Nagaram village creates history by electing 95-year-old Sarpanch

Hyderabad: Nagaram village in Suryapet district has presented one of the most watched tussles as part of the first phase of the gram panchayat polls. The village has elected 95-year-old Guntakandla Ramachandra Reddy as Sarpanch, creating history of sorts.

Fondly called Bapu by the villagers, the nonagenarian defeated much younger contestants by a handsome margin setting a rare record in Telangana's rural political history.

"The entire village is like my family. Serving its welfare has always been my responsibility," Bapu told jubilant supporters after the results were declared. Overwhelmed by the massive turnout and the majority he secured, he said "this sweet experience at 95" was unforgettable.

Despite being close to a century old, Bapu actively campaigned, walked door-to-door and contested alongside the youth, proving that age was just a number when it comes to commitment towards one's native village. Celebrations erupted across the village as soon as the results were announced.

Bapu's son and former Minister G Jagadish Reddy was the first to reach his father's residence. He took his father's blessings and congratulated him. Former MLA Gadari Kishore Kumar honoured the new Sarpanch with a shawl.

A farmer by profession, Ramachandra Reddy was born around 1930. He is married to Savithramma and is father to five children. Known for his simplicity, Bapu has long been a respected elder and guiding force in village affairs.

HYDRAA cracks down on encroachments in Nizampet

Hyderabad: A major anti-encroachment drive was carried out on Thursday in Nizampet Municipal limits under Quthbullapur constituency by Hyderabad Disaster Management and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA).

During the operation, the HYDRAA officials removed illegal occupations from government-owned land in survey no.191, located in the Nizampet. The operation marks a significant step in reclaiming public property that had been under encroachment for a long time.

To ensure that the clearance process proceeded smoothly and without obstruction from the locals and encroachers, the officials on the ground coordinated with the police officers.

The targeted land parcel in Survey No.191 has been under close monitoring due to repeated encroachment attempts. As part of the drive, HYDRAA authorities deployed machinery and personnel to enforce land protection measures and prevent future violations.

Local residents observed the large-scale and filed a complaint with the HYDRAA. Following the complaint, the officials removed the encroachment and the locals welcomed the move, stating that protecting government land in rapidly developing zones such as Nizampet

is essential for planned urban growth.

Authorities also emphasised that strict action would continue against any fresh attempts to occupy government land illegally.

Meanwhile, HYDRAA Commissioner A.V. Ranganath directed officials to complete the desilting of nalas by April 2026. "We are witnessing unusual rainfall, with 10 cm to 20 cm falling in a single day. To ensure the free flow of stormwater during such events, achieving a flood-free city must be our goal," he said during a coordination meeting with GHMC maintenance officials. The

GHMC will take up the work from January.

Ranganath said clearing the clogged underground drainage lines at Maitrivanam and removing encroachments at the Patny nala has eliminated flood risks.

He assured to complete the works by April. The Commissioner instructed officials to involve locals and public representatives in monitoring the nala desilting works starting from January.

HYDRAA will also launch the Basti Bata to ensure community participation during nala desilting works.

BRS bags majority of villages in Siddipet in first phase

Siddipet: Bharata Rashtra Samithi (BRS) supported candidates performed well in the first phase of gram panchayat elections in Siddipet district.

While BRS bagged 76 gram panchayats, the Congress party won 60 villages. The BJP and independents won 11 panchayats each. Out of 163 gram panchayats for which the elections were conducted during the first phase, 16 villages elected the sarpanches unanimously while elections were conducted in 147 villages on Thursday.

However, Congress performed slightly better in Sangareddy and Medak districts. BJP failed to open its account in Medak, but managed to win 2 and 11 panchayats in Sangareddy and Siddipet

districts respectively. A high turnout of voters was recorded in these three districts during the first phase.

After recording the best results in Siddipet, BRS cadres and leaders were putting all-out efforts for better results in the second and third phases of elections. They are vigorously campaigning, exposing the government failures and highlighting the works the BRS had done during their ten years of rule. The sarpanch and ward member contestants have also been highlighting the issues at village level.

Meanwhile, officials are gearing up for conducting the second phase of elections on Sunday, with the campaigning for the same to end on Friday evening.

Dream home hunt to be made easy at SBI's mega property expo

Hyderabad: The State Bank of India (SBI) is organising a three-day mega property expo, featuring more than 60 prominent builders from Hyderabad, who will showcase their ongoing and upcoming real estate projects, at Hitex, Madhapur from December 19 to 21.

For the last six years, SBI has been conducting the mega event bringing together a host of prominent members of the builder fraternity on one platform. S Radhakrishnan, Chief General Manager, SBI, Hyderabad Circle, said that the mega property show turns seven this year and the expo will provide customers a one stop solution to acquire their dream home."If one dreams of owning a home, there's no need to hop between multiple sites — Hyderabad's top builders and the most promising properties will all be under one roof at this expo. Special concessions and attractive interest rates will also be offered to those who book their home at the property show," said Radhakrishnan.On Thursday, the SBI team flagged off the vehicles, which are being promoted as the moving ambassadors for the property expo. On the occasion, Radhakrishnan said that over 300 vehicles are being deployed for the publicity of the expo. "We request people interested in purchasing a property in Hyderabad to visit the property expo, choose their dream home, and make the property show a success," he addedInteracting with media persons, Radhakrishnan said that Hyderabad Circle crossed over Rs 2,000 crore of housing loan disbursements each month. "The property show is likely to showcase around 500 residential projects in the city. These properties will be a mix of affordable, mid and luxury range. We have seen demand for larger living spaces these days," he said, adding that the bank is giving an interest rate of 7.7 per cent to 8.5 per cent."

