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Weed out drug mafia, but don't kill this techie's career. Read her story

Defamed On Net, Hounded By City Cops

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: Dragged out of her bedroom by police and society members without a knock on the door in a gated colony in Kukatpally for supposedly possessing ganja, IBM engineer Ekta Negi is in acute trauma. It was just not the ignominy of police questioning, but also the defamation of her pictures going viral on Internet and branded a druggie that has rubbed salt in wounds of the 22-year-old. Ekta Negi has been accused of possessing 20gm weed, which was kept in a corner of the dining table of her flat, which she shares with two others.

The IBM engineer said she had nothing to do with ganja seized from her flat at Malaysian Township on July 21. The techie, who came to TOI office on Thursday explained how the 'Gestapo' mentality of members of Malaysian Township residential association and the 'name and shame' pogrom of city police was ruining lives of young professionals even as the narcotics mafia in the state remained untouched.

On July 21, KPHB police arrested Ekta, resident of flat number 103, block number 17, Malaysian Township, along with her flat mate, Gopi Sadhana, and seized 20gm of ganja from their flat. Based on the confession of Ekta, police also raided flat number 304, block number 27 of Malaysian Township and arrested Sadhana's friends, M Nithin Sai, D Uday and Abhilash M, in possession of 40 grams of ganja.

Talking to TOI, Ekta said

POINT-COUNTERPOINT

Police mentioned in FIR, whose copy Ekta is yet to receive, that ganja was bought from unknown peddler, whose number was secured from a friend

► Ekta said for past one-and-half months she has been using her friend's SIM card after she lost hers. There was confusion among police over seized phones
► Ekta says IBM colleagues and management are supportive

WHAT MALAYSIAN TOWNSHIP SAYS

Malaysian Township Residents Association members say they only "accompanied" police during the crackdown. Police had prior information about accused. "One executive committee member and some housewives went with police. Nobody forced their way into the apartment as the main door was shut, but not bolted from inside," said K R K Prasad, president of association. While Prasad said he wasn't part of the 'operation' he claimed "girls were doing weed", when the group reached their house. "One of them even admitted she 'smokes up' regularly," said general secretary, G S Raju, who was 'absent' when arrests were made. Yet, he asserted that police retrieved ganja from the flat.

she barely knew her flatmate, Sadhana, who moved into the flat three weeks ago. "I came in contact with her through a Facebook group, Flats and Flatmates, when she was looking to share a room," said Ekta.

Police mentioned in the FIR, a copy of which Ekta is yet to receive, that the women procured ganja from an unknown peddler whose number she secured from a friend, Basheer. The three men arrested have procured ganja from their friend, Robin, the FIR stated. Both Basheer and Robin are also named accused. However, Ekta said since past one-and-half months she has been using a friend's SIM

card as she lost her card.

Talking to TOI, Ekta said it was not police, but members of Malaysian Township Residential Association who barged into her bedroom at 3.30pm when she was in deep sleep after night shift. "Women association members entered my room and dragged me out. I also saw my flatmate and three men, who are her friends in the hall. Among scattered items on the table in the shared hall, the women pointed to a small box and forced us to open it. And there was ganja in it. Then police were called and they took me and my flatmate to police station at 4.30pm," said Ekta.

According to Ekta, after



WHO'S EKTA NEGI?

She finished her BTech in Electrical, Electronics and Communication engineering from Bharti Vidyapeeth Deemed University in 2016.

Joined IBM in January 2017

she reached the police station, police seized their phones and did not allow them to call family members. "They took my photograph, saying it won't be circulated. The next day, I saw them online in news portals everywhere. How can they do that? Also, there was a virulent anti-North Indian bias among police, who accused me of procuring drugs from my native Uttarakhand," said Ekta.

"Police also forced me to sign on a paper, which was in Telugu text, which I could not read. All I could read was my name, address and work details written in English. Rest of the content was in Telugu and they hurried me to sign on it.

With no one to consult and desperate to leave the police station, I signed on it and only then I was let off," said Ekta.

KPHB inspector Ch Kushalkar, who is also the complainant in suo motu case, told TOI that the raid was carried out in the presence of eye-witnesses after receiving a confidential information from society members. Documents furnished before the 19 Metropolitan Magistrate Court of Kukatpally by police state the raid was carried out by them in presence of tehsildar Kukatpally and two official 'panchas'.

"Ekta gave her statement orally in Hindi and the same was written in Telugu by our

police team. Entire process had been done in presence of witnesses," the inspector said.

