacher Mala Sarma Bordoloi as new president of Nagaon Press Club and Jiten Agarwal as the secretary.

Similarly, former treasurer and public relations officer respectively Pavan Kumar Bora and Biswajit Mahanta have been included in the new committee in the same portfolios for another term, a release said. Besides, in the session, the members of the club also discussed about how the oxygen cylinder it stored in the club, would be supplied to the COVID victims in time in the district during the ongoing pandemic situation. The session was attended by the club members - Jugal Agarwal, Ganga Ballabh Goswami, Himmat Sulangki, Manok Chand Nahta, Basanta Bordoloi, Hardarshan Singh, Harbhajan Singh, Gurucharan Singh, Ajoy Mittal, Gouri Sengupta, Balvinder Singh, Inamul Masjid, Pranab Das, Bharati Nahta, Surinder Karwa and many.

Convene special parliament session on COVID crisis: Adhir Ranjan writes to President Kovind

New Delhi, May 11 : Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Monday (May 10) urged President Ram Nath Kovind to convene a special session of parliament to discuss the COVID-19 situation prevailing in the country. In a letter to the President, Chowdhury said that a special "covid crisis" session should be held so that the MPs could discuss about the constituencies they represent. "Corona pandemic in the Country is in a grave situation and you must be well informed about the exact scenario. In this critical situation I would urge your kind conscious to convene a special (covid crisis) session of Parliament," Chowdhury wrote in the letter. He said the session was needed as "India consists of a number of constituencies and each Member of Parliament represents his/her constituency from respective State has some say

about the condition of people therein and in order to find a way to ease lives of suffering people". The request from the Congress party comes at a time the country is facing the second wave of the pandemic that is having a devastating impact on the people. Many opposition leaders have demanded for the functioning of parliamentary panels by virtual means. India has touched a record number of COVID-19 cases in recent days. After recording over four lakh fresh cases for four consecutive days, India witnessed a single-day rise of 3,66,161 COVID-19 cases on Monday, which pushed its tally to 2,26,62,575, according to the health ministry. The death toll due to the viral disease climbed to 2,46,116 with 3,754 more people succumbing to it, the ministry's data updated at 8 am showed.

Tokyo Olympics: poll shows 60% of Japanese people want Games cancelled

Tokyo, May 11 : Preparations for the Tokyo Olympics have suffered another setback after a poll found that nearly 60% of people in Japan want them to be cancelled, less than three months before the Games are due to open. Japan has extended a state of emergency in Tokyo and several other regions until the end of May as it struggles to contain a surge in Covid-19 cases fuelled by new, more contagious variants, with medical staff warning that health services in some areas are on the verge of collapse. The Olympics, which were delayed by a year due to the pandemic, are set to open on 23 July, with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and organisers insisting that measures will be put in place to ensure the safety of athletes and other visitors, as well as a nervous Japanese public. The survey, conducted between 7 and 9 May by the conservative Yomiuri Shimbun, showed 59% wanted the Games cancelled as opposed to 39% who said they should be held. "Postponement" - an option ruled out by the IOC - was not offered as a choice. Of those who said the Olympics should go ahead, 23% said they should take place without spectators. Foreign spectators have been banned but a final decision on domestic attendance will be made in June. Another poll conducted at the weekend by TBS News found 65% wanted the Games cancelled or postponed again, with 37% voting to scrap the event altogether and 28% calling for another delay. A similar poll in April conducted by Kyodo news agency found 70% wanted the Olympics cancelled or postponed. As public opposition holds firm just over 70 days before the opening ceremony, the IOC and the Japanese government appear to be sending

mixed messages over who is ultimately responsible for deciding the Games' fate. The IOC's vice president, John Coates, said on Saturday that while Japanese sentiment about the Games "was a concern", he could foresee no scenario under which the sporting extravaganza would not go ahead. "The prime minister of Japan said that to the president of the

originally expected to take place next week, is being arranged for June, Fuji News Network reported on Monday, citing multiple unidentified sources. Japanese media had reported that Bach would take part in a torch relay event in Hiroshima on 17 May, but Tokyo 2020 organisers said the visit had not been confirmed. A prerequisite for his visit would be



