

The Assam Rising

Projecting the best of Northeast India everyday

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against Chinese bullying...

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Businessman killed at Diphu

Guwahati, May 15 : Suspected Dimas extremists gunned down a businessman at Diphu in Assam's Karbi Anglong district on Saturday. Police sources said Dimas National Liberation Army (DNLA) militants armed with AK-47 rifles and 9 mm pistols, shot businessman Debajit Sinha at his residence in Diphu. Police have intensified operations to nab the culprits involved in the incident.

Curfew in Dibrugarh, Tinsukia

Guwahati, May 15 : Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday advised the deputy commissioners of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts to advance the curfew hours from 2 pm to 12 noon. Chief minister Sarma made the advice during his visit to upper Assam for taking stock of the Covid19 situation. Besides Kamrup Metro, the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia are two districts of Assam which have been worst hit by Covid19 in the second wave of the pandemic. Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday visited Assam Medical College Hospital (AMCH) at Dibrugarh to take stock of the Covid19 situation.

Blast site in Tinsukia

Guwahati, May 15 : Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday visited Tingrai Bazar in Tinsukia district of upper Assam to take stock of the situation. On Friday, two persons were killed and two others injured in a grenade blast in the market area of Tingrai under Digboi police station in Tinsukia. The deceased were identified as 25-year-old Sanjit Singh and 22-year-old Surajit Talukdar, both residents of Tingrai area. The injured, identified as Monjit Das and Ganasyam Agarwala, are undergoing treatment at Assam Medical College Hospital (AMCH) in Dibrugarh. Talking to media persons at Tingrai on Saturday, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma strongly condemned the killing of the two innocent lives.

Mamata Banerjee's brother dies

New Delhi, May 15 : West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's younger brother Ashim Banerjee died due to COVID-19 on Saturday (May 15, 2021). As per the reports, Ashim Banerjee was undergoing treatment for COVID-19 at Medica Hospital in Kolkata. Meanwhile, on Friday, West Bengal recorded its highest single-day spike of 20,846 fresh COVID-19 cases, taking the total tally to 10,94,802. The death toll in the state rose to 12,993 after 136 more people succumbed to COVID-19 infection on Friday, the state health department bulletin said.

All commercial establishments in Assam to be closed at 11 AM from today



Guwahati, May 15 : The Assam government has directed that all the shops and commercial establishments across the state would shut down their shutters at 11 AM with effect from May 16, 2021. The decision has been taken in view of the rising Covid19 cases across

Assam. An order, issued on Saturday by the chief secretary of Assam, Jishnu Barua said: "In continuation of the order of even number dated 12th May, 2021 and in exercise of the powers, conferred under Section 22(2) (h) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the undersigned, in his capacity

as chairperson, State Executive Committee of the State Disaster Management Authority, Assam, hereby issues the following directives which shall come into force with effect from 5 AM of May 16, 2021 until further orders". Covid19: All shops, commercial establishments in Assam to be closed at 11 AM from May 16. According to the order "all shops and commercial establishments shall shut down at 11 AM on all days". As per the order, all vehicles other than government vehicles and those exempted vide Order No. ASDMA.2412020/R-21250 dated May 13, 2021 will be allowed to ply in accordance with an odd-even formula to be decided by the jurisdictional District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) between 5 AM to 12 noon. "However, this restriction shall not apply to personal vehicles used for medical emergencies," the

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CM visits AMCH, takes stock of COVID preparedness and treatment facilities

CM asks DC to take more containment measures

Guwahati, May 15 : Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma visited Assam Medical College & Hospital (AMCH) at Dibrugarh today and took a comprehensive review of the COVID situation in the district with DC, AMCH authorities and other senior officers. He also reviewed the precautionary measures adopted by the administration apart from enforcement of COVID protocols and treatment facilities being provided to COVID patients at AMCH. Keeping in view the fact



that more COVID fatalities have occurred late in the night and due to late night arrivals, the Chief Minister directed AMCH authorities to improve odd hour management to render efficient services to COVID patients arriving late night through on-duty senior and experienced doctors. Further to boost COVID care, he asked MD NHM and AMCH authorities to ensure early operationalization of the super specialty hospital constructed at AMCH within a week. The super specialty hospital will

have 60 ICU beds and is expected to significantly boost COVID care treatment. The Chief Minister also asked AMCH authorities to coordinate with Oil India Limited (OIL) for setting up a 40,000 litres oxygen plant at the hospital. Moreover, reviewing the containment and testing measures adopted by the district administration to deal with the pandemic, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma asked the DC to take more containment measures including increasing the number of

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Traders association writes to Arvind Kejriwal, asks not to extend COVID-19 lockdown in Delhi



Israeli military 'tricks' Hamas with vague media statement on Gaza offensive

New Delhi, May 15 : Early Friday, just after midnight, the Israeli military put out an ominous statement to the media: "IDF air and ground troops are currently attacking in the Gaza

feared scenario that would mark a bloody escalation of this week's operation against Hamas militants. Some reporters were even told outright the incursion had begun.



Strip." The vaguely worded statement set off frenzied speculation that Israel had launched a ground invasion of Gaza — a much-

Hours later, the military issued a "clarification." There were no troops inside Gaza. But by then, several

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PM Modi Reviews COVID-19 Situation, Vaccination Drive

New Delhi, May 15 : Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday held a review meeting on the COVID-19 situation and vaccination drive in the country. Government sources said top officials from different ministries attended the meeting. Modi has been holding regular review meetings on the pandemic situation and taking measures as he spearheads the drive to curb the second wave of a surge in infections. India recorded 3,26,098 COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours that took the tally to 2,43,72,907, while 3,890 new fatalities pushed the death toll to 2,66,207, according to Union health ministry data updated on



Saturday. Shortage of medical oxygen, which has been linked to deaths of patients in several parts of the country, has emerged as one of

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Vaccinated or not, ensure physical distancing and wear mask, says govt's top scientific advisor

New Delhi, May 15 : As the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc with the country recording more than two



lakh cases daily. The Principal Scientific Advisor to the Centre K Vijay Raghavan urged people to continue to follow COVID-appropriate behaviour and to not become complacent. He tweeted on Saturday morning asking the people not to let their guard down. "Very important, whether vaccinated or not: Masks, physical distancing, ventilation. These interventions are also immediately critical for lowering pressures on the healthcare system, during this surge. Adherence essential at the personal

and community levels. By all," he wrote. Very important, whether vaccinated or not: Masks, physical distancing, ventilation. These interventions are also immediately critical for lowering pressures on the healthcare system, during this surge. Adherence essential at the personal and community levels. By all. Earlier May 5, K Vijay Raghavan had claimed that a third phase of the deadly novel coronavirus pandemic is inevitable. Addressing a press conference, Raghavan said, "A third wave is

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12 Arrested Over Posters Against PM Modi In Delhi: Sources

New Delhi, May 15 : At least a dozen people have been arrested by the Delhi Police over posters criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's handling of the coronavirus pandemic that came up in the past few days in the capital, sources told NDTV on Saturday. The police have registered more than 13 First Information Reports or FIRs under sections of the Defacement of Public Property Act besides other laws. The arrests were made by four different divisions of the police - eastern range, east, central and north-east - suggesting the operation was a co-ordinated action. The move comes over posters that had emerged in several parts of the city with messages like: "Modi ji,

aapne humare bacchon ki vaccine vidhes kyu bhej diya?" (Modi ji, why did send vaccines meant for our children, abroad?). On Thursday, six people were



arrested in East Delhi's Kalyanpuri area where Delhi Police received input that the posters criticising the Prime Minister were being put up. More than 800 posters and banners were

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Cyclone Tauktae fury to hit Maharashtra soon

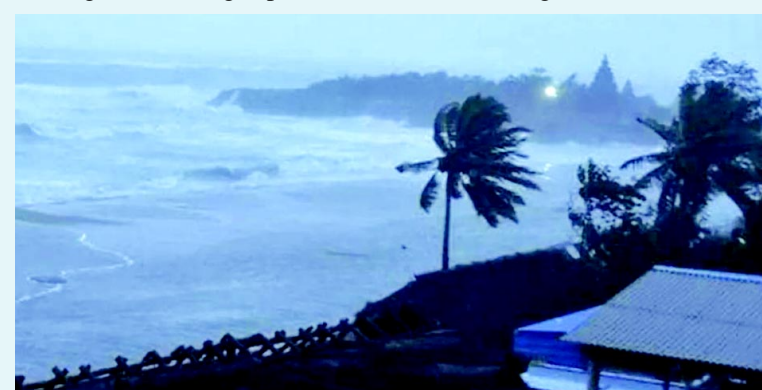
New Delhi, May 15 : With the Cyclone Tauktae whirling towards the Gujarat coast, Maharashtra is all set to grapple with its impact on the coastal Konkan and some interiors which are likely to be hit by heavy rains and gusty winds. The entire coastal belt comprising Palghar, Thane, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg besides Mumbai is in a state of high alert with all rescue and relief agencies are in standby to tackle any eventualities. The NDRF has deployed 3 teams in Mumbai, 15 in Pune and one in Goa with Cyclone Tauktae now said to be in the Arabian Sea off north Karnataka-south Maharashtra coasts. How-

ever, officials expressed hope that Maharashtra may escape the fury of the cyclone as it is likely to pass around 250 kms in the Arabian Sea, moving at an average speed of 7

kms/hr. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has reviewed the situation and asked the people and the government machinery to be vigilant, rekindling memories of the dev-

astating Cyclone Nisarga that pounded Raigad-Ratnagiri in June 2020, at the height of the pandemic lockdown. "In a preparatory meeting regarding Cyclone Tauktae on Friday night, Thackeray has instructed all Divisional Commissioners and district Collectors to be vigilant and well-equipped in coastal areas, especially in Palghar, Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg," informed an official of the CMO. Head of SID at the Climate Research and Services Pune, K. S. Hosalkar said that the latest satellite images indicate the system are getting matured and cloud bands are now on coastal north

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Chief Minister announces setting up of an oxygen generation plant at Tinsukia Civil Hospital

Visits Tinsukia; takes stock of COVID situation

Guwahati, May 15: Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma said that to meet the surging demands of medical oxygen, government would set up an oxygen generation plant at Tinsukia Civil Hospital. Making a visit to Civil Hospital in Tinsukia today to take stock of the treatment facilities put in place for COVID patients, Chief Minister Sarma said that State government would set up an oxygen generation plant. He said that National Health Mission would take steps very soon to build the plan to meet the high demands of medical oxygen. Visiting the hospital, Chief Minister Sarma took stock of the number of positive patients, ICU beds, COVID medicines, availability of oxygen etc. Chief Minister held a review meeting in presence of Union Minister of State for Food Processing Rameswar Teli, Minister for the Welfare of Tea Tribe Sanjay Kisan and MLAs Bolin Chetia, Bhaskar Sharma, Suren Phukan, Taranga Gogoi and Rupesh Gowala with the district administration and health department at DC office, Tinsukia. In the meeting Chief Minister Sarma asked the Health Department to conduct at least 500 RTPCR and two thousand RAT tests on a daily basis in Tinsukia district. In view of the positivity rate happening in the district which sees at least 150 and 200 persons being detected COVID positive, Chief Minister Sarma asked the DC to prepon the curfew by two hours. It may be noted that in Tinsukia so far 14825 COVID tests were done and 1680 people were de-

tected with COVID positive with the positivity rate of 11.33 per cent. Chief Minister Sarma also took stock of the status of vaccination in the district. Taking into consideration of large number of people living in tea garden areas as well as in other interior areas, Sarma asked the Health Department to increase inoculation centres in the district to inoculate more eligible persons against the virus. In Tinsukia district 108921 people were given COVID vaccines at 125 vaccination centres. Later talking to media Chief Minister Sarma said that the COVID situation in Tinsukia over the last 10 days remain unchanged. The infection has spread in the tea garden areas also. District administration has been asked to declare the infected areas in the tea garden as 'containment zones'. He also said that steps will be taken by the government to mitigate all hardships in the tea garden areas emanating from declaring 'containment zones'. Responding to the ceasefire announced by ULFA (I), Chief Minister Sarma said that it will create a congenial atmosphere for peace in the state. Stating that both the State government and the insurgent group have the responsibility of forging a conducive environment for peace, Chief Minister Sarma said that State government will take proactive steps in initiating peace in the state. He also said that at a time when state is waging a war against COVID 19 he sought cooperation from everybody to maintain peace and tranquillity in the state.

Biswanath Administration Lays Emphasis On Generating Awareness To Fight Covid-19

Biswanath Chariali, May 15 :

With Covid-19 cases steadily increasing in the district, Biswanath administration has zeroed in on the fact that without wholehearted support from the people, no amount of effort of the civil or police administration would fetch desired result. Hence, the administration has decided to vigorously launch Covid awareness programmes and meets throughout the nook and corners of the district to make masses aware of the disease and the precautions and appropriate Covid behavior they are required to follow. All the administrative officers have been instructed to regularly visit villages and tea estates and hold awareness meets with the local populace. Biswanath's Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mr. Pranab Kumar Sarmah too has been holding such meetings where he has been appealing the people not to take the virus lightly and to strictly follow all Covid rules and protocols. "The Covid pandemic is an emergency situation. We will have to anyhow bring the situation under control,



however no amount of effort of the administration will yield any result until masses themselves join this fight voluntarily. Hence, we have decided to generate awareness among masses and apprise them about the seriousness of the situation so that they wholeheartedly engage themselves in this fight against Covid-19," said the Deputy Commissioner. Besides holding awareness meets and programmes by officers of the dis-

trict administration, several Task Forces too have been formed at Panchayat levels involving civil society, self help groups, Gaon Burhas, Naamghars etc. with the purpose of generating awareness at micro level. Regular meetings are also being held with the Panchayat and Rural Development (P&RD) department on how to involve the masses in this fight. Simultaneously, the district administration too is concentrating on vig-

orous testing so that infected persons could be soon identified and isolated. "The more we test, the more we will be able to isolate the infected persons. And the faster we can identify and isolate the infected persons, sooner we will be able to stem the spread of the virus," added Mr. Sarmah. Yesterday, 42 new positive cases were detected in the district, which took the total number of active cases in Biswanath to 568.

