

# The Assam Rising

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Senior journalist died of covid

Guwahati, May 14 : Senior journalist from Assam – Shivcharan Kalita has died of COVID-19. Shivcharan Kalita died due to COVID-19 in a Guwahati hospital on Friday. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has expressed grief at the demise of Shivcharan Kalita. CM Himanta Biswa Sarma while condoling the death of the senior journalist has extended sympathies to the family of the deceased. The COVID-19 situation in Assam continues to be grim with high number of COVID-19 deaths being reported on a daily basis.

### Sputnik V vaccine

New Delhi, May 14 : Drug firm Dr. Reddy's Laboratories on Friday said as part of a limited pilot, the soft launch of the COVID vaccine Sputnik V has commenced and the first dose of the vaccine was administered in Hyderabad. The imported doses of the vaccine will cost Rs 995.40 per shot, said the company's partner in India Dr. Reddy's Laboratories on Friday. The price includes a GST of 5% on every dose. However, the doses of the vaccine that will be made in India are expected to be cheaper. "Further consignments of imported doses are expected over the upcoming months. Subsequently, supply of the Sputnik V vaccine will commence from Indian manufacturing partners," said Dr. Reddy's.

### PLA militant arrested

Guwahati, May 14 : The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a People's Liberation Army (PLA) militant on charges of his involvement in an ambush on Record of Proceedings (ROP) of 4th Assam Rifles. Mayanglambam Siromani, the self-styled lieutenant of the proscribed Manipur insurgent group, was arrested by NIA on Thursday. The case was initially filed as an FIR at Chakpikarong police station in Manipur's Chandel district relating to an ambush on Record of Proceedings (ROP) of 4th Assam Rifle at Chamol-Sajik Tampak Road. One Assam Rifle personnel was killed and one was critically injured in the ambush.

## Grenade blast at Tingrai Bazaar in Tinsukia district

### 2 persons died, ULFA(I) denied responsibility



Guwahati, May 14 : A grenade blast has been reported from Tingrai Bazar at Digboi in Tinsukia district of Assam. Two motorcycle-borne miscreants lobbed the grenade in front of a hardware shop owned by a person named Sandip Agarwala. Two persons have died in the incident. One of the victim has been identified as Surajit Talukdar. Surajit Talukdar succumbed to his injuries at the AMCH. The other deceased person has been identified as Sanjiv Singh (25). On the other hand, 2

more persons have sustained injuries and are stated to be in critical condition. Meanwhile, the ULFA-I has denied any involvement in the incident. Meanwhile, the Army and Police have cordoned off the area and have begun an investigation in

the case. Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma has expressed concern over the grenade blast at Tingrai Market in Digboi and asked DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta to deal with the incident sternly and nab the miscreants at the earliest. Two persons were killed and two others sustained injuries in a grenade blast at a market in Digboi of Tinsukia district of Assam on Friday. According to the information available, two people

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## Govt instruct to paste posters outside residences of COVID-19 patients

Guwahati, May 14 : District authorities in Assam have been instructed by the State Government to paste posters outside the residences of COVID-19 positive patients. The step has been taken by the Assam Government to "protect the community at large from further spread of the COVID-19 virus". "...there have been reports that some COVID positive persons do not observe COVID appropriate behaviour and

end up spreading the infection among the uninfected persons who come in their contact," read an official order signed by Assam Chief Secretary Jishnu Baruah. "Therefore, it is necessary to put an identify mark, on places where such persons are self-isolated or quarantined, for the larger benefit of community," the order added. It, however, stated that pasting of posters outside the residences of COVID-

19 positive persons "will be done only if such a residence is used by the COVID-19 positive person for self-isolation or quarantine purpose and such posters shall be removed as soon as such person/persons turn COVID-19 negative". The order also stated that there has been a "significant surge of COVID-19 cases across the State" in the last few days. "...stricter measures are required to contain the spread of the virus," the order added. Assam: Authorities

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## Telangana High Court stays government's order stopping ambulances from other states

Hyderabad, May 14 : The Telangana High Court on Friday (May 14) stayed an order by the state government banning the entry of ambulances from other states. The order

comes after Telangana Police were directed by the state government to stop all ambulances carrying COVID-19 patients that do not have prior permission and confirmation from the hospital for getting treatment. Several patients have been travelling from the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh due to lack of

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## Bengal Governor visits camp in Assam sheltering post-poll violence affected WB people

Guwahati, May 14 : West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday visited the camps in Assam sheltering people affected by post-poll violence in West Bengal. West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar visited the Ranpagli camp in Assam on Friday. Around 400 violence affected people from West Bengal, mostly BJP workers and their families are taking shelter in 2 camps in Assam. Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar met with the affected people who fled Bengal

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New Delhi, May 14 : Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday released the 8th installment of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme, giving over Rs 20,000 crore to about 9.5 crore farmer beneficiaries. For the first time, farmers in West Bengal have joined the scheme and about 7 lakh Bengal farmers received

their first installment today. The installment is released at a time when India continues fight the deadly Covid wave. "In these challenging times," the prime minister at a virtual event said, "farmers have made records in agriculture and the government is also setting new records on procurement on MSP every year." Modi said that in comparison to 2020, 10 per cent more wheat has been purchased on MSP this year. At the event, PM Modi will interact with farmers from Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya, Jammu & Kashmir and Andaman and Nicobar. Union Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar was also present at the occasion. The PM-Kisan scheme, launched in Febru-

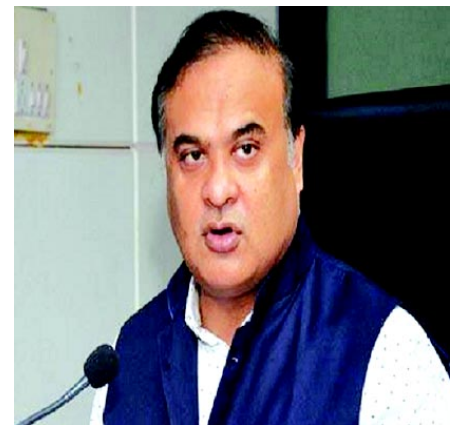
ary 2019, is providing Rs 6,000 in 3 installments to 14 crore farmers annually. The amount is directly transferred into the bank accounts of the beneficiaries through direct benefit transfer (DBT) mode. Till now, over Rs 1.15 lakh crore has been transferred to farmer beneficiaries under the scheme. While releasing the 8th installment, Modi also touched



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## CM Himanta Biswa Sarma hints lockdown at specific places if needed

Guwahati, May 14 : At a time when many in Assam are speculating a possible lockdown in the State, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma clarified that imposing a lockdown in the entire State is not on the table. He, however, hinted that lockdown might be imposed in a few parts of the State, where surge in COVID-19 cases is high. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma while briefing the media in Guwahati on Friday said that if the COVID-19 situation in the cities of Guwahati, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh doesn't improve over the next one week, the State Government would be compelled to introduce more stricter measures to contain the spread. CM Himanta Biswa Sarma made this statement after holding a meeting with the doctors and



staff of the Gauhati Medical College Hospital (GMCH) and National Health Mission (NHM). The Assam Chief Minister added that the

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## CM reviews functioning of GMCH

## CM takes stock of ongoing construction of 200 ICU bed hospital at GMCH parking

20,000 tests daily in Guwahati from May 17: CM

Guwahati, May 14 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma today reviewed the functioning of Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) in the fight against COVID-19 at the GMCH conference hall and took stock of availability of oxygen, essential medicine, ICU beds etc. He directed the GMCH authority to take steps for providing round-the-clock service to the COVID patients. He instructed for giving immediate treatment to COVID patients even during late night by the on-duty doctors while ensuring regular monitoring of the patients. He stressed on the importance of strengthening tele-medicine system and

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## Modi releases 8th installment of PM-Kisan scheme; over 7 lakh Bengal farmers benefitted

## Tauktae likely to be a very severe cyclonic storm: IMD

New Delhi, May 14 : Tauktae, once formed, is likely to intensify into a 'very severe cyclonic storm' with wind speed of 150 to 160 kmph gusting to 175 kmph on May 17, according to the latest forecast by the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The depression over Lakshadweep area has moved north-north-eastwards with a speed of about 19 kmph and is now centred over Lakshadweep about 30 km south southwest of Amini Divi, 320 km west-southwest of Kannur (Kerala), 1120 km south southeast of Veraval (Gujarat) at about 11.30 am on May 14. It is very likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm during the next 24 hours and

is also expected to intensify further during the subsequent 24 hours. Tauktae is likely to move north-north-eastwards initially for some more time and then move north-north-westwards and reach the Gujarat coast by May 18 morning. There is no consensus among models yet on whether the very severe cyclonic storm will cross the Gujarat coast. "As on today we cannot say very clearly if it will cross the Gujarat coast. But the probability of crossing the coast cannot be ruled out. It may skirt the coast early on May 18. Because it's a large system, it will bring a lot of heavy and extremely heavy rainfall in its path. It is also

an intense system," said Sunitha Devi, in charge, cyclones at IMD. Most cyclones develop in the Arabian Sea during May end and

early June. "Vayu was a very severe cyclonic storm which formed over Arabian Sea in early June in 2019. The

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## Delhi gynecologist S K Bhandari who delivered Rahul, Priyanka Gandhi, dies of COVID-19

New Delhi, May 14 : One of the longest serving doctors at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital here and renowned obstetrician and

gynaecologist Dr S K Bhandari died on Thursday due to COVID-19, officials said. Dr Bhandari, who delivered Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and her two children, was 86. Dr Bhandari was admitted to the hospital two weeks back for some heart-related issues but tested positive for COVID-19, said Dr D S Rana, chairman of Sir Ganga Ram Hospital. She had received both the doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, he added. Dr Bhandari's husband, a retired IAS officer, is also in the ICU after he tested positive for COVID-19 and he has not

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# 18 Year Old Gives Guwahati Its Own App To Fight Against Covid

*Ghy Fights Covid is an inventory of verified covid 19 resources being used by over 18,000 users*

**GUWAHATI, May 14 :** In these trying times of the Covid 19 pandemic, when the spread of panic and false information amongst people is at its peak, 18-year-old Nitya Jain of Guwahati decided to design a mobile app. Nitya, who is still a high school student noticing the lack of verified leads for essential Covid resources for people of Guwahati educated himself through the internet and launched the app "Ghy Fights Covid" from his home. The idea behind making the app was to bring together the most extensive collection of verified covid resources and help Guwahatians to fight the pandemic together. "Ghy Fights Covid" was launched by Nitya Jain on 27th April 2021 with him managing everything from updating the resources on the app and verifying the information. Today, more than 30 volunteers from across the city including students and working professionals have joined him

in this noble cause and support in updating the resources on the app. The app has witnessed more than 18,000 users and a lot of people have benefitted as well. In one such incident, a 6-month pregnant covid positive woman found an ICU bed in Hayat Hospital through the app. In one such incident, Mr VeenitBhurat found a plasma donor through the app and stabilised his 85-year-old grandfather admitted at Marwari Hospital. In another instance, a 6-month pregnant covid positive woman found an ICU bed in Hayat Hospital through the app. In order to ensure that the details of the app are known to people, Nitya and his team of volunteers have also used social media effectively by ensuring presence on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. The response has been encouraging and the team is fully committed to managing the app till the time the crisis posed by the pandemic

is over. He is delighted by the support he has received from people and looks forward to serving the people in the best way possible. In this tough time, the "Ghy Fights Covid" teamwork around the clock to provide Guwahatians with verified data and create a difference. Nitya is now working on expanding the app to include resources for other cities as well. He is also exploring various ideas to encourage people to take the vaccine. About the App : The app, "Ghy Fights Covid" is a one stop solution and a storehouse of verified information related to various essential resources and services for the fight against COVID-19. The link to the website is - <https://ghyfightscovid.in/> and one can use it as an app by clicking on the "add to home screen" button. The app which is compatible with all devices is simple and user-friendly and is divided into different tabs which can be easily operated by any age

group. The "Home" Tab is a common database that helps in finding availability of various resources and services like availability of Ambulance Services, Hospital beds, Plasma and blood banks, Quarantine Centres, Pharmacies, Oxygen Cylinders, Meal Services, Testing Facilities and vendors who are providing medical equipment and surgical items. The "Doctors" tab provides contact details of doctors and hospitals who are engaged in providing consultancy & treatment to COVID patients including issues related to mental health support. The "Ask For Help" tab allows users to get in touch with the "Ghy Fights Covid" team as well as each other for any support to find resources. The "Feed" tab of the app provides regular updated news, daily case updates, daily recovery updates, other statistics and nutritional advice related to COVID.



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma inspecting the construction status of a 200 bedded COVID19 hospital at the parking lot of GMCH on Friday

## Forest Minister visits Bamuni Pahar to assess the on the spot scenarios, enquiry committee institutes for detail investigation

**NAGAON, May 14:** Following the heart wrenching elephants' death incident at Topotjuri forest area near Bamuni Pahar under Kathiatoli forest range on Wednesday night, state forest minister Parimal Suklaboidya, local MLA of Barhampur LAC Jitu Goswami accompanied by PCCF, principal secretary, Environment and Forest, a team of veterinarians as well as other wildlife specialists rushed to the site of the incident at Topotjuri forest area this morning and assessed on the spot scenarios. After preliminary investigation with the top officials from state forest department, the minister, Suklaboidya however ensured it too that the herd of jumbos probably died due to electrocution caused by lightning and thunderbolt as no visible signs of struggle before death were found or noticed on the spot for which the exact cause of death of the herd of jumbos would come out only after the post mortem report. Speaking to the local media persons here, the minister said that an enquiry committee headed by Deputy Conservator of Forest, KK Deori and other seven member team of veterinarians have been instituted to investigate the entire episode in detail. The committee will submit the preliminary investigation report within just three days while the detail report will be entertained within 15 days, he said adding further that the government would construct a mausoleum in memory of the herd of wild jumbos on the site in the days to come. Earlier the minister also paid tribute to the precious asset of the nature. Significantly, various organizations including the nature lovers have not accepted the tragic death of the herd of the wild jumbos at Bamuni Pahar as a mere incident caused by lightning and thunderbolt. Rather these organizations claimed that there was a solid conspiracy by some forest mafias behind the tragic episode of Bamuni Pahar. Claiming it as pre planned killing, delegates from Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad, All Assam Students' Union, Krishak Mukti Sangram Somitee submitted separate memorandums to the forest minister Parimal Suklaboidya and the local MLA Jitu Goswami on the site itself and also appealed to stop the ongoing construction work of Bamuni Grant solar energy project by a private sector company at Bamuni Mikirgaon area. It is pertinent to mention that among those 18 dead wild elephants, forest personnel have ensured 10 male and 8 female.