United States two or three weeks ago. He continues to say that to the IOC," Coates said. But on Monday, Japan's prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, said the IOC would have the final say, insisting that his government had not prioritised the Games over public health. Asked in a parliamentary committee meeting whether the Games will continue even if Covid-19 infections spike, Suga replied: "I've never put the Olympics first". He added: "My priority has been to protect the lives and health of the Japanese population. We must first prevent the spread of the virus." Suga has repeatedly vowed to go ahead with the Olympics despite the spike in Covid-19 cases, but the TBS survey found his support rate at 40%, close to record lows marked earlier this year. A visit to Japan by the IOC president, Thomas Bach,

the lifting of Japan's targeted states of emergency, the broadcaster said. While no prominent athlete has publicly opposed the Games being held this summer, the Japanese tennis star Naomi Osaka said the time had come to discuss the merits of holding the event in the middle of a pandemic. The world No 2 said staging the Games should be discussed as long as the issue was "making people very uncomfortable". "Of course I want the Olympics to happen, but I think there's so much important stuff going on, especially the past year," she told a news conference ahead of the Italian Open. "A lot of unexpected things have happened. For me, I feel like if it's putting people at risk ... then it definitely should be a discussion, which I think it is as of right now. At the end of the day I'm just an athlete,

and there is a whole pandemic going on, so, yeah." The virus has brought disruption to the torch relay and to qualifying events. Last week, Gymnastics Canada said it would not be sending a team to a last-chance Olympic qualifier in Rio de Janeiro in June over coronavirus concerns, effectively denying men's artistic, women's artistic, and rhythmic gymnasts the chance to complete in Tokyo. Japan has recorded more than 600,000 coronavirus cases and more than 10,500 deaths - the highest in east Asia. On Saturday, it reported more than 7,000 infections - the highest since January. In addition, only about 2% of Japan's 126m people have received at least one vaccine dose since its rollout began in mid-February, while hospitals are struggling to secure beds for newly diagnosed people. A hospital in Tachikawa, western Tokyo, is displaying a banner warning that medical capacity had reached its limit. "Give us a break! The Olympics are impossible!" it says. In Osaka prefecture, which has seen a surge in cases, more than 13,000 people diagnosed with Covid-19 have been asked to stay at home as hospitals are full, according to health ministry data.

England hope Twickenham will be 50% full for July Tests with USA and Canada

London, May 11 : The Rugby Football Union is hopeful Twickenham will be 50% full for England's summer Tests against the USA and Canada in July after confirming the decision to switch the proposed tour of North America to home soil. Subject to government guidance, the RFU is optimistic of being allowed to admit 41,000 supporters for the matches against the USA - which will take place on 4 July - and Canada on 10 July. An England A fixture has also been arranged for the first time in five years with Scotland A due at Welford Road on Sunday 27 June. The RFU has decided to revert back to "A" - instead of Saxons - but it is understood any debutants will still be tied to England. The Saxons have been dormant since a 2016 trip to South Africa but Jones and the RFU's director of performance rugby, Conor O'Shea, have been eager to reprise the second team. Exeter's Ali Hopper took charge in South Africa while Jon Callard has coached the side previously, but it is understood Jones will assume control against Scotland A. Confirmation of England's summer fixtures comes as part of World Rugby's revised schedule with Wales hosting Canada - for whom Rob Howley is now working - and two Tests against Argentina in July. Ireland will welcome Japan on 3 July and USA on 10 July, after which Andy Farrell could theoretically join the British & Irish Lions coaching staff. South Africa have arranged two matches against Georgia which will be



vital to their preparations for facing the Lions given the Springboks have not played a Test since their 2019 World Cup final win. With 11 players away with the Lions, the match against Scotland A and the Tests against the USA and Canada will give Jones the opportunity to blood a number of youngsters. Jones had hoped for more of his England squad to be selected by Warren Gatland but had said in advance that even if some of his senior players were overlooked he would seek to rest them to give youngsters a chance. Four years ago Jones picked a number of callow players for the tour of Argentina and gave debuts to Tom Curry and Sam Underhill - the "Kamikaze Kids" who proved so influential in the run to the World Cup final two years later. "The summer series will give us the chance to look at a lot of players and see how they step up, and it's an important part of our World Cup preparation," said Jones. "For younger players, it's a chance to show what they can do at international level and how they are in the team environment."

