

Telangana's Kazipet Railway Manufacturing unit remains dream even after Modi's announcement

Hyderabad: After much dilly-dallying by the Centre over the Railway Manufacturing Unit at Kazipet, the announcement by the Modi government last year had rekindled the hopes of the people of Telangana, but the project has failed to take off even after 15 months. Though the Centre claimed that it was taking steps to set up a Railway Manufacturing Unit, the efforts are not visible at the field level. Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for a Railway Manufacturing Unit at Kazipet on July 8, 2023. In the same month, the Railway Board instructed the South Central Railways (SCR) and Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) to undertake the works for upgradation of Wagon Periodic Overhauling Workshop to Railway Manufacturing Unit for manufacturing and maintaining of a modern rolling stock. However, nothing much has happened in the last 15 months and now the board is claiming that it has written a letter in September this year asking the SCR and RVNL to take up the work. Though three months have passed, nothing is still visible at the ground level.

On Thursday, union Home Secretary Govind Mohan held a review meeting on the extent to which the provisions mentioned in the 13th Schedule of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act-2014 have been imple-

mented in Telangana, in which he told Telangana Chief Secretary A Santhi Kumari that a letter was written by the Railway Board on September 18 to the General Manager of SCR and Chairman and Managing Director of RVNL to take action in this regard. Surprised, Shanti Kumari reportedly told the Home Secretary that the State government was not aware of the development. Sources say the Railway Board has advised the SCR and RVNL to first work out a plan to develop facilities to produce the Linke-Hofmann-Busch (LHB) and Electric Multiple Unit (EMU) coaches at the Railway Manufacturing Unit at Kazipet. The BRS government had acquired 150 acres for the Railway Manufacturing Unit and handed it over to the railways. The then Municipal Administration Minister KT Rama Rao had written several letters to centre and the Railway Board to set up a rail coach factory at Kazipet. In fact, Rama Rao criticised the Centre for announcing the setting up of a rail coach factory in Assam last year and sought an explanation for the denial of the Kazipet rail coach factory to Telangana, which is one of the clauses in the AP Reorganisation Act. The demand for a Railway coach factory in Kazipet is perhaps the only issue that has been alive and kicking since the early 1980s but without any headway. The proposal to establish



a coach factory in Kazipet dates to 1982. However, due to political reasons, it was later given to Kapurthala in Punjab when PV Narasimha Rao was the Prime Minister. Again in 2010-11, the then Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee sanctioned a wagon factory on a public-private partnership (PPP) besides allocating Rs. 15 crore in the Railway Budget. Though the State government

allotted 64 acres, the SCR didn't take possession of it citing legal disputes and encroachments. Over the years, the demand has been a bone of contention between the Opposition and treasury benches in the Parliament but never taken to a logical end. Now also it looks like the project will take quite some time to take shape as nothing much has been done in the last one and half year.

Take note! New power connections in Telangana to cost more



Hyderabad: New power connections in Telangana will now cost more with the State-run power distribution companies — South Telangana Power Distribution Company (TGSPDCL) and North Telangana Power Distribution Company (TGNDPDCL) — increasing the minimum load capacity for domestic and commercial use and accordingly, the connection fee as well. The power distribution companies have recently issued instructions in this regard to Integrated Consumer Service Centers (ICSC) asking it to increase the minimum load capacity for

single phase and three phase connections. According to the latest directives, those who want single phase household electricity connection have to apply for 2 kilowatt instead of 1 kilowatt. Three phase residential and commercial connections will be sanctioned only on application for a minimum load of 5 KW. Officials said the new norms would be initially implemented in Hyderabad and Warangal cities and extended to other places in a phased manner. Till now, a consumer had to pay Rs 1,425, including deposit, charges and application fee for a kilowatt

household single phase connection. Henceforth, consumers have to pay Rs 2,825 for 2 KW and Rs 7,025 for a three phase 5 KW domestic connection. Similarly, for commercial connections, Rs 4,045 will be charged for 2 KW single phase and Rs 10,050 will be charged for 5 KW three phase connections. Additional charges will be levied on those households having notary documents as compared to register documents. Notary households will have to pay Rs 3,625 for single phase 2 KW connections and Rs 9,025 for three phase 5 kW connections. Similarly, for notary commercial connec-

tions, the fee is Rs 7,250 for single phase 2 kilowatts and Rs 18,050 for three phase 5 KW connections.

Meanwhile, power officials claim that they have only increased the load capacity due to high consumption of electricity and not the charges and deposit amount. Many people take one KW connection and use up to 2.5 kilowatt load, which causes problems in summer, the official said, adding that the users had been advised to regulate the load based on the Recorded Maximum Demand (RMD) of such connections.

Police confirm actress Shobhitha Shivanna's death as suicide

Hyderabad: The Gachibowli police, based on forensic doctors' opinion have confirmed that popular Kannada film and TV actress Shobhitha Shivanna had died by suicide and cause of death was hanging. Her husband Sudheer Reddy and in-laws had told the police that there were no marital issues between the couple and they have been happily married since two years. The

investigation officials are also analysing the suicide note purportedly written by her which read 'If you want to die, you can do it.' According to the police, Shobitha and her husband Sudheer, had exchanged views and interests on a matrimony site and they had an arranged marriage with the consent of elders from both the sides. However, after their wedding.

Destinies distorted by dark web in Visakhapatnam

After performing his primary duty as a responsible citizen of the country—casting his vote—Kumar, a senior citizen from Visakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh, who recently retired from a multi-national company, reaches home on the sunny afternoon of May 13 this year. Exhausted from standing in the voter queue line under the hot sun, he sits on his sofa and takes out his mobile phone to find two missed calls. Unsuspecting, Kumar dials back the missed call, and his life has never been the same. A man answered the call, introduced himself as an agent from a courier company, and told Kumar that the courier he had sent to his son studying in the U.S.A. a month ago was held at the Mumbai Airport. “Your courier was found to contain narcotic substances and fake passports. The Mumbai Andheri East police will speak to you shortly,” the man said.

Dumbfounded, Kumar told the ‘agent’ that he had only sent his son’s academic certificates to a U.S. university where he was about to join. Even as Kumar struggled to grasp the situation, the man on the other end of the call read out his Aadhaar number and said the police would talk to him about the narcotics. Kumar, who had lived in Mumbai for some time, knew that the Mumbai Airport came under Andheri East police station limits and didn’t doubt the ‘agent’. In a short while, to add to his anxiety, Kumar received another call from a person who introduced himself as an Inspector Range officer from Andheri, Mumbai. He told Kumar that a police FIR would be registered against him. Also, he warned Kumar against seeking anyone’s help, including that of his family members, saying that it would lead to more trouble and possible detention of Kumar’s family members. “Though I pleaded with him that I was not involved, he said that since the courier was in my name, I had to face the interrogation by a senior rank officer,” Kumar tells The Hindu. Kumar was asked to join a Skype call. He did as told but asked the ‘officer’ when the police started conducting interrogations online. He was once again convinced when the fake officer told him that they started online interrogations after the COVID-19 pandemic. “For every hour, they kept checking on me, saw if I was still on the Skype call. I was asked not to talk to anyone or go out. It was a sleepless night. My wife was also in a panic after coming to know about the courier. I informed her that I would be just complaining and everything was going to be alright,” Kumar said.

