

Fate of Indian Crypto investors hang in balance:

The Central Government reveals plan to introduce cryptocurrencies bill, first of its kind
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Lahaul & Losar festival promote Indian tribal culture during pandemic

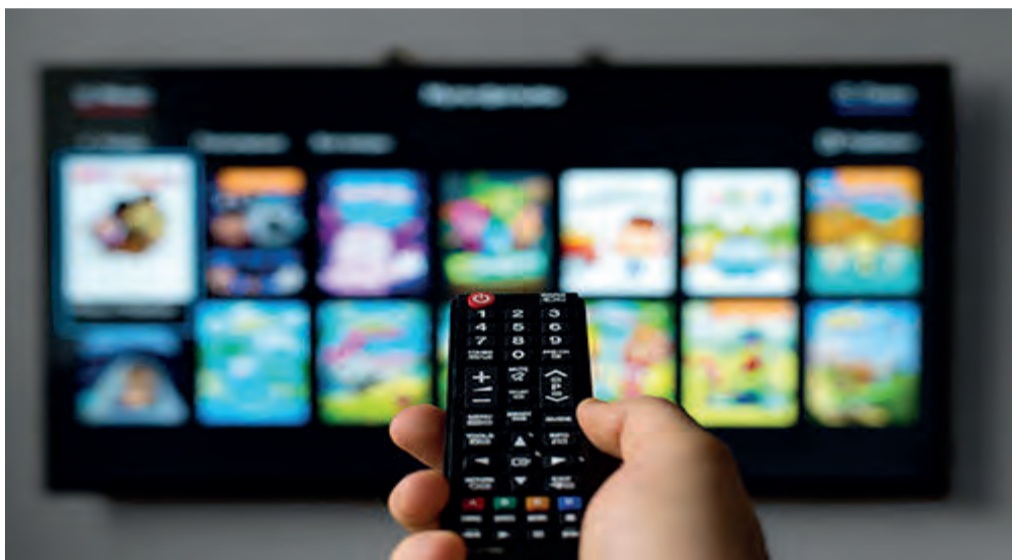
India observes its first longest snow festival at Lahaul-Spiti, Himachal Pradesh
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The Service to Humanity - International Women's Day

8th March - not just a day but a celebration of womanhood.
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Government Officials to act Gatekeepers for OTT Platforms

Deeksha Devadiga & Chinmai Tiwari



Rules and regulations set in motion for OTT platforms.

Image Source: Google Images

The Supreme Court observes that the government guidelines for regulating social media and OTT platforms have no “teeth” as it doesn’t allow pre-screening of content or have a provision to prosecute the violators. It asks the Centre to frame stringent law to regulate content and submit a copy of the draft legislation after 2 weeks.

The apex court observes that OTT platforms are showing pornography and thus proposes screening of content. Earlier, the Centre unveiled the set of new rules for OTT platforms in a press conference held by Prakash Javadekar, Union Minister, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and IT Minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad on

February 25, 2021. They said that the government has finally taken over the OTT platforms under the rules set by Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code). The government CBFC (Central Board of Film Certification) will now scan through the OTT contents before releasing them to the general public. The platforms have to place an access control mechanism with the classification rating of every content along with content description informing the nature of the content.

A 3-tier grievance redressal mechanism is to be set up for these platforms. This shall consist of self-regulation by the publishers and a

self-regulatory body which shall be headed by a Retired Supreme/High Court Judge and an inter-ministerial committee will be formed to look after specific complaints and will take required actions if there’s any violation caused by the content on the OTT platforms. The new set of rules gives the Information and Broadcast secretary to block the access of particular content in any case of emergency.

Viewers have taken to this decision as the right step towards better content viewing, “Talking from an OTT consumer’s perspective, I believe there is nothing new that the regulation has brought apart from self-classification of the content and parental lock which is very much needed in a country like India because a child’s mind is at a very developmental stage wherein watching the right content matters at the right age. Many were found using #ResponsibleFreedom and I think freedom should be used responsibly rather than exploiting it”, said Anirudh Baboo, an avid content viewer and a film student.

Raghav Dutt who has written screenplays for many films like Ribbon, Bhasmasur, and currently working for a Netflix original said, “Since things are pretty unclear right now, it leaves us with fewer instructions on how to go about creating content. We had the

freedom to express our ideas without any inhibition or restriction and the sudden imposition puts us in a box. Take for instance a political satire would demand a strong opinionated script not everyone would agree with and it could put a target on you”. Further, “the content is what made OTT platforms stand out from daily soaps or reality shows and as a writer, it puts us in a tight spot to deliver tailored content”.

“It is still early to dismiss or term it negative because along with some great content, unethical and explicit content with no base is also available which needs to be checked before exposed to the general public”, Dutt concluded.

While theatres are being closed off to maintain social distancing many new commercial movies are getting OTT release. However, with the increase in consumption, their content draws severe backlash. Under the new requirements, OTT platforms and digital media will be required to publicize information about where they distribute, the nature of the contents they share as well as their subscriber data.

“Marriage should be between a Spouse and a Spouse, not a Gender and a Gender” - Hendrik Hertzberg

Asmita Pant & Samrah Attar



Pride Parades: A Celebration of Self Acceptance

Image Source: Feminism India

The scrapping of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was a landmark judgement in the judicial history of India which decriminalised homosexuality. The watershed judgement sent a wave of hope and faith across the LGBTQIA+ community in the country. Yet almost three years down the line, the members of the community are still fighting for legalisation of non-cis-het (cisgender-heterosexual) marriages. Opposing the petition filed by couples in the Delhi High Court to legal-

ise homosexual marriages, the Central Government stated, “living together as partners and having sexual relationship by same sex individuals is not comparable with the Indian family unit concept of a husband, a wife and children which necessarily assumes a biological man as a ‘husband’, a biological woman as a ‘wife’ and the children born out of the union between the two”. The government’s response received

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Life of a Medical Intern during Covid-19

Mansi Verma

“Medical interns were the first point of contact in the Covid-19 screening process. In a batch of 100 students, 50-60 tested positive at the same time. The patient load was such that the affected interns couldn’t be provided with due leave. We had to manage amongst ourselves by working as proxies for each other.

The whole situation was traumatic. We have seen our own batchmates, seniors and professors fight against the virus for their lives”, said Dr. Krishna Kumar Singh with a heavy voice. Dr. Singh was mourning the loss of a junior medical student who had lost his life on the same morning, battling with Covid-19. Dr. Singh is a medical intern of Bihar’s first dedicated Covid-19 health center, Nalanda Medical College and Hospital, Patna (NMCH). From the time of the outbreak of the virus to almost a year later when the vaccine is ready and available to the general public, the frontline doctors have been working tirelessly to save the lives of those affected by the pandemic.

A major part of the frontline medical workforce constitutes the final year medical students. At the end of a four and a half year long MBBS degree, they have to complete a 12-month Compulsory Rotatory Residential Internship (CRR). During this period, an intern has to work in all departments concerning various clinical subjects like Medicine, Psychiatry, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Pediatrics and so on.

Dr. Anusha Jha, medical intern, Shaheed Nirmal Mahto Medical College and Hospital (SNMMCH), Dhanbad explains the intention behind this internship programme. “Interns, during this time are expected to do clerical work, observe their senior doctors, get accustomed to the work culture and most importantly, learn how to deal with a patient. This provides them good experience and hands-on training. But the advent of a global pandemic affected this crucial chapter of a medical student’s career.”

Having completed her classes, Dr. Jha was awaiting her final year exams in March 2020. At this point, a nation-wide lockdown was imposed owing to which her exams got delayed. “The final year exams are the toughest exams in a medical student’s life. The uncertainty around it took

a toll on my mental health”, said Dr. Jha. The exams were postponed to September-October, 2020 and this delay further pushed the internship dates. “The 4-month-long period, starting from July when the last batch completed its internship till November was the first time for as long as I know, there were no interns work-

training during the COVID-19 lockdown. The interns however, disagreed.

“The extension led us to postpone our future career plans and now we are lagging when the students of a lot of colleges across the country have already completed their internships”, said a BDS intern, from Dayananda Sagar

were times when 500-600 patients would suddenly arrive for screening at the same time, we had to handle it! And since our seniors were over 50-60 years, falling under higher risk, the first in contact were always us, the young interns”, said Dr. Pandey.

While the medicine department was over-crowded other departments were nearly empty. “For 3-4 months last year, patients who required non-urgent surgeries did not come to the hospital. Such patients are scheduling their surgeries now”, said Dr. Jha. Hence, students interning last year faced a lack of training in certain non-covid departments during their internship and the ones interning right now are overburdened from pending cases of last year.

On the other hand, the interns of the hospitals declared as Covid health facilities like NMCH suffered a greater loss because until November non-covid patients were not being treated in these hospitals. This gave the interns less exposure to the working of non-covid departments. Dr. Singh said, “Even if I was appointed in the Pediatrics department, I was sent for Covid duty. Only after November did non-covid patients start to come back. So, I got proper experience in the departments like OB-GYN and Medicine only after November. However, I could not experience the work of Pediatrics or Preventive & Social Medicine (PSM) as I finished those duties before November”.

“Keeping aside all the difficulties, we got to experience working during a global pandemic. Something like this happens once in centuries”, said Dr. Pandey. He added, “the most challenging task for me during our internship was the non-clinical aspect of our work - counselling a patient! We had to deal with people with all kinds of emotions - scared, furious, tensed and confused. Building a sense of trust in them was something I learned from my experience and it will stay with me”.

Medical interns have received the vaccine in the first phase of the vaccination drive and continue to perform their duties. Dr. Anusha Jha, on the 5th of March, started her PSM duty wherein she handles patients during the immunization process at the vaccination site in Dhanbad.



Junior Doctors standing in support of Medical Interns
Image Source: Ahmedabad Mirror

ing at the hospital. Our batch started working in the month of November 2020. So like all my batchmates, I was not able to work for the whole period of 12 months”, added Dr. Jha. The National Medical Commission

College of Dental Sciences, Bengaluru. The batch preceding Dr. Jha’s experienced how and when it all started. Dr. Prateek Pandey of the previous batch was working as an intern in



Medical Interns of Pune protesting against low stipend
Image Source: The Indian Express

(formerly known as the Medical Council of India) in December issued guidelines for completion of the internship post-COVID-19 lockdown. Extension of the internship period was to compensate for the lost period of clinical-clerkship or hands-on

the Medicine department when Covid screening started in SNMMCH. The burden coincidentally fell upon his department. Suddenly, duties changed and the workload increased. “We were working somewhere between 12-13 hours on a busy day. There

Plight of domestic workers to regain normalcy post Covid-19

Vishal. U

While people around the world have been easing back into normalcy, domestic workers in various residential societies across Hyderabad are finding it hard to do so. “First, it was fear, now it is these new rules set by the residents that have hampered our ability to earn properly” said a 33-year old domestic worker, Sanu.

