



Madras High Court Urges Centre to Frame Law Restricting Internet Use for Children Below 16

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In a significant move addressing growing concerns over children's exposure to harmful online content, the Madras High Court's Madurai Bench has urged the Central Government to frame a stringent law, similar to Australia's model, prohibiting children below 16 years of age from using social media and the Internet.



Call for a Law on Internet Access

Drawing inspiration from Australia's protective digital framework, the court suggested that India enact a similar law restricting Internet access for those under 16 years. According to the judges, such a law could serve as an effective deterrent against technology misuse and shield minors from online exploitation, cyber bullying, and exposure to inappropriate content.

The judges observed that unrestricted access to the Internet has led to alarming exposure of minors to explicit and inappropriate material. They underlined that the easy availability of pornographic content and the addictive nature of social media platforms are having a damaging impact on the psychological well-being of children and adolescents.

Awareness Campaigns Until Law Is Enacted

The Bench directed the Union Government to initiate extensive public-awareness drives through all forms of media, television, newspapers, and online platforms to educate both parents and

children about the adverse effects of unregulated Internet use. Citing the long gestation period for law-making, the judges emphasized the importance of immediate preventive measures through education and social communication.

Protecting Mental Health and Developing Technology Solutions

The court expressed deep concern over the mental health impact of early exposure to explicit visual content. It recommended that the Centre and technology regulators promote the development of advanced software tools capable of blocking or filtering harmful material automatically.

"Legislation alone is not enough; technology must assist in enforcement," the judges asserted.

Government and Parent Responsibility

The Bench made it clear that the responsibility does not rest solely on lawmakers. It called upon the National and State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights to take swift initiatives, monitor compliance, and collaborate with digital service providers to ensure safety mechanisms are effective.

Parents too, the judges remarked, bear a moral duty to monitor and guide their children's online behavior.

Strong Digital Safeguards Essential

Concluding the order, the court reiterated that both stringent legislation and advanced technical controls are necessary to prevent children from straying into harmful online spaces. Campaigns such as those initiated by parent organizations are expected to support the court's call for responsible digital parenting.



Ayodhya: CM Chandrababu Naidu Hails Ram Mandir as Symbol of Spiritual Reawakening, Calls Ramrajya Model for Good Governance

TPN Bureau | December 28

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday expressed deep admiration for the grandeur and spiritual significance of the newly constructed Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya. Visiting the temple to offer prayers and seek the blessings of Lord Ram, Naidu described the shrine as a "spiritual hub for India" and reaffirmed his belief that the ideals of Ramrajya represent the finest model of governance.

"The pathway wasn't easy," he remarked, referring to the decades-long legal battle over the Ayodhya site. "Courts and numerous negotiations were involved in reaching this final decision. The outcome shows that truth and faith ultimately prevail."

"The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) supremo also highlighted the temple's role in rejuvenating India's cultural and spiritual identity.

He said the Ram Mandir would not only attract devotees but also serve as a center that fosters values essential for social harmony and human development.

"Ayodhya temple is going to play a very crucial role in building spiritual values. It will be a beacon for people seeking peace and inspiration," Naidu stated. Sharing his personal experience during the visit, the chief minister said he felt deeply moved by the divinity and aura of the sanctum.

"I had a good dar-

shan. I feel spiritually fulfilled after this visit," he said, expressing his appreciation for the arrangements made by the Uttar Pradesh government. "I thank the UP government for their excellent preparations. Nowadays, UP is doing extremely well under its leadership, and their efforts in maintaining the sanctity and orderliness in Ayodhya are commendable. Naidu's visit to Ayodhya underscores the growing significance of the Ram Mandir as not only a religious monument but also a symbol of governance ideals rooted in Indian philosophy.

His remarks connect contemporary leadership values with ancient wisdom, portraying Ramrajya as a framework centered on justice, welfare, and spiritual integrity. The Andhra Pradesh chief minister's comments resonate beyond politics, reflecting a broader narrative of unity and moral governance.

As leaders and devotees from across the country continue to visit Ayodhya, Naidu's message reaffirms the temple's role in shaping India's spiritual, cultural, and ethical landscape in the years ahead.

AP CM thanks the PM



TPN Bureau | December 28:

Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for appreciating the traditional Narsapuram lace craft and the women artisans associated with it. Naidu said Andhra Pradesh is home to several traditional art forms preserved by families and communities over generations, with crochet lace-making from Nar-

sapuram in West Godavari district being one such unique heritage craft. "Thank you for your appreciation of the Narsapuram lace craft, Prime Minister Modi.

Andhra Pradesh is home to many traditional arts that have been preserved by families and communities over generations," Naidu said in a post on X replying to the Prime Minister. The Chief Minister noted that the skill and dedication of women artisans have not only preserved the craft but also helped take it to global

markets.

The state would continue to cherish and support the art while empowering those associated with it. In a post on X, the PM said, "The effort in Narsapuram has brought back to life the local lace craft and thus empowered several people."

Speaking during the latest edition of his 'Mann Ki Baat' programme, PM Modi described the Narsapuram lace craft as a symbol of women empowerment and economic progress. He said the

lace craft, nurtured by women for generations with patience and fine skill, is now being taken forward with new designs and forms through joint efforts of the Andhra Pradesh government and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

The craft has received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, with over 500 products being made and nearly one lakh women across more than 250 villages gaining employment through it, he added.

Key Twist in iBOMMA Case—Organizer Ravi Accused of Identity Theft

TPN Bureau | December 28

Hyderabad: In a sensational development in the ongoing investigation into the iBOMMA piracy case, Hyderabad police have uncovered evidence suggesting that the alleged platform organizer, Imandi Ravi, may have used a fake identity to obtain official documents, further complicating the probe into one of South India's most notorious digital piracy networks.

According to police sources, Ravi allegedly procured a PAN card and driving license under the name Prahla Vellela, a person he previously described as his room mate during

questioning. Acting on this information, investigators summoned the real Prahla from Bengaluru for direct cross-examination. During this session, Prahla reportedly told the police that he had never met or known Imandi Ravi before. "I was shocked to learn that Ravi had obtained a PAN card and driving license using my name," Prahla is said to have told investigators. Police believe that Ravi may have stolen Prahla's personal documents or digital identity details while fabricating these credentials to mask his identity.