The following day, at 8 a.m., he received a call in which Kumar was informed that his case would be forwarded to a Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP)-rank officer, whose appointment was fixed at 9.45 a.m. Kumar had another reason to be convinced since the DCP’s name matched that on the internet. “First, they showed the ID of the police officer, which is fake. Then, the mobile on which the Skype call was going on was taken into the office of the DCP. I could not see the face of the DCP clearly, as it was blurred, and he also covered his head with a cap. The DCP started to enquire about the case in detail in fluent English,” Kumar recalls. “Initially, the fake DCP spoke as if there was nothing he could do to help me since the case was related to narcotics. But then, his tone changed. He called his subordinate and instructed him to check my Aadhaar number and report in five minutes. After five minutes, the subordinate arrived and told him that I was involved in money

laundering cases. This sent chills down my spine,” says Kumar. Kumar recalls that the fake DCP knew his complete travel history during the year 2023 and questioned him on the purpose of those trips. Gradually, the DCP broached the topic of the ₹92 lakh saving in my bank account. “I received the amount after my retirement, only a few months ago. I wanted to use the money for my son’s studies abroad,” Kumar says.

Digital duping The fake DCP then sent a letter to my mail, which looked like it had been sent from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The letter said that I was to transfer 97% of my savings to a bank account related to the RBI and that the money would be returned once the officials were convinced I was not involved in any money laundering. I was threatened that if I didn’t make a quick decision, my son’s future would be in jeopardy. Fearing even to imagine that, I rushed to the bank and dropped a cheque of ₹85 lakh to the said account, recalls Kumar. The 60-year-old man only realised the next day that cyber crooks had looted his life savings when all the mobile numbers he had contacted the day before became unreachable. “They (cybercriminals) keep you occupied and do not give you much time to think between the calls. They send arrest warrants, fake FIRs and even fake RBI letters with the National Emblem on it. They give you no reason to suspect. It all felt utterly real to me,” says the dejected old man worried about his son’s future abroad. Meanwhile, the cybercrime police of Visakhapatnam are boggled at the ever-growing number of digital crimes. Around 50 cases of courier scams, upto ₹150 crore siphoned from victims who include doctors, professors, IT employees and businessman among, insignificant recoveries or arrests, and not a single kingpin identified — these cybercrime statistics of the city in 2024 have been giving the police here sleepless nights. Complex scheming, careful execution The intricate scheming, psychological manipulation, and careful execution of these digital crimes that target no specific group but anyone with a mobile phone, leave little clues for the police to probe, they say. “Gone are those days when one-time password (OTP) frauds, credit card bill frauds, job frauds, and phishing were reported. As people became aware of those, the cyber fraudsters are using innovative methods and turned hi-tech,” says G. Bhavani Prasada Rao, Inspector of Cyber Crime, Visakhapatnam, the City of Destiny. At present, there are two types of cyber fraud. In one category comes the stock market frauds, task games, honeytraps, and cryptocurrency, where the victims are lured, or their greed becomes a major problem. In the other category come cases of money laundering, courier scams, and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) scams, where the fraudsters threaten the victim, saying they were involved in a huge scam. In some cases, the victims are threatened that they were found having links with terrorist groups and that they were found making transactions for the purchase of illegal arms, Mr. Prasad Rao explains. “The fraudsters collect as much information about a person as possible using open source intelligence



on the internet and use it to corner, convince and extort money from the victim. In most of these cases, the police end up at mule accounts, which were supplied by some people to the kingpins for money,” he said.

Mule accounts are bank accounts used by cyber criminals provided to them by people with or without criminal intentions. In most cases, the mule account holders are found to receive between ₹1 lakh and ₹1 crore per transaction, an illegal arrangement. A few months ago, Ramakrishna and his wife rushed to the Cybercrime Police Station in Visakhapatnam and lodged a complaint that they have lost ₹54,000 to cyber fraudsters. “We received a call from a stranger who informed us that he was calling from Special Branch Police, Hyderabad. He said that our son would be arrested immediately as he was involved in a smuggling case. We told them that he was a law-abiding Engineering student and was not involved in any such activities. But they, in turn, read out all the details of my son’s Aadhaar card, the name of the college he was studying, etc. We were shocked,” said Ramakrishna. “Immediately, we called our son, but he did not answer. We panicked and sent the money to the stranger’s account. Minutes later, our son called back and said he did not lift the call as he was driving. We realised that we were cheated,” he says. Pawn and prey A more grim fact regarding these cybercrimes is that the frauds are executed by ‘cyber slaves’ who hail from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and other States in India. Mr. Prasad Rao says the unemployed youth from here are cheated

with fake job offers and trapped and forced to work as cybercrime criminals abroad. Most of these frauds are sourced in countries like Cambodia, Myanmar, Taiwan, Laos, etc. Till now, Visakhapatnam police have rescued 85 people who were forced into cyber slavery in other countries. Manoj was one such youth recently rescued by the city police from Myanmar. He had been trapped by fraudsters in the name of work in a Bangkok hotel. “I saw a job vacancy posting for a hospital in Bangkok on a website and applied for it. Two days later, I received communication from the company that I was selected and was to report immediately. The company itself booked my tickets to Bangkok. But after landing at the Bangkok airport, the person who was supposed to receive me did not show up. Instead, a group of unknown persons had kidnapped me and taken me to Myanmar,” says 35-year-old Manoj, a graduate who hails from Pendurthi in Visakhapatnam. In Myanmar, Manoj was put in a building and forced to commit cybercrime by impersonating a female and extracting money from people from India, he says. “When I refused to do as they said, they tortured me, gave me electric shocks and thrashed me severely. I was not given food for days on end. I really thought I would die there,” he recalls. Manoj somehow managed to contact his father even though there was no mobile phone facility, and he was put under surveillance round the clock. The Vizag City police, who learned about the issue through Manoj’s father, contacted the embassies of both countries and ensured Manoj reached home safely.

One lakh plots will soon be provided to poor families: CM Haryana

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), December 2 – Haryana government will provide One lakh plots of 100 square yards each to the poor families soon. This was announced by the Chief Minister, Nayab Singh Saini during 'Dhanyawadi Daura' of his assembly constituency. The Chief Minister said that under the state government's commitment to providing housing for the poor, one lakh plots of 100 square yards will soon be allotted in the first phase. Financial assistance for building houses on these plots will be provided under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. He said that the government's aim is to ensure that every poor individual in the state has a place to live. Earlier, the state government had already provided 15,230 plots of 30 square yards each in 14 cities.