IPL likely to be without England players if it restarts, says Ashley Giles

London, May 11 : England players are likely to be ruled out of the Indian Premier League's mooted resumption later this year following an insistence from Ashley Giles, their team director, that international cricket now takes priority. An outbreak of Covid-19 among the IPL's franchises forced the tournament to be indefinitely suspended last week with 31 games still outstanding and now organisers are eyeing a possible September restart ahead of the T20 World Cup a month later. If so it would be a clash with England's six-match white-ball tour of Bangladesh, due to depart on 20 September, and two additional Twenty20s in Pakistan on 14 and 15 October, both of which are viewed as key preparation for the global event. But while there is uncertainty over which country will host this rearranged IPL - as well as the T20 World Cup that is currently due to take place in India - Giles expects England's white-ball players to be busy regardless. Speaking on Monday, Giles, managing director of England men's cricket, said: "We've got a full Future Tours Programme. If those tours [of Bangladesh and Pakistan] are going ahead, I'd expect them to be there." Giles had previously agreed that England players who were involved in the knockout stages of the IPL could miss the two-Test series against New Zealand that starts on 2 June given the fixtures at Lord's and Edgbaston were late additions to the schedule. That flexibility was a one-off, however, and unlikely to be repeated during a 12-month period that sees the T20 World Cup followed by the Ashes in Australia - dates for which are due next week - and tours of the Caribbean next February and March. This logjam leaves the likes of Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer and Jos Buttler unlikely to fulfil the second half of their IPL contracts this year and though Giles has previously warned against pitting international cricket against the lucrative short-form tournament for fear of forcing early retirements, dissenters are not expected. In the short-term, and in spite of the IPL's recent suspension, Giles admitted that England may still use next



month's New Zealand series "to look at some new faces", with James Bracey, Gloucestershire's wicketkeeper-batsman, and Ollie Robinson, the Sussex seamer, two uncapped players in contention. Buttler, the first-choice Test wicketkeeper, is among the IPL players undergoing a 10-day quarantine that ends on Sunday but could yet be rested after a lengthy winter on the road, while Chris Woakes, who would balance the side in the absence of the injured Stokes, may struggle to get enough overs into his legs. Like Sam Curran, another Test-contracted all-rounder able to potentially fill the Stokes void, Woakes would need to play in the round of County Championship fixtures that start on 20 May. However doing so immediately after a spell of inactivity in hotel-room isolation brings a clear risk of injury for seamers. Giles said any decisions will be made on a "case by case" basis and now fall under Chris Silverwood's jurisdiction. The recent removal of Ed Smith has seen England's head coach take on full responsibility for selection, with his first Test squad expected next week before the team enters its latest biosecure bubble on 28 May. Speaking for the first time on the subject of Smith's redundancy and Silverwood's enhanced role, Giles said: "It's a change I've been looking at for some time. For me, it's more modern and it's cleaner. Let the coach pick the team."

His head's on the block. I don't want that to be the headline, but it's a conversation I'd have had with Chris. [I said:] 'I don't think things change a lot, if we lose in Australia the pressure is on all of us. You might as well have a free run at it, it's your team.' [And] the captains, Joe Root and Eoin Morgan, continue to play a major part in who goes on the field and that isn't a great change. They're very different but they have an important say." Giles cited Silverwood's knowledge of the county system and the network of scouts and coaches reporting into him as reasons to be confident the switch will work. He also maintained that the end of Smith's three-year tenure was a case of the setup being simplified, rather than any clash of personalities behind the scenes. While England's players are unlikely to be able to leave the bubble during the New Zealand series at home, with their time split between grounds and hotels, Giles expects the arrangements to relax over the course of the summer as the country emerges from lockdown and cases nationwide continue to fall. The 48-year-old also confirmed the hope that England's Test players feature in the opening fixtures of the Hundred, a week before their five-match series against India starts on 4 August. As ever this will depend on management of workloads during what is an unrelenting year.

