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EDITORIAL

The Andaman Express

06 September 2021

Crackdown on reality shows

It's not quite the Cultural Revolution but Xi Jinping's "National Rejuvenation" is certainly doing its best to catch up. The latest target for Chinese regulators is popular culture, particularly vote-in shows a la American Idol. The government, in an ostensible bid to reduce the irrational idolatry around celebrity, has told broadcasters to "resolutely put an end to sissy men and other abnormal aesthetics" and instead "vigorously promote excellent Chinese traditional culture, revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture".

There has been some concern about declining fertility rates in China, which is being cited as a reason for the crackdown on "sissy men". More likely, though, is the fact that popular culture — despite strict government controls — has a tendency to take in elements from various sources. The androgynous aesthetic that has the party-state so worried is the hallmark of K-Pop and Japanese culture — two countries that the Chinese Communist Party is unlikely to want as soft power influences among the youth. And, as with other countries with strong leaders, including democracies, it is not the irrational worship of celebrities that has the Chinese authorities worried — it's just celebrating the "wrong" kind of celebrity.

"Chinese traditional culture", coupled with "revolutionary" and "advanced socialist culture" is nothing more than a summary of "Xi Jinping Thought", recently incorporated in school and college syllabi in the Middle Kingdom. Too often, it is easy to forget that the political cults of personality — whether on the Left or Right — are among the most dangerous and irrational kinds of idol worship. Add to that an obsession with chest-thumping masculinity, and the real reason for the aversion to "idol shows" becomes clear. Leaders of a certain kind, eager to be the only objects of veneration, are just eliminating the competition. When it comes to the Chinese idol, there can be only one.

54th Engineers'..

Andaman Lakshadweep Harbour Works, Mohanpada Port Blair between 9:30AM to 1PM. The technical presentations will be on the Theme "Engineers for Skill Development & Employment in Combating COVID". The interested Engineers for presentation shall submit their presentation in soft and hard copy to Honorary Secretary Andaman & Nicobar State Centre latest by 10th September 2021. The presentation shall be of the maximum duration of 15-20 minutes. The ANSC has also decided to award Certificate of Appreciation and memento to three

M.A Sajid appointed..

Shri. Kuldeep Rai Sharma & Shri. Ranglal Haldar for honouring him with the responsibility of NSUI State President for the second term. He said that he will work with full energy to strengthen the organization as well as the

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local Tech Samaritans who have responded to the COVID-19 crisis with labour and guts and provided technical services to the society to tide over the crisis. The local Engineers/Technicians shall submit their Bio-Data and description of their contribution in COVID-19 crisis duly signed by them and their organizations/Department head to Honorary Secretary latest by 10th September 2021 ANSC. For any further clarification, Honorary Secretary Andaman & Nicobar State Centre Port Blair can be contacted in mobile number 9434288234.

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Congress party and uphold constitutional values. He assured to work for the students community of A&N Islands round the clock and requested youths to join the hands of Congress for overall development of the Islands.

Three persons..

seizures etc. as per the legal procedure. The persons were booked for the violation of Gambling Regulation with the seizure of bet money amounting to 1.07 Lakhs. The raid and legal proceedings were done by SHO Mayabunder Insp. Usman Ali under the supervision SDPO/

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Diglipur Shri. R.K.Sharma. Strict action by the district police on any information given by the public is winning the trust of the people and they are coming forward to state the information with police, though most of them prefer that their names be kept secret.

Centre provided over 66 crore 89 lakh vaccine doses provided to States, Union Territories so far

VACCINE DOSES	(As on 5 September 2021)
SUPPLIED	66,89,86,635
PIPELINE	1,56,96,450
BALANCE AVAILABLE	4,37,83,160

Over 66 crore 89 lakh vaccine doses have been provided to States and Union Territories so far. These vaccines have been given through the Central government free of cost channel and direct state procurement category. More than 1.56 crore doses are in the pipeline. The Union

Health Ministry said, over 4.37 crore balance and unused COVID vaccine doses are still available with the States and UTs. The Ministry said the Centre is committed to accelerating the pace and expanding the scope of COVID-19 vaccination throughout the country.

EFFORTS GROW TO STAMP OUT USE OF PARASITE DRUG IVERMECTIN FOR COVID-19

Health experts and medical groups are pushing to stamp out the growing use of a decades-old parasite drug to treat COVID-19, warning that it can cause harmful side effects and that there's little evidence it helps.

