

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer
The Congress Government introduced the Bhubharati Portal in place of the Dharani Portal assuring that encroached lands will be taken back and given to the poor. One Minister himself has been helping his relatives to grab government lands with the Revenue Department's help. He delivered lectures in the Assembly but now is helping his relatives to grab tribal lands worth Rs 1,500 crore defying HC orders
- Raghunandan Rao, BJP MP P4

Startup India a transformative programme, lauds
PM Modi

WISH TO
BRING AS MANY INDIANS INTO MARKET ECOSYSTEM: BUCH

I am choosy, because of these reasons:
BRAHMANANDAM

DON'T MISS...
Eluru district wins PM's Award

India will lead in every sector by 2047

Infosys says HIB visa dependence lowered

Women must make this year their best

All systems on track: CM

SAYS AP EYES 15% GROWTH RATE AND \$42,000 PER CAPITA INCOME BY 2047

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
"The people of Andhra Pradesh have reposed their faith in me, believing that with my return, the State will move on a progressive path and wealth can be generated through employment opportunities," observed Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu, on Thursday. During a PowerPoint presentation at the State Secretariat on the growth rate in the State, the Chief Minister assured that he would certainly maintain the people's trust and implement plans aimed at achieving a 15 per cent growth rate. "We have set a target of \$42,000 per capita income by 2047," he added. Regretting the total collapse of systems over the past five years, which left the State in a state of turmoil, Naidu said that in the name of three capitals, Amaravati has been completely disregarded, while the Polavaram project, the lifeline for the people of the State, has also been neglected. The situation was so dire that even the natives of Andhra Pradesh were hesitant to invest in the State, he remarked. He further stated that the people have entrusted him with the responsibility to lead the State from destruction to development. Making it clear that wealth generation is possible only through development, the Chief Minister said that if the State's revenue grows, it



- CM regrets the destruction of systems over the past five years, with key projects like Amaravati and Polavaram neglected
- Highlights investments of over Rs 4 lakh crore, progress in Amaravati and Polavaram, and a focus on profitable farming
- Emphasises wealth generation through development and welfare, with plans to eliminate poverty
- Announces the launch of WhatsApp governance and improvements in roads and amenities

can be utilised for welfare programmes, ultimately eliminating poverty. "This is the economic policy I strongly believe in. When I spoke about IT in 1995, people laughed at me, but today, IT has elevated people's lives," he said. Pointing to the Vision 2020 he introduced, which helped Telangana

LOCAL BODY POLLS

Only candidates with more than 2 kids eligible: Naidu

PNS ■ TIRUPATI
Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has said that a person can become a sarpanch, municipal councillor or mayor only if he/she has more than two children, hinting that it will arrest the falling population. Naidu said he will bring out policies to encourage people to have more children. "At one time, individuals with many children were not allowed to contest the panchayat (election) or local bodies. Now what I am saying is that individuals with lower numbers of children cannot contest. You will be a sarpanch, municipal councillor, corporation chairman or a mayor only if you have more than two children," he told reporters in Naravariipalle here recently. According to the CM, North India may lose its advantage of having a stable fertility rate in about 15 years. The TDP supreme noted that the older generations had more children, while the current generation

brought it down to one child and also highlighted that some 'smart' people nowadays are going for double income no kids (DINK) concept to enjoy. "Your parents bore four to five children and you reduced it to one. Even smarter people now are saying double income no kids let us enjoy. If their parents had thought like them, they would not have come into this world," he said. All countries made this mistake, and we have to decide at the right time, said Naidu, adding that the importance of having more children was not stressed and the situation went out of hand. Citing countries like South Korea Japan and continental Europe, he said people in those places did not realise the danger of plummeting populations but only focused on creating wealth, raising income and taking those countries forward. "Now they need people, we have to send them. We came to that situation," Naidu added. **Continued on Page 2**



CM presents Rs 25L to Test cricketer Nitish

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu presented young cricketer Nitish Kumar Reddy with a Rs 25 lakh cheque on Thursday, recognising his exceptional performance during a recent cricket tour of Australia. Nitish, a Visakhapatnam native and a member of the Indian Cricket Team, earned accolades for his stellar contributions, including a heroic maiden century. Accompanied by his father Muthyala Reddy and officials from the Andhra Cricket Association

(ACA), Nitish met CM Naidu at the Secretariat in Velagapudi. During their interaction, the Chief Minister praised Nitish's achievements and assured him of a house site as a reward for his success, as announced by ACA president Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni). Later, Nitish was felicitated by Minister for HRD and IT, Nara Lokesh, who commended his performance in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test series. CM Naidu also shared his praise on social media, wishing Nitish further success and congratulating his family for their support.