Overcome by fear and uncertainty, most of them had abandoned their rented settlements in the city and returned to their hometowns in March last year. “We heard from some of the residents that there are chances of a lockdown and that it was best for us to go back home as it would reduce our day to day expenses”, said a 40-year old Laxmi, who had to get through seven months without work and income.

As various restrictions started getting lifted, a few of them returned to the city in order to get back to work. Despite returning, a lot of them found it hard to find work as most of the residents were unwilling to rehire



A domestic help is seen working in the kitchen/image for representation.

Image Source: The News Minute

their domestic help unless they were willing to work only at their houses. They didn't want to take the risk of letting their maids contact the virus from other residents and bring it to their home. “Everyone is trying their best to reduce the chance of contracting the virus, so it would not be ideal for us if Renuka

(domestic help) contacted the virus from working elsewhere”, said Mrs. Rishika, a resident of the Ushodaya Residential Society. Since most of the residents were unwilling to rehire these workers unless they worked exclusively at their houses, they had no choice but to ask for a raise in pay. While the residents

agreed to pay more for working only in their house, it was still not enough. “I used to earn 4,000 Rupees by working in four houses but now I am only earning 1,500 rupees per month as I can only work at one house”, said Utthara, another domestic worker. As salaries of people are being cut down throughout the country, the residents are also having a hard time to cope up financially. This has led to such minuscule pay raises for the workers and have made their lives more difficult. Having no other choice, most of these workers have agreed to these conditions and are trying their best to hold their lives together.

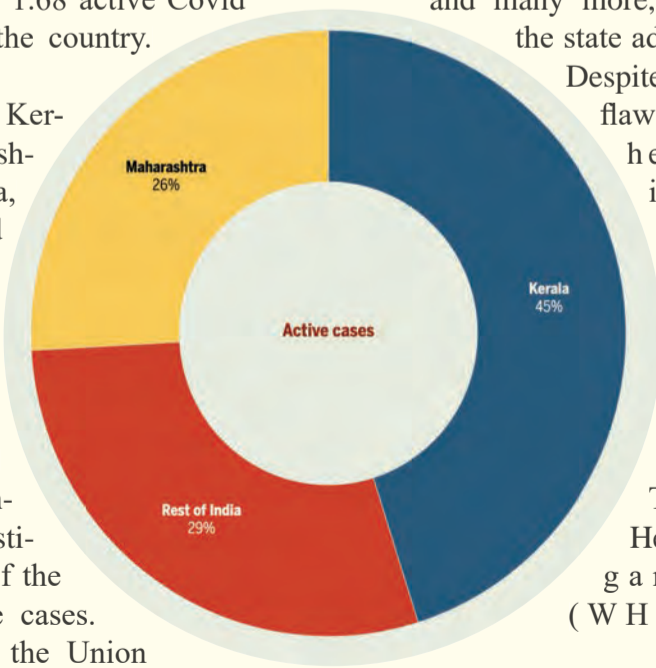
Even after almost one year since the initial lockdown in the country, these domestic workers have not been able to find their footing as they struggle to meet their day to day needs. All they hope for now is to be able to work in more houses or get another raise in pay while the uncertainty of the virus still looms around.

Covid-19 – Kerala and its contradictory curve

Riya Ashok Kumar and Suramyia Sunil Raj

As life goes back to normal, it's utmost important for us to remind ourselves that the pandemic is not yet gone. Though Covid cases in the country observed a decline in the past few months, 5 states of Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab and Tamil Nadu seem to be struggling now to contain its Covid numbers. Today, India has 1.68 active Covid-19 cases in the country.

The states of Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab and Tamil Nadu account for 84% of the total active cases of the nation. Kerala and Maharashtra alone constitute 67.84% of the spiking active cases. According to the Union



Covid 19 in Kerala : March 2020 - February 2021.

Image Source: Times of India

Health Ministry, there is an upsurge in daily new COVID-19 cases in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh also. According to a report by the Times of India, the absence of initial effective-

ness in identifying and controlling the spread of infection are the likely reasons for the present rise in the number of cases in the states. The study also states that the outspread in Kerala was not as wide as in other states of the country because of the effectiveness in robust containment measures and quarantine rules, contact tracing and many more, adopted by the state administration.

Despite technical flaws, the state's health-care infrastructure had managed to keep a potential disaster at bay, the report said. The World Health Organization (WHO) called Kerala's handling of the outbreak a “success story”. However, this success story did not last for quite long. Kerala has the largest population of senior citizens than the rest of India, and it is also known as the diabetes

capital of the country. As a result, the population becomes increasingly vulnerable to Covid 19. Kerala also had a lower mortality rate when compared to the states where the number of cases have at present increased dramatically.

“From the outset, Keralites were fully cognizant of the precautions and adhered to them diligently. However, a substantial portion of the elderly population who were previously confined to their homes were infected with Covid 19 in recent months as their immunity weakened.” Mrs.Raji L.R, a Kerala Directorate of Health Services (DHS) employee, said. “No significant signs of localized herd immunity have been recorded in Kerala. This is in contrast to the condition of localized herd immunity that may have surfaced in India's northern states”, she added. Starting in the first week of December, the Kerala government directed all state government departments to operate at full capacity, resulting in a huge influx of people to offices at the same time. Taking into account the condition of government offices, the lack of space and proper infrastructure, proper enforcement of social distancing was a tough task to execute in cramped sections of such offices while they functioned at full capacity. “The restoration of full working capacity

in all state government offices may have resulted in an increase in Covid 19 cases since December 2020. The number of cases in government offices skyrocketed post this decision by the state government. There have been times when entire sections or floors were cordoned off fearing the spread of Covid 19”, said Mr. Shiby T.K, an employee at the Accountant General's office in Trivandrum.

The reopening of international and inter-state travel was a factor for the spike in cases not only in Kerala, but also worldwide. In fact, a substantial portion of Kerala's population has returned from abroad. Since international visitors to the state were meticulously monitored, the issue was not about containing the virus or tracking positive cases. Mrs.Raji, who was also a team member of the Covid-19 control room at DHS stated, “A few domestic travellers who were asymptomatic entered the state without getting themselves tested”. The reason behind this was that the Kerala government's Covid-19 Jagratha portal for the e-pass generation did not have mandatory requirement of Covid-19 negative report for all for entrants from other states.

STUDENTS AND PANDEMIC

Do Re Mi Fa So Let me in the Meeting please: Online Education - a Course of Dilemma for Music teachers and learners.

Meenakshi Maidas

“I would continue at least some of my online classes even if things get back to normal”, says Elsa Ann, Piano Teacher when asked what class (online/offline) she would prefer in the future. In present times, online classes are respite for students. Even when things are changing slightly around the country, the lives of the majority of students have not changed. Student-teacher lives have started to be fixed into a small rectangle box controlled by a video and mic on/off button. Online shift of education has not only hit academics but also the extra-curricular part. Music classes need face-to-face interaction between teachers and students, but the absence of physical classes has put a stop to it. Nayana K Shenoy, a final year graduate student, violin player had to miss ten months practice as her teacher stopped taking online classes due to network issues at the place. “Violin is a very hard instrument to learn through online mode. You won’t understand the placement of fingers without seeing it yourself”, she said. Andrew Singaraj, a sixth standard student in Kochi, learning keyboard online from PSNA School of Emphatic Arts, Chennai says, “my classes are going well, I can learn everything from the comfort of my home and from anyone around the



Image Source: Orpheus Academy of Music

world”. However, “sometimes, teachers won’t see how I’m playing the piano since the video will be off or even get stuck and they figure it out just by listening to the keys.” Maria John, a Grade-6 Western Classical Vocals student from Amadeus Academy of Music (affiliated to Trinity College, London) had to postpone her exam due to the pandemic. “We used to have grade exams during November, but that was not possible this year”, she said. The pandemic restricted students to house walls but it turned out to be a

blessing in disguise for many. Priya Abraham, a Grade-3 Western Vocals student at Crossroads School of Music (affiliated to Trinity College, London) is delighted to learn online as earlier she used to travel for an hour

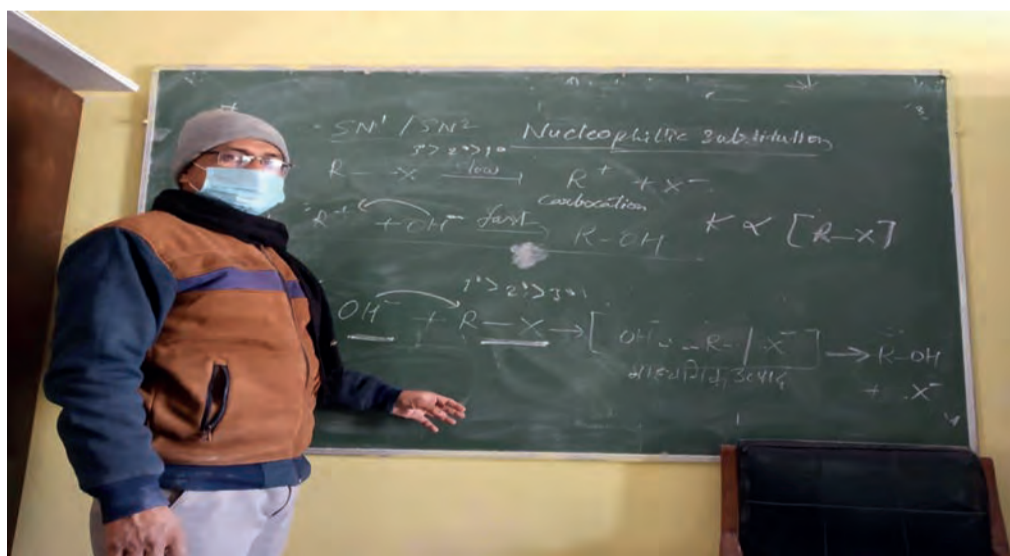
from her home to reach the school. Elsa Ann, piano and vocal teacher, Crossroads Kochi, takes private lessons from home for students residing in UAE and USA. She says that it would not have happened if online classes were not there.