With a fourth wave of infections, more Americans are turning to ivermectin, a cheap drug used to kill worms and other parasites in humans and animals.

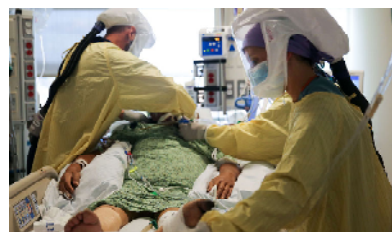
Federal health officials have seen a surge in prescriptions this summer, accompanied by worrying increases in reported overdoses. The drug was even given to inmates at a jail in northwest Arkansas for COVID-19, despite federal warnings against that use.

On Wednesday, podcaster Joe Rogan, who has been dismissive of the COVID-19 vaccine, announced he had tested positive for the virus and was taking the medication.

Ivermectin has been promoted by Republican lawmakers, conservative talk show hosts and some doctors, amplified by social media to millions of Americans who remain resistant to getting vaccinated. It has also been widely used in other countries, including India and Brazil.

This week, the top US professional groups for doctors and pharmacists appealed for an immediate end to the drug's use outside of research.

We are urging physicians, pharmacists, and other prescribers trusted healthcare professionals in their communities to warn patients against the use of ivermectin outside of FDA-approved indications and guidance, said the American Medical Association and two pharmacist



groups.

Large studies are now underway in the US and overseas to determine if the drug has any effect on preventing or blunting COVID-19.

The latest plea follows similar warnings from federal and state regulators who are tacking side effects and hospital admissions tied to the drug.

Louisiana and Washington issued alerts after an uptick in calls to poison control centres. Some animal feed supply stores have run out of the drug

because of people buying the veterinary form to try and treat COVID-19.

There's just not any good evidence right now suggesting this is a good treatment for treating or preventing COVID-19, said Randy McDougall, a pharmacist in Iowa City, Iowa.

Ivermectin is approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat infections of roundworms and other tiny parasites in humans and animals like cows, horses and dogs.

Tablets are used for internal parasites while ointments are used to treat head lice and other skin infections. The generic drug works by paralyzing the worms and killing their offspring.

The FDA has tried to debunk online claims that animal-strength versions of the drug can help fight

COVID-19.

Taking large doses of this drug is dangerous and can cause serious harm, the FDA warned in a public advisory. The drug can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, delirium and even death, said the agency.

Dr David Boulware of the University of Minnesota says the drug's side effects are mild at two or even three times the usual human dose. But formulations for farm animals might contain 1,000 times what's safe for humans.

It's pretty easy to get into toxic levels, said Boulware, an infectious disease specialist. All these concentrated doses that are meant for a 2,000 pound horse can certainly get people sick or hospitalized for toxicity.

Boulware says he prescribes the drug to patients a few times a year in the US and more routinely when working in countries where intestinal parasites are common. But he and other experts have been alarmed by the explosive growth in US ivermectin prescriptions. By mid-August, US pharmacies were filling 88,000 weekly prescriptions for the medication, a 24-fold increase from pre-COVID levels, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Meanwhile, US poison control centres have seen a five-fold increase in emergency calls related to the drug with some incidents requiring hospitalization.

The CDC cited one case of a man who drank an injectable form of ivermectin intended for cattle. He suffered hallucinations, confusion, tremors and other side effects before being hospitalized for nine days.

The World Health Organization, the National Institutes of Health and other medical experts have also recommended against using it outside of carefully controlled patient studies. An NIH panel found insufficient evidence for or against the drug for COVID-19, calling for more large, well-designed trials.

The experts noted that early laboratory research showed ivermectin slowed the replication of coronavirus when grown in monkey cells. But such studies are not useful for gauging real-world effectiveness in humans. And they noted other research suggesting the drug would need to be given at levels 100 times the standard dose to have antiviral effects in humans.

The NIH is studying the drug in a large trial comparing a half-dozen established drugs to see if they have some effect against COVID-19.

Experts say those interested in ivermectin should ask about enrolling in such studies. By participating in a clinical trial you're not going to harm yourself and you're going to help society generate the knowledge we need to know if this works or doesn't work, said Boulware.

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AYUSH and Yoga Intervention by Yoga Break Practice and Immunity Booster Medicines Distribution, AYUSH Paushik Aahar vidhi, Dinacharya/ritucharya etc.