## Photography Competition by Padmanath Gohain Boruah Government Model College

**Kakopther, May 15:** The English Department of Padmanath Gohain Boruah Government Model College, Kakopther, organises an Inter-college Photography Competition among the Degree Students of the colleges of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh Districts in connection with '5th June, the World Environment Day' so that to create more awareness and love for the nature among the students. They have set the theme of the Photography Competition as "Nature and Environment" and has invited to submit 10 MB photographs together with attractive captions. The names of the winners will be announced on 5th June, 2021 and the best five participants will be awarded with prize money and certificates. Therefore they ask the interested students to send their photographs to 'pngb. extracurricular2021@yahoo.com' on or before 30th May, 2021 with their names, institution names, date of capturing the photograph, caption, signature of the competent authority, contact details etc.

## BSF Conducted Health Check Up And Awareness Programme On Covid-19 And Distributed Mask And Covid Kits To Border Villagers

**Guwahati, May 14 :** Apart from performing primary task of safeguarding and defending ever single inch of our territory, Seema Praharies of Guwahati Frontier are conducting COVID-19 awareness camp, providing medical assistance and distributed face mask & Covid kits for Border Populace. Guwahati Frontier BSF has always remained on forefront to help the needy border population during the hour of crisis and natural calamities. 2. Seema Praharies of Guwahati Frontier are always standing with every person living in villages located at Indo-Bangladesh International border for their requirement. 3. Seema Praharies of Border Outpost (BOP) Sabri of 192 Battalion under Frontier HQ BSF Guwahati conducted health check-



up and Covid test programme at border village of Sabri under PS- Sahebganj and Distt-Coochbehar (WB). Besides, 192 Bn has also adopted village Seoti-II on Indo-Bangladesh border and conducted health Check-up, Covid test and distributed medicines to villagers. BSF also apprised the villages to approach BSF Border Out Post at any time for any medical assistance and during medical emergency. 4. Besides, BSF Guwahati Frontier conducted various awareness programmes on COVID-19 in the following bordering areas:- Troops of Border Out Post (BOP) Ghewmari, Pattamari and Gachpara of 67 Bn BSF conducted awareness programme on fight against COVID-19 at border villages of Ghewmari, Pattamari and Gachpara under PS Dhubri Distt Dhubri (Assam) in which Masks and Covid Kits were distributed to the border people and also briefed in connection with precautionary measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19. 5. The border population lauded the BSF for providing timely help to border people during hour of crisis. 6. It is worthwhile to mention that Guwahati Frontier BSF team is following the norms set by WHO as well as the Govt. of India/State Govt. to counter the COVID-19. During the distribution of masks and sanitizer they also briefed the villagers about to take all preventing measures to contain the spread of Corona Virus. 7. The Border Security Force is dedicated for Security of Border of India as well as protection of border population as its guided principle and ethos.

## CM reviews COVID-19 situation

*CM directs to conduct one lakh COVID tests daily*

**Guwahati, May 12:** Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma reviewed the COVID-19 situation of the State in a meeting held at the conference hall of Janata Bhawan today. The Chief Minister discussed in detail the present condition and measures taken by the health department to deal with the situation. Chief Minister Dr. Sarma directed the health department to conduct one lakh COVID tests daily to detect positive cases early. He also asked the department to procure 50 lakh Rapid Antigen Test kits to intensify testing. Further, the Chief Minister directed to increase institutional quarantine, micro con-

tainment zones and COVID Care Centres in a bid to arrest surging COVID-19 cases. With a view to tackle the pandemic with human heart, the Chief Minister instructed to provide free food to poor people of the containment zones for two weeks. The Chief Minister also directed to ramp up health infrastructure and ensure adequate stock of Remdesivir injections. Health & Family Welfare Minister Keshab Mahanta, MLA Taranga Gogoi, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Samir Sinha, Principal Secretary of Health Department Anurag Goel and other senior officers were present in the meeting.

## Containment Zone Declared

**Golaghat, May 14:** This year the second wave of Covid pandemic is seen hitting tea garden areas. In Golaghat two tea estates have already been declared as Containment Zone by the administration. Today another tea garden is declared Containment Zone. Two lines of Numaligarh Tea Estate under Bokakhat Circle have been declared as Containment Zone today after 72 workers in the Tea Estate were found to be Covid positive. The Bor Line and 5 No Line of Numaligarh Tea Estate were declared as Containment Zone. Any type of entry or exit and movement of individual as well as vehicular movement are strictly prohibited in the declared Containment Zones. It is to be mentioned that in Golaghat total number of Active Containment Zones rises to six.

## Yajna Performed for Purification of Air and Atmosphere

**Golaghat, May 14:** Amidst ongoing Covid pandemic situation several families in the country have offered special prayers for purification of air and atmosphere and to get rid of this dreaded Corona virus. In Golaghat also a family residing at Iferi Apartments in the heart of the town was seen offering special prayers and performing traditional Yajna for purification of air and atmosphere. The family of Pawan Kabra and Bimla Kabra for the last three days has performed Yajna ( a traditional religious practice of the Hindus) seeking purification of air and atmosphere and to get rid of this Corona virus. The Kabra family stated that this traditional religious practice of Yajna has played important role in Hindu mythology since ages and hence they also have a strong belief in this practice.

## Youths repaired damaged culverts in North Lakhimpur

**Panigaon, May 14:** Residents of Teliya-Majuliya PWD Road of North Lakhimpur have been praying long for repair of the three culverts under PWD Department, Lakhimpur Division which are located on the road. But till now no positive action has taken place by the concerned authorities in this regard. The culverts have been broken and are in a very dangerous and damaged condition. Three persons were already died in the accidents occurred in these culverts at different times during the last three years. Its

have become death traps. Though the residents of the two villages -- Teliya Gaon and Majuliya Gaon have approached the Executive Engineer of the PWD Department, Lakhimpur Division in this regard several times, but it seems that their pleas have fallen into deaf ears. At last, the youth fraternity of Teliya Gaon recently decided to repair these three damaged culverts by themselves in association with the villagers. Accordingly, they repaired the culverts completely on 11, 12 and 13 May.

## Three more persons die of COVID 19 at Nagaon

**NAGAON, May 14:** Three more people died of COVID 19 today, taking the total toll in the district during the second wave to 24. Besides, 220 fresh COVID positive cases were recorded today including which the total number of current active COVID cases in the district is 2513, sources added.

Meanwhile 201 positive patients who were undergoing treatment as well as being isolated at their homes were recovered from the infection of the virus today. Sources claimed that among those who tested positive, 19 were admitted to Nagaon COVID hospital while the rest were put in home

quarantine. Rapid Antigen Test was conducted on 1557 people today while RT-PCR test was conducted on 23 swab samples, sources said adding that a total of 2006 COVID positive patients were recovered in the district from the virus till filing of this report.

## Railways upscale it's Oxygen Express operations to deliver Oxygen relief to 12 States

**Guwahati, May 14:** Overcoming all hurdles and finding new solutions, Indian Railways is continuing its journey of bringing relief by delivering Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) to various states across the country. So far, Indian Railways has delivered nearly 7900 MT of LMO in nearly 500 tankers to various states across the country. Oxygen Expresses have been delivering nearly 800 MT of LMO to the Nation each day for last few days. It may be noted that Oxygen Expresses started their deliveries 20 days back on 24th April 2021 in Maharashtra with a load of 126 MT of LMO. In just 20 days time, Railways has upscaled it's Oxygen Express operations to deliver nearly 7900 MT of Medical Oxygen to 12 States. Crisscrossing the country, Indian Railways is picking up Oxygen from places like Hapa & Mundra in

the West and Rourkela, Durgapur, Tatanagar, Angul in the East and then delivering it to States of Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, MP, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Telangana, Punjab, Kerala, Delhi & UP in complex operational route planning scenarios. In order to ensure that Oxygen relief reaches in the fastest time possible, Railways is creating new standards and unprecedented benchmarks in running of Oxygen Express Freight Trains. The average speed of these critical Freight trains is way above 55 in most cases over long distances. Running on high priority Green Corridor, with a highest sense of urgency, operational teams of various Zones are working round the clock in most challenging circumstances to ensure that Oxygen reaches in fastest possible time frame.

## Eid-UL-Fitr Celebrated in Hojai



**Hojai, May 14:** Amid ongoing Covid protocol, Muslim Community in Hojai district, Celebrated Eid-UL-Fitr with pomp and gaiety on Friday. The devotees maintaining government guidelines, offered namaz at their respective homes and prayed 'allah' for the welfare of mankind. Many decorated their residence with flowers, balloons etc, which added extra fervour to the festivity. Greetings were poured in Social media platforms. On the other hand, the markets took a deserted look, as this time too people didn't roam out and celebrated festivity in low key at their respective home.

## Elon Musk says Tesla will no longer accept bitcoin due to fossil fuel use



**London, May 14** : Tesla has suspended customers' use of bitcoin to purchase its vehicles, Elon Musk said on Wednesday, citing concerns about the use of fossil fuel for bitcoin mining. Bitcoin, the world's biggest digital currency, fell almost 17% after the tweet to its lowest point since the beginning of March. It recovered slightly in Asian trading but was still off 12% at \$50,933 early on Thursday morning. Musk said Tesla would not sell any bitcoin, and intends to use bitcoin for transactions as soon as mining transitions to more sustainable energy. "We are also looking at other cryptocurrencies that use <1% of bitcoin's energy/transaction," Musk said. Musk said in March that Tesla customers can buy its electric vehicles with bitcoin. The digital currency is created when high-powered computers compete against other machines to solve complex mathematical puzzles, an energy-intensive process that currently often relies on electricity generated with fossil fuels, particularly coal. At current rates, such bitcoin "mining" devours about the same amount of energy annually as the Netherlands did in 2019, the latest available data from the University of Cambridge and the International Energy Agency shows. Tesla revealed in February it had

bought \$1.5bn of bitcoin, before it began accepting it as payment for cars in March, driving a roughly 20% surge in the world's most widely held cryptocurrency. Musk on Wednesday said Tesla would not sell any bitcoin, and intends to use bitcoin for transactions as soon as mining transitions to more sustainable energy. On Wednesday, Edward Moya, a

senior market analyst at currency trading firm OANDA, said that Musk was getting ahead of investors focused on sustainability. "The environmental impact from mining bitcoins was one of the biggest risks for the entire crypto market," Moya said. "Over the past couple of months, everyone disregarded news that bitcoin uses more electricity than Argentina and Norway." Chris Weston, head of research at broker Pepperstone in Melbourne, said Musk's reaction was a blow to bitcoin but an acknowledgement of the currency's carbon footprint. "Tesla has got an image of being environmentally friendly and bitcoin clearly is the opposite of that," Weston said. Musk himself is a strong believer in digital currencies while also advocating for clean technology. "Cryptocurrency is a good idea on many levels and we believe it has a promising future, but this cannot come at great cost to the environment," Musk said. The dominance of Chinese bitcoin miners and lack of motivation to swap cheap fossil fuels for more expensive renewables could mean there are few quick fixes to the emissions problem. Chinese miners account for about 70% of bitcoin production, data from the University of Cambridge's Centre for Alternative Finance shows.

## Xinjiang births plummeted after crackdown on Uyghurs, says report

**Beijing, May 14** : Birthrates in Xinjiang fell by almost half in the two years after the Chinese government implemented policies to reduce the number of babies born to Uyghur and other Muslim minority families, new research has claimed. The figures show unprecedented declines which were more extreme than any global region at any time in the 71 years of UN fertility data collection, including during genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia, according to the authors of the report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (Aspi). The data adds to mounting evidence of coercive fertility policies in Xinjiang, including first-person accounts of forced sterilisation or birth control, and leaked policing data on the internment of women for violating family planning regulations. They are among Chinese government policies believed to be designed to forcibly assimilate the Uyghur and other Muslim populations. In April, Human Rights Watch determined the Chinese government was committing crimes against humanity but said the extent of coercive birth control and sexual violence, while alarming, needed more investigation. The authors of the report, Nathan Ruser and James Leibold, said they compiled it using publicly available Chinese government statistics to create datasets of county-level birthrates from 2011 to 2019, and comparing counties with higher proportions of Uyghur and other Muslim minorities. It covered the period before, during, and after the implementation of the Chinese Communist party's campaigns against "illegal births" in April 2017, when authorities also stopped publishing statistics on the birthrates of separate minority groups. Aspi's report found the birthrate across Xinjiang fell by 48.74% between 2017 and 2019. In counties where the population was at least 90% non-Han Chinese, the birthrate dropped by an average 56.5% between 2017 and 2018. By examining county-level statistics, the report provided further evidence of "the systematic targeting" of communities, it said. "Previous research by both Chinese and foreign experts has examined the tightening of birth control policy in Xinjiang and a corresponding drop in natural population growth beginning in 2015, but even more dramatically after 2017," it said. Among the evidence cited in the report, Aspi also included state media reports about crackdowns on "illegal births", and the collection of US\$1m from 629 families over four months in a single county. In other areas authorities launched hotlines and rewarded people who informed on their neighbours, and punished officials who failed to meet targets. "The crackdown has led to an unprecedented and precipitous drop in official birthrates in Xinjiang since 2017. The birthrate across the region fell by nearly half (48.74%) in the two years between 2017 and 2019," said the



report. Citing state media, the report said in 2017, 460 party members and state employees were punished for illegal births in Hotan prefecture, where 97% of the population is Uyghur or from other non-Han groups. While China's government enforced a one-child policy for decades, it allowed minority families to have three children in rural areas or two in urban areas. The report said while the overall birthrate for the Xinjiang region remained relatively stable throughout the period, many individual counties, especially in the Uyghur-majority south, had exceptionally high birthrates in the past decade. There were 68 children born per 1,000 people in Kashgar in 2014, compared with 16.5 at the regional level. Aspi said policymakers saw this as "an increasingly urgent problem and source of perceived instability, literally a breeding ground for the 'three evil forces' of extremism, terrorism and splitism". The Chinese government denies allegations of mistreatment, genocide and crimes against humanity, saying many of its policies - including the mass detention network it says includes vocational training centres - are anti-terrorism efforts. It says birth control is entirely

the choice of individuals and there is no agency interference. This claim has been contradicted by women who claim they were coerced into sterilisation or contraception. The crackdown on minority population growth comes at the same time the Chinese government is trying to stave off a demographic crisis due to low birthrates in the rest of the country, and an ageing population. The Aspi report was published a day after the Chinese government released figures from its once-a-decade census, finding the decade to 2020 had the slowest annual population growth since the early 1960s. The census reported a bigger increase to China's minority population compared with the Han population, however this was not broken down to county levels, and included the seven years prior to the major interventions on fertility in Xinjiang. "One thing we found is that in other provinces of similarly high minority populations... the birthrate climbed by about 3% in the last decade," said Ruser. "So these policies seem to be very deliberately targeted towards the community of Xinjiang and the Uyghur community. When they talk about those general minority figures, I think you have to keep in mind there are 55 other minorities."