“I have gotten almost 20 new admissions since the start of online classes”, she said. Dr Shyla Radhakrishnan, Carnatic music teacher also has students all over the world. She teaches from her home in UAE and prefers online classes now. “Even though the apps were a little hard to use during the start of the pandemic, both me and my students are now comfortable”, she said. However, not all teachers have the same opinion. Chandramohan K R has been teaching Carnatic music in Kerala for almost 40 years. He has started taking individual classes recently for students following social distancing and says that has been a huge relief. “With growing technology, we are able to take classes without meeting students but I will always prefer offline classes. A student can completely grasp everything from a teacher only when they sit face-to-face”, said Chandramohan. Besides the problem of not having human interaction, most of the teachers and students claimed network issues as one of the major disadvantages of online music classes. Our lives might fit into little pixelated rectangles now, but we have to find ways to depixelate the offline lives and maybe the music filled rectangles might help.

Arrival of students at schools are breaking down the year-long silence of lockdown

Shreya Gautam & Oshi Saxena

“As soon as the gates of our school reopened for students, we felt a sense of normalcy finally returning to us”, Mrs. Charu Saxena, Principal of Government H.S.S Excellence School, Vidisha said with a hint of joy. While COVID-19 still continues to spread its claws across the nation, schools have slowly geared up to reopen in a phased manner in different states. After receiving a new set of guidelines from the Ministry of Home Affairs on September 30th, 2020, the states started preparing themselves for the unlock procedure. While the dates of reopening varied from state-to-state with schools in Delhi opening on 18th January, Uttar Pradesh from 9th of February, and 18th of December in Madhya Pradesh, the aim of school administration and state governments remains the same: protecting the health and safety of the students and teachers within school premises. One of the key issues of 2020 was imparting quality education via laptops and phone screens in the safety of our homes. With a large chunk of the country’s population being eco-



Teachers taking all the necessary precautions while resuming classes on campus.

Image Source: Charu Saxena

nomically challenged, the experience of learning online wasn’t as easy as it seemed in the beginning of the lockdown. Now, with the academic session coming towards an end and campuses opening once again, it is striving to make up for the academic losses students had to bear in the online medium. From this point of view, India is at a crucial stage where students and teachers have lost touch with the con-

ventional learning methods and are falling behind due to the infrastructure crisis, which became more apparent during the shift towards e-learning. While on one hand, private schools prefer the option of continuing online classes due to facilities available in their students’ homes, government schools, particularly in rural areas see the reopening as a chance to bridge the digital divide and ensure that their chil-

dren’s education isn’t compromised due to lack of financial resources or infrastructure in their homes. Sunil Arya, the only teacher in UPS Abhayapura, a pre-secondary school in Kanshiram district in Uttar Pradesh, provided an eye-opening insight into the current state of children’s education in rural India. Being used to teaching around 84 students on his own before the pandemic even started, Mr. Arya pointed out that lack of mobile phones led to a significant amount of academic loss for his students throughout the year, and since then, he tried compensating for the same by teaching them in small groups while maintaining safety protocols and even providing many students with masks at his own expense. School administrators across the country had to overcome several obstacles in order to follow the guidelines provided to ensure a healthy environment for the students. Mrs. Charu Saxena explained through an administrative perspective, how the reopening of the school brought a

STUDENTS AND PANDEMIC

What comes first: Health or Education

Atreya Raghavan, Oshi Saxena and Saloni Dhumne

Nearly a year after the Covid-19 pandemic induced lockdown and its subsequent closure of educational institutions, the state governments across the country have begun to allow the reopening of higher education institutions in a phased manner. However, the recent discovery of two new strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus across the globe and a steady rise in the cases since January in India has sparked a debate in the student community whether campuses should or should not be reopened for offline classes. Vidhi Sharma, a third-year student of Gargi College in Delhi University expressed her concerns regarding the current mode of learning. "Online classes can never replace the traditional methods of teaching. The term Zoom fatigue totally explains my situation; migraines, eye infections, I've had it all in the past year." She further added that staring at a screen for prolonged periods of time has taken a toll on her mental health, making her more irritable than ever. "It doesn't feel like college anymore, and everything seems like an obligation." Being a Covid survivor herself, Vidhi and her parents are of the opinion that "one must not lock themselves up within the four walls, rather try to adjust with the situation and move on." She there-

fore plans on taking full precautions and attending offline classes soon. Similarly, Shruti S., a final year student at Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodra believes that it is high time the colleges reopened. Since their practical subjects haven't been covered yet, it could eventually lead to an overload of practical work in the later semesters. Eiti Tyagi, a third-year student in Miranda House, also a part of Delhi University, however, raised a differ-



Image Source: Mohammad Haris

ent concern. According to her, a sudden reopening of colleges for offline classes may create confusion at this point. Furthermore, for local residents,

travelling in the metro and DTC buses during peak hours is still a risky affair due to overcrowding. "If I attend offline classes, wearing a mask for the whole day in college as compared to a couple of hours is also a hassle," says Eiti. All this leads her to believe that reopening colleges for offline classes may yet not be a good idea. Down South, Suhani Dhumne, a first-year residential student from Manipal Institute of Technology feels that ex-

ams should not be given priority over a students' health. "With the vaccination programme yet to begin for students, the fear instilled by the virus

makes it hard for them to cope with the exams, immediately after the commencement of offline classes,". Talking about the measures undertaken by the institute to prevent the spread of Covid 19, she adds, "the college has installed automatic hand sanitizers in every hostel block, and students have to undergo mandatory body temperature checks. Also, our rooms and corridors are sanitised every single day." Achyuta Kaushik, a third-year student of Christ University, Bangalore, is divided on the issue. According to him, offline classes may lead to the creation of several Covid hotspots due to complacency in following standard operating procedures, both on the part of students and college administrations. However, since the university has made it mandatory for students to bring negative RT-PCR Covid test reports, taken not earlier than 72 hours before joining college, and for them to sanitize their hands and undergo a mandatory body temperature check before entering the college and hostel buildings, hybrid/offline mode of teaching might also be helpful to students without the requisite resources such as a good internet connection, laptops etc.

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Delhi parents raise concern over offline exams

Shriya Handoo

"As soon as the gates of our school reopened for students, we felt a sense of normalcy finally returning to us", Mrs. Charu Saxena, Principal of Government H.S.S Excellence School, Vidisha said with a hint of joy. While COVID-19 still continues to spread its claws across the nation, schools have slowly geared up to reopen in a phased manner in different states. After receiving a new set of guidelines from the Ministry of Home Affairs on September 30th, 2020, the states started preparing themselves for the unlock procedure. While the dates of reopening varied from state-to-state with schools in Delhi opening on 18th January, Uttar Pradesh from 9th of February, and 18th of December in Madhya Pradesh, the aim of school administration and state governments remains the same: protecting the health and safety of the students and teachers within school premises. One of the key issues of 2020 was imparting quality education via laptops and phone screens in the safety of our homes. With a large chunk of the country's population being economically challenged, the experience of learning online wasn't as easy as it seemed in the beginning of the lockdown. Now, with the academic session coming towards an end and campuses opening once again, it is striving to make



Students appear for offline exams after lockdown

Image Source: Times Of India

up for the academic losses students had to bear in the online medium. From this point of view, India is at a crucial stage where students and teachers have lost touch with the conventional learning methods and are falling behind due to the infrastructure crisis, which became more apparent during the shift towards e-learning. While on one hand, private schools prefer the option of continuing online classes due to facilities available in their

students' homes, government schools, particularly in rural areas see the reopening as a chance to bridge the digital divide and ensure that their children's education isn't compromised due to lack of financial resources or infrastructure in their homes. Sunil Arya, the only teacher in UPS Abhaypura, a pre-secondary school in Kanshiram district in Uttar Pradesh, provided an eye-opening insight into the current state of children's education in rural India. Being used to teaching around 84 students

on his own before the pandemic even started, Mr. Arya pointed out that lack of mobile phones led to a significant amount of academic loss for his students throughout the year, and since then, he tried compensating for the same by teaching them in small groups while maintaining safety protocols and even providing many students with masks at his own expense. School administrators across the country had to overcome several obstacles in order to follow the guidelines provided to ensure a healthy environment for the students. Mrs. Charu Saxena explained through an administrative perspective, how the reopening of the school brought a drastic shift in operational and management functions and decisions. To strike a balance between health and education, her school's administration informed the students regarding the mandatory safety protocols to be followed and made it compulsory for them to obtain consent from their parents for attending classes on campus. Her team made sure to divide the students and teachers into different sections and set a proper timeline with multiple shifts for them to ensure that safety guidelines and social distancing norms were being implemented. She took separate sessions with the students to instill in

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ART AND CULTURE

Lahaul & Losar festival promote Indian tribal Culture during the Pandemic

Suramya Kaushik, Ashish Chandra & Sneha Mothey

India observes its first longest snow festival at Lahaul-Spiti, Himachal Pradesh to promote cultural richness and attract tourists worldwide. Tribal Development Minister, Ram Lal Markanda inaugurated the 80-day-long snow festival on the 25th of January, 2021. At the same time, Arunachal Pradesh also hosted India's longest new year celebration known as Losar.



Ice Sculptures carved out of snow at Lahaul Snow Festival.
Image Source: Discover Kullu Manali

Lahaul's district administration, Yuvak Mandal, Mahila Mandal, Panchayat and local residents organized the festival without any government expenditure. It revives local culture through various folk presentations, competitions, adventures sports, local food and ice-sculptures of Lord Buddha, lion, ibex, stupas, and other auspicious symbols.

Lahaul is predominantly resided by Lahaulis following Hinduism whereas people with Buddhist beliefs reside in Spiti. Thus, this festival is largely getting celebrated as a cultural reunion. Its essence travels all the way to Arunachal Pradesh in the name of Losar festival.



Tourist climbing frozen waterfall at Commander Nullah near Keylong

Image Source: Himachal Abhi Abhi

The festival is celebrated by the Monpa Tribe from 12th to 27th February to mark the advent of the new year according to the Tibetan lunar calendar where 'Lo' means year and 'Sar' means new. "It is a 15-day long event which is perhaps one of the longest new year celebrations in India", said Urgan

Dorjee, President, Monpa Tribe Student Union, Arunachal Pradesh.

