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PAPER WITH PASSION

Hope and dread

The Gaza truce between Hamas and Israel may be fragile but it is still welcome as it offers some relief to beleaguered people

The recent announcement of a potential truce between Israel and Hamas has brought a mix of cautious hope and lingering fear to those on both sides of the conflict. After months of violence and suffering following the devastating events of October 2023, which saw Hamas's deadly incursion into Israel and the subsequent retaliatory offensive, the prospect of a ceasefire offers a moment of relief. However, the road ahead remains fraught with uncertainty. The conflict has left deep scars on both Israeli and Palestinian communities. For Israelis, the abduction of hostages—including women, children, and elderly civilians—has been a source of immense anguish. The release of 33 hostages as part of the initial phase of the ceasefire would bring some relief, but many fear the fragile agreement could collapse, leaving their loved ones in limbo. In Gaza, the humanitarian crisis is dire. The death toll exceeds 46,000, with women and children accounting for over half of the fatalities. Massive displacement has left 90 per cent of the population—approximately 2.3 million people—homeless. Entire neighbourhoods lie in ruins, and the lack of basic necessities has pushed residents to the brink of famine.



The proposed truce, brokered by the United States, Egypt, and Qatar, outlines a three-phased agreement. The first phase involves the exchange of hostages and Palestinian detainees, with the release of women, children, and the elderly prioritised. Subsequent phases would address the release of soldiers and other male captives, along with broader discussions to halt hostilities. A crucial component of the ceasefire includes a surge in humanitarian aid to Gaza. This would enable displaced Palestinians to return to their homes and help rebuild critical infrastructure. Yet, the long-term success of this agreement hinges on both sides' willingness to engage in meaningful negotiations during the second phase. The fragile nature of previous ceasefires—such as the one in November 2023 that lasted only a week—underscores the difficulty of achieving lasting peace. Key obstacles include Hamas's insistence on maintaining its military capabilities and Israel's objective to dismantle Hamas's governing structures. Both sides are under immense domestic and international pressure, but deeply entrenched mistrust makes compromise elusive. For hostages' families, uncertainty looms large. Many remain haunted by the possibility that their loved ones may not survive captivity if the truce fails. Meanwhile, Palestinians fear that a breakdown in talks could trigger renewed violence, exacerbating an already catastrophic situation. If the ceasefire holds, it could mark the beginning of a much-needed reprieve for Gaza's beleaguered population. Immediate priorities include addressing food insecurity, medical shortages, and the rebuilding of homes and infrastructure. International aid would play a critical role in alleviating the humanitarian crisis, but long-term recovery would require substantial investment, political stability and lasting peace.

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PICTALK



People try to tame a bull as they participate in the 'Jallikattu' event as part of 'Pongal' celebrations, in Tiruchirappalli PTI

Diplomacy: The pillar of India's global aspirations



SANTHOSH MATHEW

To fulfill its aspirations as a global leader, India must urgently bolster its diplomatic infrastructure by expanding and modernising the Ministry of External Affairs

India, the world's most populous nation and the largest democracy is emerging as a pivotal force in global affairs. As a leader of the Global South, its growing economic might, strategic autonomy, and commitment to peace have positioned it at the centre of international diplomacy.

However, despite these achievements, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)—the critical institution shaping and executing its foreign policy—remains under-resourced. With only about 850 diplomats, the MEA is inadequately equipped to handle the complexities of a rapidly evolving global landscape. For India to realize its potential as a global leader, it must significantly expand its diplomatic infrastructure, scaling the MEA to at least 5,000 personnel. Such an expansion would align with India's ambitions and its stature as a major international power. India's diplomatic requirements have grown substantially alongside its global ambitions.

As the world's largest democracy and one of its fastest-growing economies, India's foreign policy must address a wide range of global issues. From trade negotiations and climate change to digital diplomacy and global security, the MEA serves as the nerve center of India's international engagements. India's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by strategic autonomy and a commitment to peace, rooted in the Nehruvian tradition of non-alignment. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and VK Krishna Menon laid the foundation of an independent foreign policy that prioritized non-violence while asserting India's sovereignty. This legacy of non-alignment, which positioned India as a bridge between competing superpowers, remains a cornerstone of its diplomatic approach.

However, the global order is shifting, and India must adapt its foreign policy apparatus to meet modern challenges. Strengthening the MEA is vital not only for safeguarding India's interests but also for crafting a vision capable of influencing global politics. With a population



exceeding 1.4 billion and leadership roles in key international forums, India's current diplomatic infrastructure is insufficient for the demands it faces. Countries like the United States, China and Russia deploy thousands of diplomats and foreign policy experts to maintain their global influence. In contrast, India's diplomatic corps, though skilled, is a fraction of the size required. This gap underscores the urgent need for a larger, more specialised MEA capable of shaping global discussions and providing strategic depth across multiple domains. Expanding the MEA to 5,000 personnel would ensure that India's foreign policy is both proactive and comprehensive. Such an expansion is not merely about increasing numbers; it is about cultivating strategic expertise across diverse fields.

India's diplomacy must address trade, defense, environmental sustainability, cybersecurity, humanitarian aid, and more. To achieve this, the MEA must recruit specialists who can navigate these complex issues. During the Cold War, figures like US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger demonstrated the transformative power of strategic brilliance in diplomacy. Similarly, India needs diplomats capable of long-term thinking and crafting policies that reflect its evolving global role. India's for-



THE NEED FOR A DIPLOMATIC CORPS THAT CAN SHAPE GLOBAL DISCUSSIONS AND PROVIDE THE INTELLECTUAL AND STRATEGIC DEPTH REQUIRED IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT HAS NEVER BEEN MORE URGENT

ign policy must anticipate global trends rather than merely react to events. To compete with global powers like the US, Russia, and China, India requires a diplomatic team adept at building alliances, leveraging emerging opportunities, and addressing global challenges. This necessitates investments in strategic thinking and specialised knowledge. The MEA must develop expertise in fields such as space diplomacy, climate change negotiations, global trade, and defense strategy. Moreover, diplomats must engage with governments, businesses, think tanks, and civil society to shape decisions in India's favour.

A well-staffed MEA would enable India to better engage with key global issues and deepen its relationships with major powers. Just as the US relied on figures like Robert McNamara and John Foster Dulles to shape its diplomacy, India must nurture a generation of visionary diplomats. These individuals should possess deep understanding of global security, international law, multilateral organisations, and global trade—qualities exemplified by VK Krishna Menon, who championed India's interests on the international stage during the 1950s. Expanding the MEA is not just about addressing immediate challenges but about aligning India's diplomatic capabilities

with its evolving priorities. Experts in climate change, energy security, trade relations, and technology diplomacy are essential to ensuring a forward-thinking foreign policy.

The expanded MEA must also prioritise collaboration with think tanks, academic institutions, and media professionals. These partnerships can provide the intellectual foundation for strategic decisions and help India anticipate emerging global trends. Think tanks and universities—both domestic and international—can offer critical insights into shifting geopolitical dynamics, new economic policies, and other global developments. Engaging with these institutions will ensure that India's foreign policy remains agile and informed. Public diplomacy is another critical component of modern foreign policy. Beyond government-to-government negotiations, India must focus on shaping global perceptions and building relationships with international audiences. The MEA should work closely with media professionals to effectively communicate India's vision and policies to the world. Leveraging India's soft power—its rich culture, democratic ideals, and values—can amplify its global influence and ensure its voice is heard.

(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RUPEE LOSING SHEEN

Madam — There is an ongoing concern over the rupee sharply losing value against the dollar. But then a nation's currency intrinsically represents two notions of value: one for the purchaser and seller in the domestic market and the other for the external one. China, in its monetary parlance, has the yuan and the renminbi. In layman's terms, the domestic standing of the rupee is broadly propped up by an incremental rise in GDP and per capita income, with the purchasing power sustained by low inflation.

Compared to most economies, we are far better placed. Our current concern would be more reining in inflation and fiscal deficit to retain the value of the rupee. The exchange value of the rupee with other currencies is a matter of the difference between the inflow and outflow of foreign currency for our external buying or selling, be it products, commodities, or services. The crux lies in developing our niche in any one of them to reverse the trade deficit. China found it in manufacturing and commodities and dares to keep its currency highly depreciated. The US despite its huge debt has the privilege of printing the dollar, the global currency. We must find it in diligence, research, and human potential.