Haryana Chief Minister, Nayab Singh Saini on Monday visited the villages of the Ladwa Assembly constituency, namely Beed Pipli, Khanpur, Babain, Mangoli Jattan, Chapra, and Gobindgarh. The visit was a part of the Dhanyawadi daura being conducted by the Chief Minister to express his gratitude to the people of the State for giving such a huge mandate to his government for the third consecutive time. On this occasion, the Chief Minister announced the fulfilment of 12 demands for Beed Pipli through respective departments and sanctioned Rs. 20 lakh for the village. Besides this, additional grants of Rs. 20 lakh each were announced for Khanpur and Chapra villages, and Rs. 30 lakh for Babain village. The Chief Minister directed the officers to draft estimates for the construction of village streets in Babain village. He said that construction of a government college in the Babain village will be done after checking the feasibility. Addressing the gatherings, CM Nayab Singh Saini said that Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has ensured that the benefits of government schemes directly reach the poor. He said that the government has fulfilled the dreams of those who never imagined getting a government job. The state government has provided government jobs to deserving youths without 'Parchi Kharchi'. The welfare schemes of the state government have brought happiness and prosperity to the poor today, said the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister claimed that in the interest of farmers, the state government has decided to procure all crops at MSP. He said that the government has worked uniformly for the development of every sector. Recently, Rs. 900 crore has been allocated for development works in Panchayats. The Chief Minister assured that there would be no shortage of funds for development works across the state, including Ladwa constituency. He directed the officers concerned to prioritize road improvements works and ensure that necessary repairs are carried out promptly. Additionally, new roads will be constructed where required to enhance transportation facilities, said Saini.

Expressing his gratitude to the villagers, he said that the blessings of Ladwa residents have given him the opportunity to serve the public. The BJP government has been formed in the state for the third consecutive time, and now development works will proceed three times faster. The Chief Minister said that even before taking the oath, the government had provided 25,000 govern-



ment jobs to youth without any favouritism, bringing happiness on the faces of thousands of poor families. Moreover, the government has ensured the availability of gas cylinders at Rs. 500 for BPL families, free dialysis for kidney patients, and free medical treatment

under the Ayushman Bharat scheme for senior citizens aged above 70 years, said CM Nayab Singh Saini. While criticising the Opposition, the Chief Minister said that the illusions created by opposition parties have now been shattered. He alleged that previ-

ous governments have always exploited the poor and failed to deliver the benefits of government schemes to them, whereas, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has worked to ensure that the benefits of schemes reach the last mile citizens.

Battling Air Pollution by Switching to Clean Mobility Solutions

Hyderabad :It is that time of the year, where the recurring air pollution in select regions, especially the National Capital, have soared to extremely severe levels, choking residents and engulfing the city in thick smog. Notably, from 2013 to 2021, India accounted for 59.1% in the increase of global pollution levels. As per India Fact Sheet by AQLI [Air Quality Life Index] study, around 1.3 billion inhabitants of India live in areas where PM2.5 levels exceeded the WHO guideline. Alarmingly, 67.4% of the population live in areas that exceed the country's own national air quality standard of 40 µg/m3.

Every year, India's northern states, in particular, battle hazardous air during the winter months of October to January due to plummeting temperatures, smoke, dust, low wind speed, vehicular emissions and crop stubble burning. This has led to air pollution levels in the national capital to soar a record high of 1,500 on the AQI in a single day, this year, according to tech company IQAir, which is 15 times the level the WHO considers satisfactory for breathing. Not just New Delhi, 39 of world's 100 most polluted cities are from India. The major concern is particulate pollution that has seen a significant rise over the years. Between 1998 and 2021,

average annual particulate pollution in India increased by 67.7%, leading to a reduction in average life expectancy by 2.3 years. The average annual concentrations of PM2.5 in recent years are so high that 521.2 million people or about 38.9% of the current population can lose eight years of life, highlighting the adverse effect of pollution on the health of citizens. One of the major pollutants are vehicular emissions and aging vehicles with traditional technologies. While the government's push towards replacing old and unfit cars and commercial vehicles, through the progressive Vehicle Scrappage Policy is a pragmatic step, a major move in improving the environmental crisis can be the active adoption of electric vehicles.

As per a S&P study, there is growing traffic congestion in major Indian cities with Mumbai topping the list with 430 cars per kilometre. Switching to EVs can decrease the load on air pollution due to reducing average vehicle speed in these highly congested cities. EVs are new-age vehicles that eliminate any possibility of pollutant emissions, thereby considerably alleviating the core causes of air pollution. In addition, the transition to EVs can decrease imports of fossil fuel substantially, significantly easing



Author: Gaurav Gupta, Chief Growth Officer, JSW MG Motor India

the country's cash outflow. In terms of benefits to consumers as well, compared to conventional vehicles, EVs are more cost-efficient when it comes to running cost. The average cost per kilometer of EVs is lower than that of a conventional vehicle. Most of this is due to the fact that electric motors have a better conversion rate of energy into motion than internal combustion engines which dissipates a lot of energy in form of heat. Additionally, EVs have very low maintenance costs because they don't have as many moving parts as an internal combustion vehicle. The servicing requirements for electric vehicles are lesser than the conventional petrol or diesel vehicles.

Celebrates Graduation Ceremony 2023-24

Hyderabad: Anantha Law College proudly held its graduation convocation ceremony at RTC Kalyana Mandapam, RTC X Roads, Hyderabad, marking a significant milestone in the academic journey of its graduating students. The ceremony, acknowledged the hard work, dedication, and achievements of the students over the past years. The event was presided over by Prof. Dr. G. B. Reddy, a senior professor at the University College of Law and Director of PGRRCDE, who presented the prestigious Anantha Rajamma Memorial Gold and Silver Medals to outstanding scholars recognized for their academic excellence. In addition, the ceremony saw the release of the third edition of the college's annual newsletter by DR. G. B. Reddy alongside Mr. Ravi Anantha, Correspondent of the Anantha Educational Society. During his address, Dr. G. B. Reddy emphasized the vital role of lawyers as "social engineers," highlighting the importance of their contributions to society. He extended his heartfelt congratulations to the graduating batch, encouraging them to uphold the values and responsibilities that come with their professional journey. Principal Dr. M. V. Chandramathi delivered an insightful academic report, underlining the accomplishments of the college and the bright prospects awaiting the graduates in their respective legal careers.