## US Target stores to stop selling Poke?mon cards after rising value prompts threats to staff

**Washington, May 14** : The dramatic rise in the re-sale value of the cards prompted a fight in Wisconsin during which a man pulled a gun. US retail giant Target will stop selling Poke?mon playing cards out of an "abundance of caution" for its staff and other shoppers. The re-sale value of the cards has increased dramatically during the coronavirus pandemic, prompting chaos and threats to staff. Target will also stop selling MLB, NFL and NBA sports playing cards. The decision comes after man pulled a gun during a fight over trading cards in a Target parking lot in Brookfield, Wisconsin on 7 May. Police said the 35-year-old man produced the gun when he was assaulted by four men aged 23-35 as he left the store, ABC reported. A shopper who was at the Target during the parking lot incident told Fox news at the time: "It's just kind of sad

for the kids. It just sounds kind of ridiculous that adults got into a fight in the parking lot about trading cards." "The safety of our guests and our team is our top priority," it said. "Out of an abundance of caution, we've decided to temporarily suspend the sale of MLB, NFL, NBA and Pok?mon trading cards within our stores, effective May 14. Guests can continue to shop these cards online at Target.com." Joe Maddalena, executive vice-president at Texas-based Heritage Auctions, explained the skyrocketing resale value of the cards, telling Reuters: "When Covid-19 hit, a lot of Gen X and Millennials were looking for things to do and we found a lot of these guys and girls started playing Pok?mon again because they grew up with it." Maddalena said boxes of the 1999 US first edition base set had sold for about

\$400,000 at auction in recent months. A single card in mint condition for the popular fire-flying character Charizard sold for \$300,000 in January, whereas in late 2019 asking prices for a Charizard card were about \$16,000, he said. Earlier this year, Target limited the number of packs per person to three and then one. The store had to stop people camping outside overnight when trading cards were restocked, The Verge reported. Earlier this year in Japan, a man broke into a trading card shop at dawn by climbing down a rope he tied to the roof of the six-storey building. He then stole 80 Poke?mon and Yugioh! cards worth more than US\$9,000, Mainichi reported. "I was in my high school's rock climbing club, so I wasn't afraid of heights," the man, who was later arrested, told police.

# How conspiracy theories led to Covid vaccine hesitancy in the Pacific

and the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme has uncovered worrying trends which show 62% of Facebook posts about Covid-19 vaccines in the region make unsubstantiated claims about vaccines, with popular falsehoods including that vaccines have been manufactured to track personal data, are counter to the foundations of the Christian faith, and impact fertility, circulated widely across the

arrived in PNG, and the fears of officials is no longer that there won't be enough vaccines for those who need them, but that the vaccines they have will expire before they are put into people's arms. "Addressing vaccine hesitancy ... is crucial to the success of the Covid-19 vaccination program in PNG," aid Dr Pamela Toliman, a research fellow at the PNG Institute of



region. One post, in a Samoan news discussion group said that this had been "predicted in down the Bible... we're living in our last days", while another in Fiji has said that "apart from blood clots, vaccines are designed to render women infertile for population control". In PNG, where new Covid-19 cases have increased ten-fold since February, the nation's health minister Jelta Wong has labelled disinformation on social media as the "biggest challenge" to abating the spread of Covid-19. As Minister Wong knows, any return to normality hinges on widespread community vaccination to develop immunity. Just 3,075 of 8,500 AstraZeneca vaccines donated by Australia to PNG in March had been administered in Port Moresby as of 11 May, according to the World Health Organization, with Wong citing vaccine hesitancy as the key barrier. A shipment of 100,000 doses, from the Covax initiative, which bring vaccines to developing nations, has now

Medical Research. The institute is conducting research into the role of social media in the time of Covid-19. "There is certainly a need to ascertain public willingness to accept the vaccine, but also to understand underlying factors that fuel the spread of misinformation", she said. In the neighbouring country of Solomon Islands, president of the Solomon Islands Medical Association, Dr Claude Posala, has said that a social media "information overload" initially reduced trust in vaccines in his country, as residents struggled to sift reliable information from falsehoods. Solomon Islands received its first shipment of 24,000 AstraZeneca doses on 23 March. Frontline workers were initially prioritised for inoculations, however, just 600 were administered in the first three days. The issue was not supply, but demand. Workers simply did not trust the vaccine. However, a strong counter-campaign by the government is increasing access to

reliable information, and has built trust. By 25 April, close to 5,000 people had been vaccinated in both Honiara and Western province, with reports of queues outside vaccination hubs. #Vaccinated Thank you to all the fantastic staff-carpark attendees, ushers, registration crew & nurses-for making the experience so pleasant?? Every Fijian & Pacific Islander knows what this jab means for our country; the 1st symbol of hope after so much devastation #AstraZeneca pic.twitter.com/uVr68Cq71N "The government is now engaging in social media communications. As a result, information about vaccines that would have taken two weeks to reach communities has been provided in a short period of time, boosting trust. We are now seeing enthusiasm to get vaccinated," said Posala. The pandemic has highlighted the powerful role of social media in storytelling and information sharing in the Pacific. In many countries, Facebook is accessed more widely than traditional media. Accordingly, verified information channels are destabilised, and opinion is accessed more widely than fact. In the Fijian capital of Suva, which is in lockdown following the detection of the Indian variant of Covid-19, vaccine hesitancy is wearing off, says Jope Tarai, a social media expert at the University of the South Pacific. "Enthusiasm for vaccines has increased dramatically. With Suva in lockdown, Fijians are prepared to accept vaccines in order to get their lives back. As more people are successfully vaccinated, trust increases that social media conspiracy theories are false," said Tarai. "Owing to the central role that social media plays, it is now assisting the vaccine process, rather than hindering it." Social media is now filled with images of people lining up for vaccinations - building trust and eagerness to be vaccinated," said Tarai.

## 'You might die because you desire peace': Colombians split on protests

**London, May 14** : Nearly two weeks after mass anti-government protests kicked off in Colombia at the end of April, President Iv?n Duque has promised a national dialogue over issues raised by young demonstrators, including free university tuition. "We know we must take urgent steps to generate hope and a future for our youth," Duque said during a brief visit to Cali, a city of over 2 million that has been the setting for violent clashes. But the government has dismissed out of hand some of the protesters' demands, such as a basic income, and ignored broad calls for police reform. At least 47 people have died, according to local watchdogs Temblores and Indepaz, and local and international human rights organisations have blamed police for the killings. Dozens of disciplinary investigations have been launched, and three officers have been charged with murder. But the protests - mostly peaceful, some riotous and destructive - have divided the Colombian population. "Unfortunately, in my city this has not been a peaceful protest," Juan, 40, a hospital doctor in Cali, said. "We are in the middle of the third Covid peak in Cali. For the last three to four weeks, we've had 85-95% occupancy in ICUs. My work at the hospital has been hugely affected by the blockades erected across and around the city." My hospital was forced to cancel ambulatory consultations and surgeries, until further notice. We are only seeing emergencies and are operating at perhaps 10% capacity." Juan is one of hundreds of people who responded to a



reader callout asking about the situation in Colombia. Carolina, 26, a paediatrician in Bogotá, where demonstrators and police have also clashed, is still on the side of the protesters. As the main breadwinner in her family, she feels it's too risky to participate in marches herself, but tries to do her bit by sharing information on social media to counter what she considers an avalanche of fake news in favour of the government. "It's hard for me to go to the streets. My parents are worried I'm not going to come back, but it frustrates me so much to see so many videos of my people facing the police and being hurt," she says. "Our president ignores the complaints of the people and sends the military and police to kill us." Carolina also feels abandoned by wealthier citizens who oppose the uprising, and others from the political ruling class. "It's pretty depressing to be afraid of dying and knowing you can not call the police, because they are the ones shooting." She concedes that some protesters have damaged property and erected blockades, but blames a small minority. "Most protesters are peaceful," she says. "We listen to the helicopters at night, and the tanks driving through our neighborhoods. No matter what you do, you are a criminal in the eyes of the authorities, and you might die just because you desire peace, a better country and a non-corrupt government. We need international help." Carolina says Covid infections and deaths increased in Bogotá since the protests began. "This is the third peak in our country, and maybe the worst one so far. But believe me when I say people think the government is more dangerous than Covid. As a paediatrician, I'm tired of seeing children sick with hunger." Carolina's views mirror those of scores of university students and young people from Cali, Bogotá, Medellín, Manizales, Barranquilla and elsewhere in the country who wrote in via the callout to express their support for the protests, and their despair over police crackdowns. Decrying poor living conditions, censorship, social media blockades by the government and police brutality, various teenagers, students and young professionals commented on the scenes of violence and disorder from their homes, too scared to leave. Fabian, 25, a chemical engineer from Bogotá, fears police are trying to set up demonstrators. "The police constantly provoke clashes with protesters, but we also suspect that plain-clothed police are engaging in criminal activities to discredit the protests and justify the violence against people," he said. But this narrative is not persuading everyone, with many people believing the social unrest has gone too far.

## THE ASSAM RISING

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## Gaza Crisis : where is the solution?

Violent confrontations between Palestinian citizens of Israel and Jewish Israelis have resumed in several cities inside Israel as the Israeli military continued air raids on the besieged Gaza Strip and Hamas fired rockets into Israel for a third day on Wednesday. The crisis, which started with Israeli efforts to displace Palestinian families in occupied East Jerusalem, has sparked intra-communal tensions within Israel, with some Palestinian citizens staging protests in recent days. Footage of the attack, which was aired live on television, showed a man being forcibly removed from his car and beaten by a crowd of dozens. Al Jazeera "looked like an attempted public lynching". Video footage on local media also showed dozens of people with black masks ransacking Palestinian stores, with reports saying the Jewish ultra-nationalist attackers had responded to a call issued on social networks by a group known as La Familia. Elsewhere, a video uploaded to social media appeared to show a crowd of flag-waving Israelis attacking a car in the northern city of Tiberias. Israel's Channel 13 also quoted a senior police officer as saying Palestinian citizens of Israel were suspected of attacking and seriously wounding a Jewish man in Acre, also in the country's north. Meanwhile, after a synagogue was torched in Lod, a city some 15km (9.3 miles) from Tel Aviv, Israeli authorities deployed border police and announced a curfew. "We must not be dragged into provocations and inflicting harm on people or property," Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef said in a rare public appeal. "The Torah of Israel grants no licence for taking the law into one's hands and acting violently." Palestinian citizens of Israel say the violence of the past two days was not directed at Jews, but rather at religious nationalists with close ties to the Jewish settlement movement who have moved into mixed areas in recent years, pushing Palestinian residents out. "All across the country, we've seen these similar images of Jews and Arabs facing off in the streets," Al Jazeera's Fawcett said about the recent confrontations. "This is a parallel and extremely concerning development for the [Israeli] government, even as it continues to conduct this extensive and accelerating military operation in and around Gaza," he reported. Tensions have soared in recent weeks in anticipation of a court ruling on planned forced expulsions of several Palestinian families from their homes in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. The ruling has been postponed. The situation escalated when Israeli forces raided Al-Aqsa Mosque compound for three straight days during the final week of the holy month of Ramadan. Hundreds of Palestinians were wounded as Israeli forces fired rubber-coated steel bullets, stun grenades and tear gas at Palestinian worshippers. Violence escalated on Monday after Hamas issued an ultimatum demanding Israel stand down its security forces from the compound. Shortly after the deadline, the Palestinian group, which rules Gaza, fired several rockets towards Jerusalem and later, Israel launched air attacks on the territory. Since then, at least 67 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip, according to the ministry of health. Israeli medics have said at least six people have been killed by rocket fire from Gaza. After police broke up a protest on Monday night in Lod, a young Palestinian resident was shot and killed by a Jewish-Israeli resident. Violence later broke out a day later at the man's funeral – and spread to other communities inside Israel, including Ramle. Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week visited Lod and Acre, where he pledged to "stop the anarchy" and restore order "with an iron fist if needed". Netanyahu on Tuesday evening authorised the deployment of hundreds of police to Lod and other areas, including paramilitary border police who usually operate in the occupied West Bank. Palestinian citizens of Israel make up about 20 percent of the country's population. While they hold citizenship and have the right to vote, they face widespread discrimination and limited civil, political and socio-economic rights. Many Palestinian communities inside Israel also are under-funded and marginalised. Ghassan Munayyer, a Lod-based activist, said the veneer of coexistence conceals deeper disparities, including in housing and infrastructure. He compared the city's Palestinian neighbourhoods to "refugee camps". "The Jews love saying there's co-existence. They go out to eat in an Arab restaurant and they call it coexistence," he said. "But they don't see Arabs as equal human beings who have rights that they have to respect." Israel and Hamas are locked again in combat likely to yield – beyond tragic life and property loss – a return to a destructive status quo. The immediate triggers were the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli yeshiva students, for which Israel holds Hamas responsible, and the revenge torture and murder of a Palestinian teen by vigilante Israeli Jews. The nature and extent of Hamas's involvement in the initial obscenity remains unclear, but the attack's consequences are anything but. Since Israel launched Operation Protective Edge on 8 July, 168 Palestinians have been killed (80 per cent civilians, a fifth of whom were children) and about 1,150 wounded. Some 1,000 rockets have been launched toward Israel, of which about 200 were intercepted by the Iron Dome defence system. Previous rounds ended with each side claiming at best a Pyrrhic victory, because Israel can achieve lasting stability only when Gaza does, and vice versa. Breaking this pattern is even more urgent today, because the stakes of this escalation could be higher. The reconciliation agreement of 23 April 2014, signed by Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), led principally by Fatah, offers both a further challenge and an opportunity. The situation in Gaza has deteriorated markedly since then. The new PA government formed on 2 June was supposed to take over governance in Gaza but has not. The Strip runs on administrative inertia, since the new ministers have not assumed their responsibilities. An estimated 43,000 employees, hired since Hamas took over Gaza in 2007 and who still largely run the Strip, have not received their salaries in months; in frustration, they have prevented some of the other 70,000 employees – who were not hired by Hamas and in most cases had been paid by the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) on the West Bank to stay home during those years in order to weaken the Hamas government – from obtaining theirs. Electricity, fuel and medical supplies have grown scarcer. Now that conflict has erupted, the flux in the Palestinian political system introduces a new variable into efforts to achieve calm. But the reconciliation agreement might also hold the key to squaring the ceasefire circle. Though opposed by Israel, the deal, if implemented, offers the best chance of alleviating Gaza's misery and lessening Hamas's incentives to fight. The Islamist movement long resisted admitting any PA presence, but now that it has renounced governance, a door has been opened, and with it, an opportunity to redesign the peace process and advance the well-being of Gaza's 1.7 million residents.