R Narayanan | Navi Mumbai

NGO SUSPECTED FOR BOMB THREAT

Madam—Apropos of the headlines 'Police find NGO, political ties in Delhi bomb threats', it is imperative to dig deeply into the conspiracy of scaring 400 Delhi schools with bombing. The 16-year-old boy is only a juvenile shield to escape punishment. This is a heinous crime closely connected with the terrorist act perpetrated by the sympathisers of terrorist Afzal Guru, who had been hanged during Congress's tenure. Delhi CM Atishi is also a potential source of investigation because of her family's sympathy with the terrorist Afzal Guru. All those associated with the NGO should be slapped with NSA under the zero-tolerance policy of the Union Government. The

Meta offers apologies on election remark



Mark Zuckerberg's controversial statement has sparked a new debate across India and the world. His remarks about the functioning of Joe Biden's administration and the 2024 Indian elections have angered the Indian Parliament. Now, Meta India has publicly apologised following backlash over its CEO Mark Zuckerberg's comments on India's 2024 general elections. This issue raises critical questions about the responsibility of tech companies and the impact of their statements

on a global scale. Zuckerberg's comments on Joe Rogan's podcast regarding economic challenges and democracy in India are being seen as damaging to India's image.

Particularly, the questions raised about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government's economic management and COVID-19 strategies are considered serious. India's IT Minister, Ashwini Vaishnaw, has responded strongly, stating that foreign companies must respect India's constitutional dignity. This incident not only scrutinises the social impact of social media giants but also questions their political interference. India's stance highlights that major tech giants are now being held accountable for their actions. This development sends an important message that strict action against misinformation is essential to upholding the dignity of democracy.

R K Jain | Barwani

Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist who carried out the Parliament attack in 2001 earned sympathy for those vying for Delhi rule. It is the most unfortunate for the country and the ugliest face of our political ecosystem.

Hitherto, a part of the INDIA bloc, AAP must clarify the role of its Delhi CM. The Khalistani links of the Aam Aadmi Party and Arvind Kejriwal are already in public awareness. There seems to be no end to the revengeful acts of sympathisers of the terrorists, so the strongest punishment should be ensured against the culprits. We are aware that a team of leading advocates will protect the NGO behind the Delhi school bomb threats. Such an ecosystem should be exposed. Delhi has been targeted by the extremist forces; it is very obvious and evident.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

B'DESH AG'S ANTI-SECULARISM PITCH

Madam — Bangladesh's Attorney General Mohammad Asaduzzaman has demanded the removal of the word secularism from the Constitution. He has said that 90 per-

cent of Bangladesh's population is Muslim, so it should be a Muslim country by removing the word secular. The Attorney General has said that words like socialism and secularism do not present the correct picture of Bangladesh. He has suggested making major changes in the constitution and removing 'secularism'. He will make these changes before the next elections. Because Yunus is an educationist later and is first a fundamentalist Muslim. Earlier, in the year 2010, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh had ruled that the removal of secularism in 1977 was illegal. The court had reinstated secularism in the constitution. Just as Bangladesh is attacking temples in its country, similarly in India too, deities are being searched for in mosques. The destination of both the neighbours is the same. Bangladesh wants to become an Islamic nation while preparations are on in India to make it a 'Hindu Rashtra'.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

India's projector demand soars with eco-friendly innovations

These next-generation projectors not only offer enhanced energy efficiency and sustainability but also excellent output redefining the visual experience

India is rapidly becoming one of the fastest-growing projector markets globally, with an anticipated annual growth rate of 8.10 per cent over the next five years. This surge is driven by the increasing demand for projectors in both commercial and personal spaces. Technological advancements are playing a key role in this trend, as new, more eco-friendly projector alternatives are replacing traditional lamp-based models. These older models, while effective, had significant drawbacks such as high power consumption, reliance on hazardous materials, and limited recyclability. In contrast, modern projectors are designed with sustainability in mind, making them an attractive option for a wide range of applications.



The rise in digitization across businesses and households further accelerates the need for effective display solutions. Eco-friendly projectors not only address this need but also offer a greener, more sustainable alternative to conventional options. With advanced production standards grounded in sustainable development, these projectors are perfectly positioned to meet India's growing demand for high-tech, energy-efficient devices. Eco-friendly projectors are designed to tackle many of the issues associated with traditional models. They operate with much higher energy efficiency, significantly reducing power consumption. The manufacturing process also minimizes carbon footprints, with materials sourced responsibly. Innovations such as LED and laser light sources have significantly improved these devices' energy efficiency and lifespan, making them superior to traditional lamp-based projectors.

These advancements appeal to environmentally conscious consumers and businesses alike, offering a more sustainable solution to their

display and entertainment needs. Compared to earlier generations, eco-friendly projectors offer several clear advantages. Their energy efficiency makes them much more cost-effective in the long term, as they consume far less power and do not require frequent replacements of parts like traditional bulbs. Additionally, the longevity of these projectors reduces waste, further decreasing their environmental impact. Importantly, many eco-friendly projectors do not contain harmful substances like mercury, which is found in conventional models, thus contributing to safer disposal practices. Furthermore, these projectors are built to last longer and require less maintenance, thanks to technologies like LED and laser, which do not degrade as quickly as traditional bulbs. As a result, maintenance costs are significantly lower, and users benefit from reduced downtime and increased durability.

This is an appealing factor for both businesses and consumers, as it translates to lower total ownership costs

over the life of the device. Looking ahead, there are several trends that will further shape the future of eco-friendly display technologies. One of the most promising is the development of even more efficient light sources, such as OLEDs and advanced lasers, which will provide higher brightness while consuming even less power. Another exciting possibility is the use of solar-powered projectors, especially in rural or off-grid areas, which would reduce reliance on conventional power sources and minimize carbon footprints. Additionally, there is growing interest in integrating biodegradable materials into the production of projectors, which would reduce the environmental impact when the product reaches the end of its lifecycle. The future will also likely see the introduction of more smart projectors that can integrate seamlessly with smart home and office ecosystems, featuring energy-saving modes based on usage patterns.

(The writer is MD Optoma Technology; views are personal)



VIJAY SHARMA



FIRST COLUMN

US EXPORT CONTROLS: IMPACT ON INDIA'S AI

US export controls pose new challenges for India's AI and tech ambitions



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The Biden administration's Interim Final Rule (IFR), effective January 2025, introduces strict regulations on the export, reexport and in-country transfer of advanced computing integrated circuits (ICs) and artificial intelligence (AI) model weights. These measures aim to limit the proliferation of advanced technologies with potential military and intelligence applications, particularly in AI-driven systems. While this move marks a significant policy step from the outgoing administration, its future under the next presidency remains uncertain, as the new administration could pause the implementation for review. India, a nation rapidly advancing its AI infrastructure, faces significant challenges under the IFR. Here are the key implications:

The IFR enforces licensing requirements for exporting advanced computing ICs and AI model weights, particularly those integral to high-performance AI models. For India, which is heavily investing in AI research and infrastructure, these restrictions may hinder access to state-of-the-art U.S. technologies. A "presumption of denial" applies to licenses for advanced ICs used in training AI models, limiting India's ability to obtain cutting-edge hardware essential for its AI development.

The regulations impose stringent controls on advanced closed-weight AI models, while open-weight models are exempt. Since closed-weight models often drive groundbreaking AI research, this limitation could slow India's progress in leveraging advanced US AI models. Restricted access to these critical technologies could delay breakthroughs in AI-driven applications.



Although the IFR provides exceptions for low-risk destinations, India is not included in the list of preferred nations. As a result, Indian entities face capped allocations on advanced computing capacity based on total processing performance (TPP). Over the next three years, these limitations could restrict the computational resources available for Indian researchers and developers, potentially stalling AI initiatives.

Indian companies seeking US technology will face heightened scrutiny under the IFR, including stringent checks on supply chain security, personnel vetting, and cybersecurity compliance. These requirements will increase the complexity of partnerships with US firms and may delay India's efforts to scale its AI ecosystem.

India's plans to establish advanced data centers and high-performance computing clusters will be directly affected by the new regulations. The IFR mandates compliance with US security standards, such as NIST guidelines, adding operational costs and potential delays.