Mercedes expect Lewis Hamilton to sign new two-year deal for 2022 by August



London, May 11 : Lewis Hamilton has indicated he is eager to conclude a new deal that will see him continuing to race on in Formula One. After his victory in Sunday's Spanish Grand Prix the world champion said he would like to be in a position to have concluded negotiations with his Mercedes team by the time F1 takes its summer break in August. The team principal, Toto Wolff, has suggested he expects Hamilton to sign a two-year contract with Mercedes. Hamilton won from Red Bull's Max Verstappen at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya after he and Mercedes delivered a masterclass of teamwork. Mercedes pulled off a bold strategic race, opting to pit Hamilton twice, confident their driver could overcome the deficit on track to Verstappen. After his second stop Hamilton was 21 seconds in arrears to the Dutchman with 24 laps to go but he chased him down and passed him within 17 laps to sweep to a mighty win. He is enjoying the best start to a season of his career with three wins and a second place in four races and now has a 14-point advantage over Verstappen, who has enjoyed the quicker car over Hamilton at at least two of the four opening meetings. Hamilton now has seven world championships, six of them with Mercedes, but currently has only a one-year contract with the team. That deal was done exceptionally late in F1 terms, agreed only in February of this year. There has been widespread speculation on how long the 36-year-old, now in his 15th season in F1, will continue to race. If he wins an eighth title this year he will surpass Michael Schumacher's record but after victory in Barcelona he strongly implied that there would be more to come. "There's still some life in this old dog," he said of proposed contract negotiations. "Hopefully soon we can start, as long as it doesn't interfere with the actual job. We still have 19 races to do but it would be great to get something in place before the break so then we could be in that break and have a clear picture of the future." Previous negotiations last year with Wolff were delayed by the pandemic and complicated by the difficulty in the pair meeting face to face. The team principal was intent on getting the deal done and to make it more than just a one-year extension. "Yes, it should be [more than a year]," said Wolff. "We don't want to be in a stressful situation every single year where we are absolutely flat-out trying to win races and needing to negotiate. I would rather that doesn't happen every year." "We just need to spend a day or two together, put it out there, and decide which are the difficult components. We will then lock the

door and won't walk out until it is sorted. That works best for us and it has worked best for us in the past." Hamilton was insistent that he wanted to ensure that the process this time began now, a clear indication he wanted to continue to race in F1. "We never want to be in the position that we were in in January, in February," Hamilton said. "It ruined my whole winter and I'm sure it wasn't helpful for Toto's, in terms of being able to be off and relaxed, so it felt like we didn't really have much of a break. Naturally we don't have to rush anything but I think we have to be sensible and start conversations. They're very complex, it's never a super simple procedure and so hopefully soon we can start." Hamilton is in the form of his life during his 15th season in F1. Wolff was confident his driver could race on into his 40s. "Yes, absolutely. I have no doubt about that. He is so disciplined that in a way it is inspiring," he said. "As long as Lewis continues to look after himself mentally and physically, continues to develop cognitively, then he can go on for much longer." Hamilton scored his 100th pole in qualifying for the Spanish GP on Saturday and after his win paid tribute to how much it had meant to him when former world champion Damon Hill had praised his achievement. Hill, who won his title with Williams in 1996, posted on Twitter after Hamilton took his remarkable 100th pole: "You do realise you are watching one of the most talented people to have ever walked the Earth, don't you? He really is a phenomenon. I can only watch on in awe". Reflecting on Hill's comments, Hamilton explained how much they had meant to him. "I felt so much gratitude to Damon," he said. "I remember growing up watching Damon and having, as I do now, so much respect for him."