# How to spot the difference between a real climate policy and greenwashing guff



So it's goodbye climate deniers, hello - and you'll pardon me for being blunt here - climate bullshitters. The impacts of the climate emergency are now so obvious, only the truly deluded still deny them. Instead, we are at the point where everyone agrees something must be done, but many are making only vague, distant promises of ineffective action. As a result, we are currently on track for a 0.5% cut in global emissions from 2010 levels by 2030, when a 45% drop is needed to avoid climate catastrophe. So how to spot this greenwash? A good rule of thumb is whether the proposal actually cuts emissions, by a significant amount, and soon, and whether the proposer is in fact making the climate emergency worse elsewhere. Let's start at the top, with the world's governments, which have been setting out more targets than an archery competition. The global leader is the UK, which recently pledged a world-beating emissions cut of 78% by 2035. Targets are a necessary first step, but need action to be met and the instant, universal response: "Show me the policies!" The problem is some actual UK policies are pushing emissions up, not down: massive road building, a scrapped home energy efficiency programme and slashed electric car incentives, new oil and gas exploration, a failure to halt airport expansions and block a new coalmine (instead, the government belatedly ordered a public inquiry). But it is not just Boris Johnson's government that says one thing while doing another. All are talking tough on climate, but China is building one large coal-fired power station a week, Japan remains one of the biggest financiers of overseas coal plants and Norway is developing giant new oil and gas fields.

Canada's premier Justin Trudeau says climate change is an "existential threat", yet the country's emissions have actually increased since the 2015 Paris deal, thanks to its tar sands exploitation. Oh, and many nations still subsidise fossil fuels, which is like buying more cigarettes when you're trying to quit smoking. The world's forests are suffering because of the same doublespeak. Indonesia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Peru and Colombia all pledged in 2014 to end deforestation by 2030. Yet in official carbon-cutting pledges submitted to the UN since then, none have confirmed that commitment. Companies are, if anything, even better bullshitters than governments, and the fossil fuel giants are masters. Many are still exploring for new reserves, when we already have more than can ever be safely burned. Chevron touts capturing CO2 emissions and storing them underground as a solution - one that of course enables the continued burning of its products. But its plans for carbon capture and storage cover less than 1% of its 2019 carbon emissions. ExxonMobil wants public money to help with its carbon capture project to store 50m tonnes of CO2 by 2030. That's just 8% of the 2020 emissions its products resulted in. Another technological fix promoted is hydrogen, in theory a clean fuel when generated using renewable energy. But its most enthusiastic backers are incumbent fossil fuel companies. Members of the global Hydrogen Council include Saudi Aramco, BP and Total, while the UK parliament's hydrogen group is funded by Shell and gas network and boiler-making firms. Why? Because hydrogen is a way for oil companies to move towards green energy without giving up fossil fuels. Pierre-

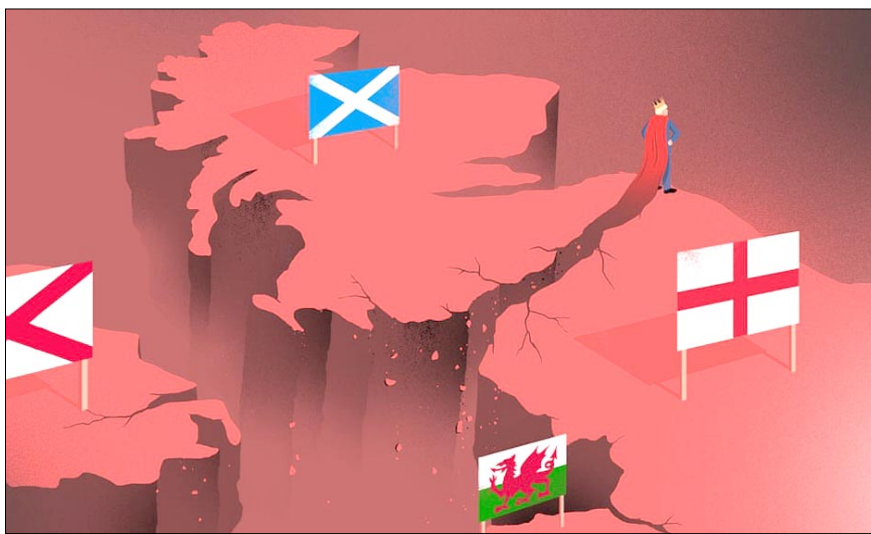
Etienne Franc, co-secretary of the Hydrogen Council until 2020, explained: "It's a way to avoid having stranded assets from the current fossil fuel-based system." Heating homes currently produces 14% of UK carbon emissions and finding a green alternative is a major challenge. But hydrogen is a "very poor solution", says one clean energy expert, Michael Liebreich, and should only be considered for heavy industry, and perhaps aviation and shipping, sectors where using electricity directly or via batteries is near impossible. SSE is one of the UK's biggest electricity suppliers and a "major partner" of the crucial UN Cop26 climate summit that the UK is hosting. It is also the only company currently building a

new gas power plant in the UK. Then there is Drax, which receives huge subsidies for burning wood in its power station. It insists this is climate-friendly - many scientists and environmentalists disagree. Drax proposes in future to add carbon-capture capability to its wood-burning power station, suggesting this would mean CO2 was being removed from the atmosphere, via trees and plants. But to work on the global scale some envisage, this approach would require an estimated 0.4 to 1.2bn hectares of land - 25% to 80% of the cropland that currently feeds the world. WWF and other NGOs recently walked out on the European Commission after the bloc's "disastrous" decision to label bioenergy as sustainable. Next up, big banks - their financing of fossil fuels was bigger in 2020 than in 2016 or 2017, after the Paris climate deal. Top of the pile is JPMorgan Chase, despite it launching a "Paris-aligned financing strategy" and "aiming to finance and facilitate" \$1tn in green initiatives by 2030. Barclays and BNP Paribas both became founding members of the UN-backed Net-Zero Banking Alliance last month, yet both are in the top 10 financiers of fossil fuels since 2015. Over at BlackRock, the world's biggest investor and a company that says climate change is a "global threat", its "Carbon Transition Readiness" fund includes Chevron, ExxonMobil and other fossil fuel giants. Now let's turn to carbon offsets, which many companies proffer as a way to claim future climate neutrality. An alarm bell should already be ringing when long-term climate-change sceptic Nigel Farage is getting into the offset business. Offsets sound good in theory,

but too often are fantasy accounting. Planting trees is a popular idea, but even if every possible new tree on the planet took root and started sucking up carbon, they would still be overwhelmed by fossil fuel emissions. Shell is keen on offsets - 120m tonnes by 2030 - while Nestlé's goal of offsetting 13m tonnes of CO2 a year with "nature-based solutions" would require 4.4m hectares of land a year, according to NGO Grain - about the size of Denmark. Still, KitKats will be carbon neutral by 2025, the company says, so that's nice. Even UN climate finance envoy and former Bank of England governor Mark Carney recently tripped up over offsets. He claimed that the investment company he vice-chairs was "net zero" despite investing in fossil fuels because the company also invested in renewable energy. Some called that an "accounting trick". I call it a pile of rubbish. Aviation companies are also prime purveyors of green guff. Ryanair boasted before the pandemic that its CO2 per passenger kilometre was the lowest in Europe, neglecting to mention that its growth in passengers meant its total emissions were rising. London City is among the many airports claiming to be carbon neutral - actual flights not included. And British Airways' owner has just pledged to powering 10% of its flights with sustainable aviation fuel by 2030, a date by which the world must halve emissions. Meanwhile, the UK is set to cut taxes on domestic flights - contrast that with France, which is banning short internal flights. Perhaps the worst transport offender is the shipping industry. In November 2020, the International Maritime Organization, which says it is "contributing to the global fight against climate change" sealed a deal that allows emissions to increase until 2030. I could talk next about the giant meat companies - such as the one promising to end its deforestation, but not for 14 years - or the motor or tech industries, but I think you've got the picture by now. So what to make of it all? Don't think there is no real climate action: renewable energy and electric cars are accelerating rapidly. And companies' pledges can sometimes be impressive, for example Burger King committing to less meat and more plants in the patties it serves up. But until every government and corporate decision has to pass the bullshit test - does it really cut carbon now - then we are kidding ourselves if we think we are treating the climate crisis like the emergency it is.

## That creaking sound? It's the United Kingdom starting to break apart

Any residual argument for Scotland to stay within the United Kingdom meets its counter-argument in Boris Johnson. Westminster politics has always been the preserve of a remote enclave, on average massively richer and more privileged than those they claim to represent, especially in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But now that they're dominated by a prehensile ogre grabbing all that his donors will give him while queues at the foodbanks lengthen, why should anyone north of the border consent to be ruled by his insouciant decree? We have never been closer and never further away. Remote technologies open up our living rooms to each other, but what we see behind the doors are different worlds: flaking plaster in one, £800-a-roll wallpaper in another. In Westminster, a hereditary elite treated the pandemic less as a crisis than as an opportunity to enrich its friends. By granting unadvertised, untendered contracts to favoured companies for essential goods and services, many of which were either substandard or never arrived, it actively encouraged the sort of profiteering during a national emergency portrayed in The Third Man. A number of Harry Limes have become exceedingly rich as a result. In Westminster, where the emblem of parliament is a portcullis surmounted by a crown and surrounded by chains (translation: keep out, plebs), the powers symbolically vested in the crown are routinely abused by prime ministers. But none, in the modern era, has exploited the absence of a codified constitution as effectively as Johnson. Now he can choose whether or not his own failures and excesses should be investigated. He has stuffed the House of Lords with a bizarre assortment of cronies and creeps who owe everything to his patronage and nothing to the electorate. Though he anointed himself "minister for the union" and claimed that "wild horses" would not prevent him from visiting Scotland before tomorrow's elections, last month he dropped his plans to do so. He has labelled devolution a "disaster" and "Tony



Blair's biggest mistake". His Internal

George Monbiot

Market Act wrenches back devolved powers from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. He has launched a challenge before the supreme court to two Holyrood bills (on children's rights and local government) designed to enhance the welfare of the Scottish people. He intervenes only to suppress. Keir Starmer seems scarcely interested in Scotland as anything other than an electoral calculation - and it's not always clear which election he's considering. Last month he made the weirdest campaign video I've ever seen in the UK. It began with a British Airways jet landing at Edinburgh airport. Starmer came down the steps like a visiting dignitary, mumbling "Remind me which country this is again?", strode around the empty airport with a phalanx of sinister-looking men, inveighed against the lack of flights and announced that he wanted to put economic recovery "above all else", presumably including life on Earth. Then, it seems, having alienated his remaining Scottish voters and anyone under 40, he flew out again. It was incomprehensible, until you remember that British Airways is a touchstone and crucial battleground for the Unite union, Labour's biggest donor, and that future remissions depend on the outcome of its leadership elections, for which nominations begin tomorrow,

just as Scottish voters go to the polls. In other words, he seems to have been using Scotland as a backdrop for an entirely different contest. That's what Scotland is to Westminster: a backdrop. I have long struggled to understand the liberal enthusiasm for the UK. To me, it looks like a mechanism for frustrating progressive change and crushing political aspiration. The number of people in the three devolved nations who are reaching the same conclusion is rising at astonishing speed. In Scotland, the three parties that favour independence (the SNP, the Greens and Alba) are on course between them to win a clear majority this week. If Westminster permits a second referendum, and allows it to be conducted fairly, the likely result is the end of the union. Until a few years ago, Welsh independence looked like an eccentric hobby; those in favour tended to peak at about 10%. But a poll in March showed that, of those who expressed an opinion, 39% of Welsh people said they would vote to leave the union. Plaid Cymru and perhaps the Greens, both of which favour independence, should make some gains tomorrow. Northern Ireland's centenary this week is almost certain to be its last. Reunification is likely to happen slowly: it could be disastrous if rushed. But, prompted by the chaos of Brexit and a

customs border in the Irish Sea, it has begun to look inexorable. A poll last week showed that a small majority of those with an opinion in Northern Ireland believe reunification will happen in their lifetimes. That creaking sound? It's the ship of state starting to break apart. The slow collapse of the United Kingdom creates an opportunity in all three nations to do things differently. An independent Scotland and Wales could cast aside the culture of corruption enabled - perhaps necessitated - by the UK's outrageous campaign finance rules. They could reclaim their politics from Westminster's gross subversions of democracy, its royal powers and the pompous rituals designed both to glorify and to conceal them. They could - and there are plenty of people in both nations with this ambition - create 21st-century governments built on proportional general elections, participatory democracy and continuous policy adjustment, distributive economies and an ethos of public service. The reunification of Ireland would necessitate the political renewal of both parts of the island. It would create a new nation, built on new constitutional principles. It would require a massive exercise in participation, recognition and reconciliation. We could all do with some of that. So what about England? At first sight the collapse of the UK leaves progressives here with a problem: a giant Tory majority coupled with all the old dysfunctions, untempered by the demands of the other nations. But this is our problem, and we should face it without recourse to the princes over the border. I don't believe England will address its manifold corruptions while our leaders can carry on like colonial viceroys, governing the four nations with ever decreasing consent. As the former nations of the UK embrace meaningful democracy, our preposterous, antiquated system will become ever harder to justify. It seems to me that political regeneration is impossible without the breakup of the union. We will begin to be good only when we stop trying to be great.