Losar begins with families going to the Monasteries praying for a prosperous new year. In the following days, elders of the village give their blessings, Buddhist flags are put around for peace and various competitions are held. This New Year celebration was incorporated in the Lahaul Snow Festival as well.

Celebrations during Pandemic

Both festivals carry unique cultural and artistic significance in high-altitude regions. When large scale celebrations have been called off, they manage to celebrate with the pandemic still looming around the corner. "The concept of wearing masks is quite new in other parts of the country, but in Lahaul we have been wearing it for ages. Draped in snow for most parts of the year, the inhabitants experience their cheeks and skin getting

cracked during snowfall, so we always wear a patka (mask)", said Ajay Bantyal, Member of Yuvak Mandal, Lahaul-Spiti. Mr. Dorjee in Arunachal Pradesh also asserted the cultural consciousness towards social distancing as success of Losar.

Tourist Presence

"The opening of Atal Rohtang Tunnel which is the world's longest traffic tunnel, is a source of income to improve our financial and economic conditions during winters. It is only because of the tunnel and the awareness of local people who take all the necessary precautions, the celebration of the festival could be made possible." he added.

"In Arunachal Pradesh, ILP (Inner Line Pass) is needed to enter which is usually given at the border.

However, owing to the current pandemic, one has to apply for the pass at least one week before arrival.

This too has been a major reason for the low-footfall of the tourists and intimate celebration of the festival."

Contrary to Arunachal's Losar, Lahaul Snow Festival is attended by many as there is no specific point of interest beyond the tunnel, which makes it a center of attraction for tourists.

Adventure and Activities

From Tibetan folk dance forms to traditional delicacies- the snow festival has got it all. Local cuisines like Thupka and Tsampa are cooked in utensils of stone and served to tourists on tables and chairs made of ice. Adventure games like chhulo (ancient game of dice), snow tug-of-war, ice climbing on frozen waterfalls are being organized.



Women performing folk dance during Snow Festival
Image Source: Raju



Tribal Development Minister Dr. Ram Lal Markanda tries hand at archery in Snow Festival
Image Source: Discover Kullu Manali

said Mr. Dorjee. Local women are enjoying themselves by organizing and participating in knitting competitions. "Women, who normally used to remain inside, have shown overwhelming participation. They have engaged in cooking some of the forgotten traditional cuisines and have joined knitting competitions, folk song recitals and have turned the whole environment into a rare festivity", posts Pankaj Rai, Deputy Commissioner, Lahaul on DC Lahaul-Spiti facebook page.

Beyond Palm trees and Beaches .. lie tiles with a dying history

Navamya G. Acharya

With its origins dating back to the 15th century, the Azulejo Tiles from Goa have somehow managed to withstand the test of time. Being native to the miniature tropical state and extensively known for their vibrant patterns and designs painted in blue and white cobalt, you'd see most of Panaji and the rest of Goa using these tiles in their name boards, murals, street names, and more. Had it not been for Orlando De Noronha, Azulejos, and its craftsmanship would've gone into a stupor. He is the founder and owner of 'Azulejos de Goa' encased in a 250-year-old Portuguese house. The

gallery consists of tiles portraying the Goan lifestyle before and after the arrival of the Portuguese. Orlando began pursuing his passion for Azulejo tiles post his return from Portugal, his first commission being a mural for Taj Exotica in 1999. Noronha fondly remembers his mural for the Goa Tourism Department, roughly made from 3600 tiles showing Goa



Image Source: Amogh Golatkar

Shankar Turi – the owner of Turi Azulejos, makes Mario Miranda and Azulejo-inspired caricatures. The tiles used for this artwork are purchased from Portugal, China, and India. In Goa, most of the tiles used are Indian, while premium work is usually done on the Portuguese.

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ART AND CULTURE

Badal is on silent protest through his artwork against potholes.

Divya Shree

Bengaluru based artist Badal Nanjunda Swamy goes on a silent protest through art to fix the potholes in the city. Silicon Valley known for its start-ups, struggles to solve an old problem- Potholes. The previous year saw 766 road deaths due to potholes, revealed Bengaluru Traffic police.

According to the BBMP (Bhruath Bengaluru Mahanagara palike), Bengaluru has 85,321 roads and out of which 62,199 are declared Pothole free. However, BBMP receives a large number of complaints daily that leaves the city under pressure to fill hundreds of potholes in the heavy monsoon rains. In September, four days before India's moon mission "Chandrayan",

Badal posted a video on Twitter tagging civic authorities. In the video, he is seen wearing a spacesuit and imitating astronauts while he was walking on the pothole-filled Tunganagar Main Road in North Bengaluru.

Just 24 hours after Badal's "moonwalk" in a viral video, the public's attention was drawn to the rising pothole issue



Badal imitating an astronaut in Pothole-filled Tunganagar

Image Source: YouTube

civic authorities immediately took action for damage control. Badal said, "It doesn't make it to the

news unless someone dies or suffers serious injuries because of potholes. This is why I decided to bring them to the notice of the civic agency through my art."

He created an artwork near one of the busiest roads in the city, Cubbon Road junction. The prodigious pothole has Sandalwood actress Sonu Gowda as a mermaid sitting inside it and playing with water. This trending artwork caught BBMP's attention to immediately fix the pothole. Badal said, "I think artistically and this is how I manage to attract the civic officials". Badal has created about 50 artworks highlighting civic issues in Bangalore. He was all over the internet for an installation where he made a crocodile

dummy emerge from a pothole. A pothole was converted into a grill and artificial meat was installed. In another artwork, he dotted a sewage-filled crater with artificial lotuses. Badal said, "Bengaluru roads are my canvas".



Sonu Gowda as a Mermaid sitting in a pothole at Cubbon road

Image Source: Badal

Bengaluru civic activist, AnanthRam, tweeted, "Badal's artwork is the reason why the infrastructural issues are outlooked in the city".

Badal is currently painting the streets of Bengaluru to urge people to take the right precaution during the pandemic as he notices people not taking precautionary measures. Such artistic initiatives are carving out revolutionary changes in the administrative system of the Valley.

Sylheti; Neither Assamese nor entirely Bengali

Yagnoseni Das

Indians, to a large extent are unfamiliar with the existence of Sylheti Hindus residing in the remote parts of the north east. Hence, their language Sylheti too, stays unheard of.

Sylheti is an Eastern Indo Aryan language spoken in the Surma river basin, now a large part of the Sylhet Division in Bangladesh, and in the Barak river basin in the neighboring Indian States of Assam, Manipur, and Tripura. Sylheti is minoritized and politically unrecognized as a language in either Bangladesh or India. Unlike most linguists, some still consider it to be an informal version of Bangla rather than an Independent language. In the Barak Valley of Assam where the majority of people speak in Sylheti, Bengali is the official language. Today, Sylheti survives only as a spoken language and is gradually losing its footing. There is an evident shift in the Sylheti speaking regions in India as Bengali has been noticeably replacing Sylheti. Even some of the native speakers often look down upon the language with claims that the language has no beneficial relevance. Parents do not speak to their children in Sylheti anymore. This has put a check in the continu-

ation of the language's legacy. There is also a fear that the newer generation might develop a habit of speaking only an intermingled version of both standard Bengali and Sylheti due to the linguistic similarities and end up speaking neither of the languages properly. "The habit of speaking regional dialects such as Sylheti don't seem to hold much relevance among the newer generations", says Mr. Suparna Das, a government employee based in Silchar, Assam.

"My ancestral roots are in Panchakanda, a region in Srihatta District, then part of the undivided Bengal. Me and my siblings grew up speaking in Sylheti and only got introduced to the standard Bengali in our schools. The younger generations of Sylheti Bengalis mostly branch out to the mainland to seek better life opportunities and naturally, become more used to speaking in the language that is more prevalent there", adds Das.

Bengalis across India and Bangladesh typically speak in their regional dialect, and write in standard Bengali. Spoken Bengali encompasses a range of dialects and the one spoken around Kolkata came to be considered the standard. Where standard Bengali



Sylheti speakers within Bangladesh and Northeast India.

Image Credits: en.wikipedia.org

In 1971, East Pakistan, which had a dominant population of mostly ethnic Bengalis went on to form Bangladesh. Therefore people of the same linguistic ethnicity now resided side by side, divided by the political border.

In 1961 in Silchar, in Assam's Cachar district, people demonstrated intense protests against the imposition of Assamese as the state's only official language.

Following that standard Bengali was established as the district's official language, whereas Sylheti did not get any recognition. Language for ethnographic groups is not just for self-expression but is also a defining mark of ethnic identity. Half of the world's 6500 languages are endangered and their survival depends on the knowledge and maintenance. And it is essential to remember that, with the extinction of a regional language also comes the risk of the demise of history of that ethnic community.

Historically, undivided Greater Sylhet (geographically composed of both Surma and Barak river basins) was part of the region of Assam in British colonial India. But after the creation of independent India and Pakistan following the Partition of 1947, while Barak Valley remained in India, Surma Valley became a part of East Pakistan.

Accelerating towards an Electric Era

Disha Palkhiwala and Rhea Varghese

Karthik Athreya and Arpit Chauhan are students of Gujarat Technological University (GTU) in Ahmedabad, who are currently pursuing their MBA in Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Venture Development from the Graduate School of Management Studies. The duo gave us an insight into their creation; a battery-operated motorbike that aims to reduce carbon emission significantly.

How did you come up with the idea of making a battery-operated kit? What inspired you to convert this thought into reality?

In 2001, Reva was the first company ever to introduce the concept of electric cars in the Indian market, which is commercially available till date due to its lingering popularity among the masses. It is now owned by Mahindra and Mahindra. Our idea, however, emerged from Tesla's Roadster model developing its first electric car in 2008 with an Internal Combustion (IC) Engine with great efficacy. Since 2015, petrol prices started rising which eventually augmented the importance and necessity of electric vehicles in India. Our aim, therefore, is to make India electronically sound in the automobile sector 10 years down the line.

Since you both hail from Bengaluru and Bilaspur respectively, what made you establish your entrepreneurial roots in Gujarat?

If we compare the states in terms of better market acceptance, Gujarat undoubtedly tops the list. We were even receiving a grant of Rs. 40 Lakhs from GTU for our project. The developed battery has been worked upon for 6 long years to achieve the success of commercialising it.