Awareness on 4 prevention of COVID-19: 1919 SMSV, which stands for Sanitation, Mask, Do Gaj Social distancing and Vaccination. And 5. Identification and advisory for SAM Children. The awareness program was led by Dr.B.D. Bishu Kumar MO (Homoeo) and Miss Vinu Kuma Instructor, Dr.Monika and Dr.Aabida from RBSC conducted SAM Survey and motivated mothers to increase complementary feeding with paushik Aahar and deworming and referral services when needed. At the outset Smt. Susan S Mathew, Mukya Sankha, ICDS and the doctors and mothers and explained in brief about Poshan Maah and the National Nutritional Mission objectives and Smt. Sujatha, CHO, Sub-centre, Nimbutala expressed gratitude to the Mothers and visiting team from CHC Rangat.

39 mining projects of Coal India face delays

State-owned Coal India Limited's 39 coal mining projects are running behind schedule on account of delays in getting green clearances and issues related to rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R).

This assumes significance in the wake of the country's power plants grappling with depleting stocks at their end. "14 coal projects with a sanctioned capacity of 836.48 mty (million tonnes per year) and a sanctioned capacity of Rs 1,19,580.62 crore are in different stages of implementation out of which 75 projects are on schedule and 39 projects are delayed," Coal India said in its report.

The major reasons for delays in implementation of these projects are delays in forest clearances and possession of land and issues related to R&R.

CLIL's nine coal projects, with a sanctioned capacity of 27.60 million tonnes per year and a sanctioned capacity of Rs 1,976.59 crore were completed with a total completion capital of Rs 1,958.89 crore during 2020-21.

Four offshoot projects belong to Western Coalfields Ltd (WCL), three of Central Coalfields Ltd (CCL) and two of Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd (MCL). WCL, CCL and MCL are subsidiaries of Coal India. One project with a sanctioned capacity of 1.4 million tonnes per year and a sanctioned capital of Rs 143.63 crore had started coal production during the year 2020-21, the report said.

CLIL arm South Eastern Coalfields Ltd (SECL) is the mining project that started production during FY21, it said.

Coal India accounts for over 80 per cent of domestic coal output.

Based on the demand projection in "Vision 2024" for the coal sector in the country and subsequent demand projection on CLIL, a road map has been prepared to project production plan in medium term. Under this, CLIL has envisaged one billion tonne coal production in the year 2023-24 to meet the coal demand of the country. To achieve this target, CLIL has identified major projects and assessed their related issues.



Food in the Andamans is an ode to the home left behind

Port Blair Sep 5: In the 1920s, the chief commissioner of the Andaman Islands, Lt Col M.L. Fearn, wrote to his cousin Rev. Harry Ignatius Marshall, head of the American Baptist Mission in Burma (now Myanmar), about the need for a "self-contained group of people to settle in the islands as labourers and cultivators". Soon a clutch of families—from the Karen ethnic community—was heading to the Andamans, ready to make the thick forested areas of the archipelago's middle island home. They took with them five-six rice varieties, including *chowchima*.

A pizza that gets cooked on the stove in Gururam

Saw John Xung Thong's family was part of the group. Today John, 49, who was born in the Andamans, and his wife, Dora, run a home-stay, Koh Hee, in Mayabunder (retd). They show these varieties on their menu, with dishes such as *moleyebar*, or boiled rice balls soaked in sugar water, and *meisegaw*, rice cooked in bamboo. He is also supporting a Karen cooperative society in a bid to keep alive the community's food, arts and culture. The initiative is called *arebustan*.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where the indigenous tribes remain reclusive, have seen waves of settlers from the mainland and parts of South-East Asia. Labourers from the Indian mainland, sent there by the British to build the Cellular Jail, preceded the Karen, and refugees from what would become Bangladesh were given shelter on Hav elock, one of the islands, in

1971. The cuisine, quite naturally, reflects these myriad flavours, with recipes passed down through generations and ingredients tweaked to adjust to what's available locally. Today, a handful of restaurants and home-stays are going beyond the usual Oriental-Continental fare to create a map of local flavours for travellers, adjusting to the safety requirements mandated by the pandemic.