Special seminar to honour Guru Tegh Bahadur's 350th martyrdom on December 14

Hyderabad: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – Telangana, in association with All Gurudwaras of Telangana, is organising a special seminar to commemorate the 350th Shaheedi Samagam (Martyrdom) of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib Ji, the 9th Guru of Sikhism, on December 14 from 6 pm to 9 pm at Jal Vihar, Necklace Road.This Samagam also honors the supreme sacrifices of Bhai Mati Das Ji, Bhai Sati Das Ji, and Bhai Dayala Ji. The event will be held under the leadership of Sardar Gurcharan Singh Bagga, Chairman, Central Committee of Gurudwara Saheban, Telangana State, Hyderabad, and will feature an Exhibition on Sikh History, Balidaan (Sacrifice), and Heritage, Kirtan, and Katha by renowned Ragi Jathas and scholars,

Cold Snap Hits Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, temperatures drop

The cold snap continues to spread across the Telugu states, prompting the Meteorological Department to issue severe warnings for residents in Telangana. With temperatures plummeting, officials expect the cold winds to persist for at least another two days. Travellers, particularly in the mornings and evenings, are advised to exercise caution, with special attention urged for the elderly and children.

Adilabad, Nirmal, and Asifabad districts are experiencing record low temperatures, with Adilabad registering a chilling 6.2 degrees Celsius. Other notable temperatures include 7.2 degrees in Medak, 8.6 degrees in Hanumakonda, 11.4 degrees in Nizamabad, and 12.2 degrees in Hyderabad. Authorities indicate that similar conditions will prevail over the weekend, leading to an orange alert being issued for 32 districts. Many areas within and around Hyderabad are reporting single-digit temperatures, heightening concerns.

In neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, the cold has particularly affected the Manyam districts, where low temperatures have deterred residents from venturing outdoors. In Paderu and Araku, water has begun to freeze, with temperatures recorded at 4 degrees Celsius. Agricultural activities have been disrupted, as fields are also frozen, preventing farmers from attending to their lands in the early hours. The minimum temperatures recorded include 4 degrees in Minumuluru and 5.5 degrees in Chintapalli, with the cold spell showing no signs of abating even after 9 am.

Cybercrime Police sound alarm as city sees spike in credit card frauds

Hyderabad: Hyderabad's Cybercrime Police have issued a sharp warning as credit card fraud cases spike across the city. Residents are increasingly being targeted by sophisticated scams involving phishing

links, fake merchant sites, and deceptive calls from fraudsters posing as bank officials. The fraudsters employ multiple tactics to steal sensitive information. These include cloning cards at compromised ATMs, deploying fake customer-care numbers, circulating malicious apps designed to capture card and OTP details, and using SIM swapping to intercept transaction One-Time Passwords (OTPs). Authorities strongly urge citizens to remain vigilant: avoid clicking unknown links, never share OTPs or card details, and ensure all applications are downloaded only from verified sources.

A crucial point of defence is understanding that banks will never request OTPs, PINs, or CVVs via phone or email, so any such request should raise immediate suspicion.

The Cybercrime Unit calls for instant reporting of any doubtful transaction or communication, emphasising that early detection can prevent serious financial loss. With transaction alerts and cautious online behaviour, cardholders can better protect themselves against these evolving threats.

Free Training and employment opportunities in Oxygen

Hyderabad: Oxygen, a digital marketing company offering SEO, Social Media and Content Creation has announced free training and expansion of its team to meet international demands.

In a press release issued here, the Oxygen CEO Shashikanth Heerekar said the graduates who are interested in the field of search engine optimisation can apply for the free training. After the completion of the training, they would be given priority in the recruitment of the company. The CEO said that as search habits evolve, brands must build credibility across multiple channels. OXYGEN supports businesses in creating a strong presence that AI platforms can easily understand and recommend. Oxygen is expanding Its team to meet international demand. The company is growing its workforce. The company is offering roles in SEO, social media, content writ-

ing, paid ads, design and AI-supported digital marketing. New hires receive practical training and exposure to global projects.

Shashikanth said that the company helps brands strengthen visibility across search engines, AI tools, review sites and online marketplaces. For enquiries or career opportunities, visit www.oxygenites.com, email info@oxygenites.com, or call +9198853 46295. He said that the future of SEO blends Google-focused optimization with AI-driven visibility. To remain strong in the changing landscape, brands need structured content, strong authority signals and dependable backlinks. With over 20,000 clients worldwide, Oxygen built strategies that match the needs of AI-led search. The agency has delivered results for leading global brands including Toyota, Lexus and Jared, along with fast-growing SaaS companies.

Dead Candidate Wins Telangana Sarpanch Election After Heart Attack; Ballot Still Carried His Name

In an extraordinary incident from Telangana's Rajanna Sircilla district, Cherla (Charla/Varla) Murali, a gram panchayat sarpanch candidate from Chintala Tana (Chintal Tana) village in Vemulawada, was declared the winner after his death, triggering widespread attention across the state.