India's ambition to lead global AI collaborations, as demonstrated by its participation in initiatives like the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI), faces friction under these controls. With international partnerships playing a crucial role in India's technological growth, the restrictions on high-performance computing components and AI models could disrupt progress.

To mitigate these challenges, India must consider alternative strategies, including strengthening domestic research and development, partnering with non-US technology providers, and leveraging diplomatic channels to negotiate favorable terms with the US. The path forward will require Indian companies to adapt rapidly, focusing on self-sufficiency and fostering collaborations beyond traditional partnerships. While the IFR offers limited flexibility through license exceptions and potential adjustments, India's advanced computing and AI ambitions will require resilience and innovation to overcome the regulatory hurdles imposed by these new export controls.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

The war they waged, the price we paid



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

With Trump's return, the stage is set for continuation of the bloodstained legacy, with devastating consequences for the world's most vulnerable



The Vietnam War should have been the United States' breaking point—a humiliating defeat that exposed the futility of projecting brute force in a world that had long learned to resist imperialism. But instead of becoming a sobering moment of reflection, it ignited a chain reaction of conflicts, interventions, and proxy wars that would devastate nations and leave millions dead. From Ronald Reagan to Joe Biden, the American war machine has not only endured but expanded, thriving on chaos and suffering. With Donald Trump poised to return, his new administration promises to perpetuate this bloodstained legacy, consolidating power at home while unleashing destruction abroad.

Reagan's tenure marked a revival of the Cold War mindset, framed by a simplistic, almost cartoonish view of global politics. His administration orchestrated covert operations and military interventions with reckless abandon, leaving a trail of devastation across continents. In Grenada, a minuscule island nation, the U.S. flexed its muscle in a laughable display of overkill. Yet, the price for the people of Grenada was far from humorous—hundreds of civilians died in an operation sold as a "rescue mission." In Lebanon, Reagan's deployment of U.S. Marines ended in catastrophe, with 241 servicemen killed in a suicide bombing. The retaliatory shelling of Lebanese villages left countless civilians dead, their stories erased from the official narrative. George H. W. Bush brought the carnage to Panama and Iraq. Operation Just Cause in Panama left at least 3,000 civilians dead, according to independent estimates—numbers far higher than the official U.S. tally.

The Gulf War of 1991 killed tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians, with entire neighbourhoods flattened by American airpower. The sanctions that followed—a form of economic warfare—led to the deaths of an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children, as reported by UNICEF. But these deaths were dismissed by then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as a price worth paying. Bill Clinton's presidency, often remembered for its charm and centrism, was any-



THE GULF WAR OF 1991 KILLED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF IRAQI SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS, WITH ENTIRE NEIGHBOURHOODS FLATTENED BY AMERICAN AIRPOWER. THE SANCTIONS THAT FOLLOWED—A FORM OF ECONOMIC WARFARE—LED TO THE DEATHS OF AN ESTIMATED 500,000 IRAQI CHILDREN.

thing but peaceful. Under his watch, NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo killed an estimated 500 civilians, while strikes on critical infrastructure plunged the region into chaos. In Somalia, Clinton inherited and expanded a disastrous intervention that culminated in the infamous Black Hawk Down incident. The fallout was not limited to American soldiers—it cost the lives of an estimated 10,000 Somali civilians caught in the crossfire. The Bush-Cheney years saw the bloodbath reach industrial levels. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, based on falsified intelligence, unleashed a catastrophe of staggering proportions. By conservative estimates, 200,000 Iraqi civilians died in the war, though many argue the real number exceeds half a million. Afghanistan, initially framed as a righteous response to 9/11, turned into a graveyard for American credibility. The war cost over 70,000 Afghan civilian lives, with many more lost to starvation and disease caused by the destruction of infrastructure.

These numbers, while horrifying, barely scratch the surface. Barack Obama, heralded as a harbinger of change, instead became the drone king. Under his administration, drone strikes killed an estimated 3,800 people in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. These numbers include as many as 800 civilians, though independent investigations suggest the real toll is much higher. Libya, once a stable if repressive state, was reduced to a failed state after NATO's intervention, with Obama admitting it was his greatest foreign policy mistake. Yet his admission did nothing to rebuild Libya, now a haven for human traffickers and militia warlords. Donald Trump's first term shattered even the pretence of restraint. Civilian casualties from U.S. airstrikes in Syria and Iraq

soared, with independent monitors estimating at least 4,500 civilians killed in 2017 alone.

In Somalia, Trump's loosening of drone strike protocols led to a surge in civilian deaths, including women and children obliterated in remote villages. Yemen's civil war, fueled by U.S.-supplied bombs and logistical support to Saudi Arabia, created what the U.N. calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. By some estimates, over 377,000 Yemenis have died—many of them from famine and disease exacerbated by the relentless bombing campaigns. Joe Biden's administration, while promising a pivot to diplomacy, has only perpetuated the violence.

The withdrawal from Afghanistan, while ending America's longest war, was executed with callous disregard for human life. At least 170 civilians were killed in a single ISIS-K bombing during the chaotic evacuation. Biden's continued drone strikes and military presence in Syria ensure that civilians remain collateral in America's unending "war on terror." In Ukraine, US military aid fuels a war that has already claimed tens of thousands of lives on both sides, with no end in sight. Across these decades, the pattern is unmistakable: the United States does not fight wars for freedom or democracy.

It fights for hegemony, resources, and geopolitical advantage, with human lives as expendable currency. The statistics are staggering but fail to capture the depth of the tragedy. From Vietnam to Yemen, from Iraq to Libya, the human cost is always paid by those least equipped to bear it: the poor, the displaced, and the voiceless. In just days, Donald Trump will return to the White House, his second administration poised to escalate the already relentless machinery of American war. This time, the

gloves are off—his power more consolidated, his team of loyalists more ruthless, and his ambitions unrestrained. The team surrounding him will be battle-hardened ideologues with little patience for opposition.

Trump has openly embraced authoritarian impulses, and his foreign policy will likely mirror his domestic ambitions—unapologetic, ruthless, and geared toward consolidating dominance. For the impoverished, this is a death sentence. The costs will not be borne by those who plan wars from air-conditioned offices or justify them in press briefings but by the powerless: Yemeni mothers sifting through the rubble for scraps, Syrian children cowering as drones circle above, and Gazan families freezing to death amid the ruins of their bombed-out homes. These are not accidents of war; they are deliberate outcomes of a global system that treats human life as expendable in the pursuit of dominance over dignity.

The bombs will continue to fall, the starving will continue to die, and the architects of this destruction will dine in opulence, their hands stained with the blood of the voiceless.

We collectively absorb these atrocities—not with shock or outrage, but with numb detachment, anaesthetised by the relentless churn of media cycles and the droning rationalisations of pundits. It is not that we do not care—it is that we have been conditioned not to. Once our souls have been amputated by decades of war-mongering, by a system that normalises suffering as the cost of 'security,' we survive in resignation, compelled by the machinery of indifference to keep moving forward.

(The writer is a journalist and policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Uttarakhand's initiatives to strengthen climate resilience in the Himalayas

The State's efforts, encapsulated in the Dehradun Declaration, highlight the importance of collaboration and community empowerment

The Uttarakhand Council of Science and Technology (UCOST) recently organised a significant workshop in Delhi, focusing on climate resilience and disaster management, with a particular emphasis on Himalayan states. This workshop attracted eminent scientists, disaster management experts, and advocates of climate resilience, underscoring the pressing need to address environmental challenges in the region. This initiative follows Uttarakhand's landmark 2023 International Conference in Dehradun, which drew participants from approximately 50 countries. The conference culminated in the adoption of the "Dehradun Declaration," a comprehensive action plan

aimed at fostering collaboration, innovation and effective strategies to mitigate the impact of climate change and natural disasters in Himalayan states. Uttarakhand's proactive approach to uniting stakeholders on these critical issues is both commendable and necessary.