Giro d'Italia: Taco van der Hoorn claims superb solo victory on stage three

London, May 11 : Taco van der Hoorn took a remarkable solo victory from the breakaway as Filippo Ganna retained the pink jersey on stage three of the Giro d'Italia. The 27-year-old Van der Hoorn, making his Grand Tour debut in this race, held his hand to his mouth in shock as he crossed the line just four seconds before the charging peloton in Canale. Davide Cimolai won the race for second place just ahead of Peter Sagan, whose Bora-Hansgrohe team had done so much of the work on the front of the peloton, pushing to try to drop rival sprinters but getting their timing wrong when it came to chasing down the break. "I can't

believe it," Van der Hoorn said. "I just wanted to go in the break and be aggressive for the whole Giro. I know how difficult it is to try to win a stage or even get to the finish line with the group but if there's even 0.5% of a chance you just take it." The Ineos Grenadiers rider Ganna was safely in the



peloton to retain the pink jersey, the Italian continuing to lead by 16 seconds from Tobias Foss with no major changes at the top of the general classification before the potential for a more serious shake-up on Tuesday. Van der Hoorn was the last survivor from a youthful eight-man breakaway which had gone up the road with hardly any hope, let alone expectation as the 190km stage from Biella began on damp roads. The group included four riders still in their first professional season, including the 18-year-

old Andrii Ponomar, the youngest rider in the Giro since 1929. A lead that reached six-and-a-half minutes was gradually cut down on the leg-draining rolling finish to the stage and it seemed a matter of when they would be caught, even when Van der Hoorn raced away from Simon Pellaud to go solo with nine kilometres remaining. "I didn't believe [we had a chance] when it was only one minute with 25km to go, but the guy from Androni [Pellaud] was pulling really hard on the last climb," the Dutchman added. "He was tired so I dropped him, and then I heard on the radio the gap was 40 seconds so I just went full gas to the line. With one kilometre

to go I was looking back and thinking 'I'm going to make it'. The last part was incredible." Van der Hoorn joined Intermarche-Wanty-Gobert from Jumbo-Visma in the winter, as the Belgian squad stepped up to the WorldTour level. In a quote published on his team's Twitter account, Van Der Hoorn said: "Five months ago I considered quitting cycling because I had no contract. Today, I won a stage on the Giro d'Italia." Attention now turns to Tuesday's 187km hilly stage from Piacenza to the uphill finish in Sestola, where the first major changes to the overall standings since the opening time trial could come.

The New York Yankees aren't evil any more, they're just boring

New York, May 11 : For roughly a century, the New York Yankees have stood at the center of Major League Baseball's universe. That's where you

the great teams of the past. These days the mighty Yankees are more likely to emulate the on-field strategies of scrappy Tampa Bay, as New



live when you win 27 World Series titles, are continuously near the top of baseball's payroll list, and play in one of the biggest sports markets in the world. Traditionally, the Yankees have been in it to win at all costs. In December 2002, the Yankees, furious after losing twice in the playoffs following a run of four titles in five years, beat out their Boston rivals in a battle for Cuban free agent Jose Contreras. "The evil empire extends its tentacles even into Latin America," said then Red Sox president Larry Lucchino. But now, nearly two decades later, the Yankees aren't evil any more. They're just boring. Down the years, the Yankees pissed fans off because they were better than your team or more ruthless - and quite often they were both. Now New York's Bronx Bombers are a buzz-free snooze-fest who don't seem to bother anybody. They're an identity-less ballclub searching for something, anything that can kick start a restoration of their once-glorious franchise, one reason why 21 games into their season, they had featured 21 different lineups. And while winning more consistently would help, there's little chance that this flavorless group lights up Broadway like

York did during the 2020 playoffs when they tried to "out-Ray the Rays", going with an opener in a disastrous loss that preceded another early-round outing. Amazingly, they tried it again against the Rays this season, drawing sharp criticism from their own television play-by-play voice Michael Kay for being "too cute". The Rays have now defeated the Bombers in six straight series. Imagine that, the New York Yankees, adopting "if you can't beat them, join them" tactics against a franchise that's some 25 slots below them in salary? And it's not the first time in recent years. After the 2017 season, they ousted long-time manager, Joe Girardi, who was fresh off leading his club to within a game of the World Series, in favor of rookie skipper Aaron Boone. The former infielder was billed as the sort of new school, analytics-embracing manager with great "connectivity" that much of baseball has started to lean towards. So far the change hasn't yielded that elusive 28th title, and Girardi remains the last manager to win it all in the Bronx. But it's not just World Series that are absent from the modern Yankees, it's the intrigue.