Murali passed away on December 5 following a sudden heart attack — just hours after filing his nomination papers. Despite this tragedy, the village went ahead with polling as scheduled.

Election authorities had already finalized and printed the ballot papers before Murali's unexpected death. Once printed, ballots cannot be easily altered due to administrative restrictions and legal procedures.

As a result, Murali's name appeared on the ballot, giving villagers the option to vote for him even though he had passed away.

In an emotional show of respect, villagers cast their votes overwhelmingly in Murali's favour. He secured over 700 votes, defeating his nearest opponent by around 378 votes.

Local sentiment, sympathy, and loyalty towards Murali and his family are believed to have played a major role in this unusual electoral outcome. Many voters reportedly saw this as their way to honour him.

Multiple reports identify Murali as a BRS-backed (Bharat Rashtra Samithi) candidate. He was actively campaigning under the party's support before his untimely death.

Election Officials Put Result on Hold

Since the winning candidate is deceased, officials have temporarily with held the final declaration and are reviewing the legal provisions under panchayat election rules.

The likely next steps include:

Declaring the seat vacant

Announcing a fresh election or bypoll

Following specific statutory procedures applicable when a deceased candidate wins

A formal decision is expected soon from district authorities.

A Case Highlighting Emotion and Electoral Process

This incident highlights both the human side of village politics and the limitations of election procedures, especially when unexpected events occur after ballot printing.

Murali's posthumous win reflects the strong bond he shared with the community and how rural voters often express sentiment through the ballot.

NRR thanks rural voters for panchayat poll success

Hyderabad: Telangana BJP State President N Ramchander Rao expressed heartfelt gratitude to rural voters for their support in the Phase 1 Panchayat elections, where the BJP registered noteworthy victories. He stated on Thursday that the results clearly indicate the party is steadily strengthening its presence in villages and that people are increasingly looking towards the BJP for leadership.

Rao emphasised that the central government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, remains committed to the development of Gram Panchayats. He highlighted several welfare and infrastructure initiatives

that have transformed rural life, including new roads, street lighting, cremation grounds, farmers' platforms, free rice distribution for the poor, permanent housing, toilets, Ujjwala gas connections, loans for women's self-help groups, self-employment schemes for youth, employment guarantee funds, drinking water facilities, healthcare security, and the PM-KISAN scheme. According to him, these measures have built strong trust among villagers, which has translated directly into electoral success for the BJP.

Looking ahead, Rao stated that the party will contest even more vigorously in the upcoming Phase 2 and Phase 3 local body elections. He urged BJP workers to reach out to the people, explain the developmental work being undertaken by the central government, and further consolidate the party's base in rural Telangana.

Appealing directly to the electorate, Rao said the future of villages depends on continued development and urged citizens to ensure the BJP's victory in the remaining phases of the Panchayat polls. He concluded by reiterating that the party's mission is to secure the progress and prosperity of rural communities across the state.

Achieve full coverage on Dec 21 pulse polio drive

Kurnool: District Collector Dr A Siri has instructed health authorities to ensure 100% vaccination across Kurnool district during the Pulse Polio programme scheduled for December 21.

Speaking at a sensitization meeting held with PHC medical officers on Thursday, supervisors and frontline staff at the Old College Block of the Government General Hospital, she emphasised that all 3,52,164 children below five years of age must be covered under the campaign without exception.

The Collector reviewed public feedback being received through IVRS on the functioning of government hospitals and highlighted concerns over the availability of doctors, supply of medicines, referral of patients for outside tests, sanitary conditions and alleged collection of money after deliveries.

Stating that such lapses must not recur, she directed PHC and UPHC medical officers to remain fully accessible, ensure medicines are provided within the facility, prevent any staff from collecting money from patients and conduct review meetings twice a week.

She also instructed PHCs reporting fewer than five deliveries a month to strengthen services and ensure a minimum of ten deliveries.

DM&HO Dr Bhaskar Raju informed that elaborate arrangements have been made for the Pulse Polio programme, including 1,600 vaccination booths, 52 Polio Transit Points and 63 mobile teams at railway stations, bus stands, markets and other public locations. GGH Superintendent Dr Venkateshwarlu, Administrative Officer Sindhu Subramanyam, medical officers and supervisory staff were present at the meeting.

Pawan Kalyan moves Delhi High Court, seeks protection of personal rights over AI misuse

Pawan Kalyan, the Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, has turned to the Delhi High Court in a bid to safeguard his personal rights amid concerns regarding the misuse of AI technology. In his petition, Kalyan has expressed alarm over the use of his images and name without his consent, particularly highlighting the damaging effects of AI-generated videos on his reputation.

The politician alleges that these AI videos are being employed for deceptive advertising and marketing purposes across platforms such as Google, Meta, X, and various e-commerce sites. During the court proceedings, Kalyan's lawyer cited precedence from a previous ruling involving actor Ajay Devgan, asserting that despite the High Court's directives, unauthorized advertisements linked to Kalyan continue to circulate online.

In response, the judge instructed social media

companies to take immediate action regarding the violations of Kalyan's personal rights and mandated that the URLs of the infringing content be submitted to mediators within a week. The court has scheduled the next hearing for December 22.

Minister Lokesh inaugurates Cognizant temporary campus in Vizag

Visakhapatnam: IT and Electronics Minister Nara Lokesh inaugurated a temporary campus of the leading international IT company Cognizant in Visakhapatnam.