Prahla, who is currently working as a software professional in Bengaluru, is cooperating fully with the investigation. Officials are now examining

how Ravi managed to access Prahla's information and whether any insider assistance or digital fraud mechanisms were involved. Investigators suspect that Ravi, operating under the alias "Prahla," may have used these documents to register domain names, financial accounts, or digital services linked to the illegal movie-streaming platform iBOMMA. The website, which has been under surveillance for distributing pirated Telugu and Indian language films, has long been a focal point of anti-piracy operations in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Police sources confirmed that Imandi Ravi is currently in custody, and his remand period ends tomorrow. Officials are

expected to request an extension to continue interrogation, given the new revelations about the identity theft angle. Cybercrime experts assisting the investigation are also analyzing Ravi's digital trail, including IP logs, bank transactions, and communication records with third parties suspected of hosting or monetizing the iBOMMA platform.

Authorities emphasized that this discovery marks a crucial turning point in the iBOMMA investigation, shifting it beyond online piracy to possible charges of identity theft, forgery, and cyber fraud.

More arrests and disclosures may follow as the case unfolds in the coming days.



PM E-Drive Scheme Marks Milestone with India's Largest E-Bus Tender; CESL to Cut 4 Million Tonnes of CO₂ Emissions

TPN Bureau | December 28

Vijayawada: Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL), a subsidiary of Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) under the Ministry of Power, has concluded India's largest-ever electric bus tender under the PM E-Drive Scheme, marking a major step toward India's clean mobility and carbon reduction goals. The mega procurement of 10,900 e-buses is expected to eliminate over four million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions across five major Indian cities.

The initiative, implemented under the PM Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM E-D R I V E) Scheme administered by the Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI), is designed to modernize urban trans-



port, improve air quality, and reduce noise pollution. This large-scale effort is part of India's broader strategy to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2070.

CESL's competitive and transparent demand aggregation process drew nationwide appre-

ciation for its efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Akhilesh Kumar Dixit, CEO of CESL and EESL, expressed gratitude to both the Ministry of Heavy Industries and the Ministry of Power for their strong support. "The ministries' guidance and cooperation

have ensured an open and transparent tendering process that brings down costs and accelerates clean mobility adoption across cities," Dixit said.

Under Phase-I of the PM E-Drive Scheme, CESL issued tenders for 10,900 buses. The techni-

cal bids were opened on November 14, 2025, and the price bids on December 23, 2025, with active participation from 16 bidders. The tender covers several State Transport Undertakings (STUs) across major cities — Bengaluru (4,500 buses), Delhi (2,800), Hyderabad (2,000), Surat (1,600), and Ahmedabad (1,600). These will include both AC and non-AC variants in Standard Floor, Low Floor, and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) configurations for city operations.

The PM E-Drive Scheme has so far sanc-

tioned 14,028 e-buses across India. The standardization and aggregation model followed by CESL has proven crucial in achieving competitive rates and economies of scale. The discovered Gross Cost Contract (GCC) rates are significantly lower than those previously achieved by individual cities. In many cases, they are now comparable to or cheaper than CNG and diesel buses, making electric mobility both financially viable and environmentally sustainable. CESL's model also shifts the focus from traditional bus procurement to a "Mobility as a Service" (MaaS) framework, enabling operators to benefit from lower costs, standardized specifications, and faster rollout timelines. It also promotes private sector participation and devel-

opment of necessary charging infrastructure. In Andhra Pradesh, 750 electric buses have been allocated under the PM eBus Sewa Scheme implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), including 150 for Visakhapatnam.

The Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) has already issued the Letter of Award (LoA) to the operator, paving the way for accelerated deployment and operation of e-buses in the state.

By combining environmental benefits with a financially competitive model, CESL's achievement under the PM E-Drive Scheme signals a paradigm shift in India's public transport ecosystem — advancing the vision of a cleaner, quieter, and more sustainable urban future.

Traffic Chaos, Tourist Rush Hit Araku Valley During Holiday Season



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Araku: Araku Valley, one of Andhra Pradesh's most scenic hill stations nestled in the Eastern Ghats, has turned into a hotspot of chaos this holiday season. Located about 114 kilometers from Visakhapatnam and sitting 900 meters above sea level, the valley is renowned for its lush greenery, waterfalls, and serene coffee estates. However, heavy tourist inflow following consecutive public holidays has brought severe traffic disruptions along the winding ghats leading to the valley. According to local authorities, vehicles have been stranded for nearly half a kilometer on certain stretches due to the massive influx of visitors. Continuous traffic jams along the narrow mountain roads have forced officials to implement traffic restrictions to ease congestion and ensure safety. As part of the new regulations, vehicular movement

from Araku towards Visakhapatnam has been temporarily stopped. Only vehicles traveling from Visakhapatnam to Araku are being permitted along the ghat route. Tourists and residents returning from Araku have been directed to take the alternative route via Paderu, as instructed by the police department. The decision, however, has triggered protests from motorists and tourists who expressed frustration over the inconvenience caused by the partial road closure.

Police and tourism officials have deployed additional personnel to manage traffic, monitor crowd movement, and provide assistance to stranded travelers. Officials have urged tourists to plan their visits in advance and follow traffic advisories to avoid congestion. Despite the temporary inconvenience, Araku Valley continues to charm visitors with its captivating natural beauty, though the current rush has highlighted the urgent need for improved infrastructure and sustainable tourism management in the region.

Meanwhile, major tourist attractions such as Padmapuram Gardens, the Tribal Museum, and the scenic Chaparai waterfalls are experiencing record footfall. The surge in visitors has led to an acute shortage of accommodation, with hotels and guesthouses fully booked for days. Visitors arriving without prior reservations are finding it difficult to secure rooms. In response to the crowd management challenges, authorities have also revised visiting hours at the popular Wooden Bridge site to control tourist flow and maintain safety protocols.

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ISRO Set to Build Third Launch Pad at Sriharikota for Next-Gen Heavy-Lift Missions



TPN Bureau | December 28

CHENNAI — The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is gearing up to establish a third launch pad at its Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota, marking a major step in India's space infrastructure expansion. The new facility, expected to be ready within four years, will support the launch of next-generation heavy-lift vehicles capable of carrying satellites weighing more than 12,000 to 14,000 kilograms into space.

Confirming the development, Padmakumar E.S., Director and Distinguished Scientist of the Sriharikota-based spaceport, said the project has entered the procurement and vendor identification phase. "We plan to develop, install, and commission a third launch pad within four years. Activities are already in progress," he told PTI in an interview. "We are now identifying the right vendors to provide the technical and structural support required for this mega project.

"The Sriharikota space complex, spread over 175 square kilometers and located about 135 km east of Chennai, currently houses two operational launch pads.