State Health Minister visits Nagaon to review COVID scenario

NAGAON, May 15: State Health Minister Keshab Mahanta visited Nagaon BP Civil Hospital this morning and reviewed the medical arrangements and other preparedness to combat the ongoing pandemic situation in the district. During his visit, Mahanta also took stocks on progress of construction of the latest facilities for the treatment of COVID patients in the hospital so far. The minister was accompanied by MLA duo Rupak Sarma and Jitu Goswami, DC Kavitha

Padmanabhan, superintendent of police Gaurav Abhijit Dilip, Joint Director of district health services as well as other medical officials during his visit to the hospital. Subsequently, the minister held a meeting at DC's conference hall with the officials of the district administration as well as district heads of various departments to discuss in detail about the COVID 19 containment measures across the district. In the meeting, the minister stressed on proper as well as smooth

functioning of COVID Care Centres, adequate transportation of COVID patients, sanitization drives, facilitating of hassle free cremation and strict adherence to COVID protocols ensured by the state government from time to time and asked for cooperation between general public and administration so that the ongoing pandemic situation could be brought under control in the district soon, a press note issued by district information and public relations office added.

More 342 fresh positive cases recorded at Nagaon

NAGAON, May 15: As many as 342 fresh cases have been registered today here, taking the total cumulative active positive cases in the district to 2406 while one died of COVID 19, sources

added. Meanwhile total 448 positive patients who were undergoing treatment in hospital as well as being isolated at their homes, were recovered today from infection of the virus.

Sources claimed that among those who tested positive today, 43 were admitted in hospital while the rest were put in home quarantine.

Rapid Antigen Test was conducted on 3162 people today while RT-PCR test was conducted on 29 swab samples, sources added.

SOS observed International Family Day virtually

Hojai, May 15 : SOS Children's Villages Family Strengthening Program, Hojai observed International Family Day, virtually with village members of Dhanuhar Basti and Kumrokata Community of Hojai on Saturday. The objective of the Program was to spread the message of importance of family and that family are the building blocks of society. Specially in this pandemic period, it is the family which is providing emotional and mental support to everyone. Every year FS program of Hojai spreads the message of family day with programs

in the community, however in this covid period, the program was conducted through virtual modes only. Speaking on the occasion, Assistant Village Director Mr. Chittaranjan Mohanty, emphasized that the International Day of Families, focuses on key issues central to the well-being of families across the world like health, education, children's rights, gender equality, work-family balance and social inclusion. Mr. Somnath Dey shared the insights on impact of new technologies on the well-being of families.

Community Significance of International day of Light

Light & optics is a major science and technology domain which, besides scientific or engineering functions, also affects human lives in a numerous ways, in recognition of which the UNESCO declared 2015 as the international year of Light and Light based Technologies. the significance of the subject was so much of relevance to the last person in the society that the need for a sustained perusal was felt at a community level and thereby it was Proposed by Executive Board of UNESCO to continue and periodically reinforce the beneficiary aspects of year of light celebrations, confabulations and exercises, The International Day of Light was proposed as a global initiative for the continued appreciation and exposition of light and the role it plays in science, culture and art, education and sustainable development, and in fields as diverse as medicine, communications and energy. Thereby, May 16th, commemorating the successful operation of LASER by Theodore Maiman was selected as the international Day

of Light. light today is beyond its traditional perception of vision and lenses, and is a family of application arising out of convergence of technological domains such as micro machining, microfabrication and electronics, thereby extending the bracket from just light to light-optical technologies - photonics. further, light based technologies address applications ranging from simple to sophisticated such as automated taps in bathrooms and kitchen, indoor photosynthesis, safety & efficiency markings, forensic application, Digital records, Camera aided monitoring and measurement, gen-

Pranab Kumar Deka

eral health and wellbeing applications apart from sophisticated devices used for Medicine and surgery. It has become important that light based technologies is viewed beyond science lab activity as a paradigm of going around about our activities. The declaration by United Nations in 2015 was a calling to upgrade our means and ways of doing things around, the way we utilize our time and resources and

to incorporate light based technologies in our scheme of things for the obvious benefits it holds out. To work for the outreach of this goal and serve as a platform for the stake holders is the motive of the day. While most of us are familiar with the advantages of Lasers in medicine and surgery, barcode readers have come to assist in hygienic, accurate and faster commerce. Hand held Refractometers have come to analyse food parameters and forensic detection within seconds. IR thermometer ensures non contagious temperature measurement and so on. Light

has come to play major role directly or indirectly in almost all technical fields such as Communication, shop floor management, Remote sensing, industry, food and agriculture, solar Power and so on besides aiding research in science through instrumentation. Today Modern science and research is simply unimaginable without the use of optics or photonics being it a simple or sophisticated. In Industries, Lasers are employed for precision cutting, measurement and alignment and condition monitoring. Advances in spectroscopy and imaging science has tremendously aided research in advance metals and metallurgy, biology and medicine, Virtual reality is expected to take up educational demonstration. I remember reading in a journal in its career counsel column, a Query by a German Student wherein the student was inquisitive of the prospect of general physics or optics for a branch of study. The counsel included exhaustive material on the pros and cons of both the subjects and the related career aspects. This indicates the stress the Developed countries are laying to optics as a specialized branch.

Optical component manufacturing needs to be infused with enthusiasm and startup pumping. Skill developments in this area need to be emphasized and Optics study

needs to be structured striking a balance of academic and industrial practice. The same is to be followed up by reinforcing with some technology incubation centers that will produce a pool of skilled professionals for optical & material processing and turn the optical component industry to a cottage industry on the lines of China, Taiwan and Korea, chalking another chapter of Self Reliance. Can optics-photonics industry be a job spinner and can we have curated courses of study in optics-photonics and optical component manufacturing? Although trends are indicative of a yes, a realistic picture supported with figures shall emerge only if extensive interactive sessions are held at multiple levels. Thereby to channelize these opportunities and issues, Symposium on light based technologies, importance of optics-photonics, manufacturing and related issues need to be organized, inviting participation of industry, academia, commerce department & other bureaus, keeping these objectives in view the International day of light is worthy to be observed at community level so that we can draw a roadmap for some positive initiatives. But Whom to Sensitise and mobilise, how to initialize? Academia needs to interact more with industry. Industry needs to be progressive and reactive, marketing people needs to convince the policy maker, policy makers need to meet the stake holders and create a conducive ecosystem and draw comprehensive policy for the promotion of the optics - photonics industry, community colleges and science center's needs to inspire use of light base techniques and the wide consumer base needs to be light savvy, inquisitive and enquire for more. When the final outcome results in making technological advantages available and affordable to the last person, the vision and mission shall offer the fruits of an advanced society. (The writer can be reach via, dekapranab@yahoo.com)

Youth killed his own octogenarian uncle and aunt with sharp weapon

NAGAON, May 15: Following a year long land dispute, a drunken youth of Nonoi Kumargaon village under Nonoi police Outpost, hacked his own octogenarian uncle and aunt to death with a sharp axe last night while they were sleeping in their house situated at the same village. According to sources, the victim octogenarian couple have been identified as Nalia Saikia and his wife Konsuwali Saikia. Being informed, Nagaon police rushed to the spot and immediately arrested the accused youth - Kartik Saikia. Significantly, the victim octogenarian Nalia Saikia was the elder brother of the accused youth -



Kartik Saikia's father, sources added. In the meantime, police registered a case in Nagaon Sadar police station in this regard and began investigation into the gruesome murder of the couple.

First and foremost work for the new Govt.

I would like to extend heartfelt congratulations to the newly elected 15th Chief Minister of Assam, skilled politician, eloquent Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma as well as the Ministers and MLAs who have been elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly. We hope that with their thoughtful insight, patience, dedication and devotion towards skilful work, Assam will be able to set a position in the top five states of the country, making a change in forthcoming days, as also has been stated by Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma. The point that we have seen two rape cases in the state where the slogan "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" is still alive in the midst of election results or during the Chief Minister's Selection Debate. Above all these, protests against the accused that have already been exempted from weak legal proceedings, perhaps the issue is not going to remain unnoticed by the newly elected Ministers and MLAs. We want the new government to take some special actions to eliminate such brutal in-

cidents against women. We want the new Govt. to take special action to stop such brutal acts against women. The new CM, ministers, legislators who consider their state as their mother should consider the women's community as their mother and should give importance to the issue of women's protection. It will be interesting to notice what tactics the Chief Minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma is going to take against stopping rapes in Assam. If the issue is not taken seriously by the new government as a matter of urgency, it will not take a long time for our state to become a rapist state in the history of India. Therefore, in the interest of overall development of the state, the new government should ponder this issue as the first and foremost task.

Gouri Prasad Sarmah
Assistant Professor, Department of Assamese, Maryam Ajmal Women's College of Science & Technology, Hojai



Glasgow protesters rejoice as men freed after immigration van standoff



London, May, 15 : Hundreds of people surrounded vehicle men were held in and chanted 'these are our neighbours, let them go' Campaigners have hailed a victory for Glaswegian solidarity and told the Home Office "you messed with the wrong city" as two men detained by UK Immigration Enforcement were released back into their community after a day of protest. Police Scotland intervened to stop the detention of the men during Eid al-Fitr. Staff from Immigration Enforcement are believed to have swooped on a property in Pollokshields early on Thursday morning and detained people. By mid-morning, a crowd of about 200 protesters surrounded the vehicle, preventing it from driving away, and chanting "these are our neighbours, let them go", with one protester lying under the van to prevent it driving off. "I'm just overwhelmed by Glasgow's solidarity for refugees and asylum seekers," said Roza Salih, shouting to be heard over the jubilant shouts of "refugees are welcome here". She added: "This is a victory for the community." Salih, who had been at the protest since the morning, is a Kurdish refugee and co-founded the Glasgow Girls campaign in 2005 with fellow pupils to prevent the deportation of a school friend and fight against dawn raids. Earlier Salih questioned why the widely condemned practice of dawn raids appeared to be recurring 15 years later in Glasgow, the only dispersal city for asylum seekers in Scotland. She also highlighted the jarring impact of carrying out such an action during Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim festival marking the end of Ramadan, in one of the most multicultural areas of the city and within the constituency of the first minister, Nicola Sturgeon. As cheering protesters escorted the men to the local mosque, Pinar Aksu, of Maryhill Integration Network said: "They messed with the wrong city." "This is a revolution of people coming together in solidarity for those who others have turned away from," she said. Aksu described how hundreds more supporters had arrived at the scene as the afternoon progressed. "This is just the start. When there is another dawn raid in Glasgow, the same thing will happen." Protesters held up placards as they block an immigration enforcement van, stopping it from leaving Kenmore Street in Glasgow. Aksu added: "For this to happen on Eid, which is meant to be a time of peaceful celebration, is horrifying. It is no coincidence that it is taking place when a new immigration bill is being prepared." "We also need answers from Police Scotland about their involvement. We have already written to the home secretary asking urgently to clarify whether the decisions to carry out immigration enforcement raids, including dawn raids, represents a change in the policy by the UK government." Shortly after 5pm, Police Scotland released an updated statement, saying that Supt Mark Sutherland had decided to release the detained men "in order to protect the safety, public health and wellbeing of those involved in the detention and subsequent protest". The force asked those

Spencer Silver, who helped invent the Post-it Note, dies at age 80

London, May 15 : The corporate scientist discovered the unique adhesive that allowed notes to be easily attached to surfaces and removed. Spencer Silver was the inventor of the adhesive used on one of 3M's best-known products, the Post-it Note. The inventor of the adhesive used on the Post-it Note has died, according to the company 3M, which produces the product, and his published obituary. Spencer Silver was 80 and died May 8 at his home, the family's obituary said. Silver was working in a company lab in 1968 when he discovered a unique adhesive formula, according to 3M. The adhesive allowed notes to be easily attached to surfaces, removed and even re-posted elsewhere without leaving residue like other glues. Silver looked for several years for a practical use for the adhesive, calling it a "solution waiting for a problem to solve". In 1974, his colleague Art Fry came up with the idea of using the adhesive to prevent paper bookmarks from falling out of his hymnal when he sang in church. The product was originally called the Press 'n' Peel memo pad in 1974, but it wasn't brought to the market until 1977 and didn't really take off until 1980, when it was renamed the Post-it Note. It's now one of the top-selling items in 3M's consumer products division. Silver retired as a corporate scientist in 1996 and earned 37 patents during his time at 3M.



ns following Israeli airstrikes in the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah

at the scene to disperse from the area as soon as possible. A spokesperson said earlier: "Police Scotland does not assist in the removal of asylum seekers. Officers are at the scene to police the protest and to ensure public safety." The second dawn raid in Glasgow within a month appears to show a further escalation of the UK's hostile environment policy. While the SNP government has argued strongly for Scotland to have control over its own immigration policy, not least because of the country's unique depopulation pressures, it remains reserved to Westminster. Sources told the Guardian the immigration status of the individuals detained was unclear. The protests took place as new MSPs were sworn in to what has been described as Holyrood's most diverse ever parliament, taking their oaths in British Sign Language, Arabic, Urdu, Punjabi, Doric, Scots, Gaelic, Welsh and Orcadian, and after an election in which refugees had voting rights for the first time in Scotland. Politicians expressed their solidarity with the residents on social media. Following the men's release, Nicola Sturgeon tweeted: "I am proud to represent a constituency and lead a country that welcomes and shows support to asylum seekers and refugees." She added that the police had been "in an invidious position - they do not assist in the removal of asylum seekers but do have a duty to protect public safety. They act independently of ministers, but I support this decision." Condemning the Home Office action, Sturgeon added: "To act in this way, in the heart of a Muslim community as they celebrated Eid, and in an area experiencing a Covid outbreak was a health and safety risk." Both as MSP and as FM, I will be demanding assurances from the UK government that they will never again create, through their actions, such a dangerous situation." Wafa Shaheen, of the Scottish Refugee Council, told the Guardian: "To force people from their homes on the first day of Eid, with neighbours and families trying to honour the religious celebration in peace, shows - at best - a serious lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness on the Home Office's part." Regardless of the immigration status of those targeted today, this heavy-handed approach from the Home Office is unnecessary and avoidable.