# US advisers endorse Pfizer COVID shot for kids 12 and up



**Washington, May 14 :** Pfizer is not the only company seeking to lower the age limit for its vaccine. Moderna recently said preliminary results from its study in 12- to 17-year-olds show strong protection and no serious side effects, data the FDA will need to scrutinize. As for even younger children, both companies have begun tests in youngsters ages 6 months to 11 years. U.S. health advisers endorsed use of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine in kids as young as 12 on Wednesday, just as expected new guidelines say it's OK for people of any age to get the shot at the same time as other needed vaccinations. The sprint to vaccinate millions of middle and high school students has already started in parts of the country, as a long line of kids rolled up their sleeves in suburban Atlanta for a first dose Wednesday. Covid-19 (coronavirus) in West Bengal, India Covid-19: West Bengal reports biggest single-day surge of

20,377 new cases; 135 more deaths Covid-19 (coronavirus) in Jharkhand, India Covid-19: Jharkhand extends lockdown-like restrictions with stricter provisions till May 27; check details But much of the nation was awaiting recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that Pfizer's vaccine, already used for months in those 16 and older, was a good choice for 12- to 15-year-olds, too. The CDC was expected to accept its advisers' recommendation. "It just felt like a flu shot, honestly," said Meredith Rogers, a 14-year-old middle school student from Decatur, Georgia, after getting her vaccination. Michelle Rogers, Meredith's mother, said she hoped the youth vaccinations would help bring some normalcy back. "A little apprehensive, but you know what? This is a step towards getting life back to normal so, we're all in," Michelle Rogers said with a slight fist pump. Earlier

## Hardware PLI: Govt cuts manufacturing target by half

**Mumbai, May 14 :** The global manufacturing hubs are limited to a handful of countries with China being the predominant supplier to the world 66% market share (2019); \$100 billion in value). As per estimates, the global market for laptops, tablets and desktop computers has grown from \$229.38 billion in 2018 to \$240.99 billion in 2019 and is expected to stabilize around \$220 billion by 2025. As per estimates, the global market for laptops, tablets and desktop computers has grown from \$229.38 billion in 2018 to \$240.99 billion in 2019 and is expected to stabilize around \$220 billion by 2025. Even before it gets operationalised, the government has had to cut the output of its production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for IT hardware, which includes laptops, tablets, all-in-one PCs and servers, by half with manufacturers turning up with low bids. As a result, the utilisation of the outlay for the scheme will also come down by a similar quantum and export targets will take a big hit - from Rs 2.45 lakh crore over a four-year period announced earlier to a mere Rs 60,000 crore. IT hardware manufacturers blame this on the low incentive structure which works out to an average of 2-2.5% over a four-year period which does not justify relocating units from China or Vietnam, especially for hardware products, where import duties are nil as they fall under IT products. The incentive structure for mobile phones PLI, which got operationalised in August 2020 and saw companies committing up to the maximum limit, works out to around 4.5% over a five-year period. The incentive amount will rise with increased specific energy density and cycles and increased local value addition. Cabinet nod: Rs 18k-cr PLI push for ACC battery storage Asian spot LNG price is up 72% from low of \$5.6/ million British thermal unit (mBtu) in early March

to the current level of \$9.65/mBtu as severe winter depleted gas inventories in North Asia and Europe leading to competition for LNG supplies. GAIL seen gaining from spot LNG surge, CGDs insulated When the government had announced the IT hardware PLI scheme on February 24, the outlay was fixed at Rs 7,350 crore over a four-year period. During this period, the government had estimated a production of up to Rs 3.26 lakh crore, of which exports were expected to be of the order of Rs 2.45 lakh crore. Last week (May 4), when the government announced the names of the companies which have applied for the scheme, the production target was slashed to Rs 1.60 lakh crore of which exports would be of the order of Rs 60,000 crore. Since the incentive structure is based on achieving a minimum threshold of incremental sales over base year going up to a maximum limit, with companies committing lower production target only half the outlay of Rs 7,350 crore will get utilised. Though 19 companies have submitted applications, the scheme will now make sense for only players which already have production capacity in India - Dell and HP, for instance. Here also it would be domestic sales which would be attractive for them rather than exporting which has been the main driving force for the government behind designing PLI schemes. India's import of laptops has increased by 42% - from \$2.97 billion to \$4.21 billion - in value terms, in the last five years. Around 87% of imports continues to come from China. In absolute terms, India's dependency on China is very high - it has increased from \$2.83 billion to \$3.65 billion during the last five years. For the year ending March 2021, India's import of laptops is estimated to have reached close to \$5 billion out of which imports from China would be around \$4.35 billion.

in the week, the Food and Drug Administration authorized emergency use of the two-shot vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner, BioNTech. A study of more than 2,000 12- to 15-year-olds found the same dose adults use is safe and strongly protective in the kids, too. Among the outstanding questions: Is it OK to get vaccinated against COVID-19 at the same doctor's visit as people receive some routine vaccinations? That's an urgent back-to-school concern especially for the 12- to 15-year-olds, who have missed out on regularly scheduled vaccines during the pandemic - but also an issue for adults, too. The CDC until now has recommended not getting other vaccinations within two weeks of a COVID-19 shot, mostly as a precaution so that safety monitors could spot if any unexpected side effects crop up. But the CDC said Wednesday it is changing that advice because the COVID-19 vaccines have proved so safe - and that health workers can decide to give another needed vaccine at the same time. The American Academy of Pediatrics on Wednesday also endorsed the Pfizer vaccine for the 12-and-up crowd - and agreed that it's fine to give more than one vaccine at the same time, especially for kids who are behind on their regular vaccinations. In the Pfizer study, there were no cases of COVID-19 among volunteers given the two-shot vaccination compared with 16 in the group given dummy shots. Kids also developed higher levels of virus-fighting antibodies than vaccinated adults. Side effects are the same as adults experience, mostly sore arms and flu-like fever, chills or aches that signal the immune system is revving up. Vaccinating Americans of all ages will be critical to getting back to normal, and there's plenty of supply for the nation's nearly 17 million 12- to 15-year-olds. In addition to the mass vaccination sites and health department rollouts that were key for adults, many states will be offering kids more familiar options - shipping doses to pediatricians and even to schools. Pfizer is not the only company seeking to lower the age limit for its vaccine. Moderna recently said preliminary results from its study in 12- to 17-year-olds show strong protection and no serious side effects, data the FDA will need to scrutinize. As for even younger children, both companies have begun tests in youngsters ages 6 months to 11 years. Those studies explore if different doses are needed at the youngest ages, and FDA plans to hold a public meeting next month to debate exactly what evidence is needed.

## Outpouring of support from US for India, COVID-19 help touches USD half a billion

**Mumbai, May 14 :** "Just as India sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, we are determined to help India in its time of need," Biden had said in a tweet. India-US, US aid to India for covid-19 fight, Biden administration, USD half a billion aid, USD 70 million by pharma major Pfizer and 450,000 Remdesivir doses, the government purchase price of each of which in the US is USD 390. Less than a fortnight after President Joe Biden in his conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged his country's steadfast support for the people of India, America has responded with an unprecedented financial assistance worth nearly USD half a billion. Biden spoke at length with Modi last month and conveyed solidarity with India in its fight against the viral disease. He assured the prime minister that the US and India will work closely together in the fight against COVID-19. "Just as India sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, we are determined to help India in its time of need," Biden had said in a tweet. XLRI professor and noted labour market expert KR Shyam Sundar said since around 21 states have resorted to restrictions, including stricter curfews, it was but natural that the urban unemployment rate breached the double-digit level. Covid effect: Weakened economy can't produce



jobs, unemployment rate at 19-week high Wheat procurement in the ongoing season has reached 33.8 MT as of May 9, which is 36% higher than year-ago period and close to 80% of this season's total target. Wheat procurement: Rs 33,000 crore transferred to Punjab, Haryana farmers Reflecting an overwhelming support for a "natural ally", the entire country not only the administration, but also the corporate sector which created a global task force, as well as Americans and Indian-Americans have opened their coffers for India. This half a billion dollars includes USD 100 million pledged by the Biden administration, USD 70 million by pharma major Pfizer and 450,000 Remdesivir doses, the government purchase price of each of which in the US is USD 390. Thousands of oxygen concentrators and plane loads of life saving drugs and health care equipment are flying off the United States for India almost every day. Several companies like

Boeing and Mastercard have announced financial assistance worth USD 10 million each, Google has pledged USD 18 million, which the Global Task Force that comprises CEOs of top American companies have already pledged USD 30 million worth of life saving equipment. Describing it as a "Berlin Life Moment", Mukesh Aghi of US India Strategic and Partnership Forum (USISPF), told PTI he expects the assistance to touch almost USD 1 billion by the end of the month. "It is emotional for the diaspora, almost everyone has someone who has been touched by COVID-19," he said. Nisha Desai Biswal, president of US India Business Council (USIBC) said, "The outpouring of support from the United States over the past two weeks was a spontaneous mass mobilisation of support for the Indian people from across the America government, business community and diaspora community and the American people." "It

is unprecedented, and it reflects both the deep bonds between our two countries and the gratitude that Americans feel for the role India played in supporting the United States when we were experiencing our COVID surge last year," she said. However, given the "speed and severity" that have overwhelmed the capacity of hospitals and local authorities, more assistance will be needed and for a sustained period of timescale of the pandemic, Biswal said. People of the country and the Diaspora too have come out in large numbers. Indian-American Vinod Khosla has committed USD 10 million, top corporate leader John T Chambers has promised USD 1 million. For the first time in its history, Sewa International has raised USD 15 million; American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) (USD 3.6 million), Indiaspora (USD 2.5) million and Jai Shetty has raised USD 4 million. "There has been overwhelming support and offers of assistance from the US Government, private sector, diaspora and the American public at large. In fact, in my interactions in recent days, the US interlocutors across the board ask me, 'tell us what more we can do for India', India's ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu told "They recall with fondness the help India gave. These are reflective of strong partnership and close people to people ties between our both nations. We deeply appreciate these gestures. We will continue to engage with the US in our collective fight against the pandemic," he said. Among other major financial contributions announced include Procter and Gamble (USD 6.7 million); Merck (USD 5 million), Walmart (USD 2 million), Salesforce (USD 2.4 million), and Caterpillar (USD 3.4 million). Companies like Deloitte have announced to 12,000 oxygen concentrators to India. While Microsoft is partnering with the US government in providing aid and oxygen, FedEx and UPS have taken up the mantle of taking care of the transportation of life-saving health care equipment like oxygen cylinders, ventilators, and oxygen concentrators to India. On Sunday, Indian-Americans from Tamil Nadu including eminent philanthropist M R Rangaswami, held a "Help Tamil Nadu Breathe" to raise USD 1.5 million in few hours. "This is an incredible outpouring of generosity, which people have come to expect from America.

## Exports, better balance sheets to help firms tide over second wave impact: Report

**Mumbai, May 14 :** It added that retail borrowers and small business will see stress, leading to a build-up of potential asset quality issues in the unsecured lending books of lenders and an increase in softer delinquencies in the MFI segment. The export growth has been reasonably strong in the past six-eight months and is likely to sustain given the fiscal push across its key exporting destinations. The export growth has been reasonably strong in the past six-eight months and is likely to sustain given the fiscal push across its key exporting destinations. The partial-to-full lockdowns imposed by various states to contain the second wave of the pandemic are likely to have a muted impact on the overall business environment, given strong export demand



and improved balance sheets in the past six months, according to a report. Though supply chain disruptions could play out, overall impact on corporates is expected to be moderate to minimal. But, small businesses and retail borrowers are likely to see stresses, India Ratings said in a re-

port on Monday. MSP, wheat procurement, rabi crop, crop harvesting season, fram laws, MSP system End of MSP? Far from it, rabi wheat purchases at brisk pace XLRI professor and noted labour market expert KR Shyam Sundar said since around 21 states have resorted to restrictions, including stricter curfews, it was but natural that the urban unemployment rate breached the double-digit level. Covid effect: Weakened economy can't produce jobs, unemployment rate at 19-week high

added that retail borrowers and small business will see stress, leading to a build-up of potential asset quality issues in the unsecured lending books of lenders and an increase in softer delinquencies in the MFI segment. The assessment will change if there were a stringent national lockdown or a protracted normalisation of activities due to the pandemic, the agency warned and cautioned that the economy in general will have a bumpy road to recovery. The second wave of the pandemic infections will be less disruptive than the first wave for overall businesses, despite the daily caseload reaching more than four times of the peak level seen during the first wave. This is because the administrative response is likely to be confined to the regional/local

lockdowns and containment zones. The agency believes the first order impact on corporates will be minimal to modest depending on the industry and size of entities, as it believes that companies are better prepared to operate under localised lockdown conditions while adhering to various guidelines. Another enabler is exports, it said pointing out that while curbs on economic activities will shave off a portion of aggregate demand, export growth could compensate for the same as the global economy is on the mend now. The export growth has been reasonably strong in the past six-eight months and is likely to sustain given the fiscal push across its key exporting destinations.

Contd. From Page 1

## CM Himanta Biswa Sarma hints

Indian variant of Coronavirus is more fatal compared to the earlier variant. He also informed that the Assam Health Department is aiming at conducting 20 thousand tests in Guwahati from May 17. Earlier, the Assam Government had issued an order stating that District authorities in Assam have been instructed by the State Government to paste posters outside the residences of COVID-19 positive patients. The step has been taken by the Assam Government to “protect the community at large from further spread of the COVID-19 virus”. “...there have been reports that some COVID positive persons do not observe COVID appropriate behaviour and end up spreading the infection among the uninfected persons who come in their contact,” read an official order signed by Assam Chief Secretary Jishnu Baruah. “Therefore, it is necessary to put an identify mark, on places where such persons are self-isolated or quarantined, for the larger benefit of community,” the order added.

## Grenade blast at Tingrai Bazaar

on a motorcycle lobbed a grenade inside a shop at Tingrai Bazaar area.”A grenade blast did take place. We are trying to gather more details of the incident,” Tinsukia deputy commissioner Diganta Saikia said. The incident comes three days after a 12-year-old boy was killed when a grenade, which he found lying on the roadside, went off in Kotha Adarsha Gaon, again in Tinsukia. Assam Police later informed that the grenade may have been “dropped mistakenly” by security forces during routine movement in the area.

## CM takes stock of ongoing

directed for providing free oximeter to poor patients staying in home isolation. He also instructed the Health Department for pressing 100 additional ambulances into service for quickly bringing patients to COVID care centres or COVID hospitals. Political Secretary to the Chief Minister Jayanta Malla Barua, Principal Secretary of Health and Family Welfare Department Anurag Goel, MD NHM Assam Dr. S. Laxmanan, Principal of GMCH Dr. Achyut Baishya and senior doctors of GMCH were present in the meeting. Later talking to the newsmen, the Chief Minister informed that efforts have been taken to conduct 1 lakh tests daily in the state while 20 thousand people would be tested daily in Guwahati from May 17. He also informed that from May 17 onwards, those COVID patients, above the age of 50, who do not have separate toilet attached rooms in their houses would have to be mandatorily shifted to COVID care centres or hospitals. Dr. Sarma also said that a new SOP for tea garden areas would be issued by Health department tomorrow while informing about steps taken for providing food items worth Rs 2000 as one-time allowance to poor patients in containment zones. Updates were also shared by the Chief Minister about the ongoing construction of 200 ICU bed COVID hospital at the car parking lot of GMCH along with 24 ICUs at Kala Pahar in the city, signing of MoU between State Government and DRDO for setting up a 300 bed COVID hospital at Sarusajai for which Rs 19 crore has already been released. The Chief Minister said that there is enough stock of Remdesivir injection and oxygen in the state while informing that 27 lakh 56 thousand 790 people have been vaccinated till now in the state and 3 lakh 70 thousand vaccines are available. He said that Health Minister Keshab Mahanta has been continuously monitoring the situation in all parts of the state. Later, the Chief Minister also inspected the ongoing construction of the 200 ICU bed COVID hospital in the GMCH parking lot while taking stock of health condition of GMCH Superintendent Dr Abhijit Sarma at the hospital, who tested COVID positive.