These pads have been the backbone of India's

satellite launch program, supporting missions that have ranged from communication satellites to interplanetary probes. The proposed third launch pad is being designed to accommodate India's upcoming Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV) — a powerful rocket envisioned to replace the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) in the long run.

The NGLV is central to ISRO's vision of achieving cost-effective, high-capacity commercial and national missions, in line with India's growing participation in the global space market. According to Padmakumar, the development of the new pad is "an essential infrastructure step" toward supporting future deep-space exploration and heavy satellite launches.

The NGLV is expected to be capable of carrying payloads exceeding 14 tonnes, including large communication satellites and potential modules for sustained space exploration.

Though ISRO has not disclosed the estimated cost of the project, it is expected to be a multi-thousand-crore infrastructure investment in-

volving complex civil, mechanical, and cryogenic system setups. The need for additional ground infrastructure has become urgent. Experts view the new launch pad as a crucial addition that will ensure India's long-term launch capacity and operational flexibility as the country positions itself among leading global space powers.

Once operational, the third launch pad will reduce launch congestion and offer greater scope for simultaneous mission preparation an important factor for meeting growing commercial demands and ambitious national space goals.

Collector Reviews P-4 Scheme Implementation in ASR District, Calls for Urgent Corrective Steps

TPN Bureau | Dec 28

Visakhapatnam: Implementation of the state government's prestigious P-4 (People-Public-Private-Partnership) scheme in Alluri Sitarama Raju district has run into hurdles, prompting District Collector A.S. Dinesh Kumar to convene a review meeting with officials and special officers on Saturday. Expressing concern over the slow progress of the initiative, the collector called for immediate corrective action and greater involvement of all stakeholders to ensure the scheme's effective execution at the grassroots level. Addressing the meeting, Dinesh Kumar underscored the impor-



tance of the P-4 scheme as a flagship programme aimed at uplifting identified "Golden Families" by addressing their financial and non-financial needs. He emphasized that every official, public representative, and voluntary organization must take the responsibility of adopting the families allocated under their jurisdiction and ensure that tangible progress is made in improving their living standards. "The success of P-4 depends not just on resource allocation but also on commitment and empathy," the collector observed, directing officials to actively engage with the families and help prepare Village Ac-

tion Plans at both the secretariat and village levels. These plans, he said, should clearly identify the needs of each family and outline how government departments, community organisations, and private partners can work together to resolve issues in a time-bound manner. Dinesh Kumar also took note of the lag in performance among certain mandals and ordered the concerned officials to formulate special action plans to bridge the gap.

"Accountability is essential. Mandal-level officers must show visible progress in mentoring and supporting Golden Families, failing which disciplinary action will

be initiated," he warned. The collector further stated that the district administration would monitor progress closely through periodic reviews. He instructed secretariat-level coordination meetings to be held regularly to assess the status of families adopted by mentors.

These meetings, he said, should serve as platforms for sharing problems, solutions, and best practices across villages. Dinesh Kumar also directed officials to document the success stories emerging from mentor-family linkages in order to inspire wider participation in the initiative.

Highlighting the larger objective of P-4, the collector said the scheme is not merely a welfare mechanism but a transformative model that seeks to foster social responsibility and collective development.

By connecting government support systems with community efforts and private sector resources, the initiative aims to create sustainable improvement in the quality of life of the most vulnerable sections.

Officials from various line departments, special officers, and representatives of voluntary organisations attended the meeting. They briefed the collector on the current status of implementation, challenges in field-level coordination, and resource constraints. The collector assured them of the district administration's full support and directed all departments to work in unison to achieve measurable outcomes under P-4. As the meeting concluded, Dinesh Kumar reiterated that documenting field-level achievements and maintaining a record of best-performing families and mentors would be mandatory in each secretariat. He said that sustained monitoring, coordinated action, and committed participation would determine the success of this transformative scheme in the Alluri Sitarama Raju district.

Public grievances pour in at TDP central office; victims seek justice over land, financial, and harassment issues

TPN Bureau | Dec 28

Amaravati: At the public grievances meeting held at the Telugu Desam Party's headquarters in Mangalagiri on Saturday, several citizens from across Andhra Pradesh sought justice over a range of serious issues, from illegal land transfers to harassment and crop damage. The event was chaired by Andhra Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation (APIDC) Chairman Daggula Prabhakar, who personally received the petitions from the affected individuals. Narasaamma, a resident of Venkatapalli village in Sri Sathya Sai district, complained that agricultural land registered in her late husband's name had been illegally transferred online to another individual without her knowledge.

She alleged that the government-allotted land located in Seekepalli was tampered with following her husband's death. Narasaamma appealed to party authorities to ensure that those responsible for the fraudulent transfer are punished and her family's rightful ownership restored. In another case from Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore district, Vijayamma from Vaddipalem village filed a petition alleging that a local YSR Congress Party leader had been threatening her and her minor son over money-lending disputes.

She claimed the woman's leader had filed false police cases and even threatened to kill them. Although Vijayamma lodged a complaint at the Kovvur police station, she said no justice had been delivered so far.

Rani from Ramachandrapuram village in NTR district also sought redressal of a land issue. She stated that despite legally registering 25 cents of land in her name, it was later included in the government's prohibited property list. As a result, she has been unable to obtain bank loans or carry out any financial transactions involving the land. She pleaded for intervention to remove the property from the restricted list and restore her legal rights. A serious crop damage complaint came from Surendra, a farmer of Pedapulivarru village in Prudhuttam district.

According to his petition, an individual from the same village deliberately sprayed poisonous chemicals over his 1.3-acre turmeric crop, completely destroying it. Surendra estimated his financial loss at 10 lakh and appealed for strict legal action against the perpetrator. From YSR Kadapa district, several Dalit and poor families of Boppapuram village — identified as Kumari, Ranamma, and Lalithamma requested that ownership titles (pattas) be issued to them for the lands they've been cultivating for over 20 years.

They claimed to have been waiting for official recognition and appealed to political leaders to ensure justice for long-term cultivators. Another petitioner, Vasavi Sumitra from Prudhuttam in the same district, sought resolution of a boundary dispute involving her residential site. She alleged that certain local farmers had illegally removed boundary stones and begun cultivating crops on her property, despite the fact that the land was purchased during her husband's lifetime.

She accused revenue officials of inaction, saying they had failed to conduct a proper survey or offer any resolution. Chairman Daggula Prabhakar assured all petitioners that their grievances would be examined carefully and referred to the concerned departments.

He emphasized that the purpose of the public outreach programme was to give ordinary citizens a voice and to press for administrative accountability in cases of negligence.