'It can't be that easy': US conservative group brags about role in making voting harder

London, May 15 : Leaked video published by Mother Jones shows executive director of Heritage Action bragging about crafting voting restriction bills. Voting rights activists gather during a protest against Texas legislators who are advancing a slew of new voting

Delaying second Covid vaccine doses can save lives, study finds

London, May 15 : Delaying the second dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccines as the UK has done can save lives, according to a US modelling study that suggests other countries struggling to immunise their populations could adopt the strategy. Second shots of both vaccines and the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab are designed by the manufacturers to be given within three to four weeks of the first dose. The UK, however, opted for a 12-week delay between doses in a bid to ensure that more people received their first vaccination more quickly. Immunological evidence has shown high protection from one dose - up to around 80% with both Pfizer and Moderna, which are both mRNA vaccines made in a similar way.



People dancing in front of Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar to celebrate Eid al-Fitr

Israel air and ground forces hit targets in Gaza Strip as death toll climbs

Gaza, May 15 : Israel's military has said its ground and air forces are attacking targets in the Gaza Strip as residents reported a massive bombardment, amid fears that Israel would launch an incursion into the blockaded territory. [Israel Defense Forces] air and ground troops are currently attacking in the Gaza Strip," the military said in a statement just after midnight local time, without providing further details. The military later issued a statement saying there were no troops inside the Gaza Strip,



suggesting it was not a ground invasion but artillery and tank fire from the border. "Clarification: there are currently no IDF ground troops inside the Gaza Strip. IDF air and ground forces are carrying out strikes on targets in the Gaza Strip," the statement said. The attacks nevertheless marked a significant escalation in the worst bout of fighting in years. Shortly after the initial military announcement, in an apparent reference to the operation, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, tweeted: "The last word was not said and this operation will continue as long as necessary." In the early hours of Friday, masses of red flames illuminated the skies as the deafening blasts from the outskirts

of Gaza City, which lies more than 1km from the frontier, jolted people awake as their apartment blocks shook. The strikes were so strong that people could be heard screaming in fear. A Palestinian family flee from their house during Israeli airstrikes in the east of Gaza City early on Friday. Shortly after it started attacking, Israel's military said residents up to 4km around the frontier should head into bomb shelters, and militants began firing salvos of rockets shortly after the attack. On Thursday, Israeli military

law and order via determined use of force," he said. In an earlier statement, he said the country was fighting a battle "on two fronts". Israel's president, Reuven Rivlin, said a "civil war [would] be a danger to our existence, more than all the dangers we have from the outside". Intercommunal violence, including beatings, stabbings, shooting and arson, has been reported across the country, from Beersheba in the southern Negev to Tiberias and Haifa in the north. A television journalist was attacked in Tel Aviv. More than 400 people have been arrested, and border police have been redeployed from the occupied West Bank to towns inside Israel. "We're in an emergency, the defence minister, Benny Gantz, said in a statement. The opposition leader, Yair Lapid, said there had been a "complete loss of control". He accused Netanyahu of "leading us to anarchy". "Jewish and Arab rioters have declared war on Israel, and there's no response, no government, no police, no leadership," he said. Lod was closed off from Thursday afternoon, and an overnight curfew imposed. Netanyahu said people involved in clashes could be indefinitely detained without charge, a practice known as administrative detention. In Gaza, militants had continued to fire rockets while the Israeli air force fired missiles throughout the day. In the enclave, shops, restaurants and parks that would normally be packed for the Muslim festival of Eid al-Fitr were deserted. Rockets being fired towards Israel from Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip on Friday. The Israeli military said it had hit a main command centre where dozens of Hamas operatives were conducting surveillance, and four apartments from which senior

commanders directed rocket attacks. Hamas said it had launched a number of "suicide drones" into southern Israel. The drones lock onto targets before releasing explosives. Warning sirens sounded almost continuously through the day in towns in southern Israel as Palestinian militants fired hundreds of rockets. A total of 103 people, including at least 27 children, have been killed in Gaza, according to the health ministry. On Thursday alone, 49 Palestinians were killed in the enclave. In Israel, seven people, including two children, have been killed. More than 1,700 rockets have been fired from Gaza since Monday, according to the Israeli military. It said a third had fallen inside Gaza, and the Israeli defence system Iron Dome has intercepted most of the rest. Earlier in the day the US president, Joe Biden, said there had "not been a significant overreaction" by Israel to the Hamas rocket attacks. "The question is how, how we get to a point, they get to a point, where there is a significant reduction in the attacks, particularly the rocket attacks that are indiscriminately fired into population centres," he told reporters at the White House. Abu-Ubaida, a spokesperson for Hamas's military wing, the Izzadin al-Qassam Brigades, claimed that an Ayyash rocket with a range of 250km had been launched towards Ramon airport. The local council said a rocket had landed in the area. The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and the UN secretary general, António Guterres, called jointly for an end to the fighting. "The primary task is to stop violent actions on both sides and ensure the safety of the civilian population," the Kremlin said in a statement after a video call with Guterres.

Nine injured in Rhode Island shooting, police say

London, May 15 : Incident that left at least three critically wounded is believed to be the capital city's largest shooting. Nine people were wounded in a shooting on Thursday evening in Rhode Island's capital in what police there believe to be the largest shooting in city history. Of the nine, three were critically wounded in the shooting just before 7pm, the Providence police chief, Col Hugh T Clements, told reporters at the scene. He said multiple guns had been used and it was linked to an "ongoing feud" involving groups known to authorities. He said the shooting had begun with gunfire emanating from a vehicle, targeting a home. A person or people inside the home then returned fire.



the state legislature, praised donors for their support. "I can tell you, back in February, I felt like some days we were alone in Georgia," he said. "And then the Heritage Foundation stepped in, and that began to bring us a boost to help turn around, get the truth out about what we were really trying to do. And I'm here in part to say thank you and God bless you." But an official in the Georgia secretary of state's office familiar with the drafting of the Georgia legislation that eventually became law said Heritage Action was not involved in it. "The only people actively writing and guiding SB 202 into its final draft were Representative Barry Fleming and secretary of state's counsel Ryan Germany and Brian Tyson.

restrictions in Austin, Texas, on 8 May 2021. A top official at one of America's most influential conservative groups bragged about playing a key role in crafting voting restrictions across the country, according to leaked video published by Documented, a watchdog group, and Mother Jones on Thursday. Jessica Anderson, the executive director of Heritage Action for America, an advocacy group affiliated with the powerful Heritage Foundation, told donors in April that the group had both written statutes and provided support for lawmakers doing so. "In some cases, we actually draft them for them," she said, according to Mother Jones. "Or we have a sentinel on our behalf give them the model legislation so it has that grassroots, from-the-bottom-up type of vibe." The comments shed light on the effort behind the scenes to shape new voting restrictions across the country. At least 361 bills have been introduced in the US since the November election, according to an analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice. Anderson touted Heritage Action's influence in several closely-watched states - Georgia, Arizona, Florida, and Iowa - all states that have

implemented new voting restrictions in the wake of the 2020 election. In Iowa, which passed legislation that curtails the early voting period and makes it easier to remove people from the voter rolls. The group plans to spend \$24m over the next two years. "Iowa is the first state that we got to work in, and we did it quickly and we did it quietly," she said. "We helped draft the bills. We made sure activists were calling the state legislators, getting support, showing up at their public hearings, giving testimony ... little fanfare. Honestly, nobody even noticed. My team looked at each other and we're like, 'It can't be that easy.'" Heritage Action does not have to disclose its donors, but is extremely well funded, and has received money from the Koch brothers. Anderson also claimed Heritage Action was involved in supporting efforts to pass a sweeping new voting law in Georgia earlier this year. Barry Fleming, a Republican in

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Self-isolation is important

Too many still fear they won't be able to afford time off work should they need to stay at home. Compliance with self-isolation has been worryingly low, with some surveys showing that only around a half of people with Covid-19 symptoms stick to the legal requirement to self-isolate. Evidence suggests that financial barriers are a key reason people don't comply, but the government has failed to fix this blind spot by protecting people from lost earnings when they are required to isolate. With social restrictions set to ease further, now is the time to address this critical flaw in the government's pandemic response. Any failure to provide vital self-isolation support could undermine the government's entire roadmap out of lockdown, putting paid to everything from the vaccine rollout to the expensive test-and-trace system. Given that a significant proportion of the population is still not fully vaccinated, controlling Covid-19 will rely on people who have or might have the virus getting tested and self-isolating. The threat of new variants and high infection rates globally means we cannot afford to be complacent. The population still needs to take self-isolation seriously, and they need to be supported financially to facilitate them in doing so. The current level of statutory sick pay across the UK is just £96 a week. This covers only a quarter of the average worker's earnings, while two million workers earn less than the amount required to qualify, leaving the poorest in society without any means to support themselves should they need to self-isolate. And while one-off £500 self-isolation payments have been introduced UK-wide, these payments are only available to people who qualify for benefits targeted at low-income families and research suggests only one in eight workers are eligible. This restrictive eligibility criteria, along with often confusing and difficult application processes, has resulted in an estimated two-thirds of applications being rejected. The government has increased funding for local councils to provide practical and financial assistance to those self-isolating. But this support is discretionary and may be applied variably: it is by no means guaranteed for everyone who needs it. Some who lose earnings while self-isolating can claim universal credit, but entitlements are small - currently only £412 a month for a single adult over 25 - and the five-week wait means applicants may struggle to make ends meet until their first payment comes in. The result is that people with no money in the bank are suddenly faced with a disappearing income because they have been told to stay at home. These issues require an urgent new approach to the problem of how to pay people's wages while they self-isolate. The government took critical steps during the pandemic to protect incomes with the furlough scheme, which we believe should now be adapted to allow employers to cover the lost wages of self-isolating employees, up to a capped amount. Alongside existing local support packages, such a pledge would help remove any financial imperative for people to work when they should be self-isolating. If the cap remains as it is under the current furlough scheme (which is £2,500 a month, and would work out as £822 for a typical 10-day self-isolation period), three out of four workers would have their earnings fully replaced. Since the job retention scheme only applies to those with an employer, any self-employment income support should be modified so payments cover short periods of self-isolation rather than being paid in three-month lump sums as with furlough payments. If Covid-19 case numbers remain at a similar level to that in early April, we estimate that implementing this system would cost just £39m a month. This is equivalent to only 3% of the allocated £1.25bn-a-month test and trace budget for this year and next. The costs would grow if we see another exponential rise in cases, but this seems more affordable than other schemes the government has been willing to commit to - while the potential financial and health consequences of inaction are bleak. That's why urgent action is needed, to right the wrong of the poor provision to date by the government for those required to self-isolate. It makes sense both economically and from a public health perspective to increase income support: Covid-19 cases rise when people do not self-isolate, which could drive areas into another lockdown. This is an even more real concern with worrying news of the Indian variant possibly leading to case spikes in places such as Glasgow. Test, trace and isolate strategies work best at containing Covid-19 when cases are relatively low and the system can keep up with spread.

Covid vaccine patents can be waived without hurting firms like Bharat Biotech. Here's how



With the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic wreaking havoc on the lives of people across the world, but more so in India, there is a growing urgency to vaccinate the entire population at the earliest. The current challenge lies in the demand-supply mismatch, mainly due to limited production capacity of vaccines. For India to achieve universal vaccination, the requirement is of 1.878 million doses - two doses each for 939 million adults. As there are only two manufacturers - Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India - with their current production capacity at 80-90 million doses per month, which could expand to 160 million doses by July 2021, there is a demand-supply gap that needs to be bridged on a war footing. To bridge this gap, there is a growing clamour to invoke the provision of 'compulsory licensing' under the Patents Act, 1970 as was done a decade ago for the treatment of cancer. In case of a patented product, the compulsory licence provision allows the Indian government to grant manufacturing rights to other producers without the consent of the owner, especially during national emergencies. India's first compulsory license

Jagdish Shettigar

the IPR of the vaccine manufacturer because Bharat Biotech is a separate entity, not a part of the government. Even among different PSUs or government departments, often legal disputes crop up because they are all individual entities. However, in the prevailing pandemic condition, a humanitarian approach is needed and there might not be any complaints or opposition if traditional norms are violated, whether at the level of WTO or at the domestic front. On the flip side, would it not be better that a balanced approach is adopted keeping in view not just immediate vaccine supply but also future requirements? To begin with, exceptions adopted today to ensure universal vaccination is purely a temporary measure to cushion people at the most for ten months. As per medical experts, another dose or two of an improved version of the vaccine will be subsequently needed to be followed by a vaccine for life. Also, a vaccine for children below 18 years is still to be developed. The fact is that today, the entire world is looking towards scientists for their help and efforts. Thus, is it right to discourage scientific talent whether at the WTO level or do-

Bangladesh has shown courage against Chinese bullying but Sri Lanka still lacks it

Following the statement, read threat, by the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh that Beijing-Dhaka ties would be substantially damaged if Bangladesh joins Quad, Dhaka has reacted appropriately. Bangladesh's reply should be seen as reflective of the mood of countries in the region that are tormented by the coronavirus, which is likely to have originated in Wuhan. While expressions like "Beijing-Dhaka ties would be substantially damaged" are not veiled, they do seem like direct threats. Dhaka's polite but firm reply that Bangladesh stands by its commitment to no-alignment and balanced foreign policy is a tight slap on the face of China. In sharp contrast to Dhaka, Colombo seems to be lacking the courage to balance its relations in the region. The Sri Lankan parliament is all set to debate the controversial Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill, which seeks to protect China's interests, and is being criticised for ceding control over Colombo Port City. A delegation of senior Chinese military officials, led by De-



Seshadri Chari

fence Minister Gen. Wei Fenghe, made a two-day visit to Sri Lanka in April to consolidate the defence partnership between the two countries. Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary Jayanath Colombage had earlier said: "We are observing the rise of Quad as an exclusive military alliance. That is the problem. If Quad is aiming at economic revival, there are no issues". For the record, neither