Rationale Behind Uttarakhand's Initiatives Uttarakhand's unique geographical and cultural significance drives its commitment to addressing climate resilience. With the second-largest Himalayan boundary after Arunachal Pradesh, the state plays a pivotal role in supporting Northern India's vast hinterland. The region's popularity as a hub for tourism, religious pilgrimages such as the Char



DINESH KUMAR TYAGI

Dham Yatra, and adventure activities exerts considerable pressure on its fragile ecosystem. The state faces recurring natural calamities, including forest fires, landslides, cloud-bursts, and glacier shrinkage. These disasters significantly impact local communities, strain state resources, and demand robust measures to minimise their devastating

effects. By organising international workshops and fostering collaborations, Uttarakhand aims to raise awareness, share best practices and leverage technology, such as data analytics and artificial intelligence, to design both preventive and responsive strategies.

Highlights of the Dehradun Declaration The Dehradun Declaration lays out a comprehensive framework for building climate resilience and disaster preparedness in Himalayan states. Its key features include: **Strengthening Preparedness** Integrating disaster resilience into educational curricula. Framing regulations to protect vulnerable populations. Developing financial tools and frameworks to advance the "science of survival."



Protecting the Himalayan Ecosystem Merging indigenous knowledge with traditional community practices. Promoting nature-based solutions and active community engagement. Enhancing institutional collaboration for project monitoring and execution. **Empowering Communities** Establishing community-

based early warning systems. Educating and equipping communities to take local measures. **Strengthening livelihoods and building local networks of like-minded individuals.** **Policy Integration** Establishing an Institute of Disaster Management and a global center for climate resilience. Formulating policies based on national and international best practices. Coordinating among state, central, and international organisations. **Promoting Innovation** Supporting startups and entrepreneurs in developing tools and technologies for climate resilience. **The Delhi Workshop and Global Consensus**

The Delhi workshop served as a follow-up to the Dehradun Declaration and brought together disaster management scholars, international organisations, and corporate representatives engaged in CSR activities. Participants praised Uttarakhand's efforts to convene diverse stakeholders, emphasising that protecting the Himalayan ecosystem is a shared responsibility. The Himalayas, often referred to as the "Soul of India" and the "Third Pole," are crucial for maintaining ecological balance. Workshop attendees agreed on the need for collective action to address challenges such as unchecked tourism and resource exploitation. Recommendations included regulating plastic use, promoting organic farming,

imposing green taxes on vehicles, and training locals to mitigate post-disaster damage. **National Perspectives on Climate Resilience** The recently concluded COP 29 in Baku included an agenda to establish a global fund for addressing climate change. Developed nations were urged to allocate higher budgets to support developing and poorer countries in reducing carbon emissions. Training volunteers at the village level and connecting them through a centralised platform can foster trust and confidence in disaster preparedness efforts. (The writer is a retired IAS officer and president of Society of Digital Entrepreneurs; views are personal)

TRAVELOGUE

'Travel is more than destinations; it's about connections'



Whether it's a laid-back beach vacation, a cultural deep dive, or exploring India's rich heritage, Srividya Maharshi believes that travelling is much more than ticking destinations off a list — it's about creating memories and connecting with people. From a fun-filled girls' trip to Thailand to soulful journeys across Uttar Pradesh, she reflects on the experiences that have shaped her as a traveller, offering a glimpse into her most cherished moments and aspirations for future adventures.

TEJAL SINHA
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Travelling is not just a physical journey for Srividya Maharshi; it's an emotional and spiritual experience that allows her to disconnect from life's hustle and reconnect with herself. The actor, who has traversed paths for work, family obligations, pilgrimages and vacations, believes in the transformative power of travel. "For me, vacations are a way to unplug. I prefer peaceful experiences over rushing to cover as many places as possible. The purpose is to rest and reset, not chase deadlines, even on a holiday," she shares.

Srividya ensures her travels reflect this philosophy by choosing accommodations that exude serenity. Whether it's a cozy Airbnb or a well-situated hotel, the place must align with her need for peace. This approach was evident in her most recent trip, a girls' getaway to Thailand with her closest friends.

Organising a trip with working professionals can be a logistical challenge, but for Srividya and her friends, the effort was worth it. "Making it happen was the best decision we made. Good company makes even the slight hiccups in travelling easier to navigate," she remarks, fondly recalling how her friends' meticulous planning balanced her laid-back vacation vibe. "They even made Excel sheets for budgets and schedules, and I'm lucky they don't complain about my lack of contribution," she quips.



Among the most cherished memories from the trip were moments spent in quiet reflection on the beach during sunsets, as well as some amusing cultural surprises. However, what truly stood out was a simple act of carrying an electric cooker and rice to cook meals with "podu" (a South Indian spice mix) when they struggled to find food to their liking. "It felt like a slice of home. We sat together and ate like real Telugu girls in their Amamma's house," she says with a laugh.

While in Thailand, she and her friends made a conscious effort to explore the culture beyond the tourist hotspots. A cycling food tour through Bangkok turned out to be a highlight. The day-long journey included stops at age-old households to sample traditional recipes, visits to the floating market, and a trip to the vibrant fruit markets. "It was a wholesome experience that connected us with the locals and gave us a real feel of the place," she recalls.

For her, any place with a beach offers the ultimate rejuvenation. "The vast ocean reminds me of how small we are in the grand scheme of things. The sound of waves drowns out the noise in my head, helping me calm down," she reflects.

Her travels within India have been equally enriching. A recent journey across Uttar Pradesh, covering Agra, Mathura and Ayodhya, offered not only a glimpse into the country's heritage and spiritual significance but also insightful interactions with locals. "Every city and town in India has its own story, culture and history. Even within the same State, the diversity is striking, making every experience unique," she notes.

Not all travel experiences are smooth, and she recalls a particularly nerve-racking moment during her return from London. A technical glitch with her boarding pass nearly caused her to miss the flight, which would have left her stranded with an expiring visa. "I panicked, imagining being labelled an illegal immigrant and deported," she admits, now able to laugh about it in hindsight.

Looking back on her travels, she feels a deep sense of accomplishment. "Younger me would be so glad," she says. As a child, she often worried whether she would ever get the chance to explore the world. "Seeing those visa stamps on my passport reminds me that I'm doing something my childhood self thought was unachievable."

Next on her travel bucket list are Vietnam and Sri Lanka, destinations she hopes to visit with her husband. While she hasn't ventured into solo travelling for leisure, she enjoys group trips for the shared responsibilities and camaraderie. "Travelling with others means less stress and more fun," she shares.

For her, the essence of travel lies in the little details — the stories shared by shopkeepers, drivers and long-time residents. "Tourist attractions often offer a filtered view. The real feel of a place comes from interacting with its people," she concludes.

With her mindful approach to travel and a heart open to experiences, Srividya Maharshi continues to explore the world, one story and memory at a time.

Chidiya Udd delivers gritty drama, but struggles to soar high

PNS|HYDERABAD

Chidiya Udd, streaming on MX Player, presents a gritty exploration of survival, resilience and crime, set against the backdrop of Mumbai's infamous red-light district, Kamathipura. Directed by Ravi Jadhav, the series attempts to shine a light on the struggles of those caught in the web of human trafficking and exploitation. While it boasts a promising premise and a stellar cast, it struggles to break free from the conventional tropes of its genre.

Plot

The narrative centres on Seher, a young woman from Rajasthan whose life takes a drastic turn when circumstances force her to flee her hometown and seek refuge in Mumbai. Far from the haven she hoped for, Mumbai thrusts her into the heart of Kamathipura, where she faces the grim realities of prostitution and crime. At the same time, the show introduces Qadir Khan, a menacing figure who holds sway over the area. As Seher fights to reclaim her agency amidst the chaos, the story unfolds with a mix of suspense, emotional depth and moments of harrowing intensity.

Highlights

The show's greatest strength lies in its character-driven storytelling. Bhoomika Meena's portrayal of Seher is deeply moving, capturing both the vulnerability and the quiet strength of a woman determined to survive against all odds. Jackie Shroff is compelling as Qadir Khan, exuding authority and menace with ease. Supporting performances from Sikandar Kher and Madhur Mittal add depth to the narrative, as their characters navigate the murky waters of Kamathipura's underworld.

Drawbacks

However, while the series is engaging, it falls short of being groundbreaking. The plot often feels predictable, following a familiar trajectory that seasoned viewers of crime dramas will recognize. There are moments of brilliance, but they are diluted by the reliance on conventional storytelling and an overuse of genre clichés. Despite its efforts to shed light on the grim realities of exploitation, the show fails to offer fresh insights or perspectives, which could have elevated it from being just another tale of survival.