While police alleged the accused, including Ekta have confessed to purchase and consumption of ganja, Ekta clearly said she had never procured or consumed the drug.

Police said photographs of all accused were shared with media as it is done with every case. "Unless accused is a minor or the victim of a sexual crime, we do share details with media. This is a NDPS Act case and the accused are not minors. We have also not singled out any one of the accused," the inspector said.

Keep up vigil: IT advisory to city cyber hub

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Hyderabad: After the Special Investigation Team (SIT) identified 40 software professionals using narcotics, the information technology department has issued a set of directions to software firms identified.

The department has asked the firms to be extra vigilant and keep a close watch on employees in order to identify signs of drug intake.

"I have personally contacted many centre heads of the respective IT companies, whose list has been shared with us by the excise department. Since no employees have been named, firms have been asked to maintain strict vigil and to keenly monitor all their employees, within the office premises and check for any signs or symptoms of drug usage," IT secretary Jayesh Ranjan said.

"If such signs are detected in an employee, we have directed firms to act on it strictly and inform police," he added.

Experts say that a stress-free work environment might encourage employees to refrain from using drugs and increase their productivity. IT firms have now lined up a slew of awareness programmes and employee-engagement activities in order to tackle the issue of drug usage among employees.

"It is unfortunate that such a trend has been noted among workers in the IT industry despite the fact that most companies, including us, conduct drug tests before recruiting a candidate. We have now decided to tackle the issue by educating employees about the side-effects of narcotics," said Vijay Ranganeni, chief executive officer at Tech Mahindra BPO.

Other tech firms pointed out how there have been no instances of drug abuse within

"I have personally contacted many centre heads of the respective IT companies, whose list has been shared with us by the excise department. Since no employees have been named, firms have been asked to maintain strict vigil and to keenly monitor all their employees, within the office premises and check for any signs or symptoms of drug usage," IT secretary Jayesh Ranjan said.

"Thanks to foolproof security, there have been no instances of drug abuse within office premises. What we have observed, however, is that after dealing with work pressures, many employees consume drugs as a stress-relieving activity over the weekends. This is why we have decided to focus on conducting team-building activities over the weekends in order to engage employees and keep them occupied and in tune with the company's interests and policies," said Viswam Venula, vice president of Polarix.

Those working in the city's IT hub, which employs close to 4.7 lakh people as per latest figures provided by the IT department, however, were not very amused by this stance by the authorities as they felt it was 'unfair' for anyone to even name the industry in this unfolding drug saga in the state.

"It is a law and order issue and it is unfair to drag IT companies. The only way for the authorities to tackle this is to work towards proper enforcement of rules," a techie said.

Another techie pointed out that instead of pinpointing the IT industry, the government should be worrying about schools.

Mumait: I drink & smoke, but no drugs

Actress Quizzed For 6hrs On Pub Visits, Parties

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Hyderabad: Actress Mumait Khan, who took a break from the Big Boss house to appear before the prohibition and excise sleuths, on Thursday told Special Investigation Team (SIT) that she 'hardly' parties at pubs. She, however, admitted that she smokes and consumes alcohol, but denied doing drugs. She volunteered to give her blood, hair and nail samples, but SIT sleuths said, if need be, they will collect them later.

During the over six-hour questioning, the SIT sleuths quizzed her on pub visits and parties. The actress claimed she rarely visits and parties at pubs. "Like Charmme, Mumait too denied knowing any drug peddlers. She also denied every abusing drugs," a source in the excise department said.

Mumait claimed she mostly stays in Mumbai and



IN SPOTLIGHT: Mumait Khan appears at Abkari Bhavan on Thursday

visits Hyderabad only when she has a scheduled shoot here. As not many Tollywood projects were in hand, she claimed her visits to Hyderabad had come down drastically, the official said.

When asked about her equation with director Puri Jagannadh and Tollywood personalities under the scanner in the drugs case, Mumait clarified that she only had a professional relationship with them.

Earlier, the actress landed

at the SIT office around 9.45 am. However, unlike the situation the previous day, the excise sleuths ensured there were enough women policemen at Abkari Bhavan.

When the SIT sleuths asked about her willingness to giving blood, nail and hair samples, Mumait agreed. Interestingly, the SIT officials did not take the samples. She was informed that, if need be, they would take the samples later. Mumait was let off before the 5pm deadline.

Bigg Boss weeps as actress quits

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Hyderabad: The goodbyes were not done properly and the parting was hasty. "Five minutes hai mere pass (I have only five minutes)" actress Mumait Khan said as she exited the Bigg Boss house in Lonavala, Pune, on Wednesday. She took a flight and landed at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Shamshabad, at night. On Thursday, dressed in black, she showed up at the excise office to be questioned by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in the drugs case.