Bangladesh nor Sri Lanka has been invited to join the Quad. The Beijing-Dhaka verbal duel highlights two important aspects that should be a matter of concern to India in particular and the Quad and countries in the Indo-Pacific region in general. One is the pace and flagrantly audacious manner in which China is making forays into the Indo-Pacific and other Asian capitals. The other aspect involves attempts by the Quad countries, overt and covert, to checkmate China. China's discomfort and antagonism towards the emergence of Quad have never been a secret. Besides terming the Quad as a "military alliance aimed against China's resurgence and its relationship with neighbouring countries", Beijing views the Quad as the biggest stumbling block to its hegemonic objectives in the region. Not content with ridiculing Quad as "Asian NATO", China has set in motion a series of tactics to inch closer to its strategy of stamping Asia and Indo-Pacific with its neo-colonial footprints. When it comes to dealing with countries in Asia, Beijing does not seem to need a diplomatic veneer anymore. New Delhi experienced China's aggressive forays in eastern Ladakh - turning the area into a new flashpoint at a time when India along with the rest of the world was grappling with the killer pandemic. A quick look at the events that unfolded during the initial phase of the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent halt of the global economy due to lockdowns will reveal a pattern. It is not a mere coincidence that all the flashpoints where China is involved are dots that link countries in Asia and Indo-Pacific region and which Beijing wants to bring under its inextricable political and economic influence. Even as the violent conflict in Galwan was at its peak, China was flexing its muscles in the South China Sea, making newer claims over territories and tightening its stranglehold over Hong Kong. This was followed by navy drills

in the Taiwan Strait, clearly aimed at intimidating Taiwan and its supporters, and bullying Australia with economic boycott by putting on hold trade deals and cutting off supply chains. Another aspect of Beijing's aggressive forays in Asia concerns transforming economic engagements into political and military arrangements. China has bagged contracts worth \$4.4 billion in Afghanistan for developing the Mes Aynak copper fields in Logar province, besides oil exploration in the Amu Darya basin in the northern region of the country and railway development. China has launched the Sino-Afghanistan Special Railway Transportation Project that is being developed as 'Five Nations' railway project and will connect China, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Baluchistan, and terminate at the Gwadar Port. These economic engagements have brought Beijing and Kabul closer even as the US is scheduled to withdraw from Afghanistan. Beijing's aggressiveness in Asia, Indo-Pacific and India's extended neighbourhood should have been dealt with by forging a rules-based regional order through a pan-Asian consolidation. This would have bolstered the morale of all those nations which were helplessly watching their economic sovereignty being pawned to a hegemonic power with insatiable appetite for global resources, least respect for global commons and nothing but contempt for human rights and democracy. China's ultimate objective of dominating the global market, supply chain systems, demand-supply mechanisms and trade institutions through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - stretching from Pacific to the Indian Ocean, Australia to Africa and the Far East to Europe - is posing a challenge to the existing world order that has withstood all pressures and pulls since the fall of the Third Reich. The 2+2 ministerial dialogue at the foreign and defence ministerial levels between India and Russia should be able to take the bilateral partnership to the next level, especially at a time when India's role in the region, in general, and Afghanistan, in particular, has to be scaled up. (India has a similar arrangement with the US, Japan and Australia, all members of the Quad). Twenty-one years after the first India-EU summit (held in 2000), both sides have agreed to establish a mechanism to promote a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific architecture and strengthen the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) forum. New Delhi will have to assess whether these action plans will tame the dragon or provoke it to be more belligerent in future.

Scratch the surface, and the 'new' politics looks very much like the old

Imagine a family house, with a garden. Nothing fancy, but solid, and cheap enough to feel within reach of an ordinary couple on ordinary wages. To despairing millennials across much of the south-east, this is the stuff of fairytales, or else ancient history. But there are still corners of Britain where a house like that is yours for less than £130,000 (the price of the average deposit for first-time buyers now in London), where being able to buy your own place, and the security that comes with it, is almost the least of young families' problems. And herein lies a tale about this week's elections. Brexit was the tool that ultimately jemmied open doors long closed to the Tories. But the crumbling of the "red wall" may at least in part be the story of Conservatives learning to do well in poorer neighbourhoods with high levels of home ownership; places where wages are low but property still cheap enough that things don't feel broken, or not as broken as outsiders often think. When the pollster James Kanagasooriam drew up his original list of what have become known as "red wall" seats, he did it by identifying places full of people who, had they lived in a southern market town, would be natural Tories: homeowners, small-business owners, habitual Daily Mail and Daily Express readers. If a 55-year-old plumber in a detached house in Bourne mouth usually votes Conservative, he reasoned, why not the same guy in Wigan, who probably wants much the same things underneath? If the party could somehow override the

gut hostility in traditionally Labour communities to the very idea of voting Tory, it might unlock votes in surprising places. This week's byelection battleground of Hartlepool, where home ownership is above 50%, wasn't on his original list because it looked too hard to win there while the Brexit party was still splitting the anti-Labour vote - but it shared many similar characteristics. There are a million complicated reasons for why people vote the way they do. But having something to conserve has been a powerful driver of voting Conservative ever since Margaret Thatcher started selling off council houses, at untold cost to generations to come; people with mortgages have long been likely to vote Tory, renters to vote Labour. The towns Kanagasooriam identified were often past their glory days, but still not among the most deprived; their down-at-heel high streets often belied either a hinterland of villages doing rather better, or new-build estates on their outskirts where help to buy has lifted significant numbers of families on to the property ladder. They're places where young couples can still put down roots, plan to raise a family, feel they're getting on in life - at least so long as they're in work. Hence the Tees Valley mayoral candidate Ben Houchen's relentless focus on the promise of new green energy jobs, or Andy Street's emphasis in the West Midlands mayoral elections on economic recovery from Covid. A home, a job, something

Gaby Hinsliff

to hope for in the future; blow away the smoke of a culture war, and underneath there's nothing particularly new or revolutionary in any of this, nothing voters haven't wanted since time immemorial or that Labour hasn't historically offered, too. The new politics looks remarkably like the old, except that now it's happening in different places. How does knowing any of this help Labour? It could always try to pull the same trick in reverse, targeting the southern marginals where demographic changes are pushing things in their favour and where the Tories are more fragile than they look; the once middle-aged suburbs and market towns increasingly colonised by younger, more socially progressive and pro-remain voters priced out of London, say. Over the next few days and weeks, as analysts dig into the detailed results from Thursday's multiple layers of elections, the shape of that battleground may become clearer. But until it is, perhaps the only useful lesson to draw from Kanagasooriam's work is that his starting point was what voters in different parts of the country have in common, not what divides them. He treated "red wall" voters not as some strange alien culture, or hostile phenomenon to be understood, but as people who shouldn't be beyond persuading if only the party they traditionally rejected could find a way through to them; people who in the end just wanted the same life that millions of other people also want. Nothing fancy, but solid and cheap enough to be still just about within reach.

DBT beneficiaries can withdraw PM KisanYojana funds from Fino banking points

Mumbai, May 15 : Fino Payments Bank's merchant points across the country are geared up to help India's farming community amid the pandemic by providing access to cash to the beneficiaries of government's direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme, the PM Kisan Yojana. Prime Minister Narendra Modi today announced the benefit transfer of over ₹19,000 crores directly into the accounts of more than 9.5 crore beneficiary farmer families. Each farmer beneficiary receives ₹2,000 in his or her bank account. The beneficiaries of the DBT scheme having account in any bank can visit the nearest Fino point to withdraw cash or do any other banking transaction. Fino points are the neighbourhood small merchants such as kirana, medical stores, dairies and Bharat Petroleum (BPCL) outlets equipped with micro ATM and Aadhaar-enabled payment system (AePS) devices. To find the nearest Fino point, people can click on the URL <https://fino.latlong.in/> or can scan the QR code. "All ways available banking services are the need of the hour," says Shailesh Pandey, CSO, Fino Payments Bank. "With restrictions on movement, Fino's Hamesha available neighbourhood outlets are open for extended hours providing convenience to people during these tough times. Beneficiaries can walk-in into the points at any time or avail doorstep services to withdraw cash or send money to their family. Most importantly cash is always available at our points, including at BPCL outlets. Our objective is to provide access to convenient banking to the farming community in this hour of need." The PM Kisan Yojana provides financial benefit of ₹6,000 per year to the eligible farmer families, payable in three equal 4-monthly instalments of ₹2,000 each. The 14th May payment is the first instalment for FY21-22. During lockdown in 2020, Fino's merchant network facilitated neighbourhood and door step banking to people in urban and rural areas. The Fino merchant being familiar in the locality was called by people for any cash requirement at any time of the day. The service provided great comfort to senior citizens, women and pensioners. Majority of the withdrawals were done by DBT beneficiaries of schemes such as social security pension, PMJDY, PM Kisan Yojana etc. At Fino points, people can also open a new account and also avail cash deposit, money transfer, utility bill and loan EMI payment services, and buy health, life and motor insurance. All in the neighbourhood and completely paperless - Hamesha!

Scars of Covid second wave will run deep but India must start its road to economic recovery now



Mumbai, May 15 : The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party faces huge tests in early 2022, when elections in Mumbai, the business capital, and Uttar Pradesh, the largest state, will drive the political narrative in the run up to the next national vote. At the beginning of 2021, when S&P Global Ratings forecast Indian gross domestic product growth at 11% for the coming financial year, the number looked eminently achievable. Last month, the Goods and Services Tax - a good barometer of economy activity - hit 1.41 trillion rupees (\$19.1 billion), its highest ever monthly collection. Indeed, it's been higher than the benchmark Rs. 1 trillion for seven consecutive months and higher than the same month for the last year for eight consecutive months. India's international merchandise trade reached \$34 billion in March, the highest ever, and stayed over \$30 billion in April. Many short term economic indicators - auto sales, electricity consumption, highway toll collection - were also pointing to a strong recovery after a crushing 2020. What if I am left alone? Addressing the biggest fear in the times of Covid-19 pandemic can mixing doses of two leading Covid-19 vaccines defend against coronavirus? Check details But that's when the second wave of the pandemic hit with a vengeance. The daily case count went up from 81,000 on April 1 to more than 402,000 thousand on April 30. India's healthcare system came under severe stress the same month. As the outbreak grew worse, state governments applied restrictive lockdown measures that halted the nascent economic recovery in its tracks. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy - a think tank - the unemployment rate grew from 6% in March to 8% in April. Studies show that more than 200 million Indians are expected to fall into poverty as a result of shutdowns and healthcare costs. The S&P has now downgraded Indian GDP growth to 9.8%. Most experts predict the second wave to recede by June. But the govern-

ment has to start now to rebuild the economy. There are three parts to this. The most immediate involves vaccinations: choosing which sectors of the population get inoculated first will mitigate the negative impact on GDP. A government spending boost will then help backstop the downside. Finally, structural changes must be initiated to ensure that India's prowess in technology and manufacturing is leveraged to its highest potential. Right now, the focus must be placed on vaccinations in the 53 cities with populations of a million-plus each. They are hubs of economic activity and need to be de-risked from a third wave. Second, workers in customer-facing businesses - hospitality, restaurants, aviation, storefront retail, local transportation, commercial real estate - should have priority. The sectors have all taken a hard knock, as in every other country; inoculations there will help build confidence for consumers to patronize them and move about again. Government spending must then follow. At the end of 2019, the government released a National Infrastructure Pipeline, outlining capital expenditures of Rs. 120

trillion over five years. The announcement ran into the onset of the pandemic but this program should be expedited. With a gradual glide path to 3% fiscal deficit signaled in the union budget and buoyant direct and indirect tax collections, the government has fiscal headroom for this expansionary spend. The aggressive spending plan is likely to face political opposition. A project to revamp New Delhi's central vista is currently facing criticism. But there is no better way than infrastructure to rekindle animal spirits. Infrastructure is a job multipliers and that will help India's unorganized labor market. These projects also catalyze growth in core sectors - construction, cement, roads, railways and real

estate. One specific area of investment should be healthcare: Build modern hospitals in each of the 700 districts, upgrade all the 150,000 primary health centers and bring domestic vaccine production to 2 billion doses a year. The government should continue to push for structural market reforms. A recent Credit Suisse study talked about how 100 unicorns - firms with more than \$1 billion valuation - have sprung up in India in just a few years. Political opposition, however, has delayed the tough reforms that would encourage even more enterprise. Easier and cheaper access to capital, faster land acquisition for marquee projects and new business investments, bureaucratic agility, administrative transparency and a nimble judiciary will go a long way. Encouraging more digitization of retail through simpler rules can further open the national market to small businesses. The government can further boost business confidence with the full privatization of companies like Bharat Petroleum Corporation and IDBI Bank and Shipping Corporation this year. There isn't much time. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party faces huge tests in early 2022, when elections in Mumbai, the business capital, and Uttar Pradesh, the largest state, will drive the political narrative in the run up to the next national vote. An economic rebound would influence the two elections positively for the government. The scars of the second wave of the pandemic will run deep but well-executed policy measures will help meet the challenge - and decide how far India's rebound will go.

Cabinet nod: Rs 18k-cr PLI push for ACC battery storage

Mumbai, May 15 : Under the latest scheme, the government aims to create domestic capacity to manufacture as much as 50 giga-watt hour (GWh) of ACC and 5 GWh of "niche" ACC from almost negligible capacity now. The incentive amount will rise with increased specific energy density and cycles and increased local value addition. The Cabinet on Wednesday approved a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for advanced chemistry cell (ACC) battery storage, which would cost the exchequer Rs 18,100 crore over five years. Major battery-consuming sectors, including consumer electronics, electric vehicles, advanced electricity grids and solar rooftop, are expected to benefit from the move. The PLI scheme will draw direct investments of around Rs 45,000 crore over five years and result in an annual import substitution of about Rs 20,000 crore, information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said after the Cabinet meeting. 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 solar energy. Deadline for under-construction renewable projects extended. The government also expects the scheme to potentially reduce the country's oil import bill by Rs 2,00,000-2,50,000 crore (over five years), as increased ACC storage manufacturing will promote greater adoption of electric vehicles. The latest programme is part of the 13 PLI schemes, proposed by the government in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic last year, to lure mainly large corporations to expand manufacturing, bolster supply chains and boost exports. The total incentives under



the PLI schemes, covering sectors including telecom, electronics, auto part, pharma, chemical cells and textiles, stood at Rs 1.97 lakh crore over a five-year period. The schemes, put together, are expected to catalyse incremental manufacturing of as much as \$520 billion over five years. Under the latest scheme, the government aims to create domestic capacity to manufacture as much as 50 giga-watt hour (GWh) of ACC and 5 GWh of "niche" ACC from almost negligible capacity now. Eligible companies will be selected through a competitive bidding process, and they have to set up the manufacturing facility within two years. The incentive will be disbursed thereafter over five years, according to an official statement. The incentive amount will rise with increased specific energy density and cycles and increased local value addition. Each selected manufacturer would have to commit to set up an ACC manufacturing facility of a minimum five GWh capacity and ensure a minimum 60% domestic value addition at the project level within five years. Moreover, the beneficiaries have to achieve a domestic value addition of at least 25% and incur the mandatory investment Rs 225 crore per GWh within two years (at the mother unit level). They have to raise the value addition to 60% within five years, either at the mother unit level (in case of an integrated unit), or at the project level (if it's the so-called "hub & spoke" structure). The scheme will also provide a fresh impetus to research & development in this space and help the government's Atmanirbhar initiative, Javadekar said.