Performances

Bhoomika Meena stands out with



REVIEW

Director: Ravi Jadhav
Producer: Harman Baweja
Cast: Jackie Shroff, Bhoomika Meena, Sikandar Kher, Madhur Mittal, Mayur More and Mita Vashisht
Streaming on: Amazon MX Player
Rating: 3.5/5

Verdict

In conclusion, Chidiya Udd is a well-crafted series that delivers a gripping, albeit familiar, exploration of Mumbai's underworld. Its strengths lie in its performances, particularly those of Bhoomika Meena and Jackie Shroff, and its authentic portrayal of Kamathipura's harsh realities. However, its predictable plot and lack of innovation in storytelling hold it back from achieving greatness. Chidiya Udd is a commendable attempt to highlight the struggles of those caught in the web of exploitation, but its adherence to familiar tropes prevents it from standing out. Strong performances and a gripping setting make it worth a watch, though it falls short of being truly exceptional.

Recommendation

For fans of crime dramas with emotional depth, Chidiya Udd offers an engaging experience, though it may not linger long in memory.

her portrayal of Seher, balancing vulnerability and strength with remarkable ease. She embodies the struggles and resilience of her character with authenticity, making her the emotional backbone of the series. Jackie Shroff brings gravitas to the role of Qadir Khan. His commanding screen presence and layered performance add depth to the antagonist, making him a memorable figure. Sikandar Kher and Madhur Mittal provide solid support, adding complexity to their characters with nuanced performances.

Technical aspects

Visually, Chidiya Udd excels in immersing the audience in its gritty setting. The cinematography by Lawrence Alex D'Cunha is striking, vividly capturing the chaos and despair of the red-light district. The dimly lit alleys, crowded streets and claustrophobic interiors paint an unflinching portrait of Kamathipura. The direction by Ravi Jadhav ensures that the emotional beats of the story land effectively, even if the pacing occasionally falters. The music and background score, composed by Roshin Balu, complement the narrative without standing out as particularly memorable. While the score heightens moments of tension, it does not leave a lasting impression. Similarly, the editing, though generally sharp, struggles to maintain momentum in certain episodes, with some scenes feeling unnecessarily stretched.

The future of car protection

In the last few years, we have all witnessed that the automotive industry and its technology have evolved rapidly. There are several kinds of methods that can be used to protect vehicles from damage and give them an appealing look like never before. Along similar lines, ceramic coating and graphene coating are two cutting-edge technologies at the forefront of the industry. Both are applied to the car's exterior and offer exceptional protection against damages. However, while choosing the best car coating, car owners sometimes need help with their prices, durability, etc. This article delves into some key differences between graphene coating and ceramic coating and, specifically, answers the dilemma of which is better for a vehicle.

Ceramic coating

Ceramic coating is a combination of liquid polymer & ceramic particles applied to a car's exterior, forming a protective layer upon curing. It comes with a wide range of benefits: it elevates the paint's gloss, exuding depth and smoothness to the look, and it protects the car's exterior from external damage. Ceramic coating is also renowned for its hydrophobic properties, making the car look better and improving safety by enhancing visibility during weather conditions. It quickly beads off the windshield and other glass surfaces, reducing the need for constant windshield wiper usage.

Graphene coating

Graphene coating is a single layer of carbon atoms arranged in a hexagonal lattice, which is one of the most robust materials known among car enthusiasts. Graphene coating leverages its incredible strength and provides unparalleled protection for the vehicle. It forms a very thin yet durable protective layer that is virtually impervious to scratches, chips, and other forms of damage.

Difference between ceramic coating and graphene coating

- **Longevity:** Graphene coatings are generally considered more durable than ceramic coatings and offer superior protection against harsh environmental factors, including minor scratches, UV rays etc.
- **Self-healing properties:** One of the most important factors that attracts car owners to opt for graphene coating is its self-healing properties. This factor allows minor scratches to repair themselves over a period of time.
- **Hydrophobic properties:** Both graphene and ceramic coatings exhibit excellent hydrophobic properties, repelling water and other contaminants. However, graphene coatings often



offer superior water beading and sheeting.

- **Gloss & Shine Look:** While both coatings can enhance a vehicle's gloss and shine, ceramic coatings are often preferred for their ability to produce a deep, wet-look finish.

How do you choose a suitable coating for your vehicle?

The choice between graphene and ceramic coating depends on the vehicle owner's specific needs and preferences. Graphene coating is an excellent option if they prioritize maximum durability and cutting-edge technology. However, if they prefer a more traditional approach with a strong emphasis on gloss and shine, ceramic coating may be the better choice for them.

It's important to note that both the coatings require professional application to achieve optimal results. Additionally, it is always advisable to do regular maintenance, such as washing with car-friendly products, which can help prolong the life of the coating and maintain its protective properties.

In conclusion, as technology in the automotive sector advances, we expect to see even more innovative car protection solutions emerge in the coming years. However, graphene and ceramic coatings currently represent the pinnacle of exterior protection, offering unparalleled durability, gloss, and ease of maintenance to car enthusiasts.

(The author, Kunal Sethi, is the CEO of The Detailing Mafia)

what's brewing?



● Surya Dhananjay



● Pallam Raju



● Raunaq Yar Khan

VCIWU hosts a Three-Day International Conference on the Asaf Jahi Dynasty "First Day of Highlights the Transformation from Royalism to Democracy and the Role of Urdu in Shaping Hyderabad's Cultural Identity The "Veeranari Chakali Ilamma" Women's University in Koti, Hyderabad, inaugurated. 300-year journey of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty from Royalism to Democracy from 1724 to 2024. Hosted by the University's Urdu Department under the leadership of Professor S. Naseem, inaugural session was Surya Dhananjay, Vice Chancellor of the university, and was graced by Raunaq Yar Khan, the 9th Nizam of the Asaf Jahi dynasty and the first democratic Nizam, who delivered the keynote address. The special guest was M. M. Pallam Raju, Former Union Minister



● Ghousiya and Samina Begum



● Karuna Sree

PARTY

Photos by- SV Chary

Deepthi showcases Telangana in Delhi



PNSHYDERABAD

Deepthi Reddy Madugula, founder of Womenery, an inspirational young leader from Telangana proudly represented the State at the prestigious Viksith Bharath Young Leaders Dialogue 2025 held at Bharath Mandapam at New Delhi on January 10th, 11th & 12th. The event organised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, featured Prime Minister Narendra Modi who addressed 3,000 select youth pan India chosen over from 30 lakh youth participants; only around 200 selective youth were chosen as special invitees as "Path-breaker Youth Icons." Deepthi was invited as special invitee - Youth Icon of Telangana representing the tracks 'Making India', a manufacturing global power house & women empowerment, providing her a platform to share her valuable insights and inspire young leaders. The dialogue centered around 10 core themes of nation development for the country to become a Viksith Bharath by 2047. Deepthi's participation served as a beacon of hope and motivation for the emerging women leaders to contribute innovative ideas to women led nation building.