## Govt instruct to paste posters

to paste posters outside residences of COVID-19 patients. Notably, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday expressed hope that surge in cases will start declining within a fortnight. Assam’s COVID-19 situation continues to be grim with high number of new cases and related deaths being reported on a daily basis since April.

## Modi releases 8th installment

upon the ongoing covid-19 vaccination drive in the country, saying that governments on all levels are making efforts to vaccinate its citizens. “About 18 crore vaccine doses have been given so far, both Centre and states are making efforts to vaccinate all citizens,” he said. Modi also asked states to take action against those involved in black-marketing of medicines and essential supplies.

## Bengal Governor visits camp

and took shelter in Ranpagli camp in Assam. The affected people narrated their ordeal before the West Bengal Governor. Governor Jagdeep Dhankar reached the Ranpagli camp in Assam after his scheduled chopper ride had to be cancelled due to bad weather. “People in the state are afraid of going to police stations. Police is afraid of ruling party workers. I have encouraged them to come back, I will take the bullet on my chest. I will talk to CM with a positive approach. She got the mandate. CM should leave confrontation,” said Governor Jagdeep Dhankar after meeting the affected people. “Would urge Mamata Banerjee to take to cooperative and constitutional stance and give up confrontationist approach as this alone can blossom democracy, promote rule of law and serve the people. Would take initiative to so accomplish by deliberating with CM,” added Governor Dhankar. “Nothing can be more shameful for us than people of West Bengal taking shelter in other States,” Mr. Dhankhar said, speaking to journalists in Siliguri. The Governor, who visited Cooch Behar district on Thursday against the advice of the State government, said that the government had not done anything to contain the post-election violence. “Even the media did not do anything. It is an open secret who the perpetrators were,” he said. Asked about the law and order situation in the State, the Governor said that he was not in favour of confrontation but believed in cooperation. “We are heading in a wrong direction and there can be a point of no return...the State of West Bengal is witnessing two big issues — Covid pandemic and post-election retributive violence,” he said. The Trinamool Congress leadership and the State government spoke against the Governor’s visit to areas in north Bengal. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee described the Governor’s visit to violence-affected areas as “unilateral proceedings” against established norms. In a tweet, the Governor said, “Would urge @MamataOfficial to take to cooperative and constitutional stance and give up a confrontationist approach as this alone can blossom democracy, promote rule of law and serve the people. Would take initiative to so accomplish by deliberating with CM.”

## Delhi gynecologist S K Bhadari

been informed about his wife’s death, he said. In a series of tweets, Priyanka Gandhi condoled the demise of the senior doctor. “Dr. S.K. Bhandari, Emeritus Consultant, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, who delivered my brother, me, my son and my daughter passed away today. Even in her late seventies, she would drive early morning to the hospital herself. A leader to the end, she upheld every noble trait of humanity. A woman I will always respect and admire, a friend I will always miss,” she posted on Twitter. Rana said Bhandari had served the hospital for 58 years. She had joined the hospital after returning to Delhi from London where she did her post-graduation. She was the one who established the gynaecology and obstetrics department of the hospital and even though she was not an IVF specialist, she encouraged doctors in setting up the facility at the hospital, Rana said. “When I came to Delhi 30-40 years ago, there were only two renowned gynaecologists in Delhi -- Dr S K Bhandari and Dr Sheila Mehra of Moolchand Medcity. She was like a mother figure to me and the loss is quite huge,” he said. Dr Bhandari has a daughter, who is also a doctor, and was taking care of her ailing parents. Dr Abha Majumdar, director and head of IVF at the Ganga Ram Hospital, said there was an unsaid bond between them. “We hardly had to say anything to each other. She was like a mother figure and she was the one who helped me realise my calling,” she told Dr Majumdar had joined the hopsita in February, 1987 and was taking care of the free infertility OPD on Thursdays. After almost a year, Dr Bhandari, who was the head of the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department, asked her about her interest area and she said it was infertility treatment. She encouraged us to explore the field, she recalled.

## Telangana High Court stays

sufficient facilities for treatment at their own places. “Telangana High Court stays the state government’s order to allow ambulances with patients coming from neighbouring states only if they have prior tie-up with hospitals”. Earlier today, patients from Andhra Pradesh died in ambulances after the Telangana Police did not permit them to cross the interstate border at Kurnool. The incident occurred at the Panchalingala checkpoint on National Highway 44. The two persons were identified as natives of Nandyal and Kurnool respectively. Several reports of blocking of ambulances have emerged at various border checkpoints in the state such as Garikapadu’s checkpoint and Ramapuram cross border post near Suryapet. “All ambulances coming from Andhra to Telangana for COVID treatment and personal vehicles are being checked. Those coming for treatment will be allowed into Telangana only on hospital appointment as well as authorisation pass from Director of Health COVID control center,” said Superintendent of Police, Suryapet. At least 40 ambulances from Andhra Pradesh were forced to return back from the Pullur toll plaza since Thursday. Kin of some of the patients have alleged that even those with permits issued by the Andhra Pradesh police were forcibly turned back.

## Tauktae likely to be a very severe

1998 Gujarat cyclone also formed in early June. So, while cyclone formation in May in the Arabian Sea is rare, it often happens when monsoon sets in,” added Sunitha. According to “Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region,” a report released by the Union ministry of earth sciences last year, observations indicate that frequency of extremely severe cyclonic storms (ESCS) over the Arabian Sea has increased during the post-monsoon seasons of 1998–2018. Most models are projecting a higher sea surface warming in the Arabian Sea than the Bay of Bengal. “The frequency and intensity of cyclones in the Arabian Sea have increased in recent years. This is because of the rapid warming that has made the relatively cooler Arabian Sea (compared to the Bay of Bengal) a warm pool region that can actively support cyclone formation. Climate projections indicate that Arabian Sea will continue warming under increased carbon emissions, resulting in more intense cyclones in the future,” explained Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology. “Ocean warming has made some new challenges also. Cyclones are now intensifying rapidly since warm ocean waters act as fuel for them. Extremely severe cyclones like Fani and Amphan intensified from a weak to severe status in less than 24 hours due to warm ocean conditions. That gives us less time to be prepared. State-of-the-art cyclone models are unable to pick this rapid intensification because they do not incorporate the ocean dynamics accurately,” he added. Light to moderate rain with extremely heavy rain (over 20 cm) is likely over Lakshadweep on May 13 and 14; over Kerala on May 13; over ghat areas of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka on May 15. It is likely to rain on May 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 in all these places, the IMD said. In Konkan and Goa, light to moderate rainfall at many places with heavy rainfall at isolated places is very likely on May 15 and heavy to very heavy rainfall at a few places on May 16 and 17. In Gujarat, rainfall activity is very likely to begin from May 17 with a significant increase during the subsequent 2 days and heavy to very heavy rainfall at a few places over Saurashtra and Kutch on May 18 and 19. The major impact from the cyclone is expected over southeast, east-central and northeast Arabian Sea, Lakshadweep – Maldives area and Lakshadweep Islands and along and off Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat coasts. In these areas, very rough to high seas, squally weather and gales around the system centre will affect shipping vessels and fishing operations; inundation of low lying areas of the islands of Lakshadweep during May 14 to 16; very heavy to extremely heavy rainfall causing flash floods and landslides over the coastal districts of Kerala, Karnataka and Goa during May 14 to 16 and Saurashtra, Kutch during May 18; Thunder squalls and lightning could cause adverse impact on human settlements and livestock as well as damage to loose and unsecured structures along the coast line. Fishermen have been advised not to venture into the Arabian Sea during May 14 to 18. Ships too have been advised to avoid the area; ports along the west coast of India may take necessary precautions; naval base operations may maintain necessary precautions; tourism activities may be restricted over the area specified for squally weather and rough sea warning. Conditions are extremely favourable for the rapid intensification of Tauktae. “Ocean heat potential is above normal; sea surface temperatures are 1-2 degree C above normal and the Madden Julian Oscillation (MJO) is also favouring rapid intensification. We should be prepared,” Sunitha Devi had said on Thursday.

## Delhi will need more oxygen, AAP govt tells SC why requirement shot up 38% to 976 MT a day

**New Delhi, May 14 :** Delhi’s oxygen requirement, to treat moderate and severe cases of Covid-19 infections, is likely to increase by 269 metric tonnes (MT) in the coming days as it is looking to add more oxygenated non-ICU and ICU beds to its kitty, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has told the Supreme Court in an affidavit. The affidavit, accessed by ThePrint, states that Delhi is preparing to enhance the number of non-ICU beds with oxygen by 15,000 and ICU beds by 1,200 and, as a result, on the basis of the formula devised by the Centre, the national capital’s requirement for oxygen will increase from 707 MT to 976 MT, a 38 per cent increase. The affidavit further states that to cater to the eventuality that may arise during the third wave, the Delhi government has also chalked out a strategy to increase the storage capacity for oxygen. According to the affidavit, the city has so far not been able to store oxygen because the demand has exceeded allocation and the quantity received has been distributed on the same or the next day. On 8 May, a Supreme Court bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah had reiterated the apex court’s 5 May direction to the Modi government to supply 700 MT oxygen to Delhi. The affidavit, however, states that pursuant to the 5 May order, Delhi received 730 MT oxygen only once, on 6 May. The Supreme Court, which is hearing a suo motu cognisance matter on lack of essentials such as drugs, vaccines and oxygen during the pandemic, is likely to take up the Delhi government’s affidavit Thursday. The court has already formed a National Task Force to devise a new formula for equitable distribution of oxygen to states. Until the new formula is approved, oxygen allocation will continue on the basis of the formula worked out by the central government. On its part, the Modi government has labelled Delhi’s demand for oxygen as an overestimation. Opposing Delhi’s plea to ensure 700 MT oxygen is supplied to it every day, the central government had on 5 May maintained that the capital’s optimal oxygen demand should be in the range of 415.43 MT. According to a Delhi government note, which was cited during the arguments in the suo motu matter in the apex court last week, the national capital needed 707 MT oxygen as on 3 May to cater to the needs of the existing infrastructure. This included 304 MT oxygen for 16,272 non-ICU oxygenated beds and 218 MT for 4,866 ICU beds. The note said that for all small hospitals having less than 50 beds, the Delhi government had allotted 120 MT oxygen for cylinder refilling. It has also earmarked 28 MT oxygen for the additional 1,500 beds set up at the Radha Soami Satsang Beas, the Commonwealth Games Village and the Yamuna Sports Complex. The note further said that since 3 May, the Delhi government has added 8,000 non-ICU oxygenated beds, and is likely to add 1,200 more ICU beds – 500 each at the DRDO and Lok Nayak Hospitals and 200 at the Radha Soami Satsang. The affidavit also states that it is looking to add more beds, including 1,800 non-ICU oxygenated beds that will be set up at the district level. For now, the affidavit said, the government has commenced operations in a hospital it has built in Dwarka. But due to limited allocation of oxygen, only 250 beds are active. The Delhi government has requested the Centre to earmark more Covid-19 beds in its state-run hospitals and increase it from the current capacity of 3,409, the affidavit added. However, without adequate supply of oxygen, it submitted, the number of beds for treating Covid-19 patients cannot be increased. According to the affidavit, Delhi has total capacity to store 949 MT of oxygen.

## 'Making us scapegoats': 14 doctors resign in UP's Unnao over endless review of COVID-19 work

**New Delhi, May 14 :** As the country grapples with the second wave of the deadly COVID-19, fourteen doctors posted in a government hospital in Uttar Pradesh’s Unnao district reportedly resigned from their post on Wednesday complaining that they are being harassed with excessive review meetings and made the “scapegoats” for the rising number of Coronavirus cases in the state. According to a report by Dainik Jagran, all these doctors are in charge of the Community Health Centres and the Primary Health Care centres in Unnao providing treatment against COVID-19 to the villagers in the area. In a joint resignation letter signed by the doctors, 11 of the 14 doctors visited Unnao’s chief medical officer on Wednesday evening and handed over the letter to his deputy. The doctors say that despite working hard during the pandemic their efforts are met with baseless punitive actions and bad behaviour. “The problem is that our teams are working round the clock, but it seems we are being marked out for ‘not working’”. The DM, other officials, even the SDM, and the tehsildar are all supervising us and holding review meetings,” said one of the signatories of the letter. Dr Sharad Vaishya as quoted. “Our teams leave at noon, track and isolate Covid positive patients, get sampling done, distribute medicines and then, once we are back, we get calls from SDM asking to come for review meetings. Even if someone is posted 30 km away, he or she is bound to travel all the 30 km for these review meetings. We have to prove that we have worked. It seems it is being suggested that because we are not working, the Covid infection is spreading,” he added. The government officials have said that they are looking into the matter and will resolve it as soon as possible. The district magistrate Ravindra Kumar issued a statement that the Chief Minister’s Office has spoken to the doctors. Meanwhile, Dr Ashutosh Kumar, CMO, as quoted by Dainik Jagran said, “I have received this information about the resignation of 14 doctors. After I will reach the office, I will talk to the medical officers in charge and solve the problem. The allegation of needless pressure and mental and financial harassment is wrong”. Unnao presently has 1,980 active Covid -19 cases. 84 fresh cases and zero new deaths were reported on Wednesday in the district according to data from the Union Health Ministry. Uttar Pradesh comes fourth in the list of worst-affected states in India. Bihar Lockdown: Here’s what will continue and what will stay prohibited as.. Delhi’s positivity rate drops to 14%, lowest since April 14. Has it.. Increase gap between 2 Covishield doses, defer vaccination for 6 months..