What challenges did you face while developing the batteries?

The motor and controller of the battery were imported from China but the quality received was not appropriate for a country like India. Keeping in mind the current situation of the roads, the machinery imported weren't as energy efficient as they would be in countries having smoother roads. During our testing period, either the motor or the controller would burn when subjected to high pressure. Therefore, we invested 4-5 years to come up with our own motor and controller that could withstand the pressure exerted while driving.

How many types of kits are available?

As of now, there are three types of battery kits available - Battery kit to be operated only in motorbikes which will run for 80 km at its full capacity. Hub-motor access for two-wheelers, specifically for Activa, Access, and other gearless two-wheeler vehicles. It will be fitted to gauge its ability to bear the load of an electric battery.

Customizable battery whose capacity can be increased as per the customer's needs. It can be modified to run from a speed of 60 km/hr to almost 300 km/hr to suit our customer's requirements.

How is non-conventional energy a boon in disguise?

A standard two-wheeler vehicle working on a BS4 engine would emit 500gms of carbon and nitrogen per km while a BS 6 engine, which is considered to be eco-friendly, emits 350 gms per km.



GTU Students Karthik Athreya (left) and Arpit Chauhan (right) with their battery operated motorbike

Image Source: Karthik Athreya

Thus, our batteries made with lead-acid and lithium do not emit harmful smoke nor create noise pollution and will only release 50-60gm of carbon particles due to spot welding done on lithium batteries to fit them into the vehicle.

What are your plans to further develop the technology in the future?

Being the co-founders of Erkey Motors for 2 years, we are planning to monopolize the Indian market with electric two-wheelers and electric agricultural vehicles.

The market has a very strong customer base of two-wheeler vehicles since the majority of our country's population falls under the middle-class category, so we want to capture this opportunity in order to establish a national presence by 2022. The motorbike will be commercialised in Gujarat in the month of April or May 2021.

India, being an agrarian economy, depends upon its farmers to sustain its livelihood and since they face difficulties due to rising petrol prices, we are planning to make batteries for tractors and other agricultural vehicles by 2025.

Is offline Marketing relevant in the Digital decade?

An online education startup's offline experiments

Debomita De

"I thought digital marketing was the thing ahead, especially when everything shifted online. But I was wrong", said Ustab Chakraborty, Assistant Director and Communication and Marketing Officer, Tabula Rasa, an online education startup based in West Bengal. At a time when digital forms of marketing are sought by Industries and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), this institute has resorted to experimenting with offline marketing strategies to target their audience. Their aim of flourishing in the countryside is proving to be effective with the experiment.

According to Chakraborty, it was only after he started working that

he realised the relevance of traditional marketing strategies and that, "the world still hasn't moved on from offline to online spaces."

Starting in July 2020, Tabula Rasa followed the conventional methods of describing their demography and making plans around it. This was not working, as their demography was not large enough for effective analysis and coming up with new ideas was a challenge during the pandemic. So they started using offline modes of marketing as their primary source for reaching students. "We send out people to go and talk to students and guardians and while promoting ourselves we also get feedback on their demands and require-

ments", he said while talking about different strategies employed by them. Word of mouth plays an important role and acting upon that, the team goes out with microphones and megaphones on a cart spreading their name across villages. Experimenting with methods, their recent focus is on Network Marketing, a model that relies on a network of representatives to grow or promote an organization.

Explaining, Chakraborty said, "We don't approach people directly but through friends of friends." Being a new approach they do not have a specific network in place and so its effectiveness cannot be judged yet. What started as a conversation between

two friends, became a potential idea from the marketing standpoint. The organization decided to participate in a village fair in Jamalpur in February 2021. They went on to demonstrate science experiments and conduct quizzes. Chakraborty is of the opinion that their aim is to gather data and it made sense to reach out at a place where a number of people would congregate. "It's a fair, kids will be there," he added.

After this event they had a number of enquiries coming in, making the approach successful. He agrees that offline marketing has its own drawbacks in terms of analytics,

Rising Fuel Prices – Will buyers adopt EVs?

Pradyumna Kalagi & Nishit Navin

In recent weeks, petrol and diesel prices across the country have reached an all-time high. In some towns like Sri Ganganagar in Rajasthan, petrol prices crossed Rs. 100. For many, the constant hike has made travelling an expensive affair. “The constant rate at which fuel prices are rising pinches me every time I go out to fill petrol.” Says Aniqua Sheikh, a resident from Pune and a Design student. Aniqua’s daily commute sums up to thirty-six kilometres. “I spend a hundred rupees per day. That’s expensive for a student like me.” She adds. Electric Vehicles (EVs) are said to be one of the solutions to the problem. Running an electric moped or a car is a much cheaper option. It seems some customers are migrating to EVs for their long-term cost savings. A survey by JMK Research indicates that EV sales are on the rise. However, there remains some concerns with respect to EV ownership. Sanika lives on the outskirts of Pune and uses a car. She says the sharp rise in fuel prices have made travelling quite difficult for her. “I spend a lot more on just filling the car. Travelling has become a luxury. Even



Image Source: [pexel.com/ed-harvey](https://www.pexels.com/photo/white-electric-car-charging-station/)

cabs are not very cheap these days”. But right now, EVs are not a viable option for her. “An electric car or even a good electric scooter is too expensive. There’s not adequate charging infrastructure and range remains a problem.” Despite some apprehensions, players are optimistic towards EVs. “In the electric two-wheeler segment there are many options. We are providing customers with scooters having a wide variety of range. They can choose depending upon their needs.” Says Narendra Deo, founder of EZYRIDE – an affordable electric moped compa-

ny. “Moreover, you can uninstall the battery and take it to your house for charging. People shouldn’t be worried about range and charging anymore.” Deo also highlights the affordability of owning an electric moped. “It costs only 10 paisa per kilometer.” He believes that in the next five years, thirty percent of the market will be captured by electric two-wheelers. “From November-December to January-February, we have seen a sales increase of 150%.” Vinayak Phutane, a businessman, travels approximately 5000 kms a

month. He has started to face the brunt of the fuel price hike. He, too, has apprehensions about an electric car’s range and the price at which they come. But he thinks they are a good solution for travelling within the city. “I might consider getting an electric SUV for city drives. At least I’ll save some money with my intra-city drives in the long run.” He says. Vinayak also finds EVs attractive for their zero-emissions. “I have my own house. I can consider installing a source of renewable energy and charging my car. That would make it 100% eco-friendly and I won’t need to spend a penny for running my car.” “Fuel prices and the understanding that fossil fuels won’t be around forever has made people think of alternative energy resources, including EV.” Says Srinivas Datar. He was previously in the electrical design team of Tata Motors and has minutely observed the trends in the Indian EV market. Datar believes that there is a tremendous potential for EVs in our country. “Of all the alternative energy technologies, EV innovation has come a long way.

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Fate of Indian Crypto Investors hang in Balance

Anuran Sadhu

The Central government has finally revealed their plan to introduce a bill on cryptocurrencies, the first of its kind, called the ‘Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill 2021’. The bill is drawn upon by the Inter-Ministerial Committee’s (IMC) 2019 report titled ‘Banning of Cryptocurrency and regulation of official digital currency’ which has suggested a ban on private cryptocurrencies, like Bitcoin, in India. But first, what is a Cryptocurrency? It is a decentralized form of digital money, based on blockchain technology. It can be directly transferred online without a third-party mediator like a bank. Bitcoin and Ethereum are among the 5,000 different cryptocurrencies in circulation. Earlier in India, efforts have been made to restrict cryptocurrency transactions. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had banned banks from processing transactions relating to cryptocurrency in 2018. However, the Supreme Court, vide judgment dated March 4, 2020, lifted the ban. This time, the government decided to take a stronger stance by introducing a bill.



History of cryptocurrency regulation in India

Image Source: [The Centre for Internet and Society](https://www.cis-india.org/)

So what does it mean to the 7 million Indians who have already invested in cryptocurrencies? Sanchari Goswami, a 23 year-old energy and infrastructure lawyer from Delhi made her first investment in cryptocurrencies in September, 2020. “I have invested in Bitcoin, Ethereum and Dogecoin through a private trading platform named WazirX, which acts as a middleman. A blanket ban on

cryptocurrency would mean I would have to cash out (liquidate) my entire crypto assets within a short time,” she said. Investors in India are likely to get 90 days to liquidate their investments after the passage of the Act. The lack of information regarding whether investors will be allotted extra days to dispose of their assets is a growing concern, besides the fear of potential loss. Anomito Paul, an Indian research

assistant in Computer Science and Mathematics at Drexel University, Philadelphia and a part-time investor said, “India is a huge potential market when it comes to retail investors. If this bill becomes a law, it will take away the opportunity from retail investors who rely on marketplaces like ‘Binance’ (cryptocurrency exchange company) for their day-to-day trading.” Anomito’s interest in cryptocurrency peaked in 2017 with the increasing hype of Bitcoin. He was fascinated by the concept of blockchain, a system of recording information in a way that makes it difficult or impossible to hack or cheat the system. He, then, invested his savings in Ethereum and Bitcoin. Anomito echoed his concerns regarding the 90 days which are likely to be given for the liquidation of the assets by selling to investors outside India. This will eventually hurt the government as money will be basically flowing out of the country,” said Anomito. I have gone through the draft of the bill and what worries me is the ambiguity,” said Sanchari, who works as a Junior Legal

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Pune faces Covid-19 Biomedical Waste Crisis

Damini Solanki

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) announces Maharashtra, the highest contributor of Covid-19 biomedical waste. Data highlights Mumbai, Pune as major problem spots with the huge number of Covid-19 cases in the city.

Since April 2020, more than 1,100 tonnes of Covid-19 biomedical waste has been collected and disposed of from Pune's both public and private hospitals. The city has only one incinerator on the premises of Common Bio-Medical Waste Treatment Facilities (CBWTF) at the Kailas crematorium located at Sangamvadi.

Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) outsourced the operations of CBWTF to a private firm – Passco Environmental Solutions Pvt. Lmt. (PESPL). PESPL's another biomedical waste processing plant is located in Pimpri-Chinchwad near Yashwantrao Chavan Municipal Hospital.