YCP Rebel MLC Duvvada Srinivas Sparks Political Storm in Srikakulam, Alleges Threat to Life From Dharmana Camp

TPN Bureau | December 28

SRIKAKULAM: Tension gripped the political circles of Srikakulam district after YSR Congress Party (YCP) rebel leader and MLC Duvvada Srinivas created a sensation with his dramatic claims of receiving death threats from his rivals within the ruling party. Stopping his convoy in public at Nimmada Junction late Friday night, Srinivas launched a scathing attack on senior YCP leader and former minister Dharmana Krishnadas and his faction, accusing them of orchestrating threats to eliminate him. According to Srinivas, while he was travelling from Hyderabad to Srikakulam, he received messages warning him not to enter the district.

Addressing the media and his followers at the busy highway junction, he alleged that Krishnadas's associate, Kinjaraapu Appanna, had conveyed the warning, saying, "Krishnadas told me to inform you not to come here. If you come, you will be attacked and killed." Unfazed by the alleged threats, the MLC challenged his opponents openly. "It's 9:30 p.m. now. Even if it's 11:30 p.m., I will still be here.

If you have the guts, come and kill me," Srinivas declared, daring his attackers to confront him directly. He said he was being targeted only because he exposed corruption and "petty politics" within the ruling party and stood by the people's interests. "Do they think I will be scared if they threaten to kill me? I am not the kind who fears such tactics," he asserted. Srinivas also stated that Kinjaraapu Ap-

panna personally called him and advised him to go back for his own safety. However, he reiterated that he would not retreat under pressure or intimidation.

Expressing anger at what he described as growing intolerance within his party, he noted that even though he was suspended and isolated by YCP leadership, he would continue to raise people's issues independently.

Meanwhile, Srinivas met Srikakulam Superintendent of Police Maheshwara Reddy on Saturday night and lodged formal complaint, alleging that both Dharmana Krishnadas and his brother, MLA Dharmendra Prasada Rao, posed a serious threat to his life. The SP confirmed that an inquiry has been initiated and assured that a First Information Report (FIR) would be registered following preliminary investigation. This high-voltage episode has triggered intense political discussion across Srikakulam, renewing focus on the ongoing factionalism within the YSR Congress Party.

The SP confirmed



CPI Urges CM Chandrababu Naidu to Withdraw PPP Model for Medical Colleges

TPN Bureau | December 28

Amaravati: Communist Party of India (CPI) National Secretary K. Ramakrishna has written a letter to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu urging the state government to withdraw its proposal to implement the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model for running government medical colleges. In his letter sent on Sunday, Ramakrishna strongly opposed what he described as an attempt to privatize medical education and health infra-

structure in the state. Ramakrishna criticized the government's decision to hand over the administration of government-funded medical colleges to private entities under the guise of the PPP model.

He alleged that the Chief Minister was showing unnecessary enthusiasm to involve private players in the health education sector,

which he warned would seriously harm public interests. The CPI leader emphasized that all political parties, student and youth organizations, people's associations, and

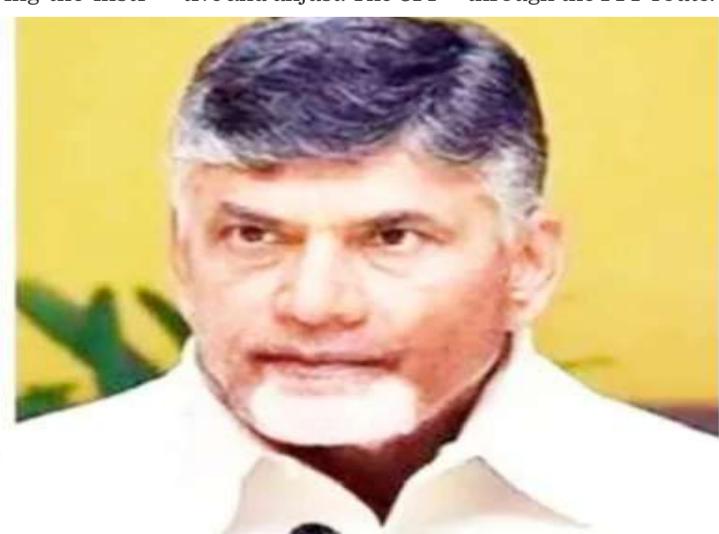
intellectuals in Andhra Pradesh were united in opposing the PPP model. He said the plan would effectively transfer the control of public medical institutions built with taxpayers' money into private hands, undermining the very idea of public healthcare and affordable medical education.

Pointing out the financial aspect of the proposal, Ramakrishna questioned the wisdom of the government's decision to continue paying salaries to teaching and non-teaching staff for two years even after transferring the institutions to private operators.

"It is inappropriate for the government to bear the expenditure while private institutions reap profits by collecting high fees from students," he remarked. He warned that such an arrangement would reduce accountability, increase corruption, and further burden students from middle- and lower-income families.

Ramakrishna stated that allowing private managements to collect tuition fees from students while enjoying state-funded infrastructure was both exploitative and unjust. The CPI leader appealed to Naidu to reconsider the decision in the interest of equity and social justice, noting that healthcare and education are essential public services that should not be commercialized.

He concluded that the government ought to focus on strengthening existing government-run medical colleges by improving facilities, appointing adequate faculty, and ensuring transparency in recruitment and admissions, rather than resorting to privatization through the PPP route.



Congress Urges National Leaders to Launch MGNREGA Protest from Bandlapalli



TPN Bureau | Dec 28

Vijayawada: Senior Congress leaders from Andhra Pradesh, Dr. N. Raghuveera Reddy and Gidugu Rudra Raju, have urged the party's top leadership to launch the nationwide agitation against the alleged move to revoke the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) from Bandlapalli village in the undivided Anantapur district — the very place where the landmark employment scheme was first inaugurated.

The appeal was made during the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting held in New Delhi on Saturday. The leaders reminded the party's central leadership that Bandlapalli holds historic significance, as the Congress-led UPA government had launched the MGNREGA scheme from this village soon after enacting the legislation in Parliament. They said that initiating the

"nationwide agitation from the same location would symbolize the party's commitment to protecting the employment rights of rural poor people."

Addressing reporters after the CWC meeting, CWC special invitee Gidugu Rudra Raju revealed that the party had extended formal invitations to All India Congress Committee (AICC) President Mallikarjun Kharge, UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi, senior leader Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to attend the protest in Bandlapalli.

The Congress leadership is reportedly keen to involve both national and state-level functionaries to make the movement a mass campaign.