Varun Sankaran Kutty and Kirti Kalyanduram of the boutique hotel Jalakara, on Hav elock island, have even created a sensitive dining experience for guests in collaboration with one of the families living in the interiors of a forest. They got to know them through phone of their cooks, who used to visit this family and the Mithas. They were very warm and had not been exposed to tourism much. The house had a wooden and iron, one could find chaps around with their super (baton) dry on them, chicken being cooked on a wood fire and chutneys made out of locally grown chillies. I thought of sharing this with



my guests but in a way that was not burly or disrespectful to the family," says Kutty. So, small groups are taken from Jalakara to the forest for this experience.

The Taj Exotica Andamans, too, show cases indigenous produce and flavours. Customised meals have replaced the typical city-style buffet format. The local cuisine at The Settlers restaurant is a tribute to the communities from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and West Bengal that have made the islands their home. "We're related to different parts of the islands, such as Mayabunder and Diglipur, to understand how cooking evolved in the islands. These insights have informed the six-course menu at the restaurant," says Brij Bhushan Rapal, the hotel's general manager.

There is, of course, seafood on the menu. There are dishes of raw banana, which is found in abundance on the islands. The two-acre farm on the property, managed by two locals of Bengali origin, grows indigenous ingredients such as vine spinach, a type of chili typical to the Andamans that rates quite high on the Scoville measure, fragrant wild coriander and wild curry leaves. Kutty is one of the first to have started working with home cooks—women whose husbands work as labourers—to create a trail of authentic cuisine for the staff of 16 at Jalakara. "We have also put this on our hotel menu." The women, initially hesitant, use ingredients such as the *barra*, a bushy country chutney, which is immensely flavoured and is made into a spicy dish. "Most guests enjoy it. And this helps motivate

our home cooks. Guests also take cooking classes from them," adds Kutty.

The local cuisine is ever-evolving. Earlier, when it was difficult to get ingredients from the mainland, communities learnt to adapt to local ingredients, incorporating coconut, papaya, the elephant ears plant, *nali* leaves and local pineapple in their dishes. "In the Andamans, you will find a huge *bhindi* that looks like it is on steroids. The one essential cooking item is mustard oil, which is brought from outside," says Kutty.

Everyday fare is heavily influenced by Bengali cuisine and the typical breakfast is *panta bhat*, or fermented rice soaked overnight, with small fish. On a festive occasion, this is paired with *ab thoria*.

The islanders eat three-four meals a day. "People on the island are very laid-back. Lunch consists of rice, vegetables, *dal* with fish head or some curries. Dinner is the most important meal as the entire family sits together. It usually comprises *ash*, *oregum*, a raw banana preparation, *choi chori* or *chilly salad*, a deep-fried potato, cabbage and pumpkin. Its rare for Bengalis to eat coconut-based gravy but one thing they eat is the *khatia* saar, or tamarind fish curry," says Kutty.

Fish is an essential ingredient in the cuisine of the Karen community as well. "In the eyes of the other settler communities of the Andamans, the Karen diet is closely associated with food items such as *ngapi* (fermented paste of dried shrimp or fish). It explains a chapter, Place, Space,

Identity And Transforming Cuisine Among The Karen Of The Andamans, in the 2020 book *Food And Power: Expressions Of Food-Politics In South Asia*, edited by K. Mukhopadhyay. The chapter has been authored by Shiba Desor, Manish Chandi and John of the Koh Hee home-stay.

The chapter highlights how the Karen in the Andamans developed their own markers of identity. For instance, the *me-to-pi*, a typical Karen dish in Myanmar that made by pounding glutinous rice, is not common in the Andamans. On the islands, a typical Karen meal would consist of soup, *ngapi*, *laado* (raw, boiled or steamed vegetables), fish or meat. "The Karens in Andamans cultivate 14 varieties of rice, 31 types of trees, 42 kitchen vegetables and herbs and 14 medicinal plants. These figures indicate how much the common perception, the Karens are not only paddy cultivators, but also avid gardeners dependent on kitchen gardens and orchards for any supplementary medicinal and flavouring additions to their cuisine," notes the chapter.

For Smita Madhusoodhan, an architect and artist based on Hav elock, the ability of Karen families such as John's to forage medicinal ingredients from the forest and use them in cooking with spices, *Burma dhaniya*, plant shoots is simply delightful. "The families here are proud of hosting and cooking for people," notes Kutty. "They have protected the recipes, passed down from generations of original settlers." This, he believes, is what will save the unique island cuisines of the Andamans.