'Swachha Andhra-Swachh Diwas' on 3rd Saturday of every month: CS P2

4 youths drown at Pakala Beach in Prakasam

PNS ■ ONGOLE
Four youths, including two young girls, drowned in the sea at Pakala Beach in Singarayakonda mandal of Prakasam district on Thursday evening. Police said a group of six friends had gone to the beach for a recreational outing. While enjoying the water, they were swept away by a strong wave. The deceased have been identified as Nosina Jessica (16), Nosina Madhav (25), Kondabattuni Yamini (16), and T Pawan (22). Their bodies were recovered from the sea and shifted to the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Kandukur for post-mortem. Local villagers reported that Nosina Madhav had recently married Nosina Navya, who was fortunately rescued by local fishermen. All the deceased hailed from Thimmapalem village in Ponnaluru mandal. The village is now



shrouded in grief following this tragic incident. SP AR Damodhar and Minister for Social Welfare Dola Balaveeranjaneeya Swamy visited the beach to assess the situation. MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy, MLAs Damacharla Janardhan Rao, Enturi Nageswara Rao, and State Tourism Corporation Chairman Dr Nukasani Balaji expressed their shock over the loss of lives.

3 die as vehicle falls into canal

KAKINADA: Three persons died and a few more were injured when the vehicle they were travelling in fell into a dry canal in Kakinada district on Thursday, a police official said. The accident occurred at Gopal Cheruvu area in Vommangi village of Prathipadu mandal when the driver lost control of the vehicle. "The vehicle was on its way to Darapalli waterfalls from Kakinada and was carrying 20 people," said the official in a release. The injured persons were shifted to Prathipadu government hospital for treatment, the official added. **Continued on Page 2**

Centre to set up 8th pay panel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
In a major decision, the government on Thursday decided to set up the 8th Pay Commission to revise salaries of central government employees and allowances of pensioners. The decision to set up the 8th Pay Commission was taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said. The term of the 7th Pay Commission will end in 2026. "Prime Minister has approved 8th Central Pay Commission for central government employees," the minister said. **Continued on Page 2**

Shah's AP tour from tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
Union Home Minister Amit Shah will embark on a two-day visit to Andhra Pradesh on January 18 and 19. His itinerary includes high-profile meetings and participation in significant events across the NTR, Krishna, and Guntur districts. On January 18, Shah will arrive at Gannavaram Airport at 5:50 pm via a BSF flight from New Delhi. He will head to the residence of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu in Undavalli, where he is set to meet CM Naidu and Deputy



Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan at 9:10 pm. The discussions will be followed by a dinner hosted by the Chief Minister. Shah will then stay overnight at Hotel Novotel in Vijayawada. The next day, January 19, the Home Minister will inaugurate the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) South Campus at Kondapavuru in Gannavaram Mandal at 11:15 am. Following this, he will attend the 20th Foundation Day celebrations of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) 10th Battalion. **Continued on Page 2**

TDP membership crosses 1 cr-mark

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has surpassed 1 crore memberships in its registration campaign, launched on October 26, 2024, by party President and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. The drive, conducted across Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and the Andaman Islands, has drawn over 1,00,52,598 members, making TDP the largest political family in the state. With a tech-driven approach led by TDP National General Secretary Nara Lokesh, the campaign ensured easy registration. **Continued on Page 2**

India achieves first space docking

ISRO SUCCESSFULLY DOCKS SPADEX SATELLITES

PNS ■ BENGALURU
In a major boost to India's ambitious future space missions, ISRO on Thursday successfully performed the docking of satellites as part of the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) and announced that post docking, control of two satellites as a single object was also achieved. "India docked its name in space history! Good Morning India ISRO's SpaDeX mission accomplishes historic docking success. Proud to witness this moment!", ISRO said in a post on 'X'. With the successful docking of satellites - Chaser and Target - India has become the fourth country after the US, Russia and China to accomplish the technological feat.



In space, docking technology is essential when multiple rocket launches are required to achieve common mission objectives. The docking experiment is crucial for the smooth conduct of the country's ambitious future missions, including Chandrayaan-4,

Gaganyaan, setting up a space station and landing an astronaut on the moon. Last October, the government announced that India will have its own Space Station by 2035, known as the "Bharatiya Antriksh Station". Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a post on 'X' greeted the scientists for the achievement. He said: "Congratulations to our scientists at @isro and the entire space fraternity for the successful demonstration of space docking of satellites. It is a significant stepping stone for India's ambitious space missions in the years to come." Further, ISRO said: "Post docking, control of two satellites as a single object is successful. Undocking and power transfer checks to follow in coming days."