Arriving in the City of Destiny on Friday morning, Lokesh reached the FinTech premises to launch the IT major temporary campus amid Vedic chants at the Mahati FinTech building located at Madhurawada Hill No:2.

Cognizant will continue its operation in the building until the permanent campus gets wrapped up, while the centre will focus on modern technology areas such as Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, digital engineering and cloud solutions.

Exhorting the Cognizant employees to make Andhra Pradesh proud, Lokesh said, "Youths continue to be the torchbearers and they should work hard to achieve success in life.

Disciplinary action ordered against 25 employees of APSPDCL

Tirupati: APSPDCL CMD Siva Sankar Lotheti has ordered disciplinary action against 25 employees of various circles of the organisation, who faced allegations including corruption, ignoring instructions from senior officers, unauthorised work, negligence in duty, and violations of rules.

The officials subjected to action include one Executive Engineer (EE), five Deputy Executive Engineers (Deputy EE), 13 Assistant Executive Engineers (AEE) /Assistant Engineers (AE), one Junior Engineer, one Line Inspector, one Line Man, two Assistant Line Men, and one Energy Assistant.

In Tirupati circle, Deputy EE D Vasanthaiah had two salary increments withheld cumulatively for giving unauthorised electricity connections. AEEs and other staff including VS Giri, S Mahaboob Basha, TD Lakshmipathi, N Radhakrishna, B Damodaram, and K Lokesh each had one increment withheld cumulatively for similar violations.

AEEs C Ravichandra Babu, M Mohan Rao, B Venkata Ramana, and Y Balagunnaiah were issued show cause notices for not following rules properly in Tirupati.

In Kurnool circle, Assistant Engineers Y Garjappa and N Maddileti received show cause notices for negligence in power supply restoration and line maintenance. Show cause notices were issued to Assistant Engineer MS Prasad and Assistant Lineman G Sambasiva in Tirupati circle for unauthorised line changes, negligence in equipment management, and corruption allegations, with three cumulative increments withheld.

In Kurnool, Deputy Executive Engineer D Khajavalli was served a show cause notice for unauthorised absence. Assistant Executive Engineer Y Siva Sankaraiah in Nellore was caught by the vigilance department, while R Viswashanthi Swaroop, Deputy EE in Kurnool, was ordered to explain posting critical messages against senior officials on social media.

Deputy Executive Engineer P Sankaraiah and Assistant Engineer B Mallikarjuna in Nellore were charged for incorrect recording of electrical equipment.

Assistant Engineer L Chalapathi in Tirupati received charges related to corruption in issuing agricultural electricity services. Junior Engineer V Venkateswarlu in Nellore is under investigation for corruption, unauthorised electricity connections to a granite factory, non-cancellation of defaulted connections under his wife's name, and giving attendance to an absent watchman.

In Kadapa, Executive Engineer N Rajasekhar Reddy was asked to explain delays in filing a court case appeal. Deputy Executive Engineer K Hanja Nawaz Khan in Nellore was ordered to submit a report on unauthorized activities in a training center.

Three employee appeals against the disciplinary measures have been rejected, and investigations are ongoing for other cases. After completion of all inquiries, appropriate disciplinary actions will be enforced to maintain accountability within the organization.

One in ten adolescents in Telangana is now pre-diabetic

Hyderabad: The long-held notion that diabetes is primarily a disease of adulthood is fast becoming obsolete. The health crisis now is rapidly shifting to classrooms and college campuses, as studies after study consistently indicate the emergence of type 2 diabetes as a silent epidemic among adolescents.

KMC sets Dec 14 deadline for cleaning vacant sites

Kurnool: Kurnool Municipal Corporation Commissioner P Viswanath has called on residents to extend full cooperation in shaping the city into a Clean and Green Smart City.

Addressing the media at the Municipal Office on Thursday, he said four key sanitation initiatives are being implemented with public participation as the central focus.

He cautioned that all vacant site owners must voluntarily clear their plots by December 14, failing which the corporation will undertake the cleaning and impose penalties.

Of the 325 identified vacant sites, notices were issued to 182 owners while the remaining 143 could not be traced, yet they too are required to comply with the deadline.

The Commissioner highlighted rising concerns over stray animals in public spaces. He said 23 cattle owners and 31 pig rearers have been identified and instructed to shift their animals to the outskirts within a week.

If they fail to do so, the animals will be taken into municipal custody. Stating that stray cattle on roads have become a major cause of accidents and inconvenience, he warned that strict action will be initiated against owners whose animals are found roaming freely.

He added that the corporation is in the process of identifying suitable locations for temporary shelters for seized animals.

Commissioner Viswanath also directed all high-footfall institutions—including railway stations, bus stands, educational institutions, hospitals and places of worship—to immediately install fencing to prevent the entry of stray dogs.

He expressed concern that hotels, restaurants and function halls have been dumping leftover food on roads, worsening the stray dog menace. Any such violations will now be dealt with severely.

He urged residents to make proper use of the Construction & Demolition Waste Management system, reminding that only authorized vehicles should be used for disposal.

A fee of Rs.500 for tractors and Rs.1,000 for tippers is applicable, and payments can be made through QR code. Improper dumping will lead to fines and legal action, he said, adding that residents can call 7422992299 for prompt services.