PhonePe Launches Affordable Dengue and Malaria Insurance Starting at 59 per Year



Hyderabad :PhonePe, today announced the launch of a new Dengue and Malaria Insurance Plan on its platform, starting at just ₹59 per year. This affordable health coverage plan offers comprehensive year-round coverage of up to ₹1 lakh for medical expenses related to vector and air-borne diseases. This insurance cover also ensures users, especially in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, are financially protected against unexpected

medical expenses caused by such illnesses throughout the year. This plan offers PhonePe users extensive coverage against 10+ vector-borne and air-borne diseases including malaria, dengue, chikungunya, filariasis, Japanese encephalitis, swine flu, bird flu, typhoid, pulmonary tuberculosis, and meningitis. The cover includes hospitalisation, diagnostics, and ICU stays. Unlike other seasonal plans, the coverage

with this plan is not limited to the monsoons. It extends throughout the year, ensuring that PhonePe users have access to year-round protection and continuous coverage. Additionally, users can instantly purchase, manage, and file claims via the PhonePe app, with a 100% digital claims process, ensuring faster settlements and a seamless user experience. Even working professionals with access to corporate health insurance can choose to avail this coverage as it offers additional protection for more specific health risks. Commenting on the launch, Vishal Gupta, CEO at PhonePe Insurance Broking Services, said, "At PhonePe, we are committed to making insurance accessible and affordable to all. The launch of this product is a testament to our commitment of offering our users comprehensive coverage round the year. Through this, we aim to empower

our users to manage health risks effectively while eliminating financial barriers to quality care. Our goal is to provide tailor-made insurance solutions to underserved populations across the country by leveraging our expertise in digital distribution, thus ensuring peace of mind for millions of Indians."

Here's how users can avail the insurance cover on the PhonePe app:

1. Navigate to the Insurance section on the PhonePe app and select 'Dengue & Malaria' Insurance.
2. Review plan details, including sum insured and premium options.
3. View insurer information and detailed plan benefits.
4. Fill in policyholder details and complete the payment process in minutes.

Top 5 tech-savvy ADAS SUVs in India

Hyderabad :Finding a car equipped with advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) at an accessible price point has become more feasible in India, thanks to automakers integrating cutting-edge technology into their vehicles. Catering to safety, convenience, and a futuristic driving experience, the latest SUVs come equipped with features like adaptive cruise control, lane-keeping assist, and autonomous braking.

MG Astor – India's first SUV with AI inside, the MG Astor is now available at an attractive price of 17.21 Lakh (ex-showroom). The MG Astor has a personal AI assistant with advanced UI and 14 Auto-

nomous Level 2 features delivering an enhanced driver's experience. Along with i-SMART 2.0 and 80+ connected features, it also offers premium features like a Panoramic sunroof, Ventilated Seats in the front row, Wireless Charger, Wireless Android Auto & Apple Car Play, and Auto-dimming IRVM for additional security giving a holistic driving experience.

Hyundai Creta: The Hyundai Creta has gained popularity for its tech-rich cabin, featuring a large 10.25-inch touchscreen infotainment system and is available for Rs 15.98 Lakh (ex-showroom). The Hyundai Creta comes equipped with advanced safety

features including six airbags, as standard. The new Hyundai CRETA is alive with Hyundai Smart Sense-Level 2 ADAS. It also comes with a panoramic sunroof, wireless phone charging, an 8-way power-adjustable driver seat, and ventilated front seats. The Creta promises to deliver an ultimate comfort and safety. Kia Seltos: The Kia Seltos comes with a 10.25-inch touchscreen infotainment system that matches the best in its class. The Seltos is priced from Rs 19.00 Lakh (ex-showroom) and offers Autonomous Level 2 along with stylish and edgy look with generous space that offer you supreme comfort. Additionally, it features a

Dual Pane Panoramic Sunroof and a Smart 20.32 cm (8.0") Head-up Display ensuring an advanced driving experience to the consumers. Honda Elevate: Honda's mid-size SUV comes with autonomous driving features in the top-spec ZX trim. All variants of the Elevate are powered by a refined 1.5L i-VTEC engine delivering 121 PS and equipped with advanced technologies like Honda SENSING, the vehicle offers both excitement and safety. It comes with ADAS technology and its spacious interior boasts a 10.25-inch touchscreen, wireless smartphone connectivity, and a premium sound system. The Honda Elevate price starts from 16.31 Lakhs. (ex-showroom)

40 years after Bhopal gas tragedy, Union Carbide's toxic waste yet to be removed

Four decades after the Bhopal gas tragedy, hundreds of tonnes of toxic waste remain on the premises of Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL). Despite multiple court orders and warnings, government authorities have not disposed of the waste safely, officials confirmed to The Hindu. The Union government has released ₹126 crore to the Madhya Pradesh government to carry out plans to dispose of 337 MT of the toxic waste, which was collected and kept in the premises of the factory in 2005, documents show. However, a 2010 government-commissioned study showed that, apart from this 337 MT of toxic waste, the factory premises also contains about 11 lakh tonnes of contaminated soil, one tonne of mercury, and nearly 150 tonnes of underground dumps. The government has no plans yet on how to deal with this. Disposal yet to start

The presence of waste dumps within the premises show that the 2005 collection of waste was "incomplete", the 2010 report noted. It had then recommended excavation of the toxic waste from the dumps in order to remediate it. Subsequently, a 'peer review committee', formed in 2010 to look into different government studies till that point, recommended a comprehensive assessment. Fourteen years later, however, a proper re-assessment is yet to be done. "Though ₹126 crore was released in March this year for disposing 337 MT of waste, the state government is yet to actually begin the process of disposing it on the ground. We understand that there are some administrative issues," a Central government official told The Hindu. Delayed reassessment

In June 2023, an oversight committee — which met 12 years after its last meeting on May 25, 2011 — had again recommended that the Madhya Pradesh government undertake fresh studies to quantify groundwater and soil contamination and the underground dumps of toxic waste. When asked about the rest of the waste and the reassessment, the official said, "A proposal for reassessment of the toxicity after the 2010 study was also submitted to the State government about six months back, but that has also not made much headway. The government is first trying to deal with the 337 MT of waste and then look into the rest of it." Another source privy to the development also said that reassessment is necessary as it has been 14 years since the 2010 study and the ground realities would have changed by now. "But there is no movement on this front as of now," the source added. Groundwater contamination over the years, various government and non-governmental studies have found groundwater in different residential areas outside the factory contaminated with heavy metals and other toxic substances, which could lead to cancer and other diseases. Now, experts say there are chances of the contamination spreading further. On March 20 this year, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) pulled up the government for its inaction. "It is a known fact that the chemical waste where it is accumulated is creating leachate and further contaminating the surface water, underground water, and in the rainy seasons, by flow to the other places and water of the river bodies are also being contaminated by this chemical waste," it observed. When contacted, the Madhya Pradesh government did not respond to The



Plan to dispose of 337 MT of toxic waste yet to be implemented; no plan for 11 lakh tonnes of contaminated soil plus mercury, waste dumps; SC, NGT orders ignored for years as groundwater contamination spreads