There were tears and weeping at the Bigg Boss house. The other inmates, taken by surprise at her sudden departure, wanted to know why she was leaving. "Why are you packing?" they asked her. "Kya

Hua (What happened)?" "What are you doing?" "Give us clarity?" were some of the questions she was bombarded with.

"Chalo Chalo, Bye Bye," Mumait Khan said as she ran towards the huge door of the Bigg Boss house and got out. "Play well. Be good. Be nice," she said, while rushing out of the house on Wednesday.

Mumait Khan had to attend the questioning by excise officials, but she chose not to tell anyone that. However, even before the show began and inmates got into the house, word was out that her name had figured in the drugs case. The inmates probably were not aware of this.

Organisers of Bigg Boss did not get back to a query from TOI about when she would return to the house.

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Visakhapatnam: Hyderabad could be where all the action is, but serving the capital city its heady dosage of drugs is a thick-network of 'gentlemen users' flying in the stash, all the way from Visakhapatnam.

Their generic profile: young, suave white-collared executives -- mostly employed with multi-national corporations in Hyderabad -- with connections in the Port City. "They are usually in the 25 to 40 age bracket and often have a long-standing association with Vizag. Many among them are engineering and management graduates who perhaps went to school/college there and built these contacts," said a senior policeman from Visakhapatnam.

From the dealers in the Port City, these gentlemen users transport ganja pack-

Tollywood To Walk The Talk

A 'walk against drugs' is to be organized by the Telugu film industry on July 30 at 7am at KBR Park in Banjara Hills. Many film stars are expected to participate in the walk.

Movie Artistes Association (MAA) president Shivaji Raja, general secretary Naresh and others met excise minister T Padma Rao at his residence on Thursday and extended an invitation to the minister to also participate in the walk. With the film industry being in the dock in the drugs case being probed by the excise department, MAA took the initiative to drive home the message that the industry was against drug abuse.

ges to Hyderabad from where it then travels to peddlers stationed at almost 100 minor distribution points -- in Hyderabad and other major towns of Telangana, including Warangal.

Official estimates suggest close to 150 tonnes of ganja is routed from Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts, accounting for about 5% of the banned substance harvested every year in south Odisha and north coastal Andhra. The most-sought after variety: Sheelavati.

Those familiar with 'Sheelavati' say it's the prime variety of marijuana that's grown in Visakhapatnam and other north coastal zones. "This hybrid variety has high levels of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) a compound that affects behavioural pattern among users. If consumed in large doses, medical research suggests, it can severely impair many psychological functions (such as memory) and leave the individual disconnected," a senior psychiatrist said.

'Mass Maharaja' Ravi Teja in hot seat today, ready for quiz

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Hyderabad: Ravi Teja, one of the top Telugu film heroes, will be grilled by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the excise department on the drugs issue on Friday. The actor's mother Rajyalakshmi had claimed that there was no way her disciplined son would be related to the drugs issue. Teja himself has maintained a stoic silence on the issue.

Ravi Teja has acted in many films directed by Puri Jagannadh, who was the first from the film industry to be subjected to questioning in the drugs probe. In the past, Ravi Teja's brothers Bharath, who died in a road accident recently, and Raghu had been arrested in drug related cases.

Twenty years ago, Ravi



Ravi Teja

Teja debuted with a role in 'Sindhooram' directed by Krishna Vamsi. In 'Nee Kosam', he put up a sterling performance, but what endeared him to the masses was 'Idiot' directed by Puri Jagannadh in 2002. That placed the hero in big league and he even got the title 'Mass Maharaja' from his fans and admirers.

More impressive and power-packed performances

followed in films like 'Ammamma Naana O Tamila Ammayi', 'Dubai Seenu', 'Kick' and 'Don Seenu'. He also acted in 'Tilu Sravani Subramanyam', 'Power', 'Mirapakay' and 'Krishna'. With established stars holding centre-stage in Tollywood, Teja managed to climb up the ladder, giving the producers the hope that not only would his films get good openings but also prove to be hits. Most of the times, it proved right.

Ravi Teja, who has been shooting for his two forthcoming films 'Raja the Great' and 'Touch Kesi Chudu', had lost his cool recently when media questioned him why he had not attended his brother Bharath's last rites. He explained saying he wanted his brother's smiling face to be etched in his mind forever and not his dead body.



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