

# METROPLUS



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Chennai

Wednesday, December 28, 2016



**TECHKNOW**  
WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA  
INFLUENCERS HAD TO SAY  
ABOUT 2016 P2



**FOOD**  
DECADENT  
CAKES THAT TOP  
OUR LIST P3



**MUSIC**  
THE SUNBURN FESTIVAL  
MOVES TO PUNE  
THIS YEAR P8

**Admit two**



**Concert**

T.M. Krishna will perform as part of a series of special performances to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Chandralekha, the founder-trustee of SPACES.  
**Date and Time:** December 28, 7.30 p.m.  
**Venue:** SPACES

**Themed dinner**

To mark the festive season, Taj Coromandel hosts themed dinner buffets with various interesting cuisines such as Thai, Colonial and Middle Eastern.  
**Date:** Till December 30  
**Venue:** Anise, Taj Coromandel  
**Tel:** 6600 2827



**Colour splash**

Artworld showcases the work of artists from around India.  
**Address:** 1/12, Ganeshpuram, 3rd Street  
**Date and Time:** Ongoing, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
**Tel:** 2433 8691

**Grill fest**

A2 hosts a Japanese grill fest with an exclusive menu.  
**Date and Time:** Till January 1, open for lunch and dinner  
**Venue:** The Park, Nungambakkam  
**Tel:** 4267 6000



**Cinema**

Watch as former wrestler Mahavir Singh Phogat (Aamir Khan) trains his daughters Geeta (Fatima Sana Shaikh) and Babita (Sanya Malhotra) to follow in his footsteps in *Dangal*.

## Space, time, and the startup

From attempting a mission to the moon to building a small bike, TEAM METROPLUS looks at ventures that have made a mark globally this year

**Uniphore**

Uniphore takes the lead when it comes to Indian startups making global news. The company, which created a software to enable rural India use speech recognition in their native tongues on their phones, was featured in *TIME* magazine. Rather, its founder Umesh Sachdev was — he was named one of the 10 Millennials Who Are Changing the World. In fact, he happens to be the only Indian and only technologist to have figured in the list that features individuals from all walks of life. For Chennai-based Sachdev, the mention was only a step forward in a long journey.

Uniphore's journey began in 2007 when Sachdev and his co-founder Ravi Saraogi moved to Chennai from Delhi to work out of the IIT-Madras incubation centre. Uniphore, according to Sachdev, was a sort of last attempt at entrepreneurship. "We'd had a couple of other ventures that hadn't worked out. We were just two men who'd launched our startup straight out of college.

So we decided to give our next venture a shot for at least six months. If it didn't work, we thought we'd go back and do either an MBA or get ourselves corporate jobs," he says.

But then, entrepreneurs are just wired differently. "We gun for something that we are intent on." And this one paid off.

Today, with over 70 enterprise customers, and a software that enables speech



Umesh Sachdev PHOTO: SHAJU JOHN

to transform human-machine interaction, Uniphore has touched millions of lives. Think IVR systems for phone banking, Jan Dhan programmes or customer care services.

Uniphore has touched millions of lives through IVR systems for banking, Jan Dhan and customer care services

According to Sachdev, the co-founders envisioned building a product with a rural focus. Today, Uniphore has successfully addressed language barriers. Now, even a farmer in a remote Indian village can carry out financial transactions in his language via phone.

The company knew the product was working a couple of years after inception. And, there's been no looking back since. It now offers 35 global languages, including dialects, and has a presence in South East Asia and West Asia as well. "We are now working towards making our presence felt in the Americas and Europe," he says.

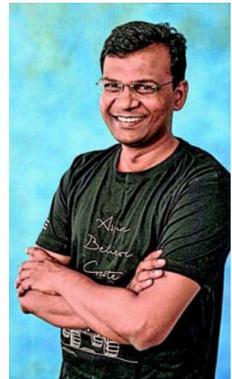
RANJANI RAJENDRA



**Team Indus**

In December 2017, Bangalore-based Team Indus intends to launch a rover with the aim of landing it on the surface of the Moon and beam back images and video. The project is India's entry into the Google Lunar XPRIZE competition, which challenged the best technical minds in the world to achieve this feat.

In a chat about the future of space exploration and the entities that push it forward, Rahul Narayan, who heads the team, explains that conquering space is an act born out of humanity's curiosity to experiment, even without a specific goal in sight. "The moment you see all of Earth in one picture, you realise how small it is," Rahul says, reminiscing about mankind's first ventures beyond earthly confines. "Space is a natural extension for us, beyond the Moon and now Mars. But



Rahul Narayan; (top) the rover

these are things that happen in multiple lifespans."

About the competition, which was announced 10 years ago, and is set to culminate next year after multiple extensions, Rahul says that the journey has been long and stimulating. "We began by trying to solve a technical problem, but over time we've expanded and whittled away at the list of unknowns, and now the few left are regulatory in nature. There isn't enough literature about lunar conditions and there is also a lot of deliberate misinformation. There are also a lot of unique

engineering challenges we've had to work with, like getting the rover wheels to work on the lunar surface and designing a passive locomotion system," he explains.

According to him, the future of space exploration will be fuelled by private companies that dare to push the envelope, though the support of governments can never be ruled out. Indus itself has recently secured a launch contract for its rover from ISRO, ensuring a spot in the final phase of the competition. "In the late 90s, you had Iridium who launched a global satellite network, and though it did not find many takers at the time, it set the foundation for the mobile revolution of today. Even companies like SpaceX were doing their own thing until NASA offered them a launch contract. So, that synergy is important."

On the rate of progress in space technology, he says, "Technological progress has been such that we will make it into outer space relatively soon, though a Moon base and then a Mars base will be necessary. Will the companies pushing the boundaries now be around then? Possibly not, but investment is unlikely to be a problem."

But is this endeavour a necessity? "Is being in Antarctica necessary?" he counters. "But we're there anyway, and a lot of research happens there. It is the same case here. Once a commercial interest is found, private players will come in and then there is no stopping them," he says, painting a realistic picture of mankind's journey into the unknown.

SOORAJ RAJMOHAN

Continued on page 2

## Ashwin bats for cricket film

The cricketer might be cast in part three of *Chennai 600028*



Ravichandran Ashwin; (below) Venkat Prabhu

**SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM**

A recent Tamil film on cricket has attracted the attention of cricketer Ravichandran Ashwin, who has been making headlines since he was adjudged ICC's Cricketer of the Year 2016. The cricketer tweeted, "What a wonderful movie *Chennai 600028 II*, completely put my life on rewind mode. Genuinely felt I could have been a part of it. (sic)"

The sports-comedy flick, *Chennai 600028 II*, turns the spotlight on 'galli' cricket, and how the sport is an integral part of the growing-up years of many youngsters.

The film's director, Venkat Prabhu, said, "We actually wanted him {Ashwin} to play a small cameo in this part, but it didn't materialise as he was busy with his



cricketing commitments. If a part three of the film happens in the future, we will surely rope him in. At the moment, I'm just thrilled that the ICC cricketer of the year liked my film."

While the first part of the film, released in 2007, was hailed as a coming-of-age sports film and revolved around the competitive spirit between two local league teams, the second part examines how the boys, now grown-up men, still manage to keep their love for the sport alive.

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