Hindu's queries. Missed warning bells

The root cause of the problem is the solid, semi-solid, liquid and tarry wastes generated during the manufacture of pesticides and associated chemicals which were dumped by UCIL between 1969 and 1984 within their factory premises, which closed down after the gas leak tragedy which occurred on the intervening night of December 2 and 3, 1984. In 2004, the Supreme Court noted, "The report (by a court-appointed committee) records that due to indiscriminate dumping of hazardous waste due to non-existent or negligent practices together with lack of enforcement by authorities, the ground water and, therefore, drinking water supplies have been affected/damaged." In 2005, the Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board (MPPCB) through a private company collected waste from the factory premises. A small portion was incinerated and the remaining 347 MT of waste was kept in a shed within the factory premises. Ten years later, in August 2015, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) incinerated around 10 MT of this waste on a trial basis at a facility in Pithampur and recommended the same for the rest of the waste. Government 'apathy' In 2022, an NGT-appointed committee said there was a "possibility of contamination of soil" and suggested "speedy disposal" of the waste. In March 2022, citing the "serious unsatisfactory" state of affairs as well as "apathy" and "failure" of the authorities concerned, the NGT ordered the State government and other agencies to take action within six months. The order was not followed. Over the last 15 years, with activists complaining to the Supreme Court of spreading groundwater contamination, the Madhya Pradesh government has increased the number of areas around the factory where it provides safe drinking water, from 14 localities to 18 to 22

and then to 42, following court orders and studies. The government has also sealed hand pumps and tube wells to restrict residents' access to contaminated water. However, many people still use groundwater for non-drinking purposes. New victims Rachna Dhingra — a member of the Bhopal Group for Information and Action, an NGO which is part of the Supreme Court's Monitoring Committee on the tragedy — said that the groundwater contamination is spreading to more areas and affecting people's health, finding new victims every

day even 40 years after the gas leak. "The government plans to dispose only 337 MT of the waste, which is only a small fraction of the total toxic waste. Unless all this waste is properly disposed of, it will continue to pollute groundwater and soil. Even the courts pulling up the authorities for their apathy and inaction is not working. The government is not at all interested in holding the polluter accountable, especially when the polluter company refuses to pay the ₹310 crore sought towards the cleanup," Ms. Dhingra said.

Ashray Akruti to Celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3????

Hyderabad: Ashray Akruti is to conduct an Awareness Programme in commemoration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPwD) on December 3, 2024. The event will take place at Sri Sathya Sai Nigamagaram, Srinagar Colony, Hyderabad, from 11:00 AM to 04:45 PM. This year's theme, "Amplifying Ability for an Inclusive Tomorrow," will focus on the critical themes of Inclusivity, Dignity, Potential, Well-being, and Diversity, embodying Ashray Akruti's vision of a society where every individual can realize their full potential. The celebration is expected to attract over 1,400 attendees, including students, parents, donors, corporate partners, well-wishers, volunteers, and staff. The event aims to acknowledge the resilience, creativity, and achievements of persons with disabilities while fostering

awareness and collaboration among diverse communities. Attendees will enjoy a rich variety of activities, including insightful talks, the presentation of CSR and Volunteer Appreciation Awards, Employee Awards, and inspiring performances by students. The unveiling of the Annual Report will showcase the significant milestones and successes achieved throughout the year. A highlight of the day will be the Science Exhibition and Drawing Competition, themed "Divyangjan Saathi."

This unique initiative creates an inclusive platform for students from both regular and special schools, celebrating their creativity and diversity. The event will conclude with an award ceremony that honors the extraordinary contributions and talents of participants.

Birth pangs of an academic reform in Kerala

The discussion was triggered by the announcement of the first-semester examination schedule of the newly launched Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) in the first week of November. "Yes, this could prove premature. The students are only getting to know how the new system works. Foisting an exam [on them] now will only add to their confusion," pointed out her colleague Manu Rajan*. Two weeks later, on October 21, an announcement by the Kerala Minister for Higher Education R. Bindu postponing the first semester exams helped address their anxieties a little. An official release had attributed the landslides in Wayanad and the extended admission window period as the key reasons for the change in the exam schedule. As per the revised schedule, the first semester exams began on November 25.

But the initial hiccups raised questions about the challenges ahead and the way forward in the implementation of the academic reform that was rolled out in the institutions of higher education in Kerala and its affiliated colleges on July 1, 2024. The framework of the programme was formulated with "a student-centric approach, providing maximum flexibility in terms of choice of disciplines of study". It also allowed students to move from one discipline of study to another and from one institution to another. Nearly five months after FYUGP was launched, academic experts say there are questions on how the ambitious objective of "enabling students to acquire competence in using digital technologies and other skills essential to participate in the knowledge economy" will be met amidst the gaps in the academic and infra requirements demanded by the new system. "The postponement of the first semester exam of the newly introduced four-year undergraduate programmes in Kerala highlighted the structural issues involved within the system. The curriculum is too ambitious, which makes it extensive and demanding. The successful implementation of the curriculum depends on a meticulously planned academic calendar and the will to follow it strictly. This has been a serious flaw in the case of Kerala," says Amruth G. Kumar, Professor and Dean, School of Education at the Central University of Kerala.

"The rescheduling of the first semester examination showed either the weakness of the academic calendar or poor respect given to it while implementing. A realistically planned academic calendar and its implementation shall be part of the system. The government should have advanced with the project, with State-level master trainers and regional level trainers under them so that at least 60% of the teachers would have been trained before the implementation. This would have benefited a good number of teachers as peer/colleague trainers at the college level," he says. Fears over a possible spike in financial burden for the universities and its affiliated colleges following the introduction of new and diverse programmes in tune with the new curriculum structure and pedagogical changes remain unanswered. "The question of who will bear the increase in financial burden is crucial as new faculty members may have to be recruited to match the increase in the number of courses. The burden is likely to shift to the universities and the affiliated colleges concerned as the government may not agree to shoulder it," says Premachandran Keezhoth, general secretary, Kerala Private College Teachers' Association, and Assistant Professor, Depart-

ment of English at Payyannur College.

"Except for some cosmetic differences, there are no considerable changes as of now from the earlier main-subsidiary pattern of academic programmes offered. The interdisciplinary alterations may be only around 10-15%, though they seem incomplete and peripheral. The lack of proper awareness creation among parents and teachers about the pedagogical changes need to be addressed effectively. There are also apprehension among the teaching community on whether the fourth year of study under the new system will help achieve the intended outcome of improving the skills and employability credentials of the aspirants," he says.

The decision of Calicut and Kerala universities to increase the exam fee after the rollout of the new programme has come in for criticism from various quarters. "The hike in the fee structure clearly showed that the universities will use the FYUGP to increase their internal revenue under the guise of stepping up infrastructure facilities. Students will be forced to bear the burden of this increase," says M. Shajarkhan, vice-president of the Save University Campaign Committee. Faculty members in colleges express concern over whether the students in colleges located in rural areas may receive internship and skill-based training options compared to the increased opportunities available for learners in urban areas. The chances of regional disparities may arise in such a situation as the colleges in rural areas lack the required facilities/options to offer internship to the students, they say. The new system has evoked mixed reactions among students. Mohammed Shameer*, who joined for a programme in Botany in a government college in Ernakulam, opted for a minor programme in Economics. "The decision was taken under the influence of my friends, who told me that Economics may offer a variety of job options. But I was proved wrong after the classes began as I was not able to grasp the nuances of the subject," he says. A teacher in the Department of Botany in the college admit that several students opted for minor and multi-disciplinary programmes without giving a serious thought on whether they will be able to pursue it in the long run. "We need a mechanism to check whether they have the skills and capability to undertake an entirely different subject," he says. But students such as Remya V*, who have chosen English as her major course, seemed impressed by the basket of choices available. "For the minor course, I opted for History as it will help me while preparing for the Civil Services exam. Such a combination may also open up new windows in the future, especially when I am scouting for higher education opportunities abroad," she says. Despite the apprehension, the Department of Higher Education and the Kerala State Higher Education Council (KSHCEC) exude confidence about the progress of implementation of the nearly five-month-old reform. The Minister for Higher Education says that the Vice-Chancellors, who attended a review meeting in Kochi in October, had stated that there were no major problems related to the implementation of the new academic reform. Review meetings are being held regularly to identify the problems, if any, and resolve it immediately, she says.