Their first sack of titles came along with the uncomfortable relationship between Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Later, there was the schism between Joe D and The Mick, with Mantle eventually dethroning DiMaggio in the Bronx. In between winning fists full of rings there was a famous fight at the Copa, and Berra's colorful Yogi-isms. Their last dull lull, which began in 1965, ended with the arrival of owner George Steinbrenner in 1973, who was brilliantly described in the Guardian's obituary as "a bully and a brat, devoid of humility, class, and civility, born on third base, deluded that he'd hit a triple, and convinced he had to tell the whole world how he'd done it." And while Steinbrenner made the evil empire more malignant - to fans of other teams, at least - his reign was never boring. New York under Steinbrenner, from his soap operas with Billy Martin, Reggie Jackson, Dave Winfield and the legendary Berra, to his drunken sailor spending and continuous trading of top prospects, was a trainwreck you couldn't take your eyes off. Between 1996 and 2000 came the mostly peaceful dynasty of four titles in five seasons. They were won in spite of Steinbrenner, and were anchored by the steady hand of Derek Jeter, who, to be fair, did once date Mariah Carey, and may or may not have offered fully branded "gift baskets to one night stands." That calm was interrupted by the trade for headline machine Alex Rodriguez in 2004, bringing a new drama, surrounding his relationship with Jeter. The once-supertight shortstops' relationship took a drastic turn after A-Rod told Esquire that the Yankees captain "never had to lead". The pair won one World Series title in 2009, before three-years of chaotic, non-stop, eye-popping A-Rod coverage that brought back memories of the Steinbrenner "Bronx Zoo" era. In 2013, A-Rod sued the Yankees team doctor for misdiagnosing his hip injury - a warmup for his eventual lawsuit against MLB for their suspension of the third baseman for his use of performance enhancing drugs. A-Rod eventually returned, drawing fury from fans and beanballs from opposing pitchers, before retiring in

2016, taking the last vestiges of star-driven, interesting Yankees baseball with him. Today, the Yankees are in Year 12 of a run of zero titles and zero World Series appearances, while the closest thing they have to controversy is what to do with their disappointing catcher Gary Sanchez. Their longtime general manager Brian Cashman is considered untouchable despite his recent lack of rings, mostly because the team nearly always makes the playoffs, even if they don't make the World Series, and the current chairman, Harold Steinbrenner, prefers a more stable, less bombastic organizational framework. Cashman has built another talented, but faceless team, who are incapable of winning the World Series. A unit as sterile as the Yankees policy of trimmed hair and beardless ballplayers. Who do you want to watch on this team? Aaron Judge? He was billed as the franchise's next Derek Jeter, but has struggled to stay on the field and has even been mentioned in trade talks. Giancarlo Stanton? He has been mostly a bust and has hemorrhaged the team financially. Gerrit Cole is an ace, no question, but after that, the rotation lacks stability and character. The Yankees have been surpassed by the Red Sox, who gobbled up four titles between 2004 and 2018 around the larger than life David Ortiz. By the Dodgers, who have dominated the payroll list in all but one season since 2013 and grabbed the premiere free agent pitcher last off season in lightning rod Trevor Bauer. By the Rays, who have reshaped the way baseball teams are put together, all for pennies on the dollar. Even the New York Mets, with their new Twitter dabbling billionaire owner, the best pitcher in baseball, and recent scraps in the tunnel, have a more intriguing product. Yankees fans are noticing: tickets to a recent Wednesday night game against the Braves could be had for as little as \$8 on the resale market. o, the Yankees have nothing going on. They have no bluster. Even Reggie Jackson, the ultimate symbol of Bombers swagger is now working for the hated Houston Astros after departing New York's payroll.