PEOPLE WITH NO CO-MORBIDITIES DIDN'T HAVE POOR COVID OUTCOME

People with uncomplicated liver transplant and with no co-morbidities did "not have poor outcome" if they were affected by Covid, according to a new study.

The independent study was conducted by Max Super Speciality Hospital, Saket, under the aegis of Dr Subhash Gupta, the chairman of the hospital's centre for liver & biliary sciences.

The study was conducted on a batch of people who went for liver transplant since 2006, including those affected by COVID-19, to understand their response, as they are on "immunosuppressive medications" which predispose them to infections.

It was based on over 2,100 adult recipients of the transplant procedure at the hospital's department of gastroenterology and hepatology and the centre for liver and biliary sciences, and who have been under follow-up starting 2006, hospital authorities said Saturday.

The study has suggested that recipients with uncomplicated liver transplant cases and who had no co-morbidities, and were affected by Covid "do not have poor outcome".

Asked about recipients who had complicated transplant procedures, doctors said the severe ones also recovered on treatment,

and later they were administered the monoclonal cocktail therapy, and "responded well to it".

Typically, COVID-19 is associated with higher mortality among patients who have comorbidities or pre-existing medical conditions such as obesity, diabetes, coronary artery disease, chronic kidney disease and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

"It is an established fact that patients who have undergone liver transplant are on long-term immunosuppressive medications which predispose them to infections. The study is significant because the data regarding impact of SARS-CoV-2 infection in post liver transplant patients is conflicting, and risk factors for outcome are also not well defined," Gupta said.

While initial studies suggested that patients on immunosuppressive medications, such as liver transplant recipients, are at an increased risk of severe COVID-19 and mortality, subsequent evidence does not support this finding, he said.

The study shares the clinical characteristics, demographics and outcomes of SARS-CoV-2 infection in post-liver transplant population, the doctor was quoted as saying in a statement by the hospital.



CORONAVIRUS MUST KNOW FACTS

What Is 2019-nCoV?
A new strain of the coronavirus that infects humans and causes lower respiratory tract illnesses.

Who Is At Risk?
Common in people with cardiopulmonary diseases, weakened immunity, infants, and older adults.

What Are The Symptoms?
Fever, Cough, Breathing difficulty, Sore Throat, Runny nose, Headache and General Weakness.

What Are The Preventive Measures?

- Wash hands regularly using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water.
- Cover mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing.
- Avoid touching face, nose or mouth with dirty hands.
- Wear protective masks to avoid spreading into others.
- Stay at home if sick.
- Disinfecting and cleaning surfaces that you frequently touch.

Over 68 crore 46 lakh COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in country so far; National recovery rate stands at 97.42 pct

Over 68 crore 46 lakh COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered in the country so far under the National Vaccine Drive. In the last 24 hours, more than 71 lakh 61 thousand vaccine doses were administered yesterday. Over 42 thousand new COVID-19 cases were reported while more than 38 thousand people recovered in the last 24 hours. Three hundred eight people lost their lives during the period.

Till now, more than three crore 21 lakh people have recovered from COVID-19. Union Health Ministry said, the COVID recovery rate in the country now stands at 97.42 per cent. The active caseload stands at over four lakh ten thousand.

Over 17 lakh 47 thousand COVID tests were conducted yesterday. So far, 53 crore tests have been conducted in the country.

10 TIPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS DO NOT RISK YOUR LIFE

1. Stay at home with members of your household. If you are planning to go out, wear a face mask and other safety precautions.
2. Wash your hands often and well with soap and water or alcohol-based hand gel.
3. Disinfect surfaces you touch, e.g., like cell phones, door knobs, desktops etc.
4. The COVID situation is a stressful time for everyone, including your pet. Chat with or video-call friends and family to stay connected.
5. Limit how much social media and news you consume. Avoid rumors and misinformation by checking news from trusted sources.
6. Exercise or meditate at home.
7. Maintain a familiar routine - exercise and receiving physical therapy - to help you feel calmer and more in control.
8. Reach out to a trusted adult or professional if you need help or are feeling sad or stressed.
9. Do not leave your house if you are sick. Follow guidance from your health authorities on how to contain health services if you need medical care.
10. Listen to your local authorities for other advice and directions on how to stay safe.

Please people not share or use personal information, images, photos, video, health data, etc. on WhatsApp and other social media platforms. For more information, visit www.mca.gov.in.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Avoid close contact. Allow a 6 foot distance between you and other people.