GC Cera Tiles, a trusted name in the ceramic tile manufacturing industry for over 28 years, is proud to announce the grand opening of its exclusive showroom at Autonager Hyderabad. Kishan Patel, CEO of GC Tiles Says "This new venture allows us to connect with our customers directly and offer them a personalized experience that reflects our dedication to design,

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



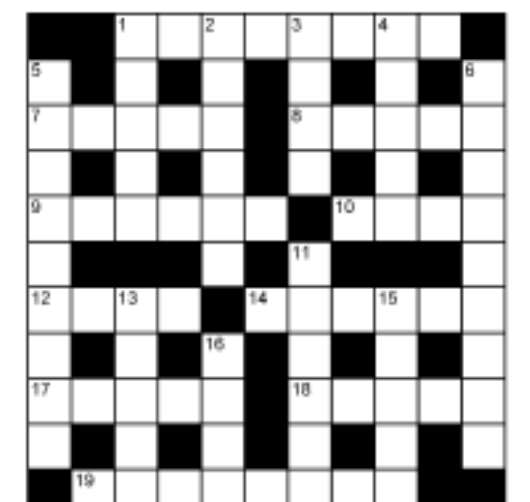
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

1	8	7					4
			8				1
			3	9	6		
3			9			1	2
5				8			3
	6	2			1		9
		6	4		7		
	2				8		
1					3	4	9

Yesterday's solution

5	8	4	9	6	3	2	1	7
6	7	1	4	8	2	9	5	3
2	9	3	7	1	5	6	8	4
8	4	9	6	7	1	5	3	2
1	6	5	2	3	9	7	4	8
7	3	2	5	4	8	1	9	6
3	2	6	1	9	4	8	7	5
4	1	7	8	5	6	3	2	9
9	5	8	3	2	7	4	6	1

- Rules
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- Gets better after illness
- An item of furniture
- Move
- Painter or sculptor
- At this place
- Pleased
- A meal outdoors
- Arrive at
- A large lifting machine
- A bird's covering
- People unknown to you
- Made longer by pulling
- Ring shape
- Not asleep
- Gets closer
- Closed

DOWN

- A mechanical person
- A mark from a fold
- A holder for cut flowers
- Lift up



I AM CHOOSY, BECAUSE OF THESE REASONS: BRAHMANANDAM



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Legendary comedian Brahmanandam is acting in a film titled 'Brahma Anandam', after a long break. The interesting thing about this film is that his son Raja Goutham is also acting in it. Brahmanandam is playing the role of a grandfather and his son is playing his grandson in it. Another comedian Vennela Kishore is also there in the film. "The director RVS Nikhil told me that he wrote the story for me and he wanted me to act in it, otherwise he won't do. Then they told me that my son is playing the lead actor and also grandson to me. I felt that this is something new for me, so I accepted," said Brahmanandam.

More than all this, the title is on his name which is another reason to accept. "This is the first time that the title is named as 'Brahma Anandam,'" he said. He added that though the title of this film is on his name, he didn't feel tense about it. "More than tension, it's a high moment for me because of the title," said the comedian.

Brahmanandam acted in more than 1,000 films as comedian, but recently he is choosy about films. When asked about it, Brahmanandam said one of the reasons is age factor. "Many people are telling me that my performance is good, but they couldn't get laughs like earlier. This is one reason and the other one is the age factor. You have to think about your age and I know I am becoming old and I can't be as active as earlier. So, with these reasons I reduced my films. It is

Brahmanandam talks about his comeback and why he reduced films and what are the reasons. He also talks about the present comedy in films...



not true that I didn't get films, I am getting, but I am choosy. If you want to be remembered forever, you have to reduce something and I reduced films," said

Brahmanandam about his gap.

The actor said that his son Raja Goutham is the first choice for Sekhar Kammula's 'Godavari' film. Sekhar is a

relative of Goutham too. "Goutham didn't do that film because it is a female-oriented one. I didn't say anything to Goutham at that time, because I don't want to inter-

ferre in his decision, because his generation's thinking is different. I too think that we have to check ourselves and self-criticism is very important. That's why I reduced films," said Brahmanandam.

When asked that in recent years, comedy is completely reduced in films, "Without a comedian, you can't make a film, without comedy you can't make any film. Nowadays, comedians are not doing comedy in films, the lead actors are also doing comedy. There are some good writers and directors, but I still can't say the reason. I am distant from the industry and choosy about films, so I can't tell," said the comedian.

The actor said that the film has a lot of entertainment and also emotion. "In front of the camera we are actors and we do whatever the director gives us and we don't think that he is my son and how can I act as a grandfather to him. Once we come out of camera, then we come to reality," said Brahmanandam, for another question. The film is releasing on February 14, Valentine's Day and it is not related to anything about it. "It's a beautiful film where the story tells about a bond between a grandson and a grandfather," he said.

Brahmanandam all praises another comedian Vennela Kishore. "He is one of the comedians who continue his legacy now," said Brahmanandam about him. He added that Kishore is doing well at present. Brahmanandam also praises all the actors who acted in 'Brahma Anandam'. "They gave an outstanding performance and it's a young team and I am very happy working with them," said the senior actor.



Venkatesh is Sankranti winner

Senior actor Venkatesh became the Sankranti winner with his film 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam' after his film's huge collections at the box-office. The film released on the Sankranti day, January 14, and got a hit talk from the first show onwards. The first day collections are also sensational and no one expects that it will be huge. This is also Venkatesh's best till today. Dil Raju is the producer, while Anil Ravipudi is the director. Aishwara Rajesh and Meenakshi Chaudhary are the female leads.

Interestingly, Dil Raju's other film 'Game Changer', a high budget one, directed by Shankar, is declared a flop and now he is getting at least some money in 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam'. Dil Raju may lose more than Rs 100 crore in 'Game Changer', says the source, but he may recover at least some from 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam'.

"I am happy that my film is getting good response everywhere. Whenever I do family entertainment, the audience comes and

enjoys my films. It gives me a different emotion," said Venkatesh after his film's success. He added that this film is going to be the biggest success in his career. "I should thank director Anil Ravipudi, for giving me a career best film," he added.

Venkatesh did promotions for this film like never before and it definitely attracted the audience. The film may get breakeven on the third day and from the fourth day onwards, it entered into profits.

Boyapati shooting at Kumbh Mela for Akhanda 2

Director Boyapati Srinivas is teaming up with Nandamuri Balakrishna for the sequel of 'Akhanda 2'. Balakrishna plays a dual role in this first part and his Aghora character is one of the highlights of the film. Now, Boyapati has already started the shooting of this sequel at the famous Maha Kumbh Mela. "Yes, we started shooting for some key scenes with the Aghora's backdrop. I met a few Aghoras and also Naga Sadhu at this Kumbh Mela. We started shooting from January 11 here and we will almost complete it on Thursday," said director Boyapati.

The first part of 'Akhanda' was a big success and recently they launched the second part. Ram Achanta and Gopi Achanta are the producers of this sequel. Whenever Boyapati and Balakrishna join hands, there are huge expectations on the film. They worked earlier for three films 'Simha', 'Legend' and 'Akhanda', all of them are blockbusters.

Now, he started 'Akhanda 2' with the tagline 'Thandavam', and the story revolves more around the Aghora character played by Balakrishna. Boyapati canned some key scenes at the Kumbh Mela and now, he starts the regular shoot in Hyderabad. On the other hand, Balakrishna is on cloud nine, delivered his fourth consecutive hit with 'Daaku Maharaja'. The film was released recently and is doing well at the box-office.



Jagapathi Babu is satisfied with his look in Ram Charan's film

Ram Charan is now concentrating on his upcoming film with director Buchi Babu Sana. The film already started shooting some-time back and now will continue for longer days. Buchi Babu later made his debut as director with 'Uppena' that was released nearly four years back. Now, after taking a long break, he is teaming up with Ram Charan, for a period drama and the tentative title is RC16. The film's shooting has been taking place briskly. Janhvi Kapoor is playing the female lead opposite Charan in this one.

Apart from the lead pair, the film has some good actors like Kannada actor Shiva Rajkumar, versatile actor Jagapathi Babu, and talented Bollywood actor Divyendu of 'Mirzapur' fame. Building on the excitement, Jagapathi Babu shared his enthusiasm for the film. The actor posted a high energy behind-the-scenes video that offered a peek into the hard work and dedication that is being put into his character transformation.

"After a long time, Buchi Babu gave me good work for RC16. I feel very satisfied after watching my look (getup) in the movie," said Jagapathi Babu, on his social media sharing the video. Maestro AR Rahman is providing the music and definitely it's going to be a highlight of this film. Avinash Kolla is the production designer, while Ratnavelu is the cinematographer.



Chiranjeevi, Jr NTR shocked after an intruder attacks Saif Ali Khan

Popular Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan was attacked by an intruder at his house in the early hours of Thursday. Saif was injured seriously and is now in the hospital and his condition is stable, according to the doctors. After getting the news, a few Tollywood celebrities expressed their shock and prayed for speedy recovery of Saif Ali Khan. Jr NTR worked with Saif in the film 'Devara' part one directed by Koratala Siva. Jr NTR on his social media expressed shock about the incident. "Shocked and saddened to hear about the attack on Saif sir. Wishing and praying for his speedy recovery and good health," said Jr NTR on his 'X'. Mega Star Chiranjeevi also responded and said he is disturbed after hearing about the news. "Deeply disturbed by news of the attack by an intruder on #SaifAliKhan. Wishing and praying for his speedy recovery," said Chiranjeevi on his social media page.