Rudra Raju accused the Narendra Modi-led central government of systematically dismantling welfare-oriented laws and schemes that safeguard the interests of marginalized populations. "Through its

Major Setback for YSRCP in Prakasam District: Key Leaders Shift to TDP in Veligandla Mandal



TPN Bureau | Dec 28

In a significant political development, the ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) suffered a major blow in Prakasam district as several key local representatives and senior leaders from Veligandla mandal joined the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) on Sunday.

The large-scale defection has triggered intense political discussions across the district, with analysts predicting a potential realignment of local political equations ahead of the next elections.

Prominent YSRCP leaders who crossed over to TDP include Veligandla Mandal Parishad President (MPP) Rama Mahalaxmi, Vice MPP Erraboyina Bharathi, senior party leader Nagoor Yadav, former ZPTC member Rama Tirupathi Reddy, and Kotalapalli Sarpanch Bhaskar Reddy.

Along with them, nearly 160 families from various villages

in the mandal formally joined TDP, marking one of the largest political migrations in the region in recent months.

TDP's Darsi MLA, Mukku Ugrarasihamareddy, played a key role in facilitating these inductions. During a special program organized in Veligandla, he welcomed the new entrants by draping them with the party's symbolic yellow scarves.

Addressing the gathering, the MLA described their joining as a reflection of growing public disillusionment with YSRCP's leadership and governance at the grassroots level.

The recent political shift is being viewed as strategically significant because the leaders who resigned from YSRCP hold considerable local influence and maintain strong connections with the electorate. Their move to TDP is expected to boost the party's organization and strength in Veligandla mandal and neighboring areas ahead of the 2026 elections.

According to political observers, the defection stems from growing dissatisfaction among YSRCP's local cadres.

Reports suggest that several leaders felt sidelined within the party and were unhappy with the lack of recognition for their contributions.

The failure to address local-level grievances and internal divisions appears to have further fuelled the exodus. For the YSR Congress Party, the exodus poses a serious challenge.

The departure of office-bearers such as the MPP and Vice MPP not only weakens its administrative network but also raises questions about leadership management and internal stability.

With opposition strength increasing in key mandals like Veligandla, the ruling party may face greater pressure to consolidate its base and regain the confidence of its grassroots leaders in the coming months.

Guntur Municipal Corporation Approves Expansion to Mega City Status

TPN Bureau | December 27:

Guntur: In a landmark decision, the Guntur Municipal Corporation (GMC) has approved a major expansion plan that will transform the city into a Mahanagar Palika (Mega City). The proposal, approved during the corporation's council meeting on Saturday, involves merging 18 adjoining villages from Guntur, Pedakani, Vatticherukuru, and Tadikonda mandals into the city limits.

The newly added villages include Lalpuram, Challavaripalem, Venigandla, Mallavarapu, Tadikonda, and Pedakani.

He said the state government, under the leadership of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, aims to develop Guntur on par with



other major cities like Rajamahendravaram, Kakinada, Tirupati, and Visakhapatnam. Supporting the move, Prathipadu MLA Burla Ramana Jayulu stated that the

Millennium City Concept envisions transforming Guntur into a hub of urban infrastructure, digital connectivity, and sustainable growth, aligning with the state's long-term development agenda. The council meeting also witnessed a heated debate between TDP and YSRCP corporators concerning the under-con-

struction Shankar Vilas Road Over Bridge (ROB). YSRCP members alleged that work had begun without proper permissions, drawing a strong rebuttal from TDP corporator Vemulapalli Srinivas Prasad, who dismissed the claims as baseless. Municipal Commissioner Puli Srinivasulu assured that all illegal hoardings would be removed by March next year, emphasizing strict enforcement. Mayor Ravindra expressed frustration over engineers neglecting their duties, claiming that some, including the AE of Division 31, had become unresponsive even to calls.

He added that the corporation had allocated 30 crore for the project to ensure timely completion. Several corporators

raised concerns about unauthorized advertisements and hoardings across the city. They alleged that private advertising firms such as Sambasiva Ads and Utama Ads were erecting hoardings at random locations with the tacit support of some municipal officials. Commissioner Srinivasulu assured that all illegal hoardings would be removed by March next year, emphasizing strict enforcement. Mayor Ravindra expressed frustration over engineers neglecting their duties, claiming that some, including the AE of Division 31, had become unresponsive even to calls.

He criticized the engineering department for

approving 22 crore worth of works without proper documentation and demanded accountability before clearing pending bills. The council approved a total of 167 agenda items during the meeting. Among those present were MLA Naseer Ahmed, MLC Chandragiri Esurathnam, Deputy Mayors Sheikh Sajal and Diamond Babu, along with several corporators and senior municipal officials.

The expansion move marks a major step toward redefining Guntur's urban landscape, promising better infrastructure, wider service coverage, and stronger civic administration under the proposed Mega City framework.

MP Kesineni seeks contribution

TPN Bureau | December 28

Vijayawada: Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) called upon citizens to actively contribute to the city's development, emphasizing the collective responsibility of society in shaping Vijayawada's future. He made these remarks while attending the Golden Jubilee celebrations of KBN College on Sunday. The event drew a large gathering of alumni, faculty, and students, turning into a memorable reunion of generations who have been part of the college's illustrious journey.

Speaking on the occasion, MP Kesineni Sivanath lauded KBN College for its significant contribution to the field of education over the past five decades. He noted that the institution has played a vital role in producing several distinguished personalities who have excelled not only in India but also across the globe. Many of its alumni, he said, have gone on to occupy

prominent positions as administrators, public representatives, and professionals in diverse sectors.

Expressing his happiness at the large turnout, Kesineni Sivanath remarked that it was heartening to see thousands of former students returning to their alma mater to celebrate its achievements and share their own journeys. "It fills me with immense joy to witness how KBN College continues to uphold its legacy of quality education. The success of its alumni is a reflection of the strong academic foundation laid here," he said.

The MP also highlighted the college's commitment to making higher education accessible and inclusive, particularly for middle-class families. He praised the management for offering a wide range of academic and vocational courses that cater to contemporary demands while keeping fees within affordable limits. "At a time when education has become

increasingly commercialized, institutions like KBN College stand out for their dedication to providing quality learning opportunities without imposing a heavy financial burden," he observed.

Kesineni Sivanath described KBN College as a "gem in the education system," commending its ability to evolve with changing times while maintaining its core values. He urged students and alumni alike to continue their involvement in local developmental initiatives and contribute to Vijayawada's growth.

"Development is a collective effort. As educated citizens and professionals, we must ensure that our city progresses through innovation, civic responsibility, and shared commitment," he stated.