On gaps in the infrastructure and allied facilities for enhancing the skills and employability of the learners, she says that centres

for skill development and career planning will be set up at all universities and affiliated colleges as part of the four-year undergraduate programme. These centres will offer a range of vocational minors integrated into the curriculum and stand-alone skill courses in collaboration with professional skill providers. The initiative aims to enhance students' employability by providing industry-relevant skills and certifications in areas such as IT, entrepreneurship, and communication. These centres will also offer career counselling, internship opportunities, and support for lifelong learning, she says.

The authorities have initiated steps to identify the gaps in the training programmes for teachers and students. "The council has set up a centre of Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Training to enhance the quality of faculty training for the four-year undergraduate programme. It focusses on equipping faculty with modern, technology-based teaching, learning, and evaluation methods, as well as offering guidance on curriculum development and course design," says Rajan Varughese, Member-Secretary of the council. On criticism about the lack of initiatives to enhance the employability of students, he says FYUGP has included skill courses, vocational components, all relevant for upskilling and reskilling students at the undergraduate level. "The BVoc courses can be used for securing credit for skill courses. The revised curriculum will focus on providing students with industry-relevant skills alongside multidisciplinary academic knowledge, emphasising both theoretical understanding and practical training. This update includes the incorporation of vocational minors and flexible course structures, allowing students to earn credits through hands-on projects and internships. By aligning BVoc programmes with the four-year programme, the idea is to enhance the employability of students, preparing them for diverse career paths in evolving industries while maintaining the focus on skill development," he says.

Academics have recommended the need to step up training on various aspects of the new system, including basket of courses on offer for students and the importance of credit hours, outcome-based evaluation, and internship options. "These are the edifices upon which the four-year degree programme is built. A decision on whether to follow the Centre's National Education Policy or to devise a different system needs



to be confirmed. At present, systemic confusion is evident. The decision to postpone the first semester exams resulted from these underlying issues. It is crucial to address the root causes of these problems to ensure the long-term success of the programme in Kerala," says Prof. Kumar. A draft review of the programme by the KSHCEC and the Department of Higher Education states that all colleges will offer internship opportunities through State-level portals and the centres for skill development and career planning. The State-level portals will serve as centralised platforms connecting students with industries, government bodies, and NGOs offering internships. The centres for skill development will facilitate these opportunities by partnering with various sectors, ensuring students gain practical, hands-on experience. These internships are designed to align with the academic curriculum, helping students apply their skills in real-world settings while enhancing their employability and professional networks for future career success, it says. The authorities are hopeful that universities and affiliated colleges will step up their efforts to align with the intended goals of the new reform. "The choice of students and flexibility envisaged in the curriculum depend on courses included in the university course basket and the willingness of the faculty at the college level," they say.

After US indictment, Adani Group stocks shed Rs 2.45 lakh cr market value

New Delhi: After US prosecutors charged billionaire Gautam Adani over his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay \$250 million bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts, the Adani group stocks faced heavy drubbing during the morning trade on Thursday, with the combined market valuation of all the listed firms getting eroded by Rs 2.45 lakh crore. The stock of the group's flagship firm Adani Enterprises plunged 22.99 per cent, Adani Ports dived 20 per cent, Adani Energy Solutions tanked 20 per cent, Adani Green Energy plummeted 19.53 per cent and Adani Total Gas tumbled 18.14 per cent on the BSE. Shares of Adani Power slumped 17.79 per cent, Ambuja Cements cracked 17.59 per cent, ACC fell 14.54 per

cent, NDTV dropped 14.37 per cent and Adani Wilmar declined 10 per cent. Some of the group firms also hit their lowest trading permissible limit for the day. The combined market capitalisation (mcap) of all the ten listed group firms eroded by Rs 2,45,016.51 crore during the morning deals.

In the equity market, the BSE benchmark Sensex traded 536.89 points lower at 77,041.49 and the NSE Nifty quoted 186.75 points down at 23,331.75. US prosecutors charged Adani, 62, his nephew Sagar and other defendants for paying over \$250 million in bribes between 2020 and 2024 to Indian government officials to win solar energy contracts on terms that could potentially bring in more than \$2 billion in profit.

Bengaluru's street vendors: Balancing livelihood and urban chaos

John Peter sells helium and foil balloons ranging from ₹10 to ₹600 every day. He begins his day in Jayanagar, and as the day progresses, he travels to different parts of the city. "I go to busy marketplaces like K.R. Market, Chickpet, Shivajinagar, and Majestic. I also linger around schools. Mostly, I travel by bus, but if it's late or the load is heavy, I take an auto. I typically earn ₹500-1,000 per day. I stay out until about 9 p.m. and then head home. Buses are harder to get after 9," he said. From bustling markets to quiet residential areas, street vendors/hawkers who sell everything from stationery to clothing to imitation jewellery, food items, fruits and vegetables are found everywhere in Bengaluru. According to the 2017 survey of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), there were 25,000 street vendors in Bengaluru. The number might have crossed a lakh in the post-pandemic era, according to the vendors themselves.

The city's residents and permanent business owners all have their own love-hate relationships with these street vendors, primarily due to the unorganised nature of this economy. People prefer to shop for certain items from these vendors due to easy availability and affordability but find it problematic when their walking or parking space is taken away by the same vendors. "When I was in college, I used to love going to Sampige Road (in Malleswaram) for my shopping as I would get things for cheaper rates from street vendors. But now, when I take a walk on the same road during weekends or festivals, it is difficult to keep one step in front of the other as the vendors have taken up all the space on the footpath with their shops. The prices are not cheap like before either," said Ankitha Sharma, a copywriter from Bengaluru. On the other hand, a street vendor can make around ₹10,000 to ₹1 lakh a month depending on what they are selling and the location they are selling in, according to vendors themselves, but most of them work without basic facilities like shelter, godowns, washrooms and drinking water. They also say they face a plethora of problems daily, including eviction and corruption, which also sometimes lead to loss of business. "We are also constantly under the threat of eviction from both the police and the BBMP. In central areas like Market, Majestic and Malleswaram, bribes have to be paid to multiple agencies and local goondas," claimed S. Babu, president of Bengaluru Urban District Street Vendors' Federation. In Shivajinagar, which is known for its bustling market areas like Russell Market and Commercial Street, most street vendors say that they are being evicted constantly. Saleem Ahmed and Syed Ahmed, street vendors who sell cosmetics and stationery, said, "Recently, the police have been chasing us away every day. We come back after they leave and continue with our work."