Melody song from Return of the Dragon unveiled

Pradeep Ranganathan became an overnight star after the success of 'Love Today'. He acted as lead actor, provided the story and also directed the film. It became a huge success in Tamil and also did well in Telugu. Pradeep became a household name with that success. It was made with a small budget, but at the box-office it collected huge money. Now, Pradeep is coming up with a film titled 'Return of the Dragon'. Pradeep is playing lead actor, while Ashwath Marimuthu is the director and also provided the story for

this one. Anupama Parameswaran is the female lead. India's leading production company, AGS Entertainment, is producing it. Ashwath Marimuthu earlier directed a Telugu film 'Ori Devuda'.

After the chartbuster first single 'Rise of Dragon', the team dropped the second single titled 'Madhuvaramae'. This most enchanting melody features Pradeep and Kayudu Lohar. The song is sung by Sarath Santhosh and Srinisha Jayaseelan in an enchanting way. Ramajogayya Sastry penned the lyrics.



Australian Open: Iga Swiatek moves into third round against Emma Raducanu

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Iga Swiatek rushed through the first set in 26 minutes and completed her 6-0, 6-2 second-round win over Rebecca Sramkova in an hour at the Australian Open. The five-time Grand Slam champion makes a habit of advancing quickly through the early rounds at the majors. She's won almost 12% of her sets in Grand Slams by 6-0, which puts her in exclusive company. So when No. 49-ranked Sramkova ended a seven-game losing run by holding serve on Thursday, she raised her arm to acknowledge the applause from the Rod Laver Arena crowd. It was one of the few chances she had to celebrate. "It was good to play in such an efficient way and just finish it quick," Swiatek said. "Also, you know, just feel the court and how it is in RLA."

Second-seeded Swiatek next faces 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu, who recovered from an early break in the second set to hold off Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 7-5. Taylor Fritz hasn't wasted any time advancing to the third round, dropping just eight games across two rounds and spending just over three hours on court. The 2024 U.S. Open runner-up and No. 4 seed beat Cristian Garin 6-2, 6-1, 6-0 to move into a third-round match against 38-year-old Gael Monfils, who last week became the oldest player to win an ATP Tour title. Also advancing on the men's side were local hope Alex de Minaur, seeded 8th, No. 16 Lorenzo Musetti, No. 19 Karen Khachanov and No. 21 Ben Shelton, who beat Pablo Carreno Busta 6-3, 6-3, 6-7 (4), 6-4. Raducanu has struggled with injuries since her breakthrough major in 2021, when she became the first qualifier to win a Grand Slam singles title. She didn't play a warmup tournament ahead of this year's Australian Open because of a muscle strain and needed time



Swiatek is moving on from the doping infringement which led to her one-month ban last year. And she's not showing any signs of it being a distraction. She did everything at pace in the second round, including quick claps of her racket to acknowledge the crowd after her win. Swiatek didn't face a break point against Sramkova and converted five of the six she had. She finished off points with winners off both sides, and also hit some clean volleys on her ventures to the net. She's feeling slightly less pressure this year, too, after losing the No. 1 ranking to two-time defending Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka. "Yeah, there was a lot of pressure starting the year as No. 1, but I think overall last year I didn't think about it this much anyway," she said. "Also, I realized last year that I don't have 100% influence on what happens with my ranking sometimes. So now I just

have nothing to lose. I'm just going to swing." Swiatek is moving on from the doping infringement which led to her one-month ban last year. And she's not showing any signs of it being a distraction. She did everything at pace in the second round, including quick claps of her racket to acknowledge the crowd after her win. Swiatek didn't face a break point against Sramkova and converted five of the six she had. She finished off points with winners off both sides, and also hit some clean volleys on her ventures to the net. She's feeling slightly less pressure this year, too, after losing the No. 1 ranking to two-time defending Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka. "Yeah, there was a lot of pressure starting the year as No. 1, but I think overall last year I didn't think about it this much anyway," she said. "Also, I realized last year that I don't have 100% influence on what happens with my ranking sometimes. So now I just

focus on tennis." Emma Navarro, a U.S. Open semifinalist last year and seeded in the top eight for the first time at a major, was in trouble after two service breaks early in the third set before she reeled off four straight games to beat Wang Xiyu 6-3, 3-6, 6-4. She hopped from the baseline toward the net, and made a big, swirling swing of her arm to underline another tough, three-set victory. "It was really tough the whole time... Super tough there at the end," Navarro said. "Found some good tennis there in the last games." She'll next play Ons Jabeur, a three-time Grand Slam runner-up, who struggled with asthma but held off Camila Osorio 7-5, 6-3. Sixth-seeded Elena Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion and runner-up in Australia two years ago, registered her 50th win in a Grand Slam main draw singles match when she beat American qualifier Iva Jovic 6-0, 6-3.



Barcelona reaches Copa del Rey quarterfinals with a 5-1 victory over Real Betis

PTI ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona followed up its prout of Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final with a comfortable 5-1 victory over Real Betis in the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey. Gavi and Jules Kounde scored a goal each in the first half-hour and Raphinha, Ferran Torres and Lamine Yamal added to the lead in the second half to give the Catalan club the win and a spot in the quarterfinals. It was the fourth straight victory in 2025 for Barcelona, which on Sunday defeated Madrid 5-2 in Saudi Arabia to win the Spanish Super Cup. "We wanted to keep the momentum from the Super Cup here at home in front of our fans," Barcelona defender Pau Cubarsi said. "We continue like this and keep the foot on the throttle. The (Christmas) break did well for us, we were able to refresh." Barcelona had lost its last two games in 2024 before going on a winning streak against Barastro in the Copa del Rey and Athletic Bilbao and Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup. Playmaker Dani Olmo, registered in the last minute after a long battle between Barcelona, the Spanish league and Spain's federation because of a missed deadline by the club, helped set up Gavi's opening goal in the third minute at Montjuic stadium. Yamal gave the pass for Kounde's goal in the 27th. Kounde thought he had added to the lead in first-half

stoppage time but his effort was disallowed by video review because he was offside. Yamal also had one called back by the VAR because of offside early in the second half. Barcelona's third goal finally counted when Raphinha found the net in a breakaway in the 58th. Torres scored the fourth from inside the area in the 67th, a few minutes after coming off the bench, and Yamal sealed it after a nice run in the 75th. Vitor Roque scored Betis' lone goal by converting an 84th-minute penalty kick. **ATLETICO WINNING** Atletico Madrid, playing without many regular starters, routed second-division club Elche 4-0 to extend its record winning streak to 15 matches. The club had never won more than 13 games in a row across all competitions before. Alexander Sorloth scored from close range in the eighth and converted a 29th-minute penalty kick. Rodrigo Riquelme scored the third from long range in the 61st, and Julian Alvarez closed the scoring in the 75th. Elche played a man down from the 50th after Nicolás Fernández was sent off with a second yellow card. **OTHER RESULTS** Alvaro Rodriguez scored two minutes into the match as Getafe won 1-0 at fourth-division club Pontevedra. The visitors played a man down from the 41st after a straight red card was shown to Rodriguez.

India women must make this year their best in ODIs: Smriti Mandhana

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Smriti Mandhana believes India's back-to-back 3-0 series wins against the West Indies and Ireland have provided the perfect momentum for making it their "best year in one-dayers" as the team gears up for the 50-over World Cup at home. India will host the women's ODI World Cup later this year and the team, which has been able to rediscover its form with six consecutive ODI wins, should drive home the advantage now, says Mandhana. "Two 3-0 sweeps are definitely really good in a World Cup year especially. We have to like keep going and have this for the best year for one-days (dayers)," Mandhana said in a video



shared by BCCI. Mandhana (135) and Pratika Rawal (154) put on 233 for the first wicket for the third highest opening wicket partnership for India in ODIs, setting up their highest ever total of 435/5 and eventually for their biggest ever ODI win by 304 runs on Wednesday. "I wanted to go out and bat with a lot of freedom. I said in the dugout before I went in about that you know, I'm going to try and play my shots because not many times you get an opportunity to do that," Mandhana said. Rawal, who notched up her first hundred to make 154 off 129 balls with 20 fours and

one six, admitted she slowed down nearing her century but gained pace of scoring once she was past the landmark. "As a batter I always wanted to score more runs and doing that for your country is actually a privilege and I am very happy," she said. "After (crossing) 70 (runs) I was a bit conscious that there was a hundred (on the cards). I was taking singles and going slow but when I got the hundred, I was like, let's just go for it. The 50 runs after the hundred came a bit quicker. I was able to score the way I score," she said. Talking about her 233-run opening stand with the senior batter, Rawal said, "It felt like that it was happening with the flow, we didn't think about it." "We got to know stats now, actually," Mandhana added.