The Golden Jubilee event featured cultural performances, interactive sessions, and experience-sharing by eminent alumni, many of whom traveled from abroad to be part of the celebrations.

District Collector Promotes Cycling for Healthy, Pollution-Free Society

TPN Bureau | Dec 28

Vijayawada: To mark the spirit of fitness and environmental awareness, District Collector Lakshmisai emphasized that cycling plays a crucial role in building a healthy and pollution-free society. The Collector urged youngsters and children to make cycling a part of their everyday routine to ensure both physical and mental well-being. The remarks came during the 'Fit India on Sundays' Cycling Programme, organized under the aegis of the District Sports Authority (DSA) at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Smritivinamam. The event drew enthusiastic participation from over fifty cyclists, including children, youth, members of the District Cycling Association, and officials from various government departments. Collector Lakshmisai flagged off the cycling rally, marking the start of a vibrant morning filled with enthusiasm and energy. Addressing the participants, the Collector said maintaining physical and mental health should be a top

priority for citizens, especially in modern times when sedentary lifestyles and pollution pose major challenges. He encouraged people to view cycling not merely as a sport or recreation but as a daily fitness habit that can contribute to their overall development. "Good habits lead to success," the Collector noted, adding that cycling instills discipline, enhances endurance, and fosters a sense of responsibility toward the environment. He also highlighted that reduced vehicular pollution through cycling can significantly contribute to a cleaner atmosphere and sustainable urban living. The Collector further said that government initiatives like 'Fit India Movement' aim to transform India into a nation of health-conscious citizens. Pro-

grams like 'Fit India on Sundays' not only promote active lifestyles but also bring communities together to work collectively for shared goals of fitness and clean living. District Education Officer Kakarla Koteswara Rao, District Cycling Association members, and several sports officials were present on the occasion.

The participants expressed their appreciation for the district administration's efforts to promote fitness among residents and pledged to take part in such activities regularly. The event concluded with a call to residents—especially the youth—to adopt cycling as a symbol of fitness, sustainability, and civic responsibility, reinforcing the message that a healthy mind and body lead to a healthier society.



Underground Gambling Camps Gear Up for Sankranti Festivities in Krishna District

TPN Bureau | December 28

Preparations for illegal gambling camps are gaining momentum across several mandals of Krishna district as the Sankranti festival approaches. Despite repeated police warnings and the absence of official permission, organizers are reportedly setting up large-scale camps for cockfights, "kothamukka," and other traditional forms of gambling under the guise of festive customs.

In the Ganavaram constituency, cockfight arenas and gambling camps have been operating freely for the past decade. Areas like Bapulapadu mandal's Ampapuram have hosted some of the largest camps in the district. However, this year, organizers are shifting their focus to Kespallal village, which is expected to host one of the biggest gatherings. The Penamaluru constituency has also earned notoriety for its large-scale betting activities. The Edupallu camp is known as one of the big-

"coconut-breaking" ceremony to mark the start of these activities. Police officials insist that such events are illegal, but ground-level reports suggest that preparations are in full swing despite their claims.

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gest in the state, drawing participants and gamblers from neighboring districts. Reports indicate that arrangements for this year's event are already nearing completion.

Several other villages—including Uppuluru, Godavar, Kankipadu, Katuru, Akunuru, Gandidunta, Bollapadu, Yamamalakuduru, Tadigadapa, Poranki, and Penamaluru—are preparing to host smaller camps spread over rented agricultural lands ranging from 5 to 20 acres each. In the Gudivada constituency, Nandivada and Gudlavalleru mandals are emerging as the main hubs for cockfights and other gambling-related activities this season.

Meanwhile, Pedana, Avanigadda, Machilipat-

nam, and Pamarru constituencies are also gearing up for similar events, with organizers reportedly securing informal approvals through local political influence. While the police have maintained that strict action will be taken against any illegal activities during Sankranti, past trends show enforcement has been inconsistent.

Residents say these gatherings have become so entrenched in local culture that they continue year after year despite official crackdowns. As Sankranti nears, all eyes are on whether authorities will curb these traditional yet unlawful festivities or let another season of open betting unfold.

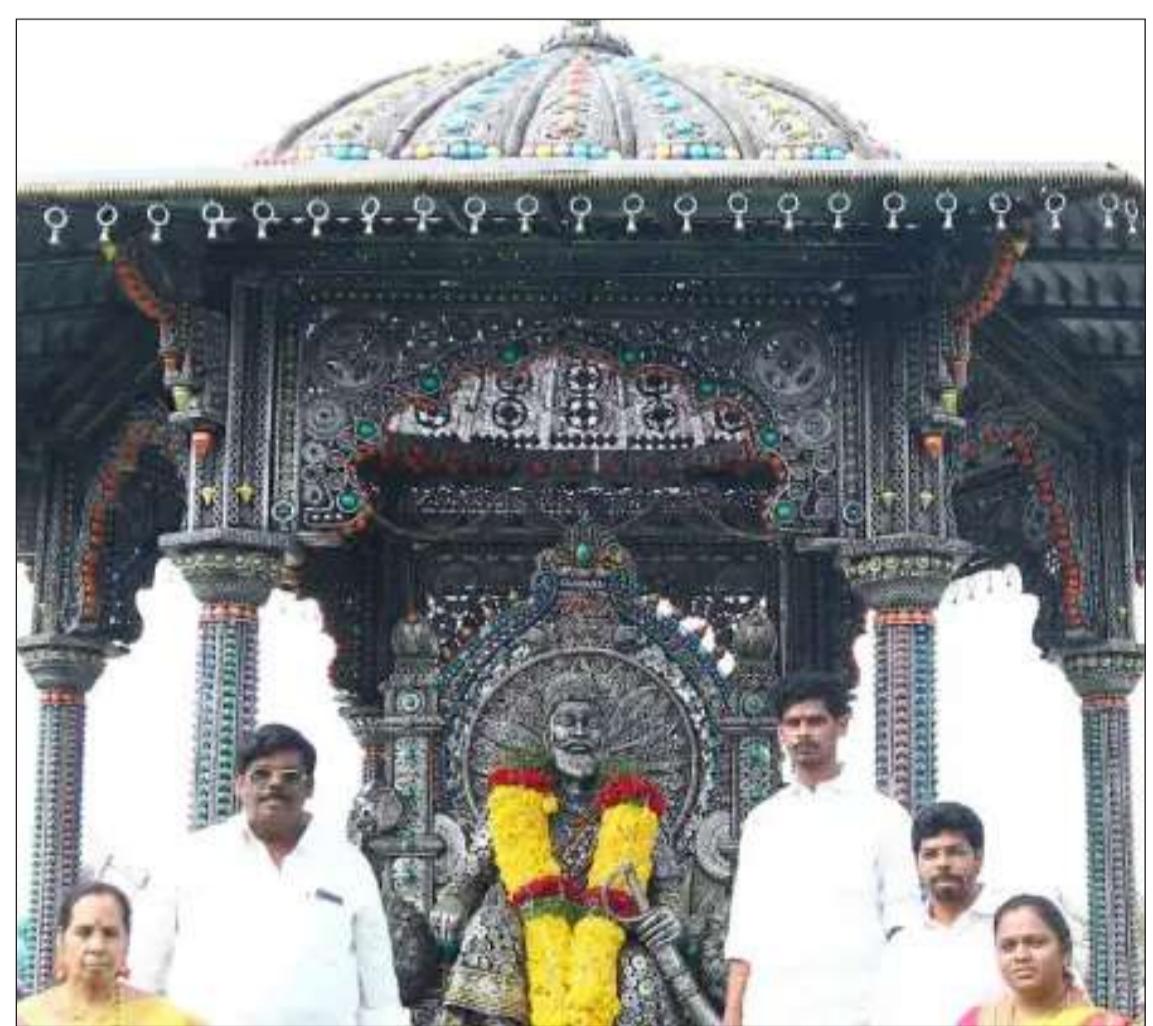
Grand Iron Statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Unveiled at Tenali Katuri Art Gallery