The demands of street vendors have been the same for years now. They want proper demarcation of vending slots in designated vending zones, regular meetings of Town Vending Committees and to be free from harassment from officials. "We need a structured space for vending and permanent systems in place according to the Street Vendors Act 2014. The illegal eviction of vendors should be discussed in TVC meetings.



"We are also constantly under the threat of eviction from both the police and the BBMP. In central areas like Market, Majestic and Malleswaram, bribes have to be paid to multiple agencies and local goondas," claimed S. Babu, president of Bengaluru Urban District Street Vendors' Federation.

We want markets to be classified as natural markets, heritage markets, etc, for better opportunities," Babu said. During the recent festive season, long-time traders from areas such as Gandhi Bazaar, Commercial Street, and Chickpet complained that their business had taken a great hit due to the presence of street vendors. On the other side, some business owners in Church Street said their businesses had taken a hit after the BBMP evicted over 70 street vendors from there on October 5 to "reclaim the footpaths for the public." "When we first started (the business), the rent was ₹700, but now it's ₹75,000. Our sales used to be ₹7,000, but now they exceed lakhs. The business has become tougher over the years as many street vendors and hawkers come here", says Nagalakshmi Hanumantha M.P., who has been running her store of festival supplies for 39 years in Gandhi Bazaar in the southern part of the city. "They (street vendors) don't have to pay rent or GST. So they can sell at lower prices. If we buy a product for ₹1.5 and sell it for ₹2.5 due to overhead costs, they sell it directly for ₹1.5, and it is unfair," she added. Jayaram, the owner of Navdurga Gift Centre, Malleswaram, hails from Rajasthan and has been in the business for twenty years now. "The street vendors on the footpath set up shops right in front of the path that leads to my shop. While regular customers still make it to the shop, I am not able to get new customers," he lamented. He added that during festivals, the popular 8th cross road is filled with street vendors due to which the entrance to the gully that leads to his shop gets blocked.

Similar concerns were shared by traders' associations across many areas of Bengaluru. However, some shoppers consider the hawkers to be an essential part of the market vibe. A lot of them also believe that designated vending zones or giving street vendors designated spots on the footpath could help free up the footpaths for walkers. "The perspectives of all the stakeholders should change from looking at street vendors as encroachers to looking at them as contributors to the urban economy," said Vinay Sreenivasa, member of Karnataka Pragathi Para Beedi Vyaparigala Sanghatane. He added, "This is their means to earn a livelihood as they cannot do other jobs like construction, and they have no education to find jobs in the organised sector. They also provide many services and serve as eyes on the road. In Kaveri Nagar, police had said that criminal activities had increased in the area after eviction of street vendors."

According to the Street Vendors Act, a survey of the vendors should be carried out every five years. But after 2017, the BBMP did not conduct a survey in 2022. Now, after a two-year delay, the survey began in October. "The identification of vendors and probable vending spots is going on the zonal level. We will be identifying three zones – no vending zone, restricted vending zone and complete vending zone. We will be identifying vending spots as per the policy. With Aadhar Card or ration card as ID proof, vendors can register themselves," said Suralkar Vikas Kishor, Special Commissioner, Health, BBMP. The street vendors have their concerns about the survey. They say out of the

25,000 who were surveyed last time, only 13,000 received their vending certificates due to reasons like lack of BPL cards and other red tape. "The survey which is going on right now is only considering vendors in main roads and markets. But what about those who are set up in residential areas or gullies? What about pushcart vendors and migrant vendors?" asked Babu. Suralkar clarified that if some who are on inner roads are not surveyed, they can intimate zonal level officials and get added to the lists. He also said that with proper ID proof, even migrant vendors can try to get their certificates. Onus on civic body Street vendors and activists also argued that according to according to the law, without the demarcation of vending zones, street vendors cannot be evicted, but the BBMP and police have been doing that for a long time. When asked about this, Suralkar said, "There is a difference in perception of policy. Some things are evident in it, and it says that there can be no vending on certain stretches. For instance, if the width of the footpath is less than the minimum space that should be provided to a street vendor, then it is not suitable for vending. If those criteria are not being met, then we can remove vendors from such areas." But most people agree that the onus is on the civic body to create vending zones that help all the stakeholders to exist in harmony. "The Street Vendors Act protects the rights of vendors and also regulates vending. After the survey, the BBMP and BDA should work on a Street Vending Plan. Law and Policy have moved in this regard, but the mindsets of people have not," Vinay remarked.

Hyderabad food poisoning: Hygiene gaps stir the pot of sickness

On a chilly mid-November evening, 23-year-old Ravi's craving for chicken biryani led him to Green Bawarchi Multi Cuisine Restaurant in Hyderabad's Neredmet area. The aroma, the bustling diners, and the promise of a hearty meal all seemed inviting — until his indulgence spiralled into a medical emergency. Within hours, he doubled over in pain, vomiting and suffering from severe diarrhoea. His family rushed him to the hospital, where doctors diagnosed him with acute gastroenteritis, likely caused by contaminated food. He was immediately placed on an IV drip and prescribed antibiotics that saved his life. Ravi's ordeal is a tiny example of a growing public health crisis in Hyderabad as poor hygiene and food contamination plague eateries across the city. The tragedy of 32-year-old Reshma Begum, three weeks prior, highlights the deadly consequences of this growing crisis. On October 25, Reshma had a plate of momos from a streetside stall in Banjara Hills that left her battling with severe diarrhoea through the night. "The next morning, as she was heading to the bathroom, she collapsed and lost consciousness," recounts her brother, Farooq Hussain.

Her family found her foaming at the mouth and frantically called for an ambulance. "The '108' ambulance took about 30 minutes to arrive and when it did, the driver, who was alone, said he couldn't carry her down from the third floor all by himself," he recalls. The family had to call neighbours for help. Almost half hour later, Reshma was admitted to the emergency room of Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS), a top government tertiary care hospital in Hyderabad. "Another 30-40 minutes later, doctors broke the news that she could not be revived," he says, sobbing. Farooq and his family began making arrangements for Reshma's funeral, unaware that others had also fallen ill after consuming momos from the same vendor. It was only when someone suggested that it could be part of a larger public health issue that they decided to request a post-mortem examination. They returned to NIMS, handed over Reshma's body, and were assured that the report would be ready in 15 to 20 days. "But it has been over a month and there is no update from the police or the hospital. When my father recently visited the police station to ask about the report, he was told it would take more time," adds Farooq, who works as a driver for a ride-hailing platform and is the sole breadwinner for his family.