Reiterating that these measures are essential for public health, environmental safety and city hygiene, the Commissioner appealed for voluntary support from all citizens.

He stated that the Eat Street development works on Stadium Road are progressing swiftly, with 15 additional stalls soon to be completed. The existing 45 stalls have already received an encouraging response.

Cognizant to boost digital capacity and AP's innovation ecosystem

Visakhapatnam: In a significant moment that is set to change the IT landscape of Visakhapatnam, Cognizant, a global leader in technology and professional services, marched ahead with a ground-breaking ceremony for a state-of-the-art 20,000-seat facility in Visakhapatnam.

Following timelines, the proposed new campus is slated to be completed by 2033 in three phases with an investment of Rs.1,600 crore.

Unveiling an Interim Techfin Centre in Visakhapatnam, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said, "We are delighted to welcome Cognizant to Visakhapatnam. This facility is a landmark step in advancing our vision of transforming Andhra Pradesh into a world-class destination where global enterprises can build, innovate, and grow."

Highlighting the advantages, the Chief Minister mentioned that the investment will generate high-quality jobs, enhance the region's digital capabilities, and contribute significantly to the state's innovation-driven and technology-enabled growth.

Along with the CM, the centre was unveiled in the presence of Minister for IT, Electronics and Communication, HRD and RTG Nara Lokesh.

The first phase of the construction will commence in 2026 and accommodate 3,000 associates upon its completion in early 2029. The subsequent phases will sum up to a total seating capacity of 20,000.

Speaking about the development that is taking place in an accelerated mode in Andhra Pradesh, Lokesh remarked, "Cognizant's presence marks a piv-otal milestone in Visakhapatnam's emergence as a thriving hub for technology. This development centre will unlock new opportunities for our youth and further strengthen the city's position as the economic and financial hub of the state."

The Techfin Centre will serve as an interim office until the completion of the first phase of the proposed 22-acre campus. It will focus on advanced technologies including artificial intelligence, machine learning, digital engineering, and cloud solutions. Sharing his views, CEO of Cognizant S Ravi Kumar commented, "Today marks a defining step in Cognizant's growth journey in India. The groundbreaking of our new campus and the opening of an Interim Techfin Centre in Visakhapatnam reflect our confidence in the city's talent and future potential."

Ravi Kumar expressed his gratitude to the state government for the partnership and added that he looks forward to unlocking the full potential of Visakhapatnam's talent and innovation spirit.

The centre features a dedicated client experience zone and collaborative spaces designed to foster teamwork and accommodate more than 1,000 associates based in and around Visakhapatnam.

Since 2024, Cognizant has established new delivery centres in Bhubaneswar, Indore, and a Techfin Centre in GIFT City, Gujarat. These centres are designed to support the future of work, promote agility, skilling, collaboration, and innovation, while providing a best-in-class employee experience.

Data Munching | The numbers don't lie: the Earth is warming, and rapidly

Earth is running a fever, and the latest temperature readings aren't offering much comfort. Last week, climate data released by Europe's Copernicus Climate Change Service, better known as C3S, presented another warning about the impending climate crisis hovering over humanity — for the first time in recorded human history, 12 consecutive months saw temperatures 1.5 degrees Celsius hotter than pre-industrial years.But to understand the real magnitude of the crisis, let's take a deeper look at what this data shows.

C3S data showed that the 12 months leading to February 2024 — the period between February 2023 to January 2024 — saw warming of 1.52 degrees Celsius above the 19th-century benchmark dubbed the "pre-industrial average", the period between 1850 and 1900, considered by scientists as the baseline to track changes in global temperature, as the pace at which greenhouse emissions entered the atmosphere accelerated due to the use of fossil fuels.It added that this surge in temperature comes on the back of storms, drought and fire that have lashed the planet as climate change, supercharged by the naturally occurring El Nino phenomenon, stoked record warming in 2023, making it likely the hottest calendar year in the past 100,000 years.

The 1.5-degree Celcius mark first entered our consciousness thanks to the Paris Treaty adopted in 2015 by nearly 200 countries to limit global temperature increase to that extent, and that extent alone. However, despite last year's average temperatures, we cannot say that the 1.5 degree Celcius mark has been breached, as this requires measurement that spans several decades and not just one year. Nevertheless, it is a stark warning for how rapidly the world is barrelling towards breaching that threshold.Now back to what the data says about the magnitude of the crisis at hand.A month-by-month segregation of the data from the analysis period shows that average temperatures in six of the last seven months were above the 1.5°C threshold. These are July 2023, September 2023, October 2023, November 2023, December 2023, and January 2023. Two months – March 2023 and August 2023 – barely missed the 1.5°C threshold, clocking in at an average of 1.49°C over the month.Chart 1Establishing a trend from this appears rather straightforward — all of the months exceeding the 1.5°C threshold come in the second half of 2023 when El Nino (a climate phenomenon in the Pacific Ocean that is characterised by unusual warming of its surface waters) had set in. The lone month in the second half of the year, August, that did not breach the mark missed it by a hundredth of a degree.