TPN Bureau | Dec 28

Tenali: In a remarkable tribute blending art, recycling, and craftsmanship, a giant 6.5-foot-tall statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, made entirely from 20 tonnes of iron components, has been unveiled at the Katuri Art Gallery in Tenali. The unveiling ceremony was performed by Katuri Kondamma, marking a proud moment for art enthusiasts and locals alike. The statue sits majestically on an 8-foot throne within a grand mandap measuring 21.5 feet in height and 18 feet in width.

Sculptors described it as one of the most intricate works ever created in the region, symbolizing both the valor of the Maratha warrior king and the transformative potential of recycled art. According to chief sculptor Katuri Venkateswara Rao, along with fellow artists Ravichandra and Sriharsha, the creation of the artwork took six months of dedicated labor.

A 20-member team of metal craftsmen and designers collaborated intensively to shape the project into reality. What makes this art installation extraordinary is the exclusive use of recycled automotive parts thousands of nuts, bolts, bearings, chains, and other metal scraps painstakingly



welded together to form the detailed contours of Shivaji Maharaj. "This statue isn't just a visual marvel; it's a statement on sustainability and creativity," said Venkateswara Rao. "By reusing discarded materials, we wanted to send a social message about recycling and conservation, while also cele-

brating the indomitable spirit of Shivaji Maharaj." Visitors to the Katuri Art Gallery have been expressing awe at the sculpture's sheer scale and detail. The metallic gleam and intricate surface textures give the statue a unique, dynamic presence—an artistic fusion of historical reverence

and modern environmental consciousness. Art enthusiasts and local officials praised the initiative as an inspiring example of how artistry can serve society. The project, they noted, reinforces Tenali's growing reputation as a hub for creative innovation in Andhra Pradesh. The unveiling

event concluded with a message emphasizing the importance of reusing materials and promoting green art practices. The iron statue now stands as not only a cultural landmark for Tenali but also a symbol of how modern art can honor history while protecting the environment.

SP Rahul Meena Directs Police to Curb Road Accidents and Festive Crimes in Konaseema

TPN Bureau | Dec. 28
KAKINADA: Konaseema district superintendent of police (SP) Rahul Meena has directed police officials to identify accident-prone areas across the district and implement effective preventive measures to bring down the number of road accidents, particularly during the upcoming Sankranti festival season.

Chairing a comprehensive crime review meeting held at the district police office on Saturday, SP Meena emphasized the need for enhanced on-ground vigilance and proactive policing to ensure public safety during the festive period. The meeting was attended by Amalapuram DSP T.S.R. Prasad, Kothapeta DSP Sunkara Murali Mohan, Ramachandrapuram DSP Raghuvir, DCRB Circle Inspector Murali Krishna, and several other police officers from across the district.

The SP reviewed the overall law and order situation in the district and directed officers to intensify highway and local patrols to prevent accidents caused by overspeeding and drunken driving. Noting that the festive season typically sees heavy vehicular movement as thousands of people travel to their native places, he instructed all traffic units to strengthen enforcement, conduct special checks, and deploy adequate staff at major junctions and vulnerable stretches.



SP Rahul Meena also stressed the importance of preventive policing against property-related crimes. He said special attention should be paid to preventing burglaries and house-break-ins, as many households remain locked during the festive holidays. The SP directed station house officers (SHOs) to increase night patrolling in residential colonies, coordinate with local committees, and ensure visible police presence to deter criminals.

Referring to seasonal law and order challenges during Sankranti, the SP categorically ordered strict measures against all forms of anti-social and illegal activities. He warned that the police would take stern action against those involved in gambling, cockfights, and other banned practices that often occur during the festival. "We will not tolerate any activities that disturb public peace or lead to law and order issues," he said.

The district police chief further appealed to citizens to remain vigilant and cooperate with the police by reporting suspicious movements or incidents immediately through control room helplines. "Community participation is vital in maintaining safety and order. People should promptly alert the police about any illegal gatherings, cockfights, gambling events, or risky traffic behavior they come across," he urged.

In addition to preventive measures, SP Meena reviewed pending investigations and instructed officers to expedite probes into old cases. He emphasized that investigations should be completed on a war footing to ensure speedy justice for victims and uphold the credibility of the police force. Periodic reviews will be conducted to assess the progress of each case.

The SP also highlighted the importance of professional conduct, public-friendly policing, and effective communication in gaining public trust. He urged the ranks to respond swiftly to citizen grievances and maintain discipline in all operations.

TTD Opens First-Aid Centre at 7th Mile on Alipiri Footpath for Pilgrims' Safety

TPN Bureau | December 28

Tirumala: Taking another step toward ensuring the well-being and safety of devotees trekking the sacred footpath to Lord Venkateswara's temple, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Chairman B.R. Naidu on Sunday inaugurated a new First Aid Centre at the 7th mile on the Alipiri footpath route. Speaking after the inauguration, Chairman Naidu said that the facility was established with the aim of providing timely medical assistance to devotees walking uphill to seek the holy darshan of Lord Venkateswara.