CM Naidu, Dy CM, Jagan compliment ISRO team

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu congratulated the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) team for successfully achieving satellite docking in space, making India the fourth country to accomplish this feat. On 'X', Naidu praised ISRO's dedication and hard work, emphasizing that the milestone will greatly enhance India's space capabilities and inspire future advancements. Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan called it a historic moment for India. He hailed the SpaDeX satellite docking as a remarkable achievement, placing India alongside the USA, Russia, and China. **Continued on Page 2**

Hindenburg shuts shop

PNS ■ WASHINGTON
Hindenburg Research, which made international waves with campaigns targeting billionaire Gautam Adani that wiped billions from market value of his group companies, will disband, its founder Nate Anderson announced on Thursday. Announcement by Anderson, 40, who started Hindenburg in 2017, came just days before Donald Trump's inauguration as the new President of the United States. While he cited the toll of the "rather intense, and at times, all encompassing" nature of the work as the reason for his decision, critics were quick to link the shutting down of Hindenburg's alleged ties with George Soros and the so-called deep state being under significant pressure from the incoming Trump administration. Typically, short-sellers like Anderson, who managed his firm's

own money but not that of others, bet against companies they believe are plagued with mismanagement or involved in some fraud/scam. Short sellers borrow a stock to sell in the expectation the price will fall, then repurchase the shares and pocket the difference. They book loss if the reverse happens. Hindenburg in January 2023 published a report accusing the Adani group of "pulling the largest con in the corporate history", wiping out more than USD 150 billion in value of the group's shares at their lowest point.

Demand to retain Volunteers

State Volunteers Association warns of protest if no decision is taken in today's Cabinet meeting

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The All-India Youth Federation (AIYF), affiliated with the Andhra Pradesh State Volunteers Association, has urged the State government, led by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, to maintain the Gram/Ward Volunteer system and raise the honorarium for these volunteers.

Association's honorary president G Eswaraiah has demanded that this decision be made during the Cabinet meeting scheduled for Friday, along with the issuance of relevant orders. He warned that if these demands are not met, the association will escalate protests, which could include street demonstrations, gheraung MLAs and ministers, and house sieges.

Speaking at a press conference held at Dasari Bhavan in Hanumanpeta, Vijayawada, Eswaraiah announced that Gram/Ward Volunteers will organise a 'Chalo Vijayawada' event on Friday. He emphasised that Chief Minister N



Chandrababu Naidu should fulfil his election promise of increasing the monthly wage of Gram/Ward Volunteers to Rs. 10,000. Eswaraiah pointed out that the volunteers' demands were legitimate, and included in the TDP's election manifesto. He highlighted that around 2,60,000 volunteers hold degrees—such as

Graduation, Post-Graduation, MBA, and Engineering -- however, they have received just Rs. 5,000 as an honorarium during the past five years.

Furthermore, he mentioned that while the State government had promised to create two million jobs for the unemployed youth, it is neglecting the 2,60,000 volunteers. He won-

dered how the government can create two million jobs when it fails to adequately support these volunteers.

Later, Eswaraiah stated that seven months into the current administration, the election promise remains unfulfilled. He warned that if the government continues to neglect the volunteers, they will organise protests

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across the State to demonstrate their collective strength. Andhra Pradesh Gram/Ward Volunteers Association State general secretary Lanka Govindarajulu and others were also present at the event.



VSP workers seek exit as financial crisis deepens

EMPLOYEES WITH MORE THAN 15 YEARS OF SERVICE ARE PARTICULARLY INCLINED TOWARDS VRS

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The ongoing financial troubles at Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL), the corporate entity of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), have left employees grappling with uncertainty. Despite strong opposition from workers' unions, many employees are now considering the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) as a way to escape mounting financial pressures caused by delayed salaries and an unclear future.

Once a symbol of pride in the region, the steel plant now faces severe challenges. The VRS, introduced as a cost-cutting measure, is being seen by some as a dignified exit. Employees over 45 years old with more than 15 years of ser-

vice are particularly inclined towards this option.

Neerukonda Ramachandra Rao, State vice-president of the INTUC, stressed the need for long-term solutions. "Instead of VRS, the Centre should grant Rs 5,000 crore to increase equity and allocate captive iron ore mines to reduce production costs. Alternatively, RINL's acquisition by SAIL or NMDC could ensure sustainability," he suggested. RINL is struggling under a heavy debt of Rs 18,000 crore, and owes Rs 7,000 crore to vendors. The company also needs Rs 10,000 crore in working capital to procure raw materials, while its downgraded credit rating has worsened its financial situation.

J Ayodhya Ram of the Visakh Ukku Parirakshana

Samithi questioned the feasibility of VRS. "If the company cannot pay salaries, how can it manage the financial burden of VRS," he asked. About 1,000 employees are expected to opt for VRS in the first phase, which may cost the company Rs 600 to Rs 900 crore.

Union Steel Minister HD Kumaraswamy hinted that the Centre might approve a scaled-down revival package of Rs 9,000-Rs 10,000 crore instead of the originally proposed Rs 18,000 crore. If this fails, the government may revisit plans for 100 per cent privatisation of the plant. As uncertainty continues to grow, many workers seek VRS as their only option, leaving the future of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant and its workforce in doubt.

'Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam' SSD tokens reviewed



PNS ■ TIRUPATI

A review meeting on the issuance of Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam SSD tokens was held virtually on Thursday evening. The meeting was attended by TTD Executive Officer J. Syamala Rao, Additional EO Ch. Venkaiah Chowdary, JEO Veerabrahmam, District Collector Venkateswar, and SP Manikantha Chandolu.

As the Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam concludes on January 19, the SSD tokens for the final day are expected to be issued by Friday, January 17. No SSD tokens will be issued on January 19 for darshan on January 20. Devotees are advised to join the Sarva Darshanam queue line for Sri Venkateswara Swamy's darshan on that day.

Additionally, SRIVANI tickets will not be issued offline on

January 19 for darshan on January 20. The VIP Break Darshan will remain cancelled on January 20, except for Protocol VIPs, and recommendation letters will not be accepted on January 19.

Devotees are requested to plan their pilgrimage accordingly and cooperate with TTD. GM (IT) Sessa Reddy and Temple DyEO Lokanatham also participated in the meeting.

Preparations underway for R-Day parade

COLLECTOR, COMMISSIONER ATTEND REVIEW MEETING

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmi and Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu have informed Chief Secretary K Vijayanand that all necessary arrangements are being made for the 76th Republic Day celebrations, scheduled to be held at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium in Vijayawada. They said that preparations are being made at the stadium as per plans.

The Collector and the CP attended the Chief Secretary's review meeting from the Collector's camp office on Thursday. They are coordinating with the Republic Day Parade Coordinator and other officials concerned. Governor SA Nazeer, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh High Court Justice Deeraj Sing Thakur, several ministers, MPs, MLAs, MLAs and various officials will attend the celebrations, they said.

They added that necessary security arrangements are



being made by the police with the coordination of the AP Special Police Battalion. In view of the attendance of VVIPs and VIPs, the district administration is coordinating with the respective departmental officials. The Republic Day parade rehearsal will be conducted in full dress. The Army, State Police, NCC, Scouts and Guides, police band and other contingents will participate in the parade.

AP boys runners-up in handball

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh bagged the runners-up trophy in the School Games Federation of India (SGFI) Under-17 Boys Handball Nationals held at Mahbubnagar in Telangana recently. In the final match, AP lost to Telangana.

In total, 36 teams attended the tournament, conducted from January 10-14. Andhra Pradesh girls lost in the pre-quarterfinals.

School Education Director V Vijaya Rama Raju, Samagra Siksha State Project



Director B Srinivasa Rao and Andhra Pradesh Secretary

Bhanu murthy Raju congratulated the team, coaches and managers.

Tribal village builds 3-km road amid Govt neglect

Repeated promises and allocated funds failed to yield results

PNS ■ PADERU

Residents of Dayethikonda, a remote tribal village in Jeenabadi gram panchayat, have taken matters into their own hands, constructing a three-km road after years of enduring hardship due to the lack of proper road connectivity. The initiative follows repeated promises from the government and allocated funds that failed to yield results.

Dayethikonda, home to 109 families, is located in Alluri Sitarama Raju district. The road serves nearly 2,000 individuals from 11 other tribal villages, offering vital access to essential services. For years, the only route to the village was a perilous journey via Gummanthi from Ballagaru village.

Despite the allocation of funds and promises from various government departments, progress has been stymied. During the 2018-19 period, the Tribal Welfare Department sanctioned Rs 38 lakh for the construction of the road. However, heavy rains washed away the work. In 2022, the Panchayat Raj Department allocated Rs 1.50 crore for a gravel road, but only 9 lakh was spent on a culvert, which was also destroyed in the subsequent rains.

Even a high-profile visit by Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan on December 22, during which he laid the foundation stone for a road from Gummanthi to Ravakilam via Reddypalem at Ballagaru,

failed to bring any tangible progress. The completion of the Gummanthi-Ravakilam road hinges on the unfinished Ballagaru to Dayethi stretch.

The lack of a proper road has had dire consequences, with villagers recounting numerous medical emergencies that turned tragic due to the inability to access healthcare in time. "We have been appealing to the Deputy CM for support, but no action was taken. Left with no other option, we decided to build the road ourselves," said one villager, expressing the frustration that led to their decision.

In response to the continued neglect, the community is now demanding Rs 13 crore under Panchayat Raj projects for the construction of a 12-km road linking Ballagaru to Dayethi, Maddarebu, and Tunisibu villages. While their self-constructed road serves as a temporary solution, the villagers are emphasising the urgent need for permanent government-provided infrastructure.

Local political leaders have lent their voices to the cause. "It is time for the government to respond and ensure that such hardships are not faced by any community in the future," said K. Govinda Rao, CPM district executive member. The residents of Dayethikonda are now seeking more than just temporary relief—they demand lasting action from the government to address their transportation woes.