## 50 employees of Bharat Biotech test COVID-19 positive; Joint MD's tweet sparks concern

**Hyderabad, May 14 :** A tweet from Covaxin maker Bharat Biotech’s Joint Managing Director Suchitra Ella saying 50 of their employees have tested COVID positive has evoked a mixed response from netizens with some questioning the effectiveness of its anti-COVID vaccine and while others wondering why the staff members were not vaccinated. Referring to comments by some political leaders over COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin supply issues, Ella had on Wednesday tweeted “Quite disheartening to the teams to hear some states complaining about our intentions. 50 of our employees are off work due to Covid, yet we continue to work under pandemic lockdowns 24x7 for U.” Covaxin dispatched 10/5/21. 18 states have been covered thou in smaller shipments. Quite disheartening to the teams to hear Some states complaining about our intentions. 50 of our employees are off work due to covid, yet we continue to work under pandemic lockdowns 24x7 for U pic.twitter.com/FmQ14vtqXCR

Reacting to her tweet, one user wrote, “How come your 50 employees down with Covid? We’re they not vaccinated? Also, why not hire more people on a temporary basis?” Ella’s tweet got 9,373 likes and was retweeted by 2,564 people by 10.30 AM on May 13). “Hi just wanted to say Thank you. Both my grandparents are over 75 & took their first jab 5 weeks back, both tested COVID positive 2 weeks back. Low fever was their only symptoms, tested negative today, on the road to recovery with no major issues,” tweeted another netizen. “Thank you Bharat Biotech for your hard work and commitment to delivering vaccines to every corner of India,” another Twitter user said. Another user said, “If you say that your employees are sick of covid, it speaks volumes about the efficacy of your vaccine.” Ella said as many as 18 states received Covaxin though in smaller shipments. The Hyderabad-based firm is supplying Covaxin to 18 states, including Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Jharkhand and Delhi. The other states are Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Telangana, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal. Meanwhile, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has given its approval to Bharat Biotech to start conducting Phase two and three clinical trials of its COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin on children above 2 years old. The national drug regulator said that it has accepted the recommendation of the SEC “after careful examination” and accorded permission to Covaxin manufacturer Bharat Biotech. On Wednesday, the Hyderabad-based drugmaker said that it has got the necessary approval from an expert panel for conducting phase 2/3 trials on those aged between 2 to 18 years.

## KP Sharma Oli Sworn in as Nepal Prime Minister; Retains Previous Cabinet

**Kathmandu, May 14 :** K P Sharma Oli was sworn in as Nepal’s Prime Minister on Friday, days after he lost a crucial vote of confidence in Parliament. President Bidya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office and secrecy to Oli, 69, as the 43rd prime minister of Nepal at a ceremony at Shital Niwas, the presidential palace. Oli was appointed as prime minister by the president in his capacity as leader of the largest political party in Nepal’s House of Representatives. He was reappointed to the post on Thursday night as the Opposition parties failed to secure majority seats in Parliament to form a new government. Oli, the Chairman of CPN-UML, lost a crucial trust vote in the House of Representatives on Monday. Oli will now have to take a vote of confidence at the House within 30 days, failing which, an attempt to form a government under Article 76 (5) of the Constitution would be initiated. The ministers of Oli’s Cabinet were also sworn in during the ceremony. During the oath-taking ceremony, Prime Minister Oli and Deputy Prime Minister Ishwar Pokharel did not mention the word God though President Bhandari had mentioned it. I will take oath in the name of the country and the people, Oli said, while President Bhandari had mentioned God, country and the people. All the ministers and ministers of state from the old Cabinet have been included in the new Cabinet. Pradeep Gyawali has been reappointed as Foreign Minister while Ram Bahadur Thapa and Bishnu Poudyal were appointed as ministers for Home and Finance. The oath-taking ceremony was kept brief keeping in mind the raging COVID-19 pandemic in the country. Oli Reappointed Nepal PM as Oppn Fails to Muster Majority to Form New Govt Vice President Nanda Bahadur Pun and Supreme Court Chief Justice Chandra Shumsher Rana were among the distinguished personalities who attended the ceremony. There are 22 ministers and three ministers of state in the new Cabinet. Oli previously served as prime minister from October 11, 2015 to August 3, 2016 and again from February 15, 2018 to May 13, 2021. Earlier, the president had asked the Opposition parties to come up with the support of majority lawmakers to form a new government by 9 pm on Thursday after Oli lost the vote of confidence in the House on Monday. Until Thursday, Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba, who got backing from CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Pushpakamal Dahal “Prachanda” was hopeful to get sufficient votes in the House to stake his claim as the next Prime Minister. But as Madhav Kumar Nepal took a U-turn after his last-minute meeting with Oli, Deuba’s dream to become the next Prime Minister was shattered.

# Giro d'Italia: Gino Mader wins stage six as Attila Valter takes pink



**London, May 14 :** Gino Mader won stage six of the Giro d'Italia as Egan Bernal and Dan Martin took a step forward in the battle for pink. Mader took the win for Bahrain-Victorious out of the breakaway, handing a huge morale boost to the team after their leader, Mikel Landa, crashed out 24 hours earlier. Attila Valter took the maglia rosa from Alessandro De Marchi, but Bernal made a statement of intent as the Ineos Grenadiers worked in the wind and rain to soften up rivals before the Colombian attacked on the final climb to take second just ahead of De Marchi's Israel Start-Up Nation teammate Martin. Only Remco Evenepoel and Giulio Ciccone could keep up, with the quartet putting seconds into Simon Yates, Hugh Carthy, and others, though they all took a step forward in the

standings as De Marchi was distanced on the mountainous 160km stage from Grotte di Frasassi to San Giacomo above Ascoli Piceno. Groupama-FDJ's Valter, 22, started the day in the best young riders' white jersey but had stated his intent to swap it for pink. "It's good to make jokes in the morning but to really believe it is another story," he said. "I cannot be more surprised. I knew I had good climbing legs but I had to stick with the best climbers in the world. I could cry I'm so happy, it's just incredible." The Hungarian now leads by 11 seconds from Evenepoel, with the Belgian able to stick with the main favourites so far in his first race back from the fractured pelvis he sustained in Il Lombardia last year. Bernal is a further five seconds back in third, with EF Education-Nippo's Carthy up to sixth, 38sec down, Martin in ninth at 47sec and Team BikeExchange's Yates in 10th a further 2sec back. After Landa and Bernal's teammate Pavel Sivakov abandoned with broken bones on Wednesday night, Joe Dombrowski and François Bidard were also non-starters in the morning as the race continued to count the cost of the crash late on stage five.

# Alexander-Arnold reminds us why we love football amid outside drama

**London, May 14 :** Near the end of what has supposedly been a difficult season the Liverpool right-back treated Old Trafford as his playground. Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold shoots on a night at Old Trafford that he dominated from start to finish. There was a decoy Liverpool bus. That was the one that ended up getting its tyres slashed by Manchester United fans on a side street near Old Trafford. The real Liverpool bus, unmarked and unheralded, sneaked around the back entrance to avoid the hundreds of protesters out front. United also operated a couple of dummy buses to shuttle between the hotel and the stadium. The players themselves travelled in their own cars and arrived six hours in advance. On the concourse, riot vans and police horses jostled to keep the crowds at bay. Two arrests were made. Remind me. Why were we doing all this again? This is, perhaps, the prevailing theme of these past eight months of plague football: the vague sensation that somewhere amid the myriad contortions and unsatisfying compromises, the endless whats and whens and whens, we mislaid the why. Decoy buses. A Thursday 8.15pm kick off to accommodate a fixture postponed because fans stopped it happening. Is this strange? Is this normal? What are we all doing here? Naturally, most of these uncertainties endure. But somehow, in amongst the six goals and the lawless entertainment, a certain logic emerged too. Liverpool are back in the top four race. United are staggering towards the end of the season like a team who have played 58 games on fumes. Harry Maguire is more important than we realised. And after the toughest season of his career, Trent Alexander-Arnold has fought his way through the storm. Tired legs, tired minds, tired bodies, tired consciences: these have been the motifs of Liverpool's pandemic, a jumble of barely legible subplots that seems to make less sense the more you look at it. And for all the turbulence and rancour off the pitch, Liverpool have looked painfully tame on it: swallowed up in a deluge of back passes and hopeless crosses, a team trying all the same things in the increasingly forlorn hope that it will all somehow click. For much of the first half hour, this game appeared to be following a similar pattern. United scored, Bruno Fernandes providing the little flick of invention the game desperately needed. Liverpool puffed and puffed and passed and passed. They had a penalty scrubbed off by the VAR. It felt like one of those nights. But out of a scruffy set piece situation, Diogo Jota diverted the ball past Dean Henderson with an instinctive flick of the heel. It was a foothold, if nothing else. Few players have embodied Liverpool's travails this season as faithfully as Alexander-Arnold. One minute you're a virtual unknown; the next you're one of the hottest footballing properties on the planet and the taker of perhaps the most famous corner in history; the next you've lost your England place and everyone has basically agreed that you can't defend. This is a familiar cycle of boom-and-bust, one that has claimed many a talented 22-year-old in the past. But somehow over the last few weeks,

something seems to have stirred in him: a fortitude and resilience that we perhaps expected to see, but not necessarily this soon. And so with half-time looming, Alexander-Arnold stood over a free-kick from the right. There was a little strut as he approached the ball, the little snap of the ankle that generates just that little extra overspin. You didn't need to be a seasoned Alexander-Arnold watcher to realise that this was a player who was comfortable in his game again. Firmino's header was brilliant, and in retrospect

Premier League - as it happened. So much of the criticism that Alexander-Arnold has received this season has been gauged against standards he himself has set. Let's take a moment to remember just what a thrilling high-wire act he has created for himself: playmaker, crosser, set-piece-taker, last-ditch defender, inexhaustible engine. This is a role that only a handful of players on the planet can play to even a competent level. Meanwhile, in supposedly one of his worst seasons, he still tops the Liverpool



perhaps that was the moment that Liverpool found their purpose. Oh, hang on. Yes. This was how it was supposed to work. For 90 minutes plus change, Old Trafford was Alexander-Arnold's playground. There was a second assist for Firmino. A scandalous stepover to send Paul Pogba for an ice cream. An unbelievable pass over the top to Sadio Mané. A couple of rakish pops at goal himself. Five key passes. And with Gareth Southgate watching from the stands, a reminder that when he is humming he doesn't just raise his own game; he raises everyone else's, too. Manchester United 2-4 Liverpool:

standings for chances created, interceptions, tackles and forward passes. And as a rampant second half unfolded, there was something else there too: a sense of unbridled relish that seemed to create its own clarity around it. Marcus Rashford galloping clear. Mo Salah scoring an emphatic fourth. Jürgen Klopp going bananas on the touchline. Scott McTominay dementedly chasing the game like a man who had accidentally got on the decoy bus. And at the heart of it all, Alexander-Arnold: playing like a man who had rediscovered football again. It was good. It was fun. And, you realised: maybe this was the point of it all.

# Firmino fires Liverpool past Manchester United and into top-four reckoning

**London, May 14 :** For Liverpool, what felt like a pre match decoy was only the beginning. With the air once again heavy with Manchester United fan protest, there was briefly the worry that the visitors' team bus might not make it through to the stadium. It was fired by footage of a red coach emblazoned with Liverpool's colours being blocked in by cars outside a city centre hotel. In the event, Liverpool arrived on a couple of dark-coloured coaches, which slipped in around the back of Old Trafford, up a little road through the W3 car park and alongside the Manchester International Freight Terminal - rather than the expected entrance via John Gilbert Way. The club said there had been no subterfuge and it was, frankly, a little difficult to unpick. But what was written all across Old Trafford was the way they outmanoeuvred United to ignite their push for a Champions League finish. They had started slowly but, driven by a magnificent performance by Trent Alexander-Arnold, they reeled in their old rivals and, when the dust on a wild night had settled, they could reflect on having taken control of their

top-four destiny. With the teams directly above them - Chelsea and Leicester - meeting at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday and, as such, one or both certain to drop points, Liverpool know that three wins from their final three games will most likely suffice, although it could come down to goal difference with Leicester. Jürgen Klopp used Sadio



Mané only as a 74th-minute substitute and the winger appeared to clash with him on the field after full time. But the Liverpool manager knew only happiness upon one of the finest displays of a difficult season. Liverpool crackled to life midway through the first half and, by the interval, they had turned a 1-0 deficit into a 2-1 lead. The truth was that their advantage could have been greater and that was certainly the case as they tore into United in the first half of the second period. Somehow United weathered the storm and, when Edinson Cavani played in Marcus Rashford to cut the deficit to 3-2, the hosts sensed an unlikely reprieve. The substitute Mason Greenwood had a shot cleared off the line by Nat Phillips. But when Mohamed Salah raced clear to round off yet another

fast and incisive counter at the very end, Liverpool could exhale. Now for the last three hurdles which, on this evidence, they will back themselves to clear - West Brom and Burnley away followed by Crystal Palace at home. For United, there was only frustration and it was shocking to witness how they went from a position of strength to

offered protection to the Munich tunnel, which had been breached by the protesters before the original fixture on the Sunday before last, causing the game's postponement. Alisson got away with a stray pass out to Cavani early on and United went in front when Bruno Fernandes took a cut-back from Aaron Wan Bissaka and unfurled a trivela. It was hard to say whether it would have curled in but Phillips's lunge made sure, the defender inadvertently slicing past Alisson. Liverpool shook their heads clear. Diogo Jota equalised with a lovely flick after Phillips had worked the ball into the six-yard box and Roberto Firmino gave them the lead before half-time when he ran off the slumbering Paul Pogba to head in Alexander-Arnold's free-kick. Liverpool had wanted a penalty in the third minute when Firmino, played in by Alexander-Arnold, watched a shot go through Eric Bailly's block and hit the defender's hand - an award would have been harsh. They then got one on 26 minutes only for VAR to confirm that Bailly had swiped the ball before cleaning out Phillips. Jota had twice worked Dean Henderson before the interval and United's defensive looseness was stamped all over Firmino's second goal at the start of the second half. Fred gave away possession on the edge of the area only for United to resist but, after Luke Shaw was robbed by Jota, Alexander-Arnold's angled drive drew a weak parry from Henderson. Firmino gobbled up the rebound. Jota rattled the post when one on-one while Henderson had to save from Alexander-Arnold. United hinted at the grandstand finish but the last word belonged to Salah.