6 feet

AVOID
Handshakes, Hugs and Large Crowds!

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Eligible and willing candidates may download the Union Bank of India job notification & apply online @ www.unionbankofindia.co.in. B.E./B.Tech/ MBA/ Any Degree are eligible to apply for this chance to start & develop careers at Union Bank of India. They will select candidates by conducting online exam/ personal interview/ group discussion. Applicants should submit the photocopies of educational qualification, age proof & other documents at the time of online application process for Union Bank of India jobs 2021. Online examination will be held on 03.10.2021. More details of Union Bank recruitment 2021, exam date, admit card, syllabus, selection list, merit list, results & upcoming job advertisements are uploaded at official website.

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ITBP Recruitment 2021, Apply 65 Constable Vacancies @ itbpolice.nic.in

ITBP Recruitment 2021 | Constable Post | 65 Vacancies | Last Date: 02.09.2021 | Apply Online @ itbpolice.nic.in. ITBP Recruitment 2021: Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force has issued the recruitment notification for the post of Constable (General Duty) under Sports Quota in the Sports disciplines. The ITBP invites both Male & Female candidates for filling up 65 vacancies for non-gazetted and non-ministerial for Group 'C' posts. These vacancies are not available for physically challenged persons or ex-servicemen. Eligible Indian citizens may apply this ITBP sports quota recruitment through online mode only. Another mode of application form will not be accepted. The online application form starts from 05.07.2021 and the last date of receipt of online application is 02.09.2021. Candidates are requested to fill the online application form carefully, because if any mistakes declared in the application form will not be entertained. Those candidates who are applied for ITBP recruitment may be recruited by the process of interview/ test. After the interview, applicant will be appointed at anywhere in India with the scale pay of Rs. 21,700 to Rs. 69,100. If you want more details about ITBP Sports Quota recruitment, ITBP constable recruitment, ITBP jobs, upcoming recruitment notification, selection list, results, merit list etc. check the official website. This is the great opportunity for the candidates who are seeking for Central Govt jobs.

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Candidates with the minimum qualification of Matriculation/ 12th/ Graduate from a recognized University/ Board will only be eligible to apply this IAF jobs. The IAF conducts written test/ skill practical/ physical test to recruit eligible candidates for the Group 'C' post. Applicant are requested to send the application form in a prescribed format and the applicant should mention name and category of the post, otherwise it will not be considered. More details of IAF jobs, syllabus, Indian Airforce Group 'C' vacancy, upcoming notification, application form etc. will be uploaded on the official website. You may download application form from the official website or the link is provided at the end of the page.

How to apply Indian Airforce Recruitment 2021
First, Visit the official website "indianairforce.nic.in"
Find the required advertisement.
Click and view the notification carefully and check the eligibility.
Apply through offline mode, take the printout of the application form and fill the required details correctly.

Send the filled application form to the concerned centres within the due date.
The notification link is given below for any reference.
The brief details of educational qualification, age limit, selection process, apply mode and how to apply process are discussed above. For more details for this recruitment, candidates may visit the official website "indianairforce.nic.in". Stay tuned with daily recruitment in to get more latest job updates.

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IN CONVERSATION

IS INDIAN EDTECH'S GROWTH WORRISOME, OR JUST WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS?

September 5 is Teacher's Day. And more than a year after a pandemic upended the way we looked at teaching, don't be surprised if an online app epitomises, at least to some, the future of teaching.

The weeks and months of pandemic restrictions that kept schools closed and parents scrambling around for ways to supplement their children's online classes have seen India's ill-represented edtech industry on an unbelievable roll; estimates indicate that nearly 30,000 crore rupees of funding have flown into the sector in the country over the past one-and-a-half years, and big names like Byju's have seen themselves muscle up like Hulk on extra-energised gamma rays.

"The advancements in technology and pandemic (have) accelerated the digital transformation of the Indian education ecosystem," Raghu Gupta, managing director (India & Asia-Pacific) of leading edtech multinational Coursera, told THE WEEK. "A growing ecosystem dedicated to solving the needs of the learners and enabling institutions to offer greater access is the way forward for the country and the economy," he added.

Besides Bengaluru-based Think and Learn, the parent company of Byju's, three other Indian edtech startups have hit the exalted unicorn status, or a valuation of one billion dollars (roughly 7,500 crore rupees) or more – Unacademy, UpGrad and just last month, Eruditus. Big daddy Byju's, meanwhile, have grown so big so quickly that when last valued, it was already worth 1.2 lakh crore rupees. Founder & CEO Byju Raveendran declared earlier this week that the startup, founded barely 10 years ago, was on course to clock turnover of 10,000 crore this year.