Collector seeks urgent action for sea turtle conservation

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Collector MN Harendhira Prasad has highlighted the crucial role of sea turtles in maintaining the marine ecosystem balance, during the district-level coordination meeting on Olive Ridley protection and conservation held on Thursday. He emphasised the urgent need for collective action to protect these endangered species, particularly during their nesting season from November to February.

Expressing concern over the increasing number of dead turtles washing ashore, primar-



ily due to entanglement in fishing gear, plastic waste, and predation, the Collector urged fishermen to adopt Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) in their trawl nets to allow turtles to escape unharmed. He also stressed the importance of proper waste disposal, includ-

ing the use of dustbins on boats and discouraging plastic waste dumping into the sea.

The Collector reminded attendees of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which prohibits the killing, consumption, and trade of turtles. He advocated for measures similar to those implemented in Odisha, such as fishing bans in sensitive areas. He also highlighted the negative impact of bright lights from fishing boats on marine ecosystems and urged strict adherence to regulations regarding boat registration, crew identification, and the use of authorised fishing gear. The meeting addressed the issue of

URGES FISHERMEN TO ADOPT TURTLE EXCLUDER DEVICES IN TRAWL NETS

plastic pollution, emphasising the need to eliminate single-use plastics on fishing boats and in fish markets. The Collector highlighted the detrimental effects of plastic waste on marine life and the fishing industry, urging immediate action to protect the marine ecosystem and sustain livelihoods.

The Collector also called for awareness campaigns by the Forest and Fisheries Departments, alongside scientific organisations, to educate coastal communities and fishermen on turtle conservation, TED benefits, and sustainable fishing practices.

Commissioner suspends Head Constable for alleged cricket betting

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam City Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi has suspended a Head Constable from the special branch over alleged involvement in cricket betting activities.

The suspended officer, P. Ganga Raju, was found to have sustained communication with known cricket bookies between 2023 and 2024, according to a preliminary investigation. The evidence, primarily gathered through a detailed analysis of call records, pointed to his alleged connections with individuals involved in illegal betting operations. Acting on this information, Commissioner Bagchi ordered

his immediate suspension pending further investigation.

"We have zero tolerance for corruption within our ranks," said Commissioner Bagchi while addressing the media. "All officers and staff members of the city Police Department are expected to maintain complete transparency in their duties. Any involvement in illegal activities, abuse of power, or corruption will be met with swift and strict action. This case should serve as a warning to others."

In an effort to promote transparency and curb corruption, the Commissioner has introduced a dedicated helpline 7995095799 for citizens to report any instances of bribery or corrupt practices by police personnel.

Concerns raised over future of Rushikonda beach

VISAKHAPATNAM'S BLUE FLAG BEACH STRUGGLES WITH CORRUPTION, POOR MAINTENANCE, AND LEADERSHIP VACUUM

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Rushikonda beach, once known for its environmental success and as a popular tourist spot, is now facing several problems. Issues like internal conflicts, accusations of corruption, and bad management have put a cloud over this well-known Blue Flag beach, causing worries about its future.

Since achieving the prestigious Blue Flag certification, which recognises exceptional environmental management, Rushikonda has witnessed a surge in the number of visitors. However, this influx has also led to increased fees, including a Rs. 50 parking fee, which has drawn criticism from some visitors. "We question whether



these exorbitant fees are being used for the beach's betterment or lining the pockets of a few,"

said a local resident. Furthermore, the beach's maintenance has become a point of

contention. The awarding of the cleaning and maintenance contract to an outside company has

raised eyebrows, with accusations of favouritism and disregard for local businesses. "The decision to overlook local vendors is not only unfair, but also detrimental to the local economy," stated a representative from a local tourism association.

The departure of the Regional Director, who was instrumental in the controversial contract decision, has exacerbated the situation. This leadership vacuum has fuelled internal tensions within the Tourism Department, with allegations of officials prioritising personal interests over the beach's well-being. "Salaries are delayed, equipment is inadequate, and we are often left without proper resources," lamented a beach worker, highlighting the plight of those

directly involved in maintaining the beach.

These internal struggles are compounded by a lack of support from higher authorities. "When officials from the State capital visit, they often bypass local expertise and impose their own agendas," claimed a senior Tourism official, highlighting the disconnect between local needs and State-level directives.

"Rushikonda Beach serves as a stark reminder of what can happen when mismanagement and internal strife prevail," warned an environmental activist. "The future of this valuable asset hinges on the ability of authorities to work collaboratively, ensure transparency, and prioritise sustainable management."

Minister Manohar assures super specialty services at Eluru GGH

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Civil Supplies, Nadendla Manohar, has assured the provision of super specialty medical services at the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Eluru. He directed the doctors and nurses to work in a coordinated manner to ensure better patient care.

The Minister conducted a surprise inspection of the hospital on Thursday. During his visit, he reviewed the outpatient statistics and inquired about the daily footfall of patients. He also examined the outpatient registration process on the computer system.