# Jack Grealish's Aston Villa return excites Dean Smith despite Everton stalemate

**London, May 14 :** A fit Jack Grealish was a sight for sore eyes for Aston Villa and England fans, even if the playmaker's return after a three-month lay-off with shin trouble was not enough to raise this match above mediocrity. Grealish, introduced from the bench in the 72nd minute, looked understandably off the pace in this mostly tepid contest - one scorching burst excepted - but his return raises hopes that he could regain his best form in time for the European Championship. "He certainly brought a spark on to the pitch straight away," said the Aston Villa manager, Dean Smith. "He had one mesmerising run where he had five or six Everton players chasing him. It's small steps at the moment but we're happy to have him back. We need to go softly-softly with him. We've got three games now in the next 10 days and we're hopeful Jack will play a part in all of those games." Villa can still finish in the top half while Everton edged closer to European qualification with this point. "Nothing changes our idea to fight until the end of the season," said Carlo Ancelotti. "Maybe we need to have three more victories to



be in Europe. We will try to do that." Ancelotti has got his tactics for away matches right much more often than not this season, with Everton gaining almost twice as many points on their travels than at Goodison Park. Here the Italian opted for a different formation to the one used in Sunday's victory at West Ham, with Séamus Coleman starting in midfield and Mason Holgate filling the right-back berth in a flat back four. They remained defensively tight, with Ben Godfrey particularly impressive at centre-back as Everton recorded their sixth clean sheet from their last seven

away matches. That said, Villa were superior in the first half and might have taken the lead with sharper finishing. Everton were grateful for the suspension of Ollie Watkins, who had tormented them when Villa won 2-1 at Goodison Park a fortnight ago. Keinan Davis, entrusted with his first league start of the season, is a useful target man but not as dynamic as Watkins. It fell to Ross Barkley to do most of the harassing of Everton defenders when Villa did not have the ball: he did so diligently but, when he got possession, was wasteful too often. He was replaced after the hour by Jacob Ramsey.

# FA Cup final and Premier League: 10 things to look out for this weekend

**London, May 14 :** The cold, dead-behind-the-eyes pragmatist might assert that Leicester's most important match against Chelsea comes on Tuesday, in a meeting that may prove decisive to their top-four hopes. But that would be to ignore the sheer euphoria of winning the FA Cup in front of 6,250 of their fans at Wembley, and to miss the fundamental point that if football does not come down to winning magical old competitions like this then everyone may as well pack up. For Leicester, a first-ever cup final win would reassert the sense, five years after their league title win, that they are here to stay as a club capable of winning major honours. Their continued presence around the top end since 2016 has, in many ways, been just as impressive as that Claudio Ranieri-inspired triumph. Leicester continue to make a mockery of the idea that a "big six" exists in anything bar inflated egos, and they can prove that once again on Saturday. Nick Ames While surprising and an obvious setback to their Champions League qualification efforts, Chelsea's midweek defeat to Arsenal wasn't quite the "wake-up call" that Thomas Tuchel claimed it to be immediately after the game. While Arsenal's defending was commendably obdurate after Jorginho gifted

Emile Smith Rowe the only goal of the game, Mikel Arteta's side rode their luck at times and can hardly claim to have been the better side despite taking all three points. While Tuchel publicly beat himself up for making too many changes to his team, the conspicuous absence of N'Golo Kanté from his matchday squad was perhaps the only omission that, with hindsight, could be considered a glaring error. Having enjoyed the night off, the pint-sized dynamo will almost certainly be back to face his former



club in the FA Cup final and on current form, his speed and developing creativity could very well make the difference. Barry Glendenning N'Golo Kanté's return to his best has coincided with Chelsea's huge improvement. Already relegated with three games to go, West Bromwich Albion host a Liverpool side with plenty to play for in a match few in their right minds will expect the home side to win. Now their relegation is confirmed, it would be no great surprise if the players of West Brom threw in the towel and gifted Liverpool the points - and even on a good day they might not be good enough to cause Jürgen Klopp's side much trouble. Despite going down, West Brom have visibly improved under Sam Allardyce and we all marvelled at the number they did on Chelsea. Given their manager's obvious relish for bloodying the noses of high-profile continental managers he feels have persistently done him out of the glamorous jobs he is certain he deserves, neutrals can but hope this fixture won't be anywhere near as straightforward

as it seems for the recently deposed champions. Few footballers can do things you previously thought impossible, and fewer footballers still can do things that you still think are impossible even after they've done them - but Tanguy Ndombele is one. In the first half of the season he seemed to have finally hit his stride, delivering the unfathomable hand-over-mouth moments that are his USP while justifying his presence in between times by putting in a shift. Now, though, he's back on the periphery, left on the bench throughout the League Cup final despite a dreadful Tottenham performance, surplus to requirements in the win over Sheffield United which followed it, and given just 10 minutes at Leeds despite his team trailing throughout the second half. Spurs will soon have a new man in charge, so Ndombele's predicament is not irresolvable, but after a year of blaming José Mourinho's mistrust of flair, Ryan Mason deeming him non-essential suggests that the problem lies with the player, not whoever his manager is. They remain outsiders but the door to Champions League football was prised back open for West Ham by Chelsea's surprise defeat to Arsenal on Wednesday.

# From Rohtak to conquer England, **Shafali Verma** raring to go

**Mumbai, May 14 :** For nearly a month, teenage batting sensation Shafali Verma's daily ritual involved waking up at the crack of dawn and knocking the hanging leather ball in her living room with the bat at Rohtak's Sunaar Gully. Lifting dumbbells would follow the strenu-

mates will tour England next month for a bilateral series. "With so much cricket scheduled over the next three months, I would have liked to practice at my coach Ashwani sir's academy. I miss the nets session. But given the current situation (pandemic and lockdown), this is the best that I

the best of my abilities and make my country and father proud," she says. These comments might come across as rehearsed. But it offers a peek into the mindset of arguably one of the most talented batters in women's cricket. It also typifies her exuberance and child-like innocence. Despite an incredible start in international cricket, she is not someone weighed down by expectations. In many ways, she is the poster-girl of a tournament like The Hundred, which will be her second major international assignment since last year's T20 World Cup. From pundits, players and fans, everyone's gaze will be firmly fixed on Shafali when she eventually turns up for Birmingham Phoenix. But that does not seem to faze her. For the teenager, this is like any other tournament. "At a young age and on the big stage that is the World Cup, she has done well. That's an indication of her talent and temperament. She will work things out as she goes along because she is only going to get better. We should not try and tell her that this is how she should go, this is the route she has to take or this is how she has to mould herself. Let her continue playing her cricket," former coach WV Raman had told reporters after India's loss to Australia in the T20 World Cup final. Another testament to Shafali's unflinching temperament is the manner in which she takes on the best bowlers around. She smoked four boundaries against Australian pacer Megan Schutt, (who was then the No.1 ranked T20I bowler) in the T20 World Cup opener. Two months ago, in another T20I encounter against South Africa in Lucknow, she smacked three boundaries and a six against Shabnim Ismail, the current No. 2-ranked bowler in T20Is. In doing so, she blasted a 26-ball 50, which paved the way for a comfortable win for India. Her blitzkrieg made Protea wicket-keeper Sinalo Jafta quip: "Firstly, you took the word out of my mind: fearless. T20 cricket is about expressing oneself and the way she expresses herself, I have to commend her. She is just 100% fearless. That's the one word," Jafta told

Star Sports. The South Africa series was particularly productive for Shafali, in which she notched up scores of 60, 47 and 23. That string of good scores came after an year of inactivity at the international stage would have pleased her. The teen, though, used the spare time to work on her fitness and polish some of the rough edges in her game. "I used this time to work on my weight-training. Apna body strength pe dhyan diya. I also tried to fine-tune my game and be more judicious in shot selection, in terms of choosing deliveries that I think I should hit," she explains. In the run-up to this year's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, Haryana Cricket Association allowed her to train with the men's team. "She hardly looked in any trouble against Mohit Sharma and Ashish Hooda, who were bowling above 135kmh mark," said a member of the Haryana men's team. This drill was not new for Shafali. At 14, she was asked to face Haryana Ranji team pacers at Rohtak's Shri Ram Narain Cricket Academy under the watchful eyes of coach Ashwani Kumar. But facing the likes of Mohit Sharma after such a long spell away from the game would go a long way in sharpening her skills. Amidst the intense nets sessions and frenetic international games, Shafali was mindful of balancing her studies with her sporting career. "I know the importance of academics. Despite my hectic schedule, my father wants me to complete my education. Before the South Africa series in March, I was preparing for Class X board exams. However, it got cancelled," she says. Father Sanjeev has got her enrolled in Noida's Shiv Nadar School for higher-secondary education. "But she will miss at least the first three months because she will leave for England next month," Sanjeev says. But in terms of her cricket, the England series and The Hundred would be highly educative. It would be a decisive chapter in Shafali's career. The challenge will be to retain her daredevilry and the bindaas attitude. If Shafali does that, she will leave the world in awe of her talents.



ous two-hour stint. It was a throw-back to her preadolescent days, long before she became a household name, a phase in life spent playing tennis-ball cricket on the dusty bylanes near home, with boys older than her. It's not ideal preparation for the World No.1 women's T20I player, who has bagged a contract for the inaugural edition of The Hundred, when Birmingham Phoenix acquired the 17-year-old's services as New Zealand batter Sophie Devine's replacement. She thus became only the fifth Indian woman cricketer, after captain Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana, Jemimah Rodrigues and Deepti Sharma, to enter the tournament's fold. She is also poised to make her Women's Big Bash league debut with two-time champions Sydney Sixers later this year. Before the Hundred rolls out from July 21, Shafali and her team-

could have done," she tells The Indian Express over the phone. For long, the women's game wasn't known to throw up big-hitters, but Shafali, with her blistering stroke-play and ability to hit sixes at will, is changing perceptions. In 22 T20Is since her debut, she has scored 617 runs, with three half-centuries at a jaw-dropping strike rate of a shade below 150. Without her blazing starts as an opener in last year's T20 World Cup in Australia, India would not have made it to the final. Her exploits Down Under had everyone from Nasser Hussain to Ian Bishop tipping her as the "next big thing" in women's cricket. When asked about her thoughts on The Hundred, Shafali gave a simple, matter-of-fact answer. "Koi tension nahi hain. Bus acha perform karna hain aur desh aur papa ka naam roshan karna hain (There's no tension. I just want to perform to

## Gary Neville says Glazers have turned Old Trafford into a 'prison' amid protests

**Manchester, May 14 :** Flares and anger filled the Manchester skies as United fans staged another protest before the rescheduled match with Liverpool in which at least two arrests were made, with Gary Neville claiming security arrangements had turned Old Trafford into a "prison". The club erected barricades to protect the ground and there was a visibly heavier police and security presence ensuring those who gathered to voice opposition to the Glazer family ownership were kept at a distance and funnelled when moving around the venue. Neville, a former United captain who was inside Old Trafford as a Sky Sports pundit, was scathing about the arrangements. "Let's be clear, what we've seen on that forecourt before is effectively Man United turned into a prison, it's a devastating image for the Manchester United football club brand around the world, let's just note that," he said. "You have to put prison walls up around your ground and have hundreds and hundreds of police officers at a game where fans aren't at-

said. "The concern is that, when the fans can come back to the stadium, you could have 70,000 fans showing up at Old Trafford, frustrated with what happened. Things can get much worse." Greater Manchester police stated that two arrests had been made relating to public order offences and Chris Sykes, GMP assistant chief constable, issued a statement. "We have been working closely with Manchester United and partners to ensure those in attendance outside the stadium are kept safe while exercising their right to a peaceful protest," he said. "The safety of all those concerned remains GMP's main priority. We encourage everyone to remember we are still living under restrictions due to the pandemic and have a collective responsibility to remain safe and protect one another. Enforcement remains our last resort but anyone whose behaviour crosses the boundary into a criminal offence should expect to be prosecuted." Protesters spoken to by the Guardian expressed frustration at the Glazers, whose leveraged buyout in



tending; there is something that has gone badly wrong. "Those who gathered on the forecourt outside the stadium and who attempted to intercept the team coaches on the way there had hoped to stop the game again after the original fixture was called off on Sunday 2 May after some individuals broke into the stadium and entered the pitch, with a police officer being slashed amid an outbreak of violence. Yet while flares were let off and what may have been a decoy Liverpool team bus was pictured having been stopped, each side arrived at Old Trafford just before 7pm. Protesters had initially arrived at 6pm on the forecourt outside the East Stand and then 45 minutes later moved to the back of the stadium to try to prevent the coaches entering on John Gilbert Way. A police cordon was in place that stopped the protesters who were released when both the United and Liverpool teams were safely inside. Roy Keane, another former United captain also at the game as a Sky Sports pundit, believes the protests will continue. "Manchester United fans are not done with this. We saw some protests a few weeks ago but I think there is still a lot to come," he

2005 loaded a debt on United that stands at £455m. Adam Ali, 24, from Oldham, said: "We want to make it clear that they can't come here, put our club in debt and get away with it. The Glazers need to leave our club now. I don't support violence but it would be great to get the game called off. It's the only way they'll listen." Many who attended wore green and gold, the colours of Newton Heath, the original club from which United emerged. Margaret Wallis, 81, from Salford, said: "The green and gold is about bringing United back to where we were. It's a message to the Glazers: 'Sell up and get out of my club.'" While chants of "We want Glazers out" and "Love United, hate Glazers" could be heard, the crowd became noticeably downbeat at the news the game was going ahead. Mark Slater, 69, from Rochdale, said: "We're here to resist the ownership as they're taking away from the heartbeat of our club. I was part of the campaign back in 2005 [when the Glazers took over]. We've protested nice and politely since then but enough is enough. Owners like the Glazers hold the fans - the lifeblood of the club - in contempt. It's time we took our club back."

## Dina Asher-Smith lays down Tokyo marker with 200m win

**London, May 14 :** Dina Asher-Smith celebrates at the 2019 world championships in Doha - the last time she competed in the 200m before her victory in Savona. Seb Coe, who knows a thing or two about winning Olympic titles, is convinced that Dina Asher-Smith will be Team GB's poster girl in Tokyo. Her rivals in the 100m and 200m will have something to say about that, but there were encouraging signs as Asher-Smith blitzed her way to victory in her first outdoor race of the season in Savona. Asher-Smith has not competed in the 200m since winning world championship gold in Doha in October

2019. But in a low-key meeting in Italy all her familiar traits - including a lightning start and a bend so exquisite that the Italian commentator shouted "mamma mia!" as she powered round it - were evident as she came home in 22.56sec. The 25-year-old would have perhaps wanted to go a touch faster, given the Olympics are scheduled to start in 10 weeks. But her dominance was clear with her closest challenger, Britain's Beth Dobbin, more than half a second back at 23.06sec. "It's good to be back on track and it's good to be back doing the 200m," Asher-Smith said. "It has been a year-and-a-half since the world

championships in Qatar and since I was doing my last 200m, so it's nice to be back over that distance again." However she knows bigger tests await, starting in 10 days when she races in Gateshead against the reigning 200m Olympic champion, Elaine Thompson-Herah, the double Olympic 100m champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, and the new American sensation Sha'Carri Richardson. "My next race is the Diamond League in Gateshead," said Asher-Smith. "I am really excited to be running at home. It will be nice." Another Briton, Andrew Pozzi, opened his summer with victory in the 110m hurdles with 13.42sec. But the



performance of the night came from the Italian Marcell Jacobs, who set the national record in the 100m with a storming 9.95sec run.

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