Not just that, the edtech startups of India have been on an expansion and consolidation spree like there's no tomorrow.

Byju's spate of acquisitions have included the likes of competing online rival Toppr as well as Aakash, once the biggie of the traditional coaching business.

However, the growing clout of Indian edtech—it helped that Chinese government's crackdown of its learning platforms has left the field wide open for desi startups (with western businesses realising the potential of the field rather late)—has also spawned worries whether Indian edtech firms are flying

also the scope for expansion abroad. Some of the recent buyouts Indian edtech players have done recently involve companies abroad. Byju's spent 500 million dollars to acquire the American digital reading platform Epic recently, while Edutellus acquired Silicon Valley startup ID Tech for 200 million dollars. Many firms now have majority of their users outside of India even.

There is also the scope for targeting multiple areas even within education. While the original focus was on providing supplementary coaching to school curriculum, many edtech firms are now focusing on specific growth areas, ranging from entrance coaching to higher education.

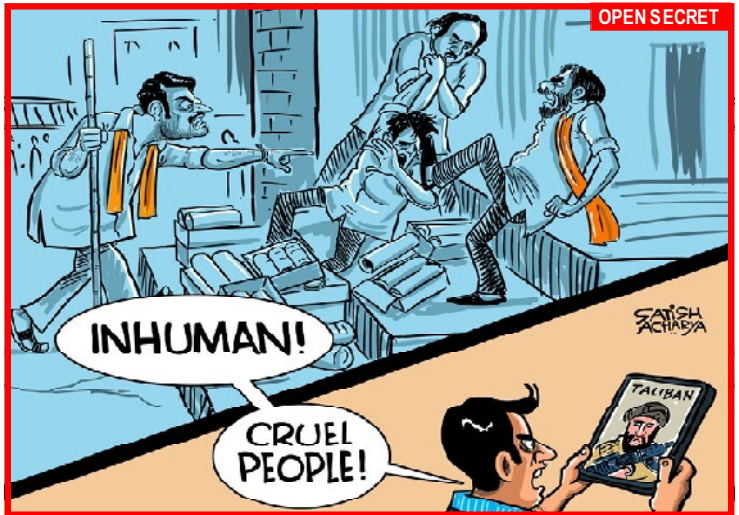
"While edtech startups and unicorns have already disrupted the K12 test prep and continued learning markets, the higher education sector remains woefully underserved," points out Chinnoy Rajwansi, co-founder and chief business officer at Imaginix, an edtech startup that is aiming at this niche.

While there are fears of a government pushback like what happened in China for edtech, or in this country itself against social media and Big Tech, top players remain optimistic. "Online learning got a major push from the National Education Policy that promotes online education to achieve the 50 per cent gross enrolment ratio vision," points out Gupta of Coursera. The enthusiasm is such that even conventional players like school managements have gotten on the act. Sri Chaitanya, a leading educational group which runs in places like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and elsewhere recently got into launching a digital educational platform, by launching Infinity Learn. "We have been able to make a difference for students with schools across the country. With the Pandemic, we realised they were in urgent need of this help digitally and we immediately jumped in, to bridge this digital divide, explains Ujjwal Singh, CEO, Infinity Learn.

too close to the sun. Too much, and too quickly for comfort? Online media as well as social media chats have recently singled out unscrupulous business practices like duping unwitting parents and a toxic marketing culture behind the aggressive growth of some leading players. Others feel most certainly that many of those rushing into the edtech gold rush will crash and burn.

"Of course, more edtech players will fall than the ones who will hit high valuation," commented an industry analyst. "How the startups ingeniously capitalise on the growth areas will make all the difference to their fortunes."

That is a point. The high valuations and growth numbers the sector has been claiming has origins not just in the immense possibilities the Indian market and in particular the rising aspirations in small town India, but



Best Wishes from...

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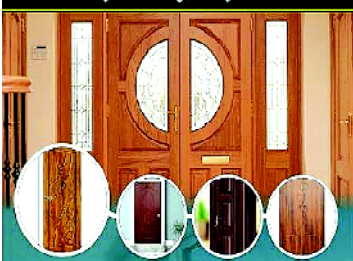
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