Disaggregating it even further, i.e., by looking at the average temperature day by day, lends further insight as to how the rise was not so much an anomaly, but a clear and steady one. This phenomenon has also carried forward into 2024, which means that the year has started far ahead of what 2023 did.Chart 2Another interesting aspect that comes forward in disaggregation is that we are able to quantify the change in temperature better.Looking at data through the first half of 2023, for instance, in the 181 days between January 1 and July 30, the daily global average surface level temperature was above 1.5°C for 17 days. This means that the world saw the 1.5°C mark breached on around 9% of days in the first half of the year.In the 184 days between July 1 and December 31, however, the same limit was breached for more than 148 days. In other words, a little over 80% of all days in the second half of 2023 saw the 1.5°C global warming threshold breached.

This trend worsens when we look at the first 38 days of 2024 (for which this data is available and analysis possible). Only three days this year — incidentally, just one spell between January 12 and January 14 where the average global temperature saw a very marginal dip to 1.46°C, 1.44°C and 1.48°C — have so far been below the 1.5°C mark. The global average on the remaining 35 has been consistently above the mark.Such a disaggregation of data makes it apparent that the average global temperature is making a near-constant upward climb. While some days may offer temporary dips, the overall trend is undeniable: the planet is warming, and quickly.

This isn't just a scientific observation; it's a call to action. The warming trend demands urgent measures to curb greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impact of climate change. The time for action is now, and the data serves as a stark reminder of the stakes involved.The implications are far-reaching. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and disruptions to ecosystems are just a few of the potential consequences. While the data presented here focuses on temperatures, it's a crucial piece in understanding the larger picture of the climate crisis.

What is it that drives us to create: Charles Assisi asks, in Life Hacks

It is difficult to explain the "writer's high", if I may call it that. As I set out on this task, my screen stares back at me, blank but for the blink of the cursor. It will start to fill with ideas, if I begin to write something coherent. And then those ideas will be beaten into shape.I will see inconsistences and seek consistencies. The battle in my head will be a silent but busy one. An intense one too, as the thoughts are honed until they acquire a shape that feels convincing. Eventually, all this will be transmitted to a larger audience, whose minds I hope to sway and shape.

To me, eventually, writing is an act of rebellion against silence.I would go so far to say that every creative act — painting, photography, music and so many others — is a gesture of defiance and bravery.

Look at it this way: we live in the age of the consumption economy. Almost everything one desires is a click away. Giants of business and technology compete to cater to our whims. It takes courage, conviction and a commitment to deeper truths, to step away from the ease of that world, stand apart, at least for a while, and say: there is more; there are still new ways to see this world.I remember a conversation with TN Hari, co-founder of the Artha School of Entrepreneurship. In an earlier life, he co-founded BigBasket. When we spoke a while ago, he raised an interesting question: How did people live before 10-minute delivery became a business model in urban India?

A likely answer is that we consumed less, and thought more about our purchases. Extend that thought to our lives at large. Most of us have forgotten the fundamental human joy of creation, and replaced it with consumption and possession. In the transition from effort to ease, we have lost a measure of control too. Our lives are now filled with products that other people want them filled with.There is still the opportunity to transition from silent consumers to careful curators.

Writing remains the simplest and most powerful way to do this. All it demands is a decision to think more deeply about one's world, crystallise thought into language, and share the inner world with the outer.I am reminded, as I write, of an outstanding passage by the African-American writer Ta-Nehisi Coates: "I strongly believe that writing is an act of courage—it's almost an act of physical courage. You get up and you have this great idea. Maybe you were hanging out with your friends—you guys were having beers and you were talking about something. You had this idea and they said, 'Wow, that's brilliant! Someone should go write it.'"But, he goes on to say, not many people follow through and "go write it"? I am among those who do. And there are still others who pursue creativity differently, in the everyday.

Muggle breaks a spell:The remarkable tale of Harry Potter stuntsman David Holmes

David Holmes was 25, and had arrived for work at the Warner Bros studio in Leavesden, England, where the seventh Harry Potter film, …The Deathly Hallows: Part 1, was being shot.It was a cold day in January, 2009, and year nine of Holmes acting as Daniel Radcliffe's stunt double. The Harry Potter films had been an unusual series to work on. Holmes had flown through the air, levitated on broomsticks, been thrown back by the explosive powers of spells and wands.

One such explosion changed it all. They call it the jerk-back routine. The stuntman is strapped into a harness, after which a wire-and-pulley system lifts and throws them into a padded wall.The team had performed the stunt hundreds of times by 2009. But that day, something was wrong. "I knew it as soon as I felt the wire pull," Holmes says. It felt like there was too much weight on the pulleys. He felt his body fly through the air and slam into the wall "at a frightening pace". The impact broke his neck, severed his spinal cord and led his sternum (the bone at the centre of the ribcage) to fold inward."I was instantly paralysed," says Holmes, 40, speaking from Thailand, where he is currently on vacation. "I kept consciousness… so I knew pretty much as soon as I landed on the floor."Holmes spent the six months in hospital, and years in recovery. A cyst in his spinal cord led to further complications, including the loss of the use of his right arm.

How does one respond to such suffering, such a fracture from the life one knew?

David Holmes: The Boy Who Lived, a documentary released in November, traces Holmes's unusual response of optimism, courage and indefatigable humour. The film is directed by former Potter crew member Dan Hartley, and executive-produced by Radcliffe."The journey that I'm now on, as a paralysed person, is not the one I would have picked for myself," Holmes says, "but it's the one that's taught me the biggest lessons. I always say breaking my neck made a man out of me."Holmes grew up in Essex, the middle of three boys born to Sue Holmes and Andy Holmes. When he was five, all three were enrolled in a local gymnastics club. "My parents were both working, and realised that this was the world's best babysitter," he says, laughing. By the time he was 13, Holmes was competing in national-level gymnastics tournaments, and dreaming of the Olympics."Then I got my first taste of Hollywood, at 14, and that was it. I was going to be a stuntman."