Expressing helplessness, he says, "If I spend my time running between police stations and hospitals, who will earn for my family?" Reshma's death has left her three children — a son and two daughters — in the family's care, compounding their financial woes. "We are struggling to make ends meet, and the lack of answers only adds to our grief," Farooq laments. Questions and concerns over foodborne illnesses have been raised on social media of late. The rising number of such incidents caught the attention of city-based activist Robin Zaccheus, who urged food safety authorities to take action. Food safety inspectors have now been visiting restaurants and uncovering a grim reality: the use of synthetic food colours, unsanitary conditions, and leftover food. Suspicious food samples have been collected

for laboratory analysis, with officials promising further action based on the findings. A blemish in gastronomic glory

Beneath Hyderabad's celebrated culinary heritage is an undercurrent of food safety issues that impacts countless lives daily. While the city is renowned for its biryani, Irani chai, and vibrant street food culture, it also grapples with a web of challenges, including unregulated food practices, ageing infrastructure, and limited consumer awareness. These issues not only jeopardise public health but also cast a shadow on Telangana's burgeoning food industry. The city now stands at a critical juncture, as it confronts a difficult truth: preserving its gastronomic pride amid an urgent need for safer, more regulated food practices. The city's bustling street food culture is a culinary treasure but often comes with hidden risks. These vibrant open-air kitchens are often hotspots for hygiene violations. One of the biggest challenges in ensuring food safety lies in consumer behaviour. While Hyderabad residents eagerly embrace new culinary trends, their awareness of food safety often falls short. "I always check the expiry dates on packaged foods, but I never stop to think about where my vegetables come from," admits Kiran, an IT professional who frequently orders meals online. This gap in awareness highlights the pressing need for better education on food safety standards.

The city's bustling street food culture, from tangy panipuri to steaming haleem and kebabs, is a culinary treasure but often comes with hidden risks. These vibrant open-air kitchens are often hotspots for hygiene violations. Sriram, a college student, shares his dilemma: "I have had food poisoning twice after eating outside in recent times. But these places are affordable and so irresistible." Explaining the dangers of foodborne illnesses, medical gastroenterologist and chairman of AIG Hospitals-Hyderabad, D. Nageshwar Reddy says, "Food poisoning occurs when harmful germs like bacteria, viruses, or parasites enter the digestive system through contaminated food or water. Common pathogens such as Salmonella, E.coli, and Norovirus can damage the stomach and intestines, causing inflammation and disrupting digestion." Those germs can produce toxins that irritate the gut, causing symptoms like nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and stomach cramps, leading to dehydration and a loss of body salts, he adds. Viral infections, like those caused by Norovirus, spread quickly and show symptoms within hours, while bacterial toxins, such as those from Staphylococcus aureus, can cause severe discomfort. Most cases get better on their own, but prolonged symptoms, bloody diarrhoea, or severe dehydration need medical attention to prevent serious complications like infections spreading throughout the body, Dr.Reddy avers.

Asked why only a few people develop food poisoning despite many consuming the same meal at a restaurant or food stall, he says, "It comes down to individual immunity. Some people have built resistance to certain bacteria that they have been exposed to earlier. Those with co-morbidities like diabetes or hypertension are more vulnerable." Moreover, each person has a unique gut microbiome — the collection of



microorganisms in the digestive tract — which plays a crucial role, he points out, adding, "A strong microbiome can effectively combat foreign bacteria, while a weaker one may allow infections to take hold."

Amid these challenges, Hyderabad is witnessing proactive efforts to tackle food safety concerns. Between January and November this year, the Telangana Food Safety Department conducted 4,366 inspections, filed 510 cases, and initiated 56 prosecutions. Of those, 316 cases were resolved through adjudication, resulting in fines totalling ₹66 lakh for establishments found violating hygiene norms, says Commissioner of Food Safety R.V. Kaman. Recent inspection drives have targeted high-risk areas, including educational institutions, hospital canteens, and street food vendors. At educational institutions, 516 inspections underscored the need for cook training in government hostels and mandatory Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) licences for PG accommodations. In a single week, 84 canteens across 45 government and 39 private hospitals were inspected, emphasising the importance of providing safe, quality food to patients and caregivers, according to Kaman. Telangana currently has 90,797 registered Food Business Operators (FBOs), with 36,849 based in Hyderabad. Sector-wise, 19,234 deal in dairy products, 17,547 in prepared foods, 16,332 in bakery items, and 16,258 in cereals and cereal products. Other sectors include spices and salts (15,669), fruits and vegetables (12,200), oils and fats (11,733), eggs (5,961), and meat products (4,253). These numbers reflect the scale of the food industry and the critical importance of stringent safety measures. In the lively neighbourhood of AS Rao Nagar in Hyderabad, nestled among a string of high-end apparel stores and shopping malls, lies Rajan Food Corner — a popular Chinese fast food spot. The modest setup features a compact 100-square-foot kitchen and a 150-square-foot seating area that can accommodate 12 to 15 people. Despite its small size, the restaurant buzzes with customers from morning until late in the night. Running a busy eatery in such tight quarters can be challenging, but owner Rajan takes pride in maintaining high hygiene standards. "Unlike many small joints that operate with just two or three staff members, I have five people working here besides myself. This helps in workload division and better coordination, thereby lowering chances of hygiene violations," he ex-

plains. Rajan ensures freshness by buying chicken twice daily, instead of stocking up in bulk. "This way, I don't reuse meat the next day. My vendor is authorised, so I trust the quality," he adds. On the other hand, Sardar Papaji Ka Dhaba, a 39-year-old iconic eatery in the bustling lanes of Hanuman Tekdi, stands in stark contrast. Like many restaurants, this dhaba features both traditional ground-floor seating and air-conditioned seating upstairs. But its standout feature is the open kitchen, which allow customers a clear view of the food preparation process. "Food safety has become the talk of the town in recent months, but my family has upheld hygiene standards from day one," says Ashmeet Singh, the dhaba's third-generation owner. He credits his grandfather for introducing the open kitchen concept. "His philosophy was simple; what happens behind closed doors cannot and should not be trusted," he shares. This legacy continues, with Ashmeet's mother preparing all the spices and masalas at home to ensure purity and to eliminate any risk of contamination. The restaurant also relies on a trusted vendor for meat and vegetables, ensuring a steady supply of consistent, high-quality ingredients. "To date, we have never had a hygiene violation, and that's a badge of honour we wear proudly," says Ashmeet. However, a major hurdle in food safety regulation across Telangana is the severe shortage of food inspectors and the strain on the State's sole food safety laboratory. "The sanctioned number of food safety officers is 112, but only 47 are currently in position, leaving 65 vacancies," an official from the department shares. Telangana's only food safety lab, located in Hyderabad's Nacharam area, has been operational since 1971. "Currently, the lab takes 15 to 20 days to test each sample. While it is managing the workload, the increasing number of checks could soon stretch its capacity," says a food safety inspector. To address this, the government has approved the establishment of three food testing labs in Warangal, Mahabubnagar, and Nizamabad, which will double the State's testing capacity. Further, a new state-of-the-art microbiology lab has been approved for the State Food Laboratory in Nacharam, informs Kaman. FSSAI regulations tend to be more "business-friendly", points out a food safety inspector, as they require that establishments be given an opportunity to rectify violations before any punitive action is taken.