Expressing displeasure over discrepancies in the blood bank operations, he reprimanded the in-charge for the flaws in its management. Manohar instructed the Vaidya



Parishath Executive Engineer to complete the pending drainage works, CC road repairs, and water pipe leakage

fixes by February 28, warning of strict action if the deadlines were not met. The Minister inspected the

ophthalmology and ICU wards, interacting with patients and inquiring about their health conditions. He

also visited the orthopaedic ward, where a patient complained about delays in seeing a doctor despite arriving at 9 AM. Angered by the negligence, the Minister took the doctor to task for the delay in attending to patients.

Addressing the media later, Manohar highlighted that the Eluru GGH had gained recognition for delivering quality medical services in the erstwhile West Godavari district. He assured further upgrades and enhancements to the 600-bed facility, including filling all vacant doctor and nurse positions and equipping the hospital with additional medical infrastructure.

The inspection was attended by GGH Superintendent MS Raju, MLAs P Dharma Raju and Chirri Balaraju, former MLAs Ganni Veeranjanyulu and Ghanta Murali, along with other officials.

DC, JC directed to expedite port and fishing harbour works

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Minister for Mines and Excise, Kollu Ravindra, has instructed the District Collector and Joint Collector to expedite the Bandar Sea Port and Fishing Harbour construction works.

The Minister convened a meeting on Thursday with District Collector DK Balaji, Joint Collector Gitanjali Sharma, and other officials to review the progress of the projects.

He suggested developing an MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) Park in the Gilakaladindi area and directed officials to assess the park's feasibility. Additionally, he called for preparing a master plan for the park's development. "Proactive steps must be taken to safeguard the livelihoods of fishermen during the Port's construction. A dedicated cluster for fishermen should be developed, including a boat-making unit. Adequate training must be provided to ensure their livelihoods are not



adversely affected," the Minister instructed.

Highlighting the potential industrial growth due to the Port's establishment, the Minister urged officials to focus on generating employment and improving basic infrastructure in the region.

Discussions also covered the development of Manginapudi Beach. The Minister proposed setting up a desalination plant to address drinking water needs and

directed the construction of washrooms for visitors to the beach.

He stressed the importance of developing the Bandar Port as a Heritage Park and taking steps to preserve the historic Bandar Port. Plans for beautifying parks and widening roads in Machilipatnam town were also reviewed.

Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) K Swathi and other revenue officials attended the meeting.



3.58 lakh MT of paddy purchased in Eluru

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Civil Supplies, Nadendla Manohar, has announced that 3,58,924 Metric Tonnes (MT) of paddy have been purchased from farmers so far during the current Kharif season.

Speaking to the media here on Thursday, the Minister confirmed that paddy procurement is progressing smoothly across the district. "Up to now, 3,58,924 MT of paddy, valued at Rs 733.91 crore, have been purchased from 49,022 farmers. The procurement process is being efficiently managed by the district officials," Manohar said. He further revealed that the target for paddy procurement in the district was 3.40 lakh MT, and the actual procurement has already surpassed this goal.

Manohar commended District Collector K. Vetri Selvi and Joint Collector P. Dhatri Reddy for their effective coordination and efficient procurement efforts. He also praised the Civil Supplies department staff for their hard work under the supervision of the district administration.

Eluru district wins PM's Award

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru district has been honoured with the prestigious 'Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration 2023'. The Government introduced this scheme to acknowledge and reward exemplary work by civil servants across the country.

For 2023, the scheme was revised to recognise the contributions of civil servants in the holistic development of districts under various government schemes. The award honours the efforts of those working to implement the welfare programmes of both the State and Central Governments effectively.

The then District Collector, V. Prasanna Venkatesh, played a key role in the development of Eluru, which was created after the bifurcation of the combined West Godavari dis-



trict. Venkatesh, during his two-year tenure, earned widespread appreciation for his efficient administration and dedication to public welfare.

Under his leadership, welfare initiatives like 'Akshaja' were implemented, focusing on the health of pregnant women and children in agency mandals. His efforts in good governance contributed to Eluru's special recognition among the 788 districts in India. Eluru was selected as one of the 16 districts in the country to receive the award, thanks to the diligent efforts of former Collector V. Prasanna Venkatesh.

Nishant Kumar earns award for PRISM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Nishant Kumar, Director of Excise and Prohibition in Mangalagiri and former District Collector of Parvathipuram, has been honored with the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration for 2023. This prestigious recognition highlights his exceptional leadership in implementing the PRISM 10 initiative (Project to Reduce Infant Mortality Rate Below 10) from 2022 to 2024.

The initiative targeted critical healthcare issues in Parvathipuram, a newly formed tribal district grappling with high infant and

maternal mortality rates and low immunization coverage. Under Kumar's leadership, PRISM 10 made substantial strides, reducing the district's Infant Mortality Rate from 24 to 8 and Maternal Mortality Rate by 42%. Immunization coverage surged to 97.77%, propelling the district to the top rank in the state. These achievements reflect the success of innovative, community-based solutions in improving healthcare outcomes.