Elon Musk's U-turn on Bitcoin: Tesla won't accept it to sell cars; Bitcoin sinks, Tesla shares fall



Mumbai, May 15 : Elon Musk has once again fueled a fire in the cryptocurrency world, but this time the Tesla CEO has sent Bitcoin prices tumbling down. The second richest man in the world took cryptocurrency bulls by surprise on Thursday as he suspended purchase of Tesla cars using Bitcoin. This move by Elon Musk sent Bitcoin tumbling as much as 15% during the day to hit a low of \$46,000, before recovering some losses later on. Elon Musk said he was suspending vehicle purchases using bitcoin due to environmental concerns. Wall Street, Joe Biden's first 100 days see historic Wall Street rally; Dow Jones, S&P 500 hit record highs. Elon Musk, Tesla, Bitcoin, cryptocurrency, dogecoin. Elon Musk sounds caution on cryptocurrency: "Don't risk life savings, invest with caution." Tesla has suspended vehicle purchases using Bitcoin. We are concerned about rapidly increasing use of fossil fuels for Bitcoin mining and transactions, especially coal, which has the worst emission of any fuel," Elon Musk said on Twitter. However, Musk assured that he has not made a U-turn on his views on cryptocurrencies in general. "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," he added. Earlier this year, Tesla bought \$1.5 billion of Bitcoin, 10% of which it later sold on the open market. Tesla holds the remaining amount of Bitcoin on books. While Tesla has now suspended transactions using Bitcoin, the company will explore the use of other cryptocurrencies that use less than 1% of Bitcoin's energy per transaction, Elon Musk said. Reports suggest that the annual carbon footprint of Bitcoin is almost equal to that of Slovakia. Bitcoin did fall on Wednesday but recovered some losses to sit at \$50,592. Despite the fall, the cryptocurrency is still up 431% in the last one

year. Meanwhile, Tesla share price closed 4.42% lower on Wednesday at \$589 apiece. Tesla was not alone in the southward march. Microstrategy, another listed entity that holds Bitcoin on its balance sheet, tanked 6.08%. Newly listed Coinbase also fell 6%. However, Elon Musk has said that Tesla will not sell any of its Bitcoin holdings; instead, it plans to use the cryptocurrency for transactions as soon as mining becomes more sustainable. Earlier last week, Elon Musk was seen cautioning people about the use of cryptocurrencies when he said that people should not be putting their life savings into the asset. "Cryptocurrency is promising, but please invest with caution," Elon Musk had tweeted. Musk, who holds a large following among retail investors has also been vocal about his support for Dogecoin - a cryptocurrency that had started as a joke. However, on Saturday, appearing on late-night comedy sketch show Saturday Night Live (SNL), Elon Musk termed Dogecoin as a "hustle" which sent the Dogecoin price down 22%.

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Revenue shortfall: Hold GST Council meet soon, Mitra to Sitharaman

Mumbai, May 15 : While Mitra expressed apprehension about rise in shortfall of GST compensation cess, GST collections in April touched a record high of over Rs 1.41 lakh crore. Under a unique arrangement in FY21, the Centre borrowed Rs 1.1 lakh crore and transferred the amount to states to meet the shortfall in GST compensation cess. Amit Mitra, who is in charge of the West Bengal finance department, has urged the Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to urgently call a meeting of the GST Council to discuss a likely rise in states' GST compensation need owing to the savage second Covid wave. "As per the Gol projection, the

shortfall was expected to be to the tune of Rs 1,56,164 crore in 2021-22, without taking into consideration the impact of Covid Wave-2. Now, due to Covid Wave-2 and lockdowns, the compensation will be much higher than what was projected earlier. This is undoubtedly deeply distressing," Mitra wrote to Sitharaman. Under a unique arrangement in FY21, the Centre borrowed Rs 1.1 lakh crore and transferred the amount to states to meet the shortfall in GST compensation cess. Farmers in West Bengal will get the PM-Kisan benefits for the first time if the state government provides the verified data of cultiva-

tors by Wednesday. PM Kisan: Rs 19,000 crore to reach farmers' accounts on Friday. IIP and CPIIIP climbs 22.4% in March on turnaround in manufacturing; retail inflation slips to 4.29% in April. While Mitra expressed apprehension about the rise in shortfall, GST collections in April touched a record high of over Rs 1.41 lakh crore. The GST revenues of April 2021 were 14% higher than Rs 1.23 lakh crore collected in March. The last GST Council meeting was in October 2020. Mitra wrote: "May I draw your kind attention to para 6 of the 'Procedure and Conduct of Business Regulations of the Goods and Services Taxes Council' which provides that the

'Council shall meet at least once in every quarter of the financial year'. You would agree that not meeting every quarter to discuss vital issues is not in line with the very principle of cooperative federalism." While Mitra expressed apprehension about rise in shortfall of GST compensation cess, GST collections in April touched a record high of over Rs 1.41 lakh crore. The GST revenues of April 2021 were 14% higher than Rs 1.23 lakh crore collected in March. "GST revenues have not only crossed the Rs 1-lakh-crore mark successively for the last seven months but have also shown a steady increase. These are clear indicators of sustained economic recovery during this period. Closer monitoring against fake-billing, deep data analytics using data from multiple sources including GST, income-tax and customs IT systems and effective tax administration have also contributed to the steady increase in tax revenue," the finance ministry had said. "Despite the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic affecting several parts of the country, Indian businesses have once again shown remarkable resilience by not only complying with the return filing requirements but also paying their GST dues in a timely manner during the month," the ministry had added.



G-SAP: Second tranche of bond buying worth Rs 35k cr on May 20, says RBI

Mumbai, May 15 :

After the Monetary Policy Committee meeting last month, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das had announced that the RBI will conduct open market purchases of government securities of Rs 1 lakh crore under the G-SAP 1.0 in first quarter of the financial year 2021-22. The Reserve Bank on Wednesday said the second tranche of open market purchase of government securities worth Rs 35,000 crore under the G-sec Acquisition Programme (G-SAP 1.0) will be conducted on May 20 with a view to enabling a stable and orderly evolution of the yield curve. After the Monetary Policy Committee meeting last month, Governor Shaktikanta Das had announced that the RBI will conduct open market purchases of government securities of Rs 1 lakh crore under the G-SAP 1.0 in first quarter of the financial year 2021-22. RBI's Rs 50K cr liquidity facility can augment hospital bed capacity by 20%; Crisil Indian rupee, US dollar, INR-USD, rupee vs dollar, RBI Rupee may fall up to 75.20 against US dollar; FIIs sell-off, COVID, slow vaccination may impact INR. The first such auction of Rs 25,000 crore was held on April 15. "...the Reserve Bank will conduct the second tranche of open market purchase of government securities of Rs 35,000 crore under the G-sec Acquisition Programme (G-SAP 1.0) on May 20, 2021," the central bank said in a statement.



Contd. From Page 1

PM Modi Reviews COVID-19

the biggest challenge. Desperate pleas for hospital beds and medicines have been flooding social media. While experts have said the country has to focus on stepping up vaccination drive, many states have been a red-flagging shortage of doses. On Thursday, the government said about 200 crore Covid shots are expected to be available by end of this year. "So far, around 18 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been given. Government hospitals are giving free shots across the country. So please do get the vaccine when it is your turn," the Prime Minister urged on Friday. Earlier this week, 12 major opposition parties wrote to him, demanding that the center take immediate action to tackle the second wave. The distribution of free vaccines, a stop to the work on the Central Vista project, and a repeal of farm laws were among a series of measures suggested in the letter. "We have repeatedly in the past drawn your attention, independently and jointly, to the various measures that are absolutely imperative for the Central government to undertake and implement. Unfortunately, your government has either ignored or refused all these suggestions. This only compounded the situation to reach such an apocalyptic human tragedy," the letter read.

All commercial establishments

order said. There shall be total ban on movement of individuals from 12 noon to 5 AM daily, except for exemptions specified in Order No. ASDNA.24/2020IR-2/250 dated May 13, 2021, it added. The order further said other restrictions as notified vide Order No. ASDMA.24/2020/Pt-2/241 dated May 12, 2021 and clarifications issued vide Order No. AMMA.24/2020/Pt-2/250 dated May 13, 2021 shall continue except the modification of timing as above. "The above order is issued to further strengthen the containment of spread of COVID-19," the chief secretary of Assam further said in the order.

Vaccinated or not, ensure physical

almost inevitable given the higher levels of circulating virus in the country. However, it is not clear on what time scale this phase three will occur. We should prepare for new waves," ANI quoted him as saying. Meanwhile, over 18 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered in India. On Saturday, India registered 3,26,098 new COVID-19 cases and 3,980 deaths as per Union health ministry data.

CM visits AMCH, takes stock

zones to bring down positivity rate in the district apart from conducting more than 700 RTPCR tests per day to detect positive cases early. In view of the surging COVID cases in the district, the Chief Minister instructed the DC to prepone the hour of curfew to 12 noon instead of 2 pm in consultation with business community and leading citizens. The Chief Minister also asked the district administration to be extremely careful in allowing home quarantine to people above 50 years. He said that only those 50 above people, who have adequate home care and transportation facilities, are to be allowed home quarantine as people of this age group are found to be highly susceptible to the virus. The Chief Minister also asked DC to extend livelihood support to poor people within containment zones in a bid to reduce their hardship. He also directed the DC to take required measures to ensure uninterrupted vaccination of people above 45 years. At the beginning of the meeting, Principal AMCH and Dibrugarh Deputy Commissioner gave detailed overview of the COVID situation in the district as well as treatment facilities being provided to patients. After the review meeting, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma visited the newly constructed super specialty hospital and the construction site of the 300 bedded cancer hospital at AMCH, which is being set up with assistance from Tata Trusts. Union Minister of State for Food Processing Industries Rameswar Tel, Assam Government & #39;s Tea Tribes Welfare Minister Sanjoy Kishan, Sports & #39; Youth Welfare Minister Bimal Borah, MLAs Prashanta Phukan, Binod Hazarika, Chakra Gogoi, Teros Gowala, Punakan Baruah, Taranga Gogoi, MD NHM Dr. Lakshamanan S were present during the visit of the Chief Minister.

12 Arrested Over Posters Against

also recovered, sources said. Delhi has been one of the worst-hit territories in the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic and has seen horrific scenes in the past few weeks of hospitals being overwhelmed and running short of necessities like medical oxygen. Though the infection numbers have come down in recent days after thousands of deaths, many have flagged a dip in testing. India has reported more than 3 lakh infections a day over the past three weeks, overwhelming its health care system and leaving many without hospital beds, oxygen and adequate treatment. PM Modi's government has faced widespread criticism for appearing more intent on addressing the bad publicity because of the missteps than solving the crisis. The administration's vaccine policy - marked by slow-buying of vaccines and then dumping the responsibility on states once shortages kicked in - has also been widely described as botched. Governments in several states like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh have been accused of trying to hide their casualties as hundreds of bodies have been seen floating in rivers and buried in the sand by the banks.

Traders association writes

National Delhi Traders Association (NDTA) president Atul Bhargava, while speaking to PTI, said that nobody was in favour of the lockdown since the beginning. "But they had no option since the coronavirus cases in Delhi were rising. However, now we are of the opinion that the government instead of extending lockdown should open the markets in a phased manner with strict enforcement of laws and proper sanitisation", he added. Furthermore, Bhargava asserted that the traders, who have stood with the nation in "all difficult times, are now in dire need of support from the government and claimed that the umpteen letters" written to the powers that be for help have fallen on deaf ears. "No relief has been given to traders in any form till date. We have to pay our EMI, salary, rents, payments, property tax, loan repayments, GST on time without any support from the government. More and more traders are finding it difficult to survive. I have written at least 150 letters to people in positing power requesting them to help the traders community, but have failed to receive a single reply so far," he said. Meanwhile, head of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Dr. Balram Bhargava has suggested that the COVID-19 lockdown should not be lifted from districts where the rate of infection is above 10% of those tested. At present, major cities like New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru have a positivity rate above 10%. "If Delhi is opened tomorrow, it will be a disaster", a portal quoted Bhargava as saying. Additionally, while addressing a virtual press conference, CM Kejriwal said the number of fresh COVID-19 cases has come down to around 8,500 and the positivity rate has dipped to around 12 percent. "But the fight against the coronavirus has not ended and there is no room for leniency," the chief minister said.

Cyclone Tauktae fury to hit Maharashtra soon

Karnataka, Goa and south Maharashtra also. For the past three days, a low-pressure area has been rapidly developing over the Lakshadweep Isles and the Arabian Sea, with a powerful Cyclone Tauktae expected to hit the states on the west-coast of India, the IMD said. The IMD has already put Mumbai and Thane under a Yellow Alert, signifying isolated heavy rains accompanied by strong winds, while an Orange Alert and Red Alert has been issued for several districts of Gujarat and Kerala. The Cyclone Tauktae will intensify into a full-fledged cyclonic storm on Sunday, causing heavy rains accompanied by gusty winds in southern and western coastal parts of the country, and it is expected to lash Gujarat coast by the morning of May 18. The storm has already resulted in rainfall in large areas in Lakshadweep Isles, Kerala, parts of Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri and Palghar, with predictions of heavy to very heavy spells in some places and extremely heavy rains in isolated places till Sunday.