The centre, he emphasized, has been set up keeping in view the steady increase in the number of pilgrims using the footpath and the need for quick-response medical services at strategic points along the route. Naidu stated that the new centre would ensure immediate first aid to devotees suffering from exhaustion, dehydration, or other health



issues during the strenuous climb. "In case of emergencies, devotees are advised to make use of the medical services available at this First Aid Centre without delay," he advised. He added that the TTD is committed to ensuring that every pilgrim's journey remains safe, comfortable, and spiritually enriching. The medical facility is equipped with essential emergency equipment, including an ECG machine, oxygen concentrator, nebulizer, and a full range of basic medicines.

Along with TTD staff, a team of doctors from Apollo Hospitals and trained paramedical

personnel will be available round-the-clock to attend to patients. This collaboration, according to Naidu, marks a significant boost to the temple authority's ongoing efforts to improve health infrastructure along the footpaths to Tirumala.

"Pilgrims often face fatigue and occasionally health complications due to the steep climb and changing weather conditions. With the support of Apollo's medical expertise and trained paramedics, we can now respond much faster to any health emergency," Naidu said. TTD Executive Officer (EO) A.V. Anil Kumar Singhal, who attended

the program, praised the initiative as a crucial addition to TTD's pilgrim welfare measures.

He highlighted that thousands of devotees undertake the 11-km Alipiri footpath daily, particularly during weekends, festivals, and special occasions.

"Having strategically located first-aid centres ensures that help is always within reach for anyone in distress," he noted. Additional EO Venkayya Chowdary, Temple Board members, Apollo medical representatives, and several TTD officials also participated in the event. TTD officials mentioned that apart from this newly opened

7th-mile centre, other first-aid and rest centers are being upgraded along both the Alipiri and Srivari Mettu routes to enhance medical preparedness and comfort for devotees. The TTD administration is also exploring the use of mobile medical units and digital health monitoring to strengthen its emergency response system.

With this latest addition, TTD continues to reaffirm its commitment to providing holistic facilities combining spiritual, physical, and medical well-being—for the millions of devotees who visit the holy shrine each year.

Rayachoti Seethes with Protest Demanding Continuation as Annamayya District Headquarters

TPN Bureau | Dec 28

Rayachoti: Rayachoti town in Annamayya district erupted in large-scale protests on Sunday as residents, political leaders, and civil society groups demanded that the government continue Rayachoti as the district headquarters. The agitation, led by the Joint Action Committee (JAC), saw thousands of people taking to the streets in a show of unity against the proposal to shift the district headquarters elsewhere.

Protesters gathered at the busy Netaji Junction and staged a massive sit-in on the Kurnool-Chittoor National Highway, raising slogans such as "We want Rayachoti, not Madanapalle" and "Keep Rayachoti as the headquarters." Traffic on the highway came to a standstill for several hours as demonstrators occupied the main road, waving placards and shouting slogans de-

manding justice for their town. The agitation drew participation from leaders of all political parties, business associations, educational institutions, and youth organizations, reflecting the widespread concern over the proposed change.

Local traders said they joined the bandh to express solidarity with the people's demand and to safeguard Rayachoti's continued development. Speakers at the protest decried the state government's reported plans to shift the district headquarters to another location, possibly Madanapalle. They argued that Rayachoti had made significant progress since

becoming the administrative center and that moving the headquarters now would halt ongoing development activities. The shift, they said, would not only disrupt administrative functioning but also hurt the sentiments of Rayachoti's residents who had made numerous sacrifices for the region's growth. JAC leaders warned that if the government failed to reconsider its decision, the agitation would intensify in the coming days. They vowed to continue their protests through rallies, hunger strikes, and statewide awareness campaigns until the government officially announced that Rayachoti would remain the Annamayya district headquarters. The situation remained peaceful throughout the day, though police maintained a heavy presence to prevent untoward incidents. The district administration appealed for calm and assured that public concerns would be communicated to higher authorities.



CPI Leader Demands Cancellation of Land Allocation to Oberoi Hotel near Alipiri

TPN Bureau | December 28

Tirupati: The Communist Party of India (CPI) has strongly objected to the allocation of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) land to the Oberoi Group for the construction of a luxury hotel near Alipiri, calling it a direct insult to the sanctity of the temple town.

The SP also highlighted the importance of professional conduct, public-friendly policing, and effective communication in gaining public trust.

He urged the ranks to respond swiftly to citizen grievances and maintain discipline in all operations.

ian food outlets. How could he hand over the lands of the Lord to private companies for profit?"

Referring to past attempts, Narayana recalled that the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government had also proposed similar projects, but strong opposition from temple staff and the public had stopped them.

He warned that the CPI, along with like-minded organizations, would mobilize protests if the current government fails to cancel the allocation.

CPI state executive member A. Rama

naidu and local leaders P. Murali and Viswanath accompanied Narayana during the visit.

The party reiterated that TTD lands should only be used for sacred, religious, or charitable purposes, not commercial ventures that violate the spiritual sanctity of Tirumala and Alipiri.

Dwaraka Tirumala Getting ready



TPN Bureau | Dec 28

Eluru: The temple town of Dwaraka Tirumala in Eluru district is gearing up for grand celebrations on December 30, marking the auspicious occasion of Mukkoti Ekadashi.

With thousands of devotees expected to flock to the revered Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple, temple authorities and police officials have undertaken elaborate arrangements to ensure the smooth conduct of the festivities.

According to temple authorities, this year's event will include the traditional Giri Pradakshina, special rituals, and the rare Nijaroopa Darshanam of Lord Venkateswara. During this special ritual, the deity's original form will be visible to the devotees for a limited period. Temple priests will perform Vedic rituals and special pujas to mark the occasion, and arrangements are being made to accommodate

date the expected large gatherings peacefully.

Mukkoti Ekadashi Darshan

The main event, Mukkoti Ekadashi, will be held on December 30. From 5 a.m. onward, the unique Uttara Dwara Darshanam (North Gate Darshan) will be open to devotees. This spiritual experience is highly revered, and devotees believe that entering through the north gate brings divine blessings and liberation from sins.

To manage the crowd efficiently, the authorities have introduced special queue lines and paid darshan tickets priced at 100, 200, and 500. Adequate parking, sanitation, and drinking water facilities are being arranged to ensure a comfortable experience for visitors.

Police forces and volunteers will assist in maintaining order and guiding devotees throughout the event days.

The Big Congress Meltdown: What Digvijaya Singh's RSS Post Really Signifies



In Indian politics, few incidents resonate as sharply as a senior leader appearing to contradict his own party's core values—especially at a time of crisis. The recent uproar triggered by Congress veteran Digvijaya Singh