Veteran stunt coordinator Greg Powell signed Holmes up for his first film in 1997, the sci-fi adventure Lost in Space, directed by the Jamaican-British Stephen Hopkins. Holmes spent that summer riding robots, diving out of the way of explosions, and falling madly in love with filmmaking."You go through a film stage door, and I describe it as the airlock into fantasy world," he says. On his first day, he was glued into a rubber "spacesuit", put in a "spaceship", and asked to jump out of the way of a pyrotechnics display. "It made a very big impression on

a 14-year-old, that's for sure," he says.Three years later, Powell called him in for another stunt test. Holmes was strapped onto a broomstick that was cantilevered on the back of a pickup truck, with Chris Columbus, the director of the first two Potter films, sitting in the truck bed.Holmes remembers pretending he was flying, dodging quaffles and reaching for snitches, as the truck was driven into a ravine. "I was the world's first Quidditch player," he says.

By the end of the day, he was the lead stunt double for Radcliffe. In the early years, he also occasionally served as stunt double for some of the other child characters, including Emma Watson (who played Hermione Granger) and Tom Felton (who was Draco Malfoy).The children in particular grew close. "Radcliffe grew from my on-set ward and mentee to one of my best friends," Holmes says. The friendship and community that surrounded Holmes after the incident is part of what makes …The Boy Who Lived so compelling."They say it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it takes a very large village to support a survivor of spinal cord injury," Holmes says.His sense of humour shines through too, in the film and in conversation. He points out the logistical nightmare of travelling from the UK to Thailand in a wheelchair ("I had go so far as to dig up the architectural plans of my hotel before booking it").

There's a fair amount of levity on Holmes's podcast as well. Cunning Stunts is where he now channels his love for performance. The podcast is produced by Ripple Productions, which he founded in 2013. On the show, he and Radcliffe interview stunt coordinators and performers."We don't get Oscars, we don't get BAFTAs. But I knew there were a million stunts out there that could be articulately described, for the wider audience to start to appreciate the value of what stunt

work is," Holmes says. "So I decided to give my friends the canvas and let them show the world the creative artists they are."His other projects include a book on his life, which he says will be full of adventure ("I once got arrested, in my wheelchair, in Amsterdam!") and fundraising for the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in London, which played a pivotal role in his recovery.He remembers films being pivotal

too. "There have been times when I've been stuck staring at ceilings for days, so I got a projector and projected movies onto the ceiling," he says. "You'd be surprised at the power of storytelling, and what it can do for you in your darkest times."He likes to think that out there, children who feel challenged, sad, alienated or alone are thinking the same things, he adds, of the movies he made.

India signs MoU with Colombia on sharing open-sourced digital public infrastructure

New Delhi: India and Colombia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation in the field of sharing successful digital solutions implemented at population scale for digital transformation. The agreement was signed between the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the Information Technologies and Communications of Colombia. India has developed some of the finest digital public goods infrastructure, which could change lives the world over. India has taken the path of building public digital infrastructure for serving citizens and UPI, and Jan Dhan, Aadhar, CoWin and ONDC are some of the examples.

Union Minister of State for Electron-

ics and IT, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Rajeev Chandrasekhar exchanged the MoU with Mauricio Lizcano, Minister of Information Technologies and Communications of Colombia. The MoU intends to promote digital transformation (viz INDIA STACK) through capacity-building programs, the exchange of best practices, the exchange of public officials and experts, the development of pilot or demo solutions and the facilitation of private sector contacts to mutually benefit the digital ecosystems of both countries.

Both sides discussed the importance of Digital Public Infrastructures. These infrastructures constitute a set of shared digital systems that are secure and interoperable. They can be built on open

standards to deliver and provide equitable access to public and private services. India Stack Solutions are DPIs developed and implemented by India at population scale to provide access and delivery of public services. India is keen on partnering with Colombia by building upon development partnership on digital transformation leading to a smooth adoption of Digital Public Infrastructure in Colombia.