The award, presented in the "Innovation-District" category, underscores Kumar's impact in transforming public health and administration in the region.

I & PR Minister assists woman hurt in road mishap

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and Information & Public Relations, Kolu Parthasarathy, showcased compassion and quick action by assisting a woman injured in a road accident on the national highway. The incident occurred on Thursday while the Minister was returning to Vijayawada after attending a review meeting in Eluru.

Near the Kalaparru Toll Plaza, Parthasarathy came across the accident, in which



K. Sireesha, a resident of Kodurupadu, sustained severe injuries. Her mother

also suffered minor injuries in the mishap. The Minister immediately

stopped his convoy and assessed the situation. He directed his team to transport Sireesha to Pinnamaneni Hospital for urgent medical care. Demonstrating his concern, Parthasarathy personally contacted the hospital staff, instructing them to ensure the best possible treatment for the injured woman.

The Minister's swift and empathetic response drew appreciation from bystanders and travelers on the highway, with many commending his humanitarian gesture.

ACA felicitates Nitish Kumar Reddy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Cricket Association (ACA) President and Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath, along with ACA Secretary and Rajya Sabha member Sana Satish, felicitated Indian cricketer Nitish Kumar Reddy at the MP's office, NTR Bhavan, in Gurunanak Colony, here on Thursday. Nitish Kumar Reddy, hailing from Visakhapatnam, shared with the two MPs his experience of playing in his debut Test match for India against Australia in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Returning from the Australia tour, Nitish met MPs Sivanath and Satish as a courtesy gesture. The MPs warmly welcomed and felicitated him. They also commended Nitish's father, Mutyala Reddy, for his continuous support and encouragement in his cricketing journey.

Speaking on the occasion, MP Sivanath praised Nitish as



an inspiration for aspiring cricketers in Andhra Pradesh and across the country. He specifically lauded Nitish's remarkable century during his first Test match in Australia. Sivanath assured that the ACA would provide all necessary support to help the young cricketer further enhance his

skills. In his response, Nitish Kumar Reddy expressed gratitude to ACA President Kesineni Sivanath for his encouragement and support. He also appreciated the efforts of MP Sivanath in fostering young talent and preparing them for platforms like the

Indian Premier League (IPL). Nitish pledged to support upcoming cricketers in the State to develop their game.

The felicitation ceremony was attended by ACA Vice-President P Venkata Rama Prashanth, Treasurer Dandamudi Srinivas, and other dignitaries.

GMC announces schedule for Standing Committee polls

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Guntur Municipal Corporation (GMC) has announced the schedule for its Standing Committee elections, which will be held on February 3, 2025, from 10:30 am to 3 pm at the Municipal Council Meeting Hall. Municipal Commissioner Puli Srinivasulu shared the details during a press conference held at the Council Meeting Hall on Thursday.

The election notification and voters' list were released on January 16, 2025, and are displayed on the Municipal Corporation's notice board for public reference. Nominations for the elections will be accepted from January 22 to 24, 2025, between 11 am and 3 pm, at the Additional Commissioner's chamber in the GMC office.

According to the schedule, nominations received by January 24 will be announced, followed by scrutiny on January 27, 2025, between 11 am and 12 noon. The list of valid nominations will also be published on the same day. Candidates wishing to withdraw their nominations can do so on January 30, 2025, between 12 pm and 3 pm, after which the final list of candidates will be released. The election will take place as scheduled on February 3, 2025, and the counting of votes, along with the declaration of results, will commence at 3 pm on the same day.

Cong Minister, kin trying to grab land worth Rs 1,500 crore: Raghunandan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The BJP's Medak MP, M. Raghunandan Rao, said that a Congress Minister is trying to register Bilaa Dhakhala land worth Rs 1,500 crore in the name of his relatives defying HC orders. He said that he is not aware of that Minister's position in the government, that is, whether he is number 2 or 3 or 4.

Addressing the media on Thursday at the State BJP office here along with the victims, Raghunandan demanded that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy should do justice to the tribals, who have been cultivating the land for three generations.

Raghunandan said that tribals had approached the High Court in 1994 appealing to register those lands in their name. He said that a dispute regarding 85 acres of Bilaa Dhakhala land costing Rs 1500 crore is going on between the villages of Velimela in Ramachandrapuram mandal of Sangareddy district and the Kondakal village of Shankarpalli mandal in Rangareddy district.

He said that relatives of one of the Ministers — Kommireddy Vikramkumar



Reddy and Aurobindo Pharma MD K. Nithyananda Reddy — are now trying to grab the land with the help of CCLA Commissioner Navin Mittal, who faced allegations during BRS rule and is continuing even now. Raghunandan said that encroachers are now constructing a wall around the land with the help of the police defying court orders. The court had ordered that the police should not interfere in the land issue, he said. He said the police had been vacating the villages forcibly since the last three days defying court orders.