Israeli military 'tricks' Hamas

major news outlets had erroneously reported the ground offensive was underway. While the army attempted to play down the incident as a misunderstanding, well-placed Israeli military commentators said the media had been used as part of an elaborate ruse to lure Hamas militants into a deadly trap that may have killed dozens of fighters. "They didn't lie," said Or Heller, a veteran military correspondent on Israel's Channel 13 TV. "It was a manipulation. It was smart and it was successful." CDC's new mask change as a surprise, creates confusion for businesses. The body ruled India breached an investment treaty with Britain and said New Delhi was liable to pay. Late on Thursday, after days of airstrikes, Israel announced it was calling up thousands of reservists and amassing troops along the border ahead of a possible ground invasion. In another sign of escalation, Israel began firing artillery shells across the border at targets inside Gaza, according to residents. In previous rounds of fighting, ground incursions have resulted in widespread destruction in Gaza and heavy casualties on both sides. That set the stage for the late-night deception. According to Heller, Israel began scrambling forces along the border in what appeared to be final preparations for an invasion. Then came the announcement to the media, issued simultaneously in Hebrew and Arabic on Twitter. There followed alerts in major outlets, including the New York Times, that the invasion was underway. The Israeli moves sent Hamas fighters rushing into defensive positions in an underground network of tunnels known as "the Metro," according to Heller and other Israeli reports. Israel called in 160 war-planes and bombarded the tunnels for 40 minutes, the military said. Heller said it was his understanding that scores of militants had been killed, though he said it was impossible to say. "What we saw tonight was a very sophisticated operation that had a media aspect to it," Heller said. Hamas has not commented on the incident, and it was impossible to confirm the Israeli reports. Heller said veteran Israeli correspondents, who have close ties to the military and in many cases have served themselves, knew that there was no way Israel was sending troops across enemy lines at this stage. Heller and other military correspondents even put out statements on Twitter assuring the jittery public that there was no ground operation. The Associated Press, based on its analysis of the army's statement, phone calls to military officials, and on-the-ground reporting in Gaza, concluded there was no ground incursion and did not report there was one. But others said the military had misled them or even lied when asked to clarify the initial statement and its ambiguous use of the word "in." Some felt the foreign media had been turned into an accessory of sorts. Felicia Schwartz, the correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, said she alerted news of a ground offensive after receiving explicit confirmation from Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, a military spokesman. In a statement posted on Twitter, she said Conricus "told me directly, 'There are ground troops in Gaza.' That was the basis for a first story saying so. He retracted that statement two hours later and I changed the story to reflect that, and that is noted in the text and will be corrected." Speaking to reporters on Friday morning, Conricus blamed an "internal miscommunication." "These things can sometimes happen in the midst of a complex operation with many moving parts and with an unclear picture of what was happening," he said. "As soon as I understood that I had the wrong information, I updated the relevant people with a clarification." But some correspondents still had questions. "If they used us, it's unacceptable. And if not, then what's the story — and why is the Israeli media widely reporting that we were duped?" said Daniel Estrin, NPR's correspondent in Jerusalem, who was also told by the military that an invasion had begun. Militaries around the world have long used deception and trickery against their enemies. Two years ago, the Israeli military reportedly faked the injuries of soldiers at the scene of a Hezbollah missile strike, going so far as to evacuate them in bandages to a hospital in a helicopter. According to reports at the time, the army staged the injuries to trick Hezbollah into thinking it had inflicted casualties and therefore agree to a ceasefire. Friday's misleading statement further strained what has often been a rocky relationship between the IDF and the foreign media. Peter Lerner, a former military spokesman to the foreign media, said the Israeli public, in general, has long felt the international media focus too heavily on the Palestinian side of the story while minimizing Israeli concerns and suffering — and the army is similarly inclined. Lerner said he felt it was unlikely the military intentionally lied, but the damage was done regardless. "Your currency is credibility," he said. "I think this is a crisis of that credibility in the way it's being portrayed."

AJYCPC submits memo to CM

BISWANATH, CHARIALI, May 15 : The Biswanath district committee of Asom Jatiyat Abadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCPC) had submitted a memorandum to the chief minister of Assam through the Deputy Commissioner of Biswanath today. The memorandum was placed demanding inquiry about the price rise of agriculture related commodities, agri-equipments and chemical fertilizers etc. The body also demanded for lessening the land tax that has been hiked recently. The student's body also placed a demand for online classes of the student's community. Diganta Barua, Biswanath district secretary of AJYCPC, Naser Ahmed, central executive member and Nihar Saikia, joint secretary were present today.

Arvind Kejriwal spent around Rs 804.93 cr on advertisement since taking to power in 2015, alleges BJP

New Delhi, May 15 : The BJP on Monday (May 10) hit out at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal over the COVID-19 crisis in the national capital claiming that latter has been busy spending crores on publicity and misleading people while washing his hands of responsibility and leaving everything to the Centre. The party claimed that instead of pushing the vaccination programme in time, the Delhi government was busy advertising and is now doing politics over the availability of oxygen. Kejriwal spent around Rs 804.93 cr on advertisement since taking to power in 2015. Addressing a virtual press conference, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra cited a RTI reply to say that the Kejriwal government has spent around Rs 805 crore on advertisements since 2015 but not opened a single new hospital in the city. He has been making daily appearances on the TV, 'misleading people and lying', Patra said, attacking the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader. "You keep advertising, claiming there will not be any lockdown, no shortage of oxygen and that people will be delivered oxygen at home. When you saw that you cannot control the situation, then you pointed fingers at the Centre and washed your hands of your responsibility," he said. Patra noted that Kejriwal had claimed on April 26 that his government will order 1.34 crore vaccines, which is worth nearly Rs 1,400 crore. "Today, he's saying he has nothing. Only 8.93 per cent people over 45 years have got their second dose in Delhi. Only 48.03 per cent people over 60 years have received their first dose. Only 17 per cent people over 60 years have received second dose," he said. Kejriwal govt failed to start any oxygen plant despite funding from the PM Cares Fund. Despite funding from the PM Cares Fund for setting up oxygen plants, the Delhi government failed to start any because it could not provide any site, he alleged. Patra also hit out at the AAP over an alleged rape at Tikri border, where farmers' protest has been continuing, alleging that the name of one of its workers has cropped up, and he has been missing.

COVID-19: West Bengal announces full lockdown from May 16 for next 15 days

New Delhi, May 15 : West Bengal on Saturday (May 15, 2021) announced to put in place more restrictions from May 16 for the next 15 days. The step has been taken in view of rising COVID-19 cases. West Bengal on Friday recorded its highest single-day spike of 20,846 fresh coronavirus infections, taking the total tally to 10,94,802. The death toll in the state has also mounted to 12,993 after 136 more people succumbed to COVID-19. Earlier on April 30, the West Bengal government had imposed a partial lockdown in the state. -- All private offices, schools, colleges will remain closed.

Oxygen black marketing: Delhi HC refuses interim protection from arrest to Navneet Kalra till May 18

New Delhi, May 15 : The Delhi High Court on Friday (May 14) declined to grant interim protection from arrest to businessman Navneet Kalra, seeking anticipatory bail in connection with alleged black marketing of oxygen concentrators. The Delhi Police last week seized 100 oxygen concentrators from premises owned by Kalra, including the restaurant "Khan Chacha." The High Court also agreed with the reasons given by the trial court while denying Navneet Kalra the relief. A Sessions court had on Thursday dismissed Kalra's anticipatory bail plea, saying the allegations against him were serious and his custodial interrogation was required to "unearth the entire conspiracy". Listing the matter for hearing on May 18, Justice Subramonium Prasad said, "I am persuaded by the reasons given by the trial court which is a valid ground for me not to grant any interim protection now." Justice Prasad made this observation after Kalra's lawyers -- senior advocates Abhishek M. Singhvi and Vikas Pahwa -- urged the court to grant some interim protection if the matter was going to be adjourned till May 18 on the request of Additional Solicitor General (ASG) S V Raju. Fearing arrest, Kalra had moved the court earlier this week to seek bail in the case, claiming that no offence was made out against him and that he is willing to join the investigation. Additional Session Judge Sandeep Garg dismissed his application and stated, "Custodial interrogation of accused is required to be carried out to unearth the entire conspiracy hatched between him and a number of co-accused persons." During a recent raid, 524 oxygen concentrators, were recovered from three restaurants owned by Kalra -- Khan Chacha, Nega Ju, and Town Hall, and he is suspected to have left Delhi along with his family. The concentrators are crucial medical equipment used for COVID-19 patients. The Delhi court said, "The accused has not joined the investigation to date. The mobile phone of accused which reportedly contains incriminating WhatsApp chats with customers, details of calls made to co-accused persons and his accounts are required to be seized." The judge said that the possibility of the accused tampering with the evidence or intimidating the prosecution witnesses cannot be ruled out. "Therefore, no case for grant of anticipatory bail is made out," the Additional Session Judge Sandeep Garg added. On May 5, a case was registered against Kalra under Section 420 (cheating), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 120-B (criminal conspiracy), and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code. The FIR also registered under the Essential Commodities Act and Epidemic Diseases Act, for black marketing of oxygen cylinders prescribes maximum punishment for seven years.

Delhi's Daily Covid Cases Down To 8,500, Positivity Rate Dips To 12%

New Delhi, May 15 : Delhi recorded 8,500 fresh COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, the first time the figure has dipped below 10,000 since April 10, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said today. The city's test positivity rate has also dipped to 12 per cent, he said during a digital press conference. Around 3,000 beds have cleared up in the past 10 days, he said, indicating that the second wave was easing in the city. "On April 20, there were more than 28,000 cases in Delhi... it has now fallen to 8,500 now. The positivity rate has fallen to 12 per cent. It had hit 36 per cent by April 22," Mr Kejriwal said. "It means fewer people in Delhi are now falling ill, admissions in hospitals have reduced considerably." He said, however, that the number of patients in critical condition remains considerable because the ICU beds have not been freed up much. Mr Kejriwal said the citizens of Delhi had played a big role in reducing the number of fresh cases by strictly following the lockdown rules. "But the battle continues. We have to bring down the cases from 8,500 to 0 and wipe out corona completely," he said. "Any leniency now would lead to disaster." The Chief Minister assured the citizens that the government was not leaving anything to chance. New oxygen beds were being made, cylinders were being bought, and ICU beds being prepared. He expressed sadness over the government's inability to help many of the patients. Adding a personal touch, he assured the young children of those who had died of Covid that his government would take care of them. "I'm here for you," he said, reaching out to those who lost their dear ones. "Your education will be completely our responsibility." All such families that have lost their earning members will be helped financially by his government, Mr Kejriwal said.

Now, bodies found buried in sand along Ganga river in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district

New Delhi, May 15 : Multiple bodies were found buried in sand in at least two locations along the Ganga river in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district on Wednesday, NDTV reported. The incident came days after bodies of suspected Covid-19 patients were spotted floating in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and other parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh. Authorities have not been able to confirm yet whether the bodies were of Covid-19 patients. District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar said that some of the bodies were found in an area far away from the river. "Search being conducted for more bodies in other areas," Kumar said. "I have asked team to carry out inquiry. Action will be taken accordingly." Kumar added that Buksar, one of the spots where bodies were found, is a major cremation spot for three districts of Fatehpur, Rai Bareilly and Unnao, India Today reported. He said that while some people burn the bodies, others bury them in the sand by the river. The incident follows a pattern that has occurred over the last few days. On Tuesday, unidentified bodies, suspected to be of coronavirus patients, were found floating in river Ganga in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur district. Locals feared the corpses will contaminate the water and lead to the spread of the infection. Later that day, a similar incident happened in Madhya Pradesh's Panna district. On Monday, floating bodies in Ganga in Buxar district of Bihar had caused panic among the residents. While some reports said there were around 10 to 12 bodies, others said there were 40-45 corpses. Some reports placed the number even higher, at 150 bodies. On Sunday, several videos showed corpses, also believed to be of Covid-19 patients, floating in the Yamuna river near Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh. Meanwhile, by Wednesday, the count of corpses found in the eastern Uttar Pradesh district of Ballia rose to 52, while that in Bihar's border district of Buxar was 71, according to officials quoted by News18. Bihar Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Chaitanya Prasad said that the bodies were dumped in Uttar Pradesh and had flown downstream. He said an investigation has been launched into the matter. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath took cognisance of the matter and instructed that the last rites of the bodies should be done according to the person's religious beliefs.

COVID-19: India gets another medical consignment from Switzerland and Netherlands

New Delhi, May 15 : As India continues to face the mounting challenge posed by the second wave of COVID-19, the country on Wednesday (May 12) received coronavirus-related assistance from Switzerland and the Netherlands. Two flights from Switzerland and the Netherlands arrived at the airport in Delhi on Wednesday (May 12) carrying medical aid. India is currently dealing with a second COVID-19 wave that has swept through the nation, straining the country's health infrastructure and overburdening frontline medical workers. On May 7, the first shipment containing 449 ventilators, 100 oxygen concentrators and other medical supplies from the Netherlands arrived in India as part of humanitarian assistance. Asserting that India values this support from the Netherlands, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi informed that remaining medical equipment would be shipped over the coming days. Earlier, India had received a consignment of 600 oxygen concentrators, 50 ventilators and other medical supplies from Switzerland. Switzerland stands with India in its hour of need and our objective is to get all possible assistance that we can as quickly as possible, said Swiss Ambassador Dr. Ralf Heckner. "Switzerland stands with India in its hour of need."