“There are 15 ward offices in Pune and all the offices are provided with one van each. These vans collect biomedical waste every day from around 5,500 healthcare establishments and transfer them to these two

plants for incinerating purposes”, said, Ajeet Deshmukh, Head, PMC Solid Waste Management Department.

The facility at Pimpri-Chinchwad was adequate but the facility at Sangamvadi is presently overloaded since it has one incinerator with a capacity to pro-



A man in personal protective equipment clears bags filled with covid related biomedical waste | Francis Mascarenhas/ Reuters

Image Source: Scroll.in

cess only 150 kg biomedical waste per hour. “The administration has considered the rising need of the city and has decided to put up two more incinerators at the Sangamvadi plant, each with

a capacity to process 300 kg per hour. These will be ready to function in a few months to increase the capacity to deal with the sudden rise in the inflow,” said Shivaji Daundkar, Municipal Secretary, PMC. Apart from the overload of biomedical waste, the

“A rapid increase in hospital bills can be observed because of the rise in biomedical waste coming along since the start of the pandemic. The rate of Rs 100 per kg charged by PESPL for disposing of Covid-related waste is not feasible for us and we even had to increase the staff to assist in the treatment of such waste, which added to the cost,” said Tryambak Waghchour, Chief Medical Officer, Nobel Hospital, Hadapsar.

“It is also becoming challenging for PMC to collect biomedical waste from covid-19 patients who prefer to be quarantined at home rather than hospitals. However, the responsibility of collecting the medical waste from Covid-19 positive patients at homes is shifted to the Health Department and on the other hand, other garbage is collected by the Solid Waste Management Department of PMC”, said Ajeet Deshmukh.

Covid-19 biomedical waste includes masks, PPE kits, gloves, shoe covers, human tissues, needles, syringes, body fluids like dressings, cotton swabs, plaster casts, beddings contaminated with blood or body fluid, blood bags, etc.

city hospitals are upset over the large bills which come along with it. Passco Environmental Solutions previously submitted a bill of Rs 8.7 crore to the civic body.

Pamohi Bitumen Plant resumes operation, villagers seek respite

Anand Singha



Image Source: Anand Singha

Pamohi, a small village in Guwahati saw villagers walk out with placards on 31st January in a joint effort to fight against the ongoing industrial expansion in the remote area. The environment and the lives of local people have been adversely affected by the two Bitumen plants in the area.

The villagers fear that the continuous exposure to the pollutants released by the factory may lead to various health hazards. The factories are located near the Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary, harming the wetland and its ecology.

The residents claim that one Bitumen plant has been in operation for the last 7 years and despite multiple concerns raised by the local populace, the local authorities are turning a blind eye to it. In fact, permissions have been granted to another plant in the residential area, opposite the Parijat Academy.

Rongali Ingti, a resident of Pamohi narrates, “The essentials for setting up the Plant were brought at the dead of the night. We could hear the sound of big machines and equipment being carried to the area. We had no

idea that they were setting up a Bitumen manufacturing factory. Since then, they mostly operate at night. The sound from the factory is unbearable and doesn't let us sleep.”

She recalls, “the people and the gaon-bura (leader of the village panchayat) were not informed.

A protest was staged in front of the new plant on 31st January and we managed to put the factory and its operations to a halt for a few days.

When the MLA Ramendra Narayan Kalita visited the area along with other authorities, we thought they would help us but to our disappointment, he didn't even hear us out. The ACP of Azara, Nandini Kakati and OC Niranjana Bharali have also visited the site.

They tried to certify that there was no pollution in the area and concluded that everything is normal. The factory was given a green light to resume operations.” Local resident Nirmali Devi said, “Every morning the air is engulfed in the unpleasant smell of chemi-

icals. The water stored in the tanks is covered with a layer of black liquid on top. There's a layer of pollutants which cover the houses, inside and out.” She further asks, “the plant is set just outside the Parijat academy, is it ethical for them to open a Bitumen Factory right outside a school where hundreds of students study?”

When Samir Agarwala, Director, GL Publication Ltd was approached regarding the matter, he said, “The allegations made by the residents have no merit. We have two ongoing highway construction jobs from Guwahati airport to Boko. This is the reason why we took this plot of land on a rental basis.

We are taking all precautionary measures and have also replaced our machinery to prevent any harm to the environment. We did all of this keeping the safety of the villagers and the wetland in mind.”

“The machines operating as of now

The Four-Wheeled Healer of the Four-Legged

Sneha Mothey

“Nobody treats street animals or brings any sort of help to them. Most of the vets don’t even leave their clinic to go treat animals elsewhere. Right from the start i.e., when I joined the service in 1972, I knew that if the animals couldn’t come to me, I would go to the animals” remarked Dr. Dattaray Mahadev Aundhkar, one of the most senior Veterinary Practitioners in Pune. The 72-year-old veterinarian worked in the government service for more than 35 years but after his retirement, decided to open his own mobile clinic with the sole purpose of bringing help to both stray as well as domesticated animals. So, in April 2011, he equipped his car with all the necessary items he would need to treat them and started going around Pune, providing his services wherever needed. Since then, there has been no turning back.

The Bombay Veterinary College alumnus initially started this unique service in a motorcycle covering large distances. Later as he bought

his first car, he finally had some more space to store medicines, vaccines and other essential items. “I would even carry sterilized instruments with me if I had to perform surgery on animals.” said the senior vet.



Dr Aundhkar and his mobile clinic aka his car which contained all the necessary first aid kits, vaccines, etc.

Image Source: Dr Aundhkar

With his new car and the necessary equipment in place, he registered his number in the Just dial app and

that is when his mobile clinic started getting even more recognition. His mobile clinic would be active from 9am to 6pm on all week days. “Every day, after treating animals all morning, at exactly 1pm I would park my

vehicle somewhere safe and eat my lunch in the car” Dr. Aundhkar said. Covering roughly 80kms per day,

he used to treat around 8 to 10 animals every day. “I didn’t even have a driver or an assistant. Only when I had to perform surgery, I would get an assistant vet to come along.”

The doctor would then get calls stating different kinds of difficulties, from maggot wounds and injuries to complications during childbirth but the most problematic one would be abandonment of pets.

He has helped animals find a loving new home after their owners refused to keep them anymore. For 10 years, his mobile clinic was active but due to the worsening COVID -19 conditions in Maharashtra, it has temporarily come to a halt. While he continues to operate from his private clinic situated in Karvenagar, Pune, he remains hopeful that when the situation in the state eventually improves, he’ll be back on his wheels saving one animal a day.

Belpahari - The Unknown Land

Souvik Saha

A three-hour-long train journey from Howrah station to Jhargram station, then another 90 minutes drive towards Binpur will take you to a lovely place, in the lap of the mountains, called Belpahari. It is situated in the West Midnapore district of West Bengal. You will enjoy the luxury of nature with its unnamed beauty.

You will also be able to identify the contrast between the natural beauty of the place and the struggles of the community staying there. Naxalites, fighting for their rights and necessities, control the Belpahari region. Dinesh Sabar, a local resident, said, “We don’t need luxuries but the basic ration will help us fight for our rights”. Another local resident, Samir said, “Our everyday income is not more than 100 rupees! We don’t even get regular work.

Most of the residents’ main occupation is cutting trees. Unfortunately, few businessmen exploit the residents by offering only basic wages. And whatever they earn, they waste



A police vehicle set on fire allegedly by the Maoists

Image Source: Souvik Saha

it on Hariya”. Hariya is a type of beer locally made out of rice by the residents. Samir explained the condition of the residents and said that they mostly have one meal in a day that includes leaves and local vegetables. Communicating with the locals is a tough task as they are scared of any exposure with the outside world. Serious problems lie deep down the muddy broken walls as they don’t have any idea about In-

dia being an Independent nation.

Electricity seems to be their dream commodity. Basic amenities like health, drinking water, and education are yet to reach the red dusty roads of Belpahari. This tribal village is also deprived of any kinds of government identity proof. Rajesh Karmakar, a local police officer, said, “They don’t let us go into the village, we even tried many times with local government officials.

But to our disappointment, our cars are set on fire and we are even attacked, everytime we try”.

A philanthropic organisation, Amader Arpan, runs free school for children and provides basic meals and clothing to this tribal village of Sabar. The organisation also routinely arranges free medical camps to look after their medical needs. It has been found there is a huge lack of nutrition in this village. Their village is in the middle of open jungles which sometimes lead them to even fight against deadly wild animals like tigers.

The Philanthropic organisation Amader Arpan is really doing a commendable job to stand with these people and welcome them as our co residents of our nation. Maloy De Secretary of Amader Arpan urged the local government to provide basic aid and help these people.

March to Delhi: Agitation for Sarna code intensifies in Jharkhand

Rupesh Kumar & Sangam

Tribal outfits in Jharkhand accelerate their demands for a separate religious code (Sarna code) for the tribal people in the upcoming census (2021) of the country. Volunteers of different tribal organizations like Kendriya Sarna Samiti, Akhil Bhartiya Adivasi Vikas Parishad among others began their protest on 20th Feb in front of the Governor's house to voice their demand.

With the census around the corner, tribal groups are now planning to intensify their protests and move to Delhi to press for their demands.

“As there is no ‘OTHERS’ column in the census, we are left with no other choice but to include ourselves in six of the recognized religions and we can't accept that. If our demand is not met, we will boycott the upcoming census,” said Santosh Tirkey, General Secretary, Kendriya Sarna Samiti.

“We are going to organize a joint meeting of all the tribal organisations soon at the Morabadi ground, Ranchi to discuss our further course of action which includes a joint agitation in Delhi for a separate Sarna code,” Tirkey added. Overwhelmed by mass agitation for a separate Sarna religious code and the growing number of protests in various parts of the state, the

Jharkhand assembly on November



Image Source: Sangam

11 passed a resolution for the provision for a separate Sarna code for tribals. Chief Minister Hemant Soren tabled the proposal which unanimously got passed by a voice vote in the assembly. The resolution was then sent to the Centre seeking a separate code without the Governor's assent.

In census surveys during 1871-1951, there was a separate category for the tribal population. They were classified as ‘Animists’ in the ninth option under the column of religion in the census. This practice was discontinued from the 1961 census onwards.

Until 2011, they had the option to choose the ‘OTHERS’ category.