"The Congress Government introduced BhuBharati Portal in place of the Dharani Portal assuring that the encroached lands will be taken back and given to the poor. However, one Minister himself has been assisting his relatives to grab government lands with the help of the Revenue Department.



IIT Kanpur inks MoU with KADA

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) and the Kuppam Area Development Authority (KADA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to make the constituency of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Kuppam, India's first Net Zero constituency.

This landmark partnership aims to advance sustainability and contribute to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by targeting Net Zero emissions, Net Zero water, and Net Zero waste in the region, a release said here on Thursday.

The MoU was signed by Prof. Pratik Sen, Dean of Students; and Affairs at IIT Kanpur, and Vikas Marmat, Project Director at KADA. Under this collaboration,

The MoU was signed by Prof. Pratik Sen, Dean of Students; and Affairs at IIT Kanpur, and Vikas Marmat, Project Director at KADA. Under this collaboration, IIT Kanpur will serve as the technology and knowledge partner for KADA, leveraging its expertise to support Kuppam's ambitious sustainability goals

IIT Kanpur will serve as the technology and knowledge partner for KADA, leveraging its expertise to support Kuppam's ambitious sustainability goals. The initiative will combine advanced technical interventions such as the adoption of renewable energy, energy-efficient systems, and sustainable waste management with community-driven efforts to foster a culture of sustainability. Enhancing water man-

agement practices to achieve Net Zero water will also be a critical focus area. Speaking on the occasion, Prof. Sachchida Nand Tripathi, Dean, Kotak School of Sustainability, IIT Kanpur, said, "This partnership between IIT Kanpur and KADA represents a groundbreaking approach to redefining sustainability in India.

By leveraging IIT Kanpur's technological expertise and

KADA's on-ground vision, we are committed to implementing innovative solutions in renewable energy, waste management, and water conservation. This initiative highlights how shared expertise and a unified vision can drive scalable and impactful solutions, setting a benchmark for sustainable development across the country.

A vital aspect of the project is the on-ground involvement of IIT Kanpur's team in Kuppam, where they will work closely with the local administration, schools, and colleges to integrate sustainability principles into education. This engagement will empower students and faculty to actively contribute to achieving the Net Zero targets while fostering a deeper understanding of sustainability within the community.

Officials directed to take steps to curb road accidents



PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector A Thameem Ansariya has directed police officials to take immediate measures to prevent road accidents and conduct joint inspections with officials from other concerned departments.

A road safety meeting was held on Thursday, chaired by the Collector, where the safety of roads and the pattern of road accidents were reviewed. Speaking at the meeting, the Collector stated that 872 road accidents occurred in the district in 2024, resulting in the loss of 389 lives.

"Stringent measures must be implemented to reduce road accidents. All motorists must adhere to road safety standards. Accident-prone areas on highways should be identified, and signboards should be installed," she instructed the officials. The Collector further

emphasized the need for joint inspections on national and state highways within the district, identifying accident-prone areas, and implementing effective measures to curb accidents. Officials were also instructed to install barricades, stoppers, and hazard signs in high-risk accident zones. The Collector reviewed the ongoing initiatives by the National Highways and R&B departments to improve road safety and reiterated the importance of organizing special awareness programs on road safety.

In addition, the Collector directed Municipal and Traffic Officers to take action against road encroachments at major intersections and busy areas. The meeting was attended by DTC R. Sushila, DSP Suresh Babu, R&B SE Devanadam, GGH Superintendent Dr. Jamuna, DMHO Dr. Venkateswarulu, and other officials.



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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.

PICTALK



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

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

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

eign 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 Vaishnav, 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

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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.

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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)

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.

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.



Swiatek during her match against Anisimova to get treatment on her back from a trainer. After advancing beyond the second round for the first time at Melbourne Park, the No. 61-ranked Raducanu was confident she'd recover in time for her next challenge against Swiatek.

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.

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.



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

PTI ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona followed up its proudest 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.

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.

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.



Mandhana 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.

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.



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.

and substitute Serge Gnabry scored minutes after going on for Kane. Sané went off to applause from the Bayern fans after Gnabry's goal.

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.

women's team making their first appearance since 2020 having qualified for the current season by winning the FIH Hockey Nations Cup in 2024.

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.

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.



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.

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.

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.

I AM CHOOSY, BECAUSE OF THESE REASONS: BRAHMANANDAM

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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 also 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 Sankranthi winner

Senior actor Venkatesh became the Sankranthi winner with his film 'Sankranthi Vasthunnam' after his film's huge collections at the box-office. The film released on the Sankranthi 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 'Sankranthi Vasthunnam'. Dil Raju may lose more than Rs 100 crore in 'Game Changer', says the source, but he may recover at least some from 'Sankranthi 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.