Cameron Bancroft on the ball-tampering scandal: 'I lost control of my values'

London, May 15: As he settles into a new season at Durham, the Australian batsman reflects on how his nine-month suspension for using sandpaper on the ball during a Test match changed his views on life and cricket. Cameron Bancroft is out of quarantine and, after being "brutally cold" on his arrival in Durham last week, the Australian batsman is beginning to thaw out and open up to another season of English county cricket. "I wouldn't say the mornings have been red-hot," he says dryly at Durham's serene Riverside ground, "but they're significantly warmer than when I got here and the wind was coming in from the Arctic." His five-day period in quarantine was also a minor inconvenience compared to the nine-month ban he endured from cricket after his role in the ball-tampering saga against South Africa in March 2018. Bancroft is a thoughtful man and he takes care to explain the lessons he absorbed during that painful humiliation. He feels "almost grateful for the mistake" he made because it turned him into a better and more reflective person. Before we reach this defining moment, however, Bancroft provides a searing insight into the unforgiving pressures that shadow elite sport when I ask him to take us back to the second day of his Test debut against England at the Gabba in Brisbane in November 2017. After England had been bowled out for 302 in their first innings, Bancroft walked out with David Warner to face Jimmy Anderson and Stuart Broad. "I remember feeling so nervous that I couldn't control my body," Bancroft reveals. "I had a lot of stress because I wanted to do really well and it was a dream of mine to play Test cricket for Australia." It is a moving admission and in the fourth over Bancroft nicked a ball from Broad and was caught behind. "I naturally felt disappointed," Bancroft says, "but I was able to find a way in the second innings. Just knowing I'd been out there before was enough

to calm down. I probably felt exactly the same in the first grade game I played in Perth and when I started state cricket. It's very normal." Bancroft scored 82 not out as he and Warner shared an unbeaten partnership of 173 to seal a 10 wicket victory at the Gabba. "Technically, I'm sure there are lots of mistakes and problems that I had. I don't look that pretty but it was



to find a way to get over the line." This is the highest score of Bancroft's brief Test career so far. He is emphatic when asked to identify the best innings of the 10 Tests he has played. "No doubt. The first innings in Cape Town [in the fateful ball-tampering match]. That was the best innings I've probably played in any form of cricket. I scored in a lot of different areas, hit [14] boundaries and felt able to put pressure on the South African bowlers. Off the front and the back foot, I felt really good even though we struggled to build partnerships. It was a great confidence boost against quality bowling. Rabada, Philander, [Morkel]..." The South Africa pace attack was relentless and Bancroft shakes his head. "It didn't stop." There is a poignant irony in the fact that Bancroft scored 77 assured runs, off 103 balls, in the very match when, in South Africa's second innings, he was caught on camera using a piece of sandpaper to tamper with the ball. When he finally realised he had been rumoured he shoved the

incriminating evidence down his underpants. It was a despairing act which could not save him or Australian cricket from ignominy. He and the two other named culprits (Warner and the captain Steve Smith) were justifiably punished for cheating but Bancroft nods gently when I say it seems a small private tragedy that he acted so stupidly just after he had found his way as a

Test batsman. Cameron Bancroft talks to the umpire during the ball-tampering incident during the third Test between South Africa and Australia in Cape Town. "In purely cricketing terms," he admits, "it makes me feel a little shit. I was just settling and then, of course, it was lost." It should be underlined that Bancroft accepts full responsibility for his actions. "That's exactly what I was - lost," he says quietly. "I was obviously disappointed because I'd let the team down and carried out an act that completely compromised my values. But it came down for me just when I was really improving at that level. It felt like I'd thrown a lot away. I hadn't got a Test 100 yet but I felt I was on my way to achieving that, so I was extremely disappointed to give that up. But that's how important that part of my life was then. I've come to learn that it is important but it doesn't dictate my life in the same way." Bancroft was so desperate to succeed as an Australian Test cricketer he was ready to do almost anything to feel valued by the other players. "Absolutely. I grew up

idolising Test cricketers and that was a dream I wanted for me. Holding that so sacred to my heart made me a little naive and vulnerable to wanting to be embraced and a part of it all. At that point I hadn't really grasped the concept that cricket's just a game. Yes, you're playing for Australia. Yes, it's Test cricket. Yes, it's something to be really proud of. But it is just a game." I invested too much to the point where I lost control of my values. What had become important to me was being liked, being well valued, feeling really important to my teammates, like I was contributing something by using sandpaper on a cricket ball. That's something I don't think I even understood until that mistake happened. But it's part of the journey and a hard lesson I needed to learn. "There is much to admire in Bancroft's honesty but it also seems wrong that only Smith, Warner and he were blamed when others in the team must have known what was happening. At least some of the bowlers, surely, knew what he was doing? There is a long pause before Bancroft answers: "Yeah, look, all I wanted to do was to be responsible and accountable for my own actions and part. Yeah, obviously what I did benefits bowlers and the awareness around that, probably, is self-explanatory. I guess one thing I learnt through the journey and being responsible is that's where the buck stops [with Bancroft himself]. Had I had better awareness I would have made a much better decision."

'He's so ready for Test rugby': the remarkable rise of Marcus Smith

London, May 15: English rugby normally loves a caveat. Player X is potentially great but is his defence good enough? Player Y looks the business but what about his attitude? Which makes it all the more unusual to hear so many hard-bitten former professionals raving about Marcus Smith, the Harlequins fly half ripping it up for his club but still awaiting the call to represent his country. Listen, for instance, to the considered verdict from the Harlequins defence coach, Jerry Flannery: "He's so ready for Test rugby and he's only going to get better when he gets there. What struck me when I met him is how incredibly driven and ambitious he is. He wants to be the best player in the world, never mind the best player in England." Given the tough world of Munster rugby in which Flannery grew up, that is some drum roll for a bouncy-haired, public-school educated fly-half. In Limerick they tend to be wary of young upstarts in danger of "getting above their station" without first paying their dues. "It is rare," Flannery says, referring to Smith's global aspirations. "I haven't come across it before. But to be fair to him the kid backs it up in terms of his workrate." He's the last player off the training pitch every single day. He's incredibly durable and a fantastic athlete. You often see young players stuttering through that weird phase between underage representative rugby and senior level. He hasn't missed a jump. You try to give him a break and he wants to be on the sideline running messages. You come across players who are ambitious, confident or even cocky but Marcus is very coachable and always looking to improve. Every week he's striving. "The view among Quins' other first-team coaches is strikingly similar. Adam Jones, the scrum coach,



reckons that "if he was Welsh he'd have 50 caps by now". Nick Evans, the former All Blacks 10, has been working as his mentor and says he "can't see what more he can do to put his hand up". At this rate even Johnny Marr and Morrissey will be joining the new Smith's fanclub. All of which makes the latter's next move fascinating. When it comes to selecting successful international fly-halves, there is an unwritten rule: it pays to pick an English No 10 as early as possible. Of the 10 specialist red rose fly-halves capped this century, seven have been aged 21 or younger. The other three - Freddie Burns (22), Dave Walder (23) and Andy Goode (24) - started only 14 Tests between them. The trend has held remarkably firm, with Jonny Wilkinson blooded at 18. George Ford and Owen Farrell were 20, as were Danny Cipriani, Olly Barkley and Shane Geraghty. Rob Andrew, Stuart Barnes, Charlie Hodgson and Toby Flood were 21. For the sake of comparison, the great Dan Carter was also 21 when he made his All Blacks debut, as was Finn Russell when first picked for Scotland. Dan Biggar was still a teenager when he first appeared for Wales against Canada in 2008. Exceptions clearly exist to every rule, most notably Ireland's Johnny Sexton who was 24 when he won his first cap, partly down to a July birthday and a broken thumb which ruled him out of 2008 Six Nations contention.

England to burst cricket 'bubble' but Covid restrictions will remain



London, May 15: England's cricketers will be encouraged to move away from referring to "the bubble" this summer amid concerns the term has developed negative connotations and is beginning to perpetuate the mental strain of life on the road. International cricket has been played in biosecure environments ever since the Covid-19 pandemic began last year and though restrictions are being lifted across the UK, Joe Root's Test team will still be limited to just grounds and hotels for the two-Test series against New Zealand that starts on 2 June. While the set-ups for the matches at Lord's and Edgbaston will not be as draconian as last summer - England played exclusively at the Rose

Bowl and Old Trafford and lived at the two on-site hotels - or the winter tours of Sri Lanka and India, the team will still be in a form of lockdown once they convene in London on 28 May. Despite a two-month gap since the end of the India Test series - and the likely absence of players who took part in the recent Indian Premier League and are currently in quarantine - Chris Silverwood's coaching staff and the squad will still be urged to start referring to the "team environment" instead of the "bubble". It is a small change but one that is hoped will help them collectively move on from a testing 12-month period that included the white-ball team pulling out of three ODIs in South Africa when panicked by

an outbreak of Covid-19 in the team hotel and saw a psychologist taken on tour in the subcontinent. England's players will still be subject to regular Covid-19 testing and have been asked to limit their movements at home during the five-day period before they get together. The management hope to relax things further after England's final lockdown restrictions are lifted on 21 June, albeit some caution will remain. Ultimately Ashley Giles, the team director, and Silverwood, the head coach, want to get minds squarely back on cricket and the return of crowds - starting at 25% capacity for the first Test at Lord's, with Edgbaston still to be confirmed - should help a sense of normality return. The pair are also wary of life getting tougher again next winter, when the schedule features trips to Bangladesh and Pakistan, the T20 World Cup and the Ashes in Australia, and families may be unable to join the players on tour. Talks with Cricket Australia are continuing as regards the latter - an acute issue given the tour straddles Christmas - while the fixtures for the five-Test series are due to be published next week. Silverwood, due to name his squad for the New Zealand series on Tuesday, has also announced he will sit out the six ODIs against Sri Lanka and Pakistan in July for a break, with his assistants Paul Collingwood and Graham Thorpe taking charge.

Ferran Torres hits hat-trick in madcap win for Manchester City at Newcastle

London, May 15: Talk about a timely reminder. With the Champions League final fast approaching Ferran Torres jogged Pep Guardiola's memory by scoring a fabulous hat-trick comprised of three different varieties of volley. One was utterly outrageous and all were far too good for Martin Dubravka to save as a refreshed Manchester City side studded with second stringers ultimately outclassed Newcastle in the most bewitchingly entertaining of supposedly meaningless games. Along the madcap way Guardiola's newly crowned English Champions set a new Premier League record after registering their 12th consecutive away win. A combination of Covid related complications and the need to recalibrate his game to high paced Premier League intensity has sometimes made this a tough, if

Newcastle, fresh from celebrating confirmation they have been spared from relegation for another season, hoped City would be still feeling a little woozy they were mistaken. Guardiola's team wasted no time in hogging possession, zipping passes between themselves and penning Bruce's players in their own half. Scott Carson was initially left standing idly by, shivering in the Tyneside evening chill as he made his City debut and first Premier League appearance in a decade. By almost uncanny coincidence Carson's last top tier engagement had also been at St James' Park, for West Brom on May 22 2011, with the game finishing 3-3. Overall, the Derby loanee's handling and footwork impressed immensely here but it did not take him long to become reacquainted with picking the ball out of the back of the net. When City's concentration finally wavered they, self destructively, permitted Allan Saint-Maximin to escape on the counterattack and pick out Joelinton whose shot was blocked by Kyle Walker



extremely promising, season for Torres. No matter; the 21-year-old Spain striker could not have picked a better moment to stake his compelling case for involvement against Chelsea in Porto later this month. "Ferran's so young and clinical," said Guardiola. "He was bought as a winger but we think he's a striker. He's a good player." City certainly needed him against deep sitting, deceptively fast breaking, opponents. "Newcastle have 10 players behind the ball," added City's manager. "But they are so, so, fast on the counterattack." After being rubber stamped as title winners on Tuesday night his players danced, hugged, drank - (mainly Catalan beer) - and ate pizza until dawn on Wednesday. If

and deflected behind for a corner. Jonjo Shelvey's whipped in

dead ball delivery was met by Emil Krafth who out-leapt the disappointing Nathan Aké before directing a header beyond the blameless Carson. Krafth has, rightly, received considerable criticism this season but, albeit facilitated by poor defending, his first goal Newcastle goal was an excellent header. It also seemed somehow appropriate, given that the Swede's ball initially cued up Saint-Maximin. Steve Bruce's side nearly scored again when Shelvey's free kick crashed back off the crossbar but, instead, City equalised as João Cancelo's low drive took a capricious deflection off Jacob Murphy and whizzed past a wrong footed Dubravka. Perhaps anxious not to be upstaged, Torres began making his presence felt. Connecting with Gündogan's free-kick with back to goal and closely minded by Shelvey, he swivelled sharply and flicked an outrageous volley executed with the outside of his left foot beyond Dubravka. Aké offered Newcastle renewed hope by sending Joelinton crashing but the referee ruled out a penalty due to a perceived offside on Saint-Maximin's part in the preamble. A lengthy VAR review ultimately disagreed, judging the Frenchman to have been outside after all and Joelinton thumped the belatedly awarded 12-yard kick beyond Carson.

Giro d'Italia: Caleb Ewan rules the sprint again as Carthy survives scare

London, May 15: Caleb Ewan doubled up with victory on stage seven of the Giro d'Italia as Attila Valter retained the pink jersey while Britain's Hugh Carthy survived a late scare at the finish in Termoli. Carthy finished more than two minutes after Ewan, having been seen riding up the short climb near the finish with a broken saddle while in conversation with a race director's car, and initial results showed him tumbling from sixth to 21st in the overall standings. But, with the incident coming inside the final 3km the EF Education Nippo rider was subsequently awarded the same time as the main peloton to retain his position. Up ahead, Ewan bided his time as Fernando Gaviria

opened up the sprint, coming past the Colombian and holding off Davide Cimolai and Tim Merlier to add to Wednesday's win in Catolica and bring up 50 for his career. Valter retains an 11-second lead over Remco Evenepoel, with Egan Bernal a further five seconds back in third. Carthy remains 38 seconds off pink, with fellow Lancastrian Simon Yates in 10th, 49 seconds down and two behind Irishman Dan Martin. Manx rider Mark Christian of the EOLA-Kometa team had been part of a three-man breakaway who animated the 181km stage from Notaresco, though they knew they had no real chance of victory on a relatively routine transition stage to the coast.

washington, May 15: 3723 Hikaru Nakamura v Magnus Carlsen, New in Chess Classic 2021. Black to move. The world champion chose 1...Nh3+ and later lost. Carlsen missed a much stronger move with a hidden tactical point which would have given Black a clear advantage. Puzzle - find the move and the tactic. One of the most enduring

chess records, Sergey Karjakin as the youngest grandmaster ever at 12 years and seven months, looks set to fall in the next few weeks. Abhimanyu Mishra, from New Jersey, US, is already the youngest ever international master, at 10, and has just achieved two of the three required GM norms for the higher title. There were GM level teenagers before 1950, but the world body Fide only issued its first list in that year. Then David Bronstein was the youngest at 26, followed by Tigran Petrosian at 23 in 1952, Boris Spassky at 18 in 1955, and Bobby Fischer at 15 in 1958. The last three all became world champions. Fischer held the record for over 30 years before the all-time No 1 woman, Judit Polgar, broke it in 1991, after which it was gradually lowered until Karjakin set his target in 2002. Since then, Karjakin's mark has narrowly survived serious attempts by India's current generation of talents, but Mishra's chances are very bright. He has until 5 September to score his third GM norm and add around another 24 rating points, and was in action again in a new tournament which started on Friday. Mishra won his first round game on Friday afternoon. He will probably need a 7/9 total for his third and final GM

norm. Abhimanyu Mishra at the 2016 World Chess Championship meeting between Magnus Carlsen and Sergey Karjakin. Photograph: Hemant Mishra. His latest tournament, the just concluded Budapest First Saturday, was his most impressive to date. It was his third GM event in a row with only a couple of days break between them, yet he simply ran away from the field, scoring an unbeaten 8/9 with a winning margin of three points. His tournament performance rating (TPR) was 2739, the level of the world top 20 grandmasters. It was almost certainly the youngest 2700+ TPR in chess history, and the first ever by a pre-teen. The most notable aspect of his performance was in the final round.