Leroy Sané answers critics by scoring two goals as Bayern routs Hoffenheim

PTI ■ MUNICH

Leroy Sané answered critics by scoring two goals as Bayern Munich routed Hoffenheim 5-0 to restore its four-point lead in the Bundesliga. Sané is subject to increased attention with his contract due to expire at the end of the season. Pundits including former Bayern great Lothar Matthaeus say he hasn't lived up to expectations since joining from Manchester City in 2020, making a contract extension unlikely. Matthaeus was speaking to broadcaster Sky before kickoff. Sané wasted little time in responding with the opener in the seventh minute when he fired a fierce shot inside the far post after Thomas Müller laid the ball off. Sané's celebrations showed the criticism had perhaps taken its toll. "You always want to shake him, that he just does something and doesn't think too much. And today he did a lot and didn't think too much and he looked good," Müller said. Raphaël Guerreiro was celebrating five minutes later as a long evening beckoned for Hoffenheim. Guerreiro played a one-two with Harry Kane before scoring his first Bundesliga goal of the season. Kane made it 3-0 with a penalty in the 26th. It was his 16th goal of the season. Sané got his second after the break, set up by Mathys Tel,

and substitute Serge Gnabry scored minutes after going on for Kane. Sané went off to applause from the Bayern fans after Gnabry's goal. "In the end, you get praised if you give a good performance and you might get a bit of flack if things don't go so well," Sané said. "I always try to help the team, to give a good performance. And I'm the first one who's unhappy when I don't give a good performance and can't help the team." **S T U T T G A R T PRESSURING LEIPZIG FOR CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUALIFICATION** Fourth-place Leipzig finished with nine players after squandering a lead to lose 2-1 at Stuttgart, which moved a point behind the visitors. Benjamin Šeško gave Leipzig an early lead, but the home team was irate that play had continued after an apparent foul by Ridle Baku on Deniz Undav in the buildup. Referee Sascha Stegemann booked Stuttgart assistant coach David Krecidlo for complaining. Undav set up winter signing Jacob Bruun Larsen to equalize in the 50th and Nick Woltemade completed the comeback 10 minutes later when he poked home the rebound from an Undav effort. Šeško and Lois Openda were sent off late as Leipzig slumped to its fifth defeat of the season. Both will miss the next match at Bochum on Saturday.

India men, women hockey teams to commence season with Pro League matches next month

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian men's and women's hockey teams will commence their international assignments this year with the high-profile FIH Pro League matches here from February 15. The Indian men's team will face Spain, while their women counterparts will take on England on February 15 at the Kalinga Stadium. Most of the Indian men's and women's team players are currently playing in the Hockey India League (HIL) in Rourkela and Ranchi respectively. The Bhubaneswar leg of the FIH Pro League will be after the Australia leg (February 04-09) in Sydney. Between February 15 and 25, the men's teams of India, Spain, England, Germany and Netherlands," FIH said in a release. "With 24 matches over the 11 days, the action will be unceasing among the top ranked teams in the world, which will be a true showcase of the 'League of the Best'."



Following the Australian leg, the league will move to Bhubaneswar, India, renowned for its passionate hockey fan base. It will be the same in the women's competition for India, Spain, England, Germany and Netherlands," FIH said in a release. "With 24 matches over the 11 days, the action will be unceasing among the top ranked teams in the world, which will be a true showcase of the 'League of the Best'."

women's team making their first appearance since 2020 having qualified for the current season by winning the FIH Hockey Nations Cup in 2024. China women will look to continue their strong start to the season after taking eight points from the opening four games of their season, played at home in Hangzhou. Netherlands men, meanwhile, will be hoping to return to their best, after an uncharacteristic start slow saw them pick up no wins in their opening four games, totalling six points through three draws and a loss. The FIH Pro League action will also simultaneously continue in Argentina as the Bhubaneswar stage goes on, with Santiago del Estero hosting the final stage of the first half of the season from February 19 to 24. Locking horns in front of the large crowds will be Argentina, Belgium and Australia, in both the men's and women's competition.

Arsenal closes in on Premier League leader Liverpool after 2-1 win over Tottenham

PTI ■ LONDON

Arsenal closed the gap on Premier League leader Liverpool to four points after a 2-1 victory over Tottenham. Mikel Arteta's team took advantage of Liverpool's draw with Nottingham Forest on Tuesday, with Leandro Trossard firing the winner in the north London derby at the Emirates Stadium. "Everybody knows you need to win these games, the fans are buzzing and it's a great night for us," Trossard said. "It's an amazing feeling, especially to get the winner as well, it had to come and now we need to look forward." Arsenal was runner-up to Manchester City in the last two seasons and is in contention for the title again this year. But it was given a fright by Spurs when Son Heung-min opened the scoring for the visitors in the 25th minute. A Dominic Solanke own goal when trying to defend a corner leveled the game in the 40th and Trossard struck low from just inside the box four minutes later to put Arsenal ahead.

Liverpool still has a game in hand on second-place Arsenal but has dropped points by drawing its last two league matches and is on a run of just one win in four in all competitions. That was against fourth-division Accrington Stanley in the FA Cup. Arsenal bounced back quickly after the disappointment of being knocked out of the FA Cup by Manchester United on penalties and opened up a two-point lead over Forest in third. "Less than 72 hours ago we played 120 minutes in another competition that we went out of — that is not easy psychologically. So the way we performed and played today was exceptional," Arteta said. Tottenham has won just one of its last nine games in the league. "The losses hurt me but they aren't acceptable. We have had too many losses this year and too many games that have got away from us. That needs to stop," head coach Ange Postecoglou said. **ISAK ON TARGET AGAIN** Alexander Isak scored for the eighth straight league game to



propel Newcastle into the top four. The Sweden international struck twice in a 3-0 victory over Wolverhampton to take his season total to 17 in all competitions. He became the fourth player to score in eight consecutive games in the Premier League, following Ruud van Nistelrooy, Jamie Vardy and Daniel Sturridge. Vardy scored a league record 11-straight games. "Like most strikers, Isak wants to practice his finishing. It is an art form. He is there after training every day trying to do more," Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said.

Isak's form has pushed Newcastle into Champions League contention. He's scored 12 in his last 10 games in all competitions and Newcastle is on a nine-match winning streak. Isak opened the scoring in the 34th against relegation-threatened Wolverhampton at St James' Park. He got his second in the 57th and Anthony maintained his own scoring form with his fourth goal in successive games. Howe's team is now one point ahead of fifth-place Chelsea. **UNHAPPY HOMECOMING FOR MOYES** David Moyes' return to Everton didn't get off to the start he wanted after a 1-0 loss to Aston Villa. In his second spell at the Merseyside club, Moyes took charge of his 519th game as Everton manager and was welcomed by the Goodison Park crowd. But he couldn't inspire his relegation-threatened team to victory as Ollie Watkins' goal six minutes into the second half sealed Villa's win. Everton is 16th in the standings

and a point above the bottom three. Moyes' immediate priority is to find goals from somewhere. Everton has failed to score in nine of its last 11 league games. **LEICESTER SLUMPING** The hiring of Ruud van Nistelrooy hasn't paid off for Leicester yet. A 2-0 loss at home to Crystal Palace leaves the 2016 champion second from bottom of the standings and without a league win since Van Nistelrooy's first game in charge at the start of December. It's now six straight defeats in the league, with Jean-Philippe Mateta and Marc Guehi scoring for Palace in the second half at the King Power Stadium. "Six without a win is not good enough. You can't keep talking about performances. We need to win and that needs to happen soon," Van Nistelrooy said. **UNITED DROPS** Manchester United doesn't play until Thursday, but Palace's win saw the record 20-time champion slip to 15th in the standings.