TRIBUTE



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Family

Quarterback Tim Tebow poised for NFL comeback ... as a tight end

London, May 11 : Tim Tebow and Urban Meyer are apparently getting back together, this time in the NFL. The former Florida star and 2007 Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback is expected to team up with his college coach by signing a one-year contract to play for the Jacksonville Jaguars, the NFL Network reported on Monday. The network said the deal "could be official in the next week or so." The 33-year-old Tebow would be returning to the NFL after a spell in baseball with the New York Mets' minor league teams and he would be playing for Meyer for the first time since his senior year in 2009. The reunion would come with a twist, though. Tebow would be joining the Jaguars as a tight end. He switched positions after retiring from baseball in February. He worked out for Jacksonville a week later. Meyer and general manager Trent Baalke are seemingly waiting until after this weekend's rookie minicamp to get the deal done. Tebow, who grew up in Jacksonville, could fill a huge hole with his hometown team. The Jaguars decided not to pick up a team option in veteran Tyler Eifert's contract and traded oft-injured 2019 draft pick Josh Oliver to Baltimore. They signed run-blocking specialist Chris Manhertz in free agency, brought back James O'Shaughnessy and drafted Ohio State's Luke Farrell in the fifth round. Those were considered minor moves after Meyer vowed to completely revamp the position group. Tebow, at the very least, would provide a splash. "That will be interesting to see how that contributes to us on offense," Jaguars co-owner Tony Khan said recently. "Obviously Urban knows Tim really well, and Tim's got a great history of winning. Urban really believes he can help us, and I think it makes a lot of sense. And it's a position where we need to get better." But

how much can an athlete on the wrong side of 30 who has never played the position bring to the team? Tebow's value could mean as much off the field as on it. Meyer has said repeatedly that signing players who already know his methodology would be helpful in Year 1. Tebow would become the sixth player on Jacksonville's roster who previously played for Meyer, joining Farrell, running back Carlos Hyde, guard Andrew Norwell, defensive end Lereentee McCray and defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton. Tebow played quarterback for Meyer between 2006 and 2009, helping the Gators win two national championships while becoming one of the most recognizable and polarizing athletes in college sports. He was a first-round draft pick by Denver in 2010, but his long windup led to a short NFL career. He spent time with the Broncos, the New York Jets, New England and Philadelphia. His last NFL game came with the Jets in 2012. They cut him in April 2013, three months after then-Jaguars general manager Dave Caldwell famously said he wouldn't sign Tebow "even if he's released." Tebow has received rock-star media coverage at every NFL stop and may get as much attention in Jacksonville as franchise quarterback Trevor Lawrence, the top pick in the 2021 draft. Tebow won a playoff game with Denver in 2012, but never developed into a consistent NFL starter. He declined several suggested moves to tight end, and he even asked Meyer for guidance before switching sports and joining the Mets. "When he was a quarterback in the NFL, that was a big topic," Meyer said at the end of the draft. "I was so busy I couldn't give him the time. What do you think? What do you think? And I didn't know. I was too busy to even think it through."

Simon Yates steps up Giro preparations with Tour of the Alps triumph

London, May 11 : Simon Yates wrapped up overall victory at the Tour of the Alps as Felix Grossschartner won the final stage in to Riva del Garda. Yates crossed the line in a much-reduced peloton to retain his 58-second advantage over Spaniard Pello Bilbao of Bahrain-Victorious, with Hugh Carthy of EF Education-Nippo using the final stage to move up to fifth overall. Bora-Hansgrohe's Grossschartner took a solo win with an attack from the 121km stage from Valle del

Chiese, while Ireland's Nicolas Roche was second across the line 34 seconds later, just ahead of the group including Yates. Yates, the 28-year-old Team BikeExchange rider was using this race as his final warm-up for the Giro d'Italia, which begins in Sicily in two weeks' time. "It's really fantastic," he said of his win. "The team did a great job today, they really controlled the start and rode all day and in the final were fantastic again." It was a short day, there wasn't so much action in the [general

classification] but it was a really hard day with a lot of stress in the peloton and with

that fast descent to the finish it was always nervous. I feel good. Now I just

need to look after myself, try not to get sick, and take it from there."



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