NFL families seek to end 'race-norming' in \$1bn concussion settlement

London, May 15 : Thousands of retired Black professional football players, their families and supporters are demanding an end to the controversial use of "race-norming" to determine which players are eligible for payouts in the NFL's \$1 billion settlement of brain injury claims, a system experts say is discriminatory. Former Washington running back Ken Jenkins, 60, and his wife Amy Lewis on Friday delivered 50,000 petitions demanding equal treatment for Black players to senior US district judge Anita B Brody in Philadelphia, who is overseeing the massive settlement. Former players who suffer dementia or other diagnoses can be eligible for a payout. Under the settlement, however, the NFL has insisted on using a scoring algorithm on the dementia testing that assumes Black men start with lower cognitive skills. They must therefore score much lower than whites to show enough mental decline to win an award. The practice, which went unnoticed until 2018, has made it harder for Black former players to get awards. "My reaction was, 'Well, here we go again,'" said Jenkins, a former running back. "It's the same old nonsense for Black folks, to have to deal with some insidious, convoluted deals that are being made." Jenkins is now an insurance executive and is not experiencing any cognitive problems, but has plenty of NFL friends who are less fortunate. In March, Brody threw out a civil rights lawsuit that claimed the practice is discriminatory. But she later said in a filing that the practice raised "a very important issue" and asked a magistrate judge to compile a report on the problem. She told the Associated Press she did not know when it would be completed. The majority of the league's 20,000 retirees are Black. And only a quarter of the more than 2,000 men who sought awards for early to moderate dementia have qualified under the testing program. Lawyers for Black players have asked for details on how the \$800 million in settlement payouts so far have bro-

ken along racial lines, but have yet to receive them. Race norming is sometimes used in medicine as a rough proxy for socioeconomic factors that can affect someone's health. Experts in neurology said the way it's used in the NFL settlement is too simplistic and restrictive, and has the effect of systematically discriminating against Black players. "Because every Black retired NFL player has to perform lower on the test to qualify for an award than every white player. And that's essentially systematic racism in determining these payouts," said Katherine Possin, a neurology professor at the UCSF Memory and Aging Center. In other major settlements, including those tied to the September 11 terrorist attacks and the Boston Marathon bombing, all claimants were treated the same. "We concluded, fairly quickly, that we would take the top compensation for the white male and everyone would get the same, the top dollar," said lawyer Ken Feinberg, who has overseen many of the largest settlement funds. Feinberg said. "We would cure this compensatory discrimination by having a rising tide raise all ships." The first lawsuits accusing the NFL of hiding what it knew about the link between concussions and brain damage were filed in 2011. A trickle soon became a deluge, and the NFL, rather than risk a trial, agreed in 2013 to pay \$765 million over 65 years for certain diagnoses, including Alzheimer's disease and dementia. But as the claims poured in, Brody feared the fund would run out early and ordered the cap removed. The NFL, which foots the bill, began challenging claims by the hundreds, according to the claims website. In appealing one filed by Najeh Davenport, the NFL complained that his doctor had not used "full demographic norms" in the cognitive scoring. That meant factoring in age, education, gender - and race. "I remain unsure what you are talking about. He was done using standard norms like everyone else. Using different racial standards is indeed discriminatory and illegal. We stand by our scores," the physician said in response, according to court records. Ultimately, the appeal was reviewed by a pair of University of Pennsylvania legal scholars serving as special masters for Brody. They rejected the original reviewer's finding that race norms were mandatory under the settlement. Still, they concluded that Davenport's doctor had to explain whether he typically uses them or only waived them so Davenport would get an award. "Using race-specific norms can be enormously

lawyers hoped to learn through the litigation how often Black players are denied payouts. Instead, Brody dismissed the suit, saying they were bound by the settlement because they had not opted out years ago. But as concerns about race-norming grew - and with the racial unrest of 2020 still simmering - Brody in April opened the door to changing the practice when she ordered lawyers for the league and the players back to the table to work out an agreement. Jennifer Manley, a Columbia University neuropsychologist hired by Davenport's lawyers, called race norms in medicine ill-conceived and outdated in a court filing. Race-based adjustments for neurology - known as "Heaton norms" - were designed in the early 1990s by Dr Robert Heaton to estimate how socioeconomic factors affect someone's health. They are widely used, but in recent years, scientists in the field have begun to recognize the limitations of the normative comparison groups they have used for years. The small sample group of Blacks Heaton chose to create his adjustment protocol came entirely from San Diego, a military town where the Black population hardly reflected the diversity of Blacks across the US. The racial classifications are also binary - Black or white - even though hundreds of NFL retirees, and millions of Americans, identify as mixed race. White and Black retired NFL players may be more similar to each other than they are to the reference populations ... used to develop Heaton or (other) race-specific norms," Manley wrote in her brief in the Davenport lawsuit. Several neurology experts have said the NFL's assessment program is flawed. Possin said UCSF had considered participating in the assessments but decided against it. "We declined to participate in these evaluations because it just didn't feel like good clinical practice to us," Possin said. "There's probably a number of these players who, the neurologists who evaluated them were pretty sure they had a neurodegenerative disease and they had dementia. But maybe they didn't score quite low enough. They didn't pass the threshold, so they didn't meet the NFL settlement criteria for a payout. And that's really, I think, unfortunate." Dr Francis X Conidi, a neurologist and former president of the Florida Neurologic Society, who has treated hundreds of former NFL players, wrote a critique of the settlement's assessment program in 2018, saying it had developed a system where players would be classified with "fictional diagnostic categories" of level 1, level 1.5 and level 2 neurocognitive impairments. Only those classified as levels 1.5 or 2 would qualify for a settlement. Conidi said these categories could leave the patient confused about the cause of his symptoms and recommended that they adopt a protocol that includes a standard workup for dementia, including neuroimaging and other testing that is not currently done under the assessments. The NFL's dementia testing evaluates a person's function in two dozen skills that fall under five sections: complex attention/processing speed; execu-

tive functioning; language; learning and memory; and visual perception. A player must show a marked decline in at least two of them to get an award. In an example shared with The Associated Press, one player's raw score of 19 for "letter-number sequencing" in the processing section was adjusted using "race-norming" and became 42 for whites and 46 for Blacks. The raw score of 15 for naming animals in the language section became a 35 for whites and 41 for Blacks. And the raw score of 51 for "block design" in the visual perception section became a 53 for whites but 60 for Blacks. Taking the 24 scores together, either a white or Black player would have scored low enough to reach the settlement's 1.5-level of early dementia in "processing speed." However, in the language section, the scores would have qualified a white man for a 2.0-level, or moderate, dementia finding - but shown no impairment for Blacks. Overall, the scores would result in a 1.5-level dementia award for whites - but nothing for Blacks. Those awards average more than \$400,000 but can reach \$1.5 million for men under 45, while 2.0-level dementia yields an average payout of more than \$600,000 but can reach \$3 million. Breton Asken, a neuropsychology fellow at the UCSF Memory and Aging Center, helped administer several assessments around 2016, when he was a student at the University of Florida. The assessments he was involved in took 4 to 6 hours, and produced a score, which would then be adjusted based on the Heaton norms. "So the male Black athletes that we saw would be compared essentially to a group of otherwise healthy Black individuals with a similar number of years of education and of the same age," Asken said. Even at the time, he said he and his colleagues worried the assessments and adjustments were not appropriate. "I think we were always hesitant to be robotic about this," Asken said. "We understood from a legal standpoint why there's a push and a need for making something a little more algorithmic and robotic, that it can be standardized and so forth. But I think there's also a lot of challenges when you take expert clinical decision-making out of things." They would report the person's level of impairment by the "letter of the law" and would also provide comments conveying "anything else we thought was relevant to the patient's brain health, physical health, mental health and so forth that we thought would be important for us to include in something like a standard neuropsychological report." The test battery also included questionnaires about mood and personality. But those scores were not included in the algorithm to determine compensation, he said. "They're getting full neurologic exams from these neurologists who are able to pick up on other aspects of the nervous system that might be having problems and so forth. Feels very odd for us to put this comprehensive neuropsychological report together and just ignore those pieces of data," Asken recalled.

'A bad FA Cup final feeling makes you want to come back'

London, May 15 : "I always had this mentality of being open to new ideas," César Azpilicueta says. "I never felt that I was fully complete because in my career I played different positions and I always tried to get the most out of them. Also that allowed me to look into players from different parts of the pitch and create different relationships in the team. When you have to change you have to pick up new relationships. With different managers, I've always been flexible." Azpilicueta, who is expected to start against Leicester in the FA Cup final on Saturday, is Chelsea's great survivor. After struggling under Frank Lampard, the defender has rediscovered his poise since Thomas Tuchel's appointment in January. Tuchel is the eighth manager for whom Azpilicueta has

was a big step moving to Marseille. They demand titles but it was not the same. We were not asked to win the Champions League." Azpilicueta, who has won six trophies in England, describes it as "a DNA of winning" at Chelsea. "When we are not having a good season we have a change of managers, but I always felt it's all about winning. You have to be ready, because we know the different manager can ask something different. We had this situation this season, when we were not at our best." Azpilicueta thinks back to watching from the bench when Chelsea last faced Leicester, who all but sealed Lampard's sacking with a 2-0 win at the King Power Stadium in January. "That was a difficult night," he says. "The result was bad, but I think the feeling we all had was worse with



played since joining Chelsea in 2012 and he is the latest to find the job is easier with the unassuming Spaniard in the team. "I always adapt," Azpilicueta says as the captain ponders hopping from one position to the next in England. Although the 31-year-old arrived as a right-back, he has never complained about being shunted around. The team have always come first. Azpilicueta got on with it when he played at left-back for José Mourinho's title winners in 2015 and he adjusted when his declining pace began to become an issue a year later, slotting in as right-sided centre-back when Antonio Conte introduced Chelsea to a back three. "The biggest change I've had was to play in a back three with Conte because at that time I only played in a back four on the right or the left," Azpilicueta says. "I never played as a centre-back. In England, we know the history of centre-backs. Normally big, strong, different kind of football. It was a challenge. I spent lots of time improving because I knew I had to be ready for it." Azpilicueta, who has played a pivotal role in Chelsea joining Manchester City in the Champions League final this month, has always maintained a steady demeanour. The club's revolving-door policy when it comes to managers does not surprise him. Chelsea were European champions when Azpilicueta joined from Marseille and he quickly saw standards were high. "When you jump into a dressing room which had just been crowned champions of Europe, you see the big personalities like Frank Lampard, John Terry, Ashley Cole, Petr Cech, [Branislav] Ivanovic," he says. "You learn from them every day. You ask how they win so many trophies. Then you see why they were successful is because in every training session they gave their best. In every game they want to win. I'm a winner but I came from Osasuna, where we were fighting against relegation. Away from home, we would win two or three games a season and if we got a draw we were happy. It

the way we performed. We are now in the position that we wouldn't have believed possible that day." Chelsea's fortunes changed when Tuchel arrived. They are fourth in the Premier League with two games left and the reversion to a back three has helped Azpilicueta, who has alternated between centre-back and right wing-back. Azpilicueta is a different kind of captain to Terry. He is quieter but he values his leadership role. He speaks about helping the goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga through difficult times and his relationship with Tuchel is strong. "He made it very clear what he wanted from the team and what he wanted from me as a part of the team and a captain," Azpilicueta says. "We always had very honest conversations about what was better for the team. Not footballistically, but in terms of trips or the time of training. He has the ability to communicate and share responsibility. I try to help as much as I can because when a manager comes halfway through the season it is not easy." Azpilicueta smiles when he is asked if there is more hugging at training with Tuchel around. "And shouts as well," he says. "Communication is not only hugs. It's also when things are not going well, to shout and correct the mistakes. What is important is when you are not doing something perfect, even winning, that's the moment when you can improve." He is very specific, he goes into the detail. When you are at the highest level, every single metre can make a difference. We had a lot of potential and we have to express ourselves. We changed the system but he thought it was the best for the team. "Few managers are as demanding as Tuchel on the touchline." He is very expressive," Azpilicueta says. "His focus is in every action. When a player is out of position, he's very demanding. You need everybody on the right spot every time. So he's very active. Antonio was very active as well. Obviously with the empty stadiums it's easier to hear. In a full stadium I imagine it's more difficult.



ken along racial lines, but have yet to receive them. Race norming is sometimes used in medicine as a rough proxy for socioeconomic factors that can affect someone's health. Experts in neurology said the way it's used in the NFL settlement is too simplistic and restrictive, and has the effect of systematically discriminating against Black players. "Because every Black retired NFL player has to perform lower on the test to qualify for an award than every white player. And

consequential, and the adjustments may often make the difference in a clinician's determination of cognitive impairment and a determination of normal functioning for retired NFL players seeking benefits," special masters David A Hoffman and Wendell E Pritchett wrote in the 20 August decision. Days later, Davenport and another former Pittsburgh Steeler, Kevin Henry, filed the civil rights lawsuit, calling public attention to the issue for the first time. Their




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