Opposition to the demand

Opposition in Jharkhand blames the Jharkhand government for fueling the demand by passing the resolution in the assembly. The Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India has refused to accept the demand on the ground that certain factions in tribals don't identify with Sarna and follow several religions like Gondi, Koya, Punem, Adi, etc. and approving one will lead to further demands.

Who are these Tribals and what is S a r n a ?

The word “Sarna” means “grove” and its followers consider themselves “Nature Worshippers” and pray to numerous deities like Singbonga, Marang

Buru etc. who are part of their folklore and culture. The elements of Jal, Jungle, and Zameen (water, forest and land) are the essence of Sarna faith. The practitioners of the Sarna religion belong to the Karmali, Lohra, Chik Baraik, Baiga, Munda, Oraon tribes among others.

Sarna faith does not have any religious books. “Hum aakriti ki nahi prakriti ki puja karte hain (We are not idol worshippers, we are nature worshippers),” said Birendra Oraon, a volunteer of sarna samiti. “The funerals in our religion are also different from others as we do both, bury and cremate our dead depending upon the cause and time of death and none of our religious rituals bear any resemblance to any other religion,” Oraon added.

The tribals claim their red and white coloured Sarna flag as the symbol of their sacred culture and belief system giving them a separate identity as a distinct religious community. “We want to protect and foster our cultural values and it is not possible without a separate religious code, and whether the Central Government approves our demand or not, as per the constitution we are well within our rights to safeguard our religious practices,” said Nikita Soren, Tribal Rights Activist.

Vapi's first solar power project to set its base in Chala.

Suranhi Srivastava

(Iede) The solar power plant project on Lakhemdev garden pond of Chala, Vapi will generate 90KW electricity per day. This will reduce the electricity bill upto 50% in the area.

“The project is being developed by the Vapi Municipal Corporation (VMC) at Chala pond, near 35 MLD water filter and sewage treatment plant situated near Namda road, thereby reducing the electricity bill of the filter plant up to 50%.” Sanjay Jha, Hydraulic Engineer at VMC said in a statement..

Gujarat Urban Development Company Ltd. (GUDC) is spending Rs. 3.70 lakhs for the development of the project. The initiative is being carried under the “Swarnim Jayanti Mukhyamantri Shehri Vikas Yojana” where it is in its final stages of completion.

Vitthal Patel, Chief of Vapi Municipal Corporation, remarked that the solar power will produce 90KW of



Image Source: Divya Bhaskar Vapi

electricity every day. With the success of this plan, the Municipal authorities are planning on expanding the project to other areas as well.

Vijay Rupani, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, in December 2020 announced the state's new solar power policy which will be valid for the next five years.

The policy has multiple incentives to

reduce the usage of coal-based power and move towards green energy. A government project of this scale was never seen before in this area. The rooftop solar power dealers in the city are quite expensive for an individual to opt for the same. Hence, Chala residents are excited about this project.

Tushar bhai Kakkad, a Shivalik Heights resident says, “I have not

seen the plant yet but the news itself is very compelling. The amount of electricity production through this project might surely lessen the overall cost in the area. Looking forward to it.”

Ketan bhai Kanabar, a resident of Balaji Tower, says, “I am not sure how much benefit a layman will receive because till now, we haven't obtained any relief regarding electricity issues.”

Ela ben Patel, a Chala Park resident said “people of Vapi do face a lot of electricity fluctuation problems and being an industrial hub, consumes a huge amount of power on a daily basis. Hence, projects like these offer tremendous help to the residents of Chala.

Thus, sChala residents are quite eager for this project to turn into a successful alternative to the existing problems in the area.

Contd. - “Marriage should be between a Spouse and a Spouse, not a Gender and a Gender”

a lot of flak for being homophobic in nature. Reacting to the statement, Suryansh Varma, a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, said, “I am pretty gutted. Ironically, the reason behind the verdict was that ‘it goes against Indian culture’ however it wasn’t until the British rule (Buggery Act) that homosexuality was looked down upon in India.

I feel for all the LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters who want to marry their partners but sadly won’t be able to anytime soon”. Another member from the community, who insisted on going by her initial ‘N’, stated, “It’s regressive and shameful. However, it’s unsurprising. During the hearings for the petition to decriminalise consensual same-sex sexual relations, the Centre had

clearly submitted that they’re okay with Section 377 being read down as long as there’s no attempt to obtain broader civil rights like marriage.

This is consistent with that”. The Center also asserted that despite the decriminalisation of Section 377 of IPC, the petitioners cannot claim a fundamental right for same-sex marriages being recognised under the laws of the country and that the judgment was “neither intended to, nor did it in fact, legitimise the human conduct in question”. “Is it a duality or hypocrisy? I don’t know what the right word is”, says Akassh K. Aggarwal, an activist, member of the LGBTQIA+ community, an Accessory Designer and a TEDx speaker, scrutinising over the fact that this very government in question brought the trans bill and consented the building of the ‘pride station’ in Noida.

He believes that the first step for mainstreaming LGBTQIA+ community members is giving them space in the family rather than denying their rights. Explaining the obstacles in legalisation of same-sex marriages, Shanu Pant, a law student, now pursuing her PhD, says, “the general view of the Centre

perceived from arguments in some of these matters show several grounds of objection against the validation of same sex marriages. For instance, in a petition filed before the Delhi High Court by a same sex couple to legalise gay marriage, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta representing the Indian



Image Source: Good Morning America

Government, has contended that same sex marriage is against Indian culture”. The Indian Constitution, unlike the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, doesn’t recognize the right to marry as



Image Source: NDTV

a fundamental or constitutional right. Though marriage is governed through various judicial laws, its recognition as a fundamental right has only developed through judicial decisions of the Supreme Court. Such declarations of law are binding

on all courts throughout India under Article 141 of the Constitution. Pant also mentioned an incident from last year where, in a matter before the Uttarakhand High Court, it was held that while same-sex marriage may not be legal, cohabitation and “live-in relationships” are protected by the law.

Elucidating the possible legal way forward, Pant states, “the amendment of personal laws for the validation of non-cisgender marriages does not seem to be an option at all,

to legalise non-cisgender marriages”. The petitioners countered the Government’s argument by citing how the Hindu texts acknowledged the existence of a number of non-cisgender genders and no ancient religious text defies them a marital status. The petitioners, furthermore, said that the government’s assertion on the presence of an offspring in a family unit implies that any marriage without a progeny is unacceptable.

“We need to normalise non-cisgender identities via creative channels like music, movies, and television shows—something that is already a challenge in a conservative nation like India, and is made harder by the clampdowns on free speech by the government”, ‘N’ added while speaking on how representation of communities plays an important role in pop culture.

Films like Dostana tend to normalise discrimination towards the community by deriving humors from homophobic jokes directed at them.

Over the years, though, Bollywood has attempted to improve its wrongdoings and mainstream the queer community with movies like Aligarh and Margarita with a Straw. These ventures have helped in sensitizing the general public about the inclusion of people with non-cisgender identities.

Even after the Center’s homophobic response, Akassh has high hopes and believes, “its only a matter of time (before same-sex marriages are legalised in India)”. “The queer community really needs to push it forward and make the court realise that this is the need of the hour. Our voices

will only be heard when they see the faces behind”, Akassh concluded.

The community continues to fight for its right as the case is pending before the Delhi High Court.

since it would face strong opposition from religious organisations. Therefore, perhaps the amendment of the Special Marriage Act, 1954 or its judicial reading down on the grounds of discrimination of the community might be the way forward

Contd. - Covid-19 – Kerala and its contradictory curve

Following the civic elections in December 2020, there was a substantial rise in Covid 19 cases.

Despite the fact that the polling process was staggered, the spread of Covid 19 was inevitable in all these states. Much obvious, the state stands high chances in witnessing yet another spike in the numbers in the 2021 elections, decided to be held in April. In this alarming situation, the precautions to be adopted remain the same as advised by the Health Ministry.

Kerala's firm but humane approach has been repeatedly appreciated not only on a national level but also by The Washington Post, The Economist and non-English media houses in West Asia, Africa and Europe. These talk volumes about the state's capacity to contain the spread of a virus in the most desirable way. Hopefully, the state that has well combated the Nipah virus outbreak, will flatten the curve at the earliest.

Contd. - Arrival of students at schools are breaking down the year-long silence of lockdown

drastic shift in operational and management functions and decisions. To strike a balance between health and education, her school's administration informed the students regarding the mandatory safety protocols to be followed and made it compulsory for them to obtain consent from their parents for attending classes on campus. Her team made sure to divide the students and teachers into different sections and set a proper timeline with multiple shifts for them to ensure that safety guidelines and social distancing norms were being implemented. She took separate sessions with the students to instill in them, a sense of positivity after a stressful year and motivated the teachers to complete their syllabus. Nagar Palika Vidisha supported her management team and also made sure to get the school campus sanitized twice a day. Regular temperature checks were conducted and sanitizers were installed in every classroom, along with an isolation room prepared for emergencies. An informative session was organized for the female students to make them aware of the sanitary hygiene regulations that needed to be followed. Metropolitan cities like New Delhi saw a huge gap in terms of access to technology between private and government school students. In an attempt to fill this gap, almost 90% of students between grade 8 and 11 of Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Rohini have been willingly attending offline classes since January 18th. "It was difficult to comprehend students who were receptive to the concepts discussed in online classes

from those weren't. As the 10th standard board exams are approaching, it felt like a step in the right direction. Students are able to resolve their doubts in a better way in these revision classes," said Mrs. Yogeeta Gautam, a maths teacher who preferred the offline method over e-learning. She mentioned the protocols being strictly followed on campus, including the teachers having an-hour duty each to ensure no overcrowding took place near the washrooms.

Looking from the students' perspective, coming back to school was a bittersweet moment for Aishanya, a 12th standard student at N.K. Bagrodia Public School, Delhi, "Since it's my last year at school, I feel sad, but happy at the same time because my studies will be taken better care of from now onwards." "Going back to school, post-lockdown felt like a celebration for us, as our lives back home were nothing but a monotonous routine with nothing to look forward to," says Raj Kushwah, a 10th standard student at Government H.S.S. Excellence School in Vidisha.

Grave challenges lie ahead, but students and teachers are quite excited to head back to school. Will the conflict between education and health overshadow the knowledge-gaining process as we come together to adapt ourselves to the new normal? time alone will tell.