12 ways and exercises to manage your respiratory health during end of winters

The end of winters are here and as much as we enjoy the last of the cold weather, there are people who get sick due to the weather change which includes flu, sinuses, cold and cough etc. On the other hand, people with known respiratory illness face a lot of challenges with regular breathing function especially in cities but sweat not as we got an expert on board to discuss more about pulmonary function, respiratory health and how breathing exercises can be an aid.In an interview with HT Lifestyle, Priya Singh, Women's Health Physiotherapist and Lactation Consultant at Cloudnine Group of Hospitals, in Navi Mumbai's Vashi, highlighted the common concerns people face with most of the respiratory illness when combined -Priya Singh said, "Breathing is one of the automated function for humans for living but no one has ever thought about the numerous benefit breathing consciously would have on lungs and over all respiratory health." She explained: Breathing exercise helps with generalized fatigu Provides relief from Breathlessness (Dyspnea) by improving oxygenatio   Improves respiratory muscle function and strength   Helps in clearing out secretions and sputu   Relaxes body through reducing elevated blood pressure and heart rateAsserting that maintaining respiratory health during winter is important since cold and dry air can have an impact on the respiratory system, Priya Singh suggested some tips to help you manage your respiratory health -   Stay Warm and Layered: Dress warmly to protect yourself from the cold air. Use layers to trap heat and prevent your body temperature from dropping too much. Stay Hydrated: Cold air can be drying to the respiratory passages. Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated and keep your mucous membranes moist. Use Humidifiers: Humidifiers add moisture to the air, which can be beneficial, especially in heated indoor environments. This helps prevent the airways from becoming too dry Practice Good Hand Hygiene: Wash your hands regularly to reduce the risk of respiratory infections. Viruses that cause respiratory illnesses are more prevalent during the winter months. Avoid Smoke and Pollutants: Stay away from tobacco smoke and other pollutants, as they can irritate the respiratory system and worsen respiratory conditions   Exercise Regularly: Regular physical activity can help strengthen your respiratory muscles and improve lung function. However, if you have respiratory conditions, consult your healthcare provider before starting a new exercise program Practice Deep Breathing Exercises: Engage in deep breathing exercises to improve lung capacity and promote better respiratory function Maintain Indoor Air Quality: Ensure good ventilation in your home and avoid the use of strong chemicals or cleaning products that may irritate the respiratory system. Get Vaccinated: Consider getting vaccinated against respiratory infections, such as the flu. Consult with your healthcare provider for advice on vaccines that are appropriate for you Eat a Balanced Diet: Consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. These foods provide essential nutrients that support overall health, including respiratory health.

Manage Respiratory Conditions: If you have pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), work closely with your healthcare provider to manage and control your symptoms. Ensure that you have an action plan in place.Stay Informed: Be aware of air quality levels and weather conditions, especially if you have respiratory conditions that may be affected by changes in temperature and air quality.Talking about the types of breathing exercises that are available to us to manage respiratory illness, Priya Singh explained - Diaphragmatic Breathing exercise - This breathing involves filling air in your lungs while you allow your abdomen to expand and gradually breath out and engage your abdomen inwards. This breathing exercise helps particularly with releasing tension around the intercostal muscles, relaxes he body by lowering blood pressure, provides energy to continue with activity of daily living. Pursed lip breathing - In this type of breathing you have to inhale deep and exhale gradually through your mouth, note that your exhalation time has to be more than inhalation. This breathing particularly with breathlessness, calms down the system. Mostly helpful in cases of asthma and COPD. Segmental expansion breathing exercise – This exercise as the name suggests is perform at particular segment, helps in conditions where there is accumulation of fluid around the segment of the lung like in pneumonia, improves chest wall movement, the aim remains to improve oxygenation and ventilation followed by underlying respiratory illness.She revealed an another pulmonary rehabilitation program that includes the below breathing techniques - Forced Expiratory Technique – also known as FET technique: As we can understand by the name of the technique this pattern of breathing is focusing on force full exhalation across the lung volumes, this tech-

nique of breathing helps with effective coughing and clearance of collected mucus.

Active Cycle of Breathing Technique – also known as ACBT technique: This pattern of breathing involves cyclic pattern breathing combining FET that is breathing for 5 times and controlling the same followed by again active cycle of 5 breaths and 2-3 FET Breathing ending with breath control , when performed in cyclic manner helps with mobilizing the mucus, improves lung volume and capacity Autogenic drainage: This technique of breathing is when you are breathing deeply

through your nose keeping the rate and depth of it in mind during inspiration, which starts from the lowest segment of lung and moves towards apical segment. This technique has stages where it helps in providing great relief with chest congestion by mobilising the secretions.Priya Singh concluded, "The above exercise are beneficial not only during winters but when practiced under guidance of a Physiotherapist can bring improvement in ones respiratory health. The atmosphere where you are practicing breathing exercise is equally important, so while you start performing make sure that you have good source of ventilation."

20 tech firms pledge to curb deepfakes during global elections this year

New Delhi: Twenty leading tech companies like Microsoft, Meta, Google, X, Amazon and OpenAI have pledged to help prevent deceptive AI content, or deepfakes, from interfering with global elections this year, including in India.At the Munich Security Conference (MSC), the companies signed a tech accord to combat deceptive use of AI in 2024 elections.The "Tech Accord to Combat Deceptive Use of AI in 2024 Elections" is a set of commitments to deploy technology countering harmful AI-generated content meant to deceive voters, they said in a statement.Digital content addressed by the accord consists of AI-generated audio, video, and images that deceptively fake or alter the appearance, voice, or actions of political candidates, election officials, and other key stakeholders in a democratic election, or that provide false information to voters about when,

where, and how they can vote.

The accord signatories are Adobe, Amazon, Anthropic, Arm, ElevenLabs, Google, IBM, Inflection AI, LinkedIn, McAfee, Meta, Microsoft, Nota, OpenAI, Snap Inc., Stability AI, TikTok, Trend Micro, Truepic, and X.

"Google has been supporting election integrity for years and the accord reflects an industry-side commitment against AI-generated election misinformation that erodes trust," said Kent Walker, President, Global Affairs at Google.

Participating companies agreed to commitments like developing and implementing technology to mitigate risks related to deceptive AI Election content, including open-source tools where appropriate and assessing models in scope of this accord to understand the risks they may present regarding 'Deceptive AI Election Content'.