Contd. - What comes first: Health or Education

as this would enable them to attend classes on campus if required. With regards to the above, in a unique turn of events, a large number of students protested near the Vice Chancellor's office in Jamia Millia Islamia University (JMI), New Delhi, on February 17, demanding that the university be reopened. They proposed the idea of blended learning to solve the problems that students are facing due to the online medium. Mohammad Haris, a student of the Mass Communication department in JMI, was an active participant of these protests.

He runs an Instagram handle named Mehfil-E-Jamia, which played an integral role in informing students of the ground reality of the reasons behind these protests. According to him, the students who are demanding that the university be reopened are not asking that all students be required to join at the same time. Instead, they're appealing for a phased re-opening, with adequate safety protocols in the form of sanitizers and body temperature checking mechanisms in place. The demand for offline classes or mixed learning stems from the fact that many students do not

have access to the requisite infrastructure to attend online classes, whether in terms of a lack of access to laptops and phones, or internet connectivity issues. Moreover, multitudes of students are enrolled in courses that require lab & research work, which are accessible only on campus. The demand for offline classes arises from the belief that e-learning has intensified the digital divide, making it highly inequitable. According to the All India Students' Association (AISA), the university administration has promised students a phased reopening of the campus sometime in March. Therefore, a divide exists on two levels in the students' community with regards to the reopening of colleges. On one level, there is a divide between students who have grown accustomed to the online mode versus students who are facing issues due to the screen fatigue taking a toll on their mental and physiological health. On the other hand, a division between students having easy access to laptops/phones and a good internet connection and those who don't have access to the same exists, due to which they are forced to urge the colleges to reopen for offline/hybrid mode of instruction.

Contd. - Delhi parents raise concern over offline exams

them, a sense of positivity after a stressful year and motivated the teachers to complete their syllabus. Nagar Palika Vidisha supported her management team and also made sure to get the school campus sanitized twice a day. Regular temperature checks were conducted and sanitizers were installed in every classroom, along with an isolation room prepared for emergencies. An informative session was organized for the female students to make them aware of the sanitary hygiene regulations that needed to be followed. Metropolitan cities like New Delhi saw a huge gap in terms of access to technology between private and government school students. In an attempt to fill this gap, almost 90% of students between grade 8 and 11 of Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Rohini have been willingly attending offline classes since January 18th. "It was difficult to comprehend students who were receptive to the concepts discussed in online classes from those weren't. As the 10th standard board exams are approaching, it felt like a step in the right direction. Students are able to resolve their doubts in a better way in these revision classes," said Mrs. Yogeeta Gautam, a

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Grave challenges lie ahead, but students and teachers are quite excited to head back to school. Will the conflict between education and health overshadow the knowledge-gaining process as we come together to adapt ourselves to the new normal? time alone will tell.

Contd. - Beyond Palm trees and Beaches

Other components such as color, glue, and glaze are exclusively purchased from Portugal. Goa is affiliated with its beaches, palm trees, and nature but it is also home to rich culture and heritage kept alive by a few who have turned their hobby and interest into a full-time job for the future generations to witness their past glory.



Image Source: Amogh Golatkar

Contd. - Is offline Marketing relevant in the Digital decade?

which help in ensuring effectiveness of an employed strategy and monetary resources. The importance of digital marketing has risen and even they plan to have a strategy in the near future but the traditional methods are not obsolete. He stresses that these methods are, "still alive, still kicking and we have made it work."



Image Source: bigrox

Contd. - Rising Fuel Prices – Will buyers adopt EVs?

Look at Tesla in the US. It is outselling many gasoline powered cars." Datar is confident about EV technology but believes that it will take some time for electric cars to cost the same as petrol or diesel cars. "Infrastructure is a huge challenge. EVs will become common only after 10 years in India." Datar acknowledges the limitations with respect to range, charging stations and adapters.

"Car batteries are heavy and complex. Unlike some two-wheelers, car batteries are not portable." "Fast actions must be taken by the government. Even today, we are struggling to supply electricity to the villages. A proper infrastructure is needed for faster adoption of EVs." Datar says that corporations like Tata Motors and Mahindra can provide technical assistance but investments and policies must be looked

into by the state and the central government.

Despite the rising fuel prices, EVs don't seem to be an immediate option for everybody. The high price of EVs, their limited range and inadequate charging infrastructure are some of the challenges faced by the sector. Yet, as evident by recent sales figures, EVs are slowly but steadily garnering popularity. Multiple brands are working on EVs. Brands like Hyundai are working for India-specific EVs.

The imminent launch of Tesla, the world's largest electric car manufacturer is another encouraging sign. As resonated in the opinions of the public as well as industry experts, the government needs to invest an adequate amount of time and money into making EVs more viable for India.

Contd. - Pamohi Bitumen Plant resumes operation, villagers seek respite

at the site have been certified safe by the Pollution Control Board. Earlier, the fuel used for the machines was LOD Diesel, different from the regular one. LOD produces black smoke but it was used to cut down on the expenses as it's much cheaper than the regular one. But after various concerns raised by the villagers, we switched to using the

normal kind", said Pranjal Talukdar, the site operator.

The villagers however have submitted two memorandums to the District Administration and the Pollution Control Board of Assam. Despite the efforts made by the people in charge of the factory, the residents are still unhappy with the way things are progressing.

Contd. - Fate of Indian Crypto Investors hang in Balance

Manager at Manikaran Power Limited. Uncertainty looms over the investors' heads as the bill does not clearly state which cryptocurrencies will be banned. Lack of details has created an air of apprehension in the investor circle regarding selling their investments. Swarnadeep Ghosh, a fourth-year Electronics and Communication engineering student at Kalyani Government Engineering College made his first investment in August, 2020 through WazirX. By the end of December he liquidated all his investments. "RBI's unclear stance had created a hesitancy in the investor circle. People were apprehensive about a bill like this and I had raked in a

50% profit by December so I decided to quit," said Ghosh, who lives in Bandel, West Bengal. Uncertainty on whether the proposed law will ban holding or trading crypto assets in India or whether it will apply to Indians anywhere in the world is also a concern for someone living abroad like Anomitro. Currently, there are 7 million Indians holding crypto assets of over \$1 billion. A blanket ban will

not only affect these investors, but also businesses like private trading platforms, employment of

That makes us wonder, what is the government's rationale behind such stringent policies on cryptocurrencies? It believes the volatile nature of cryptocurrencies is a financial risk to the consumers and an unregulated currency can be used for criminal activities and money laundering. Investors too, agree on the volatility of cryptocurrencies. As Anomitro said, "All cryptos are expected to be volatile in their early stages. However, with widespread use, every crypto has the potential to become stable. And in the long term, they will be quite stable, if not more, as fiat currencies. The government can incorporate awareness campaigns to inform the population of financial risks instead of banning."

The bill was anticipated by the investors but it still comes as a surprise to many that a government with an agenda of digitizing the payment system in India is restricting the growth of cryptocurrency. The bill drafted by the Indian government is yet to be released. Clarity will emerge on the nature of and the extent to which the government will regulate cryptocurrencies in India, when made public. Till then, the fate of Indian cryptocurrency holders hang in balance.



Image Source: The Next Web

thousands of people, and the economy as a whole. The government may choose to bring regulations instead of a ban. Here is a catch too. "Cryptocurrencies are decentralized and they cannot be regulated by RBI as easily as a fiat currency (government-issued currency like rupee or dollar). So, a forced regulation of crypto assets will only disrupt the entire system," Sanchari said.

- Kajol, Harshita, Suramya Kaushik

8th March - not just a day but a celebration of womanhood. It doesn't take a day to recognize a woman's strength but a constant effort to respect, love and honour her. This women's day, INK celebrates the valour, strength, emotion, warmth, dedication and devotion of women. This takes us to the "Devotional Drive" of a Delhi-based woman who fought covid, society's stereotype and economic hardships but didn't step back to extend her helping hand. She climbed the hurdle stones and went on to become an inspiration.

43-year-old, Nisha Chopra runs an NGO to support the education of under-privileged girls. She also runs a programme called 'Sai-Samarpan' under which she educates girls aged between 12-22 years about the competitive world and to earn a living for themselves. In the beginning of the pandemic, her whole family, including herself, tested positive for Covid-19. After recovering, she started cooking and delivering free meals for Covid-19 hit families in Delhi NCR by the name, 'Devotional Drive'.

"It is like feeding unexpected guests coming home. It gives me the pleasure to serve and be there for them", says Chopra.

Can you tell us what inspired you to start the 'Devotional Drive'?

When my husband tested positive for Covid - 19, all 3 of us experienced the feeling of helplessness. Slowly, all of us tested positive. People started treating us as untouchables. My family went into quarantine and my children survived on fruits for 2 weeks. That time I realized how important it is to help Covid hit families. This is how we came up with the idea of the "Devotional Drive".

As your team provides free food to people, can you tell us how you prepare and distribute the meals?

As I also run an NGO in Faridabad, we aim to feed at least 100 families per day, regardless of how many members are there in the family. Initially, I, along with a small group of women who came on board, cooked the meals. Later, we also got a few volunteers who helped with the distribution of meals.

As coronavirus cases are rising again, what is your plan on how you will expand the service ?

These days as coronavirus cases are increasing again and the number of volunteers is decreasing, I have taken up the responsibility of collecting food from different homes and then going out, with a couple of volunteers, to give them to those who are in need. We do not charge people anything for the food. All we ask them is to promise us that in the coming future they too should come to aid the families around them that require assistance in their time of need, just as we helped them.

Since you have been working for women's education, do you feel that during the pandemic the access of education for girls from rural areas has been negatively affected due to the lack of availability of adequate technology?

The whole world is adjusting to the reality of the covid-19 pandemic by finding alternatives. Corporations are allowing their workforce to work from home while schools and colleges are moving classes online. Online education creates a left out impact on rural students more than those who live in cities. In rural areas, a very low percentage of students possess desktop computers or laptops. They have to depend on their family member's mobile phones for learning and attending classes. It becomes tough for them to consume as much information as possible on a small screen for long hours.

What is your next goal for the service of humanity ?

As the COVID-19 cases increase our next goal is to expand our team. I along with my team have started covering the entire Delhi-NCR area. Also as of now, if someone in another location desperately needs our services and asks us for help, we will try our best to send them food at least once a day, if not twice.



Food packages for people in need
Image Credit: Kajol

On International Women's Day, is there a message that you want to send across to all women out there?

I will just say "if you can't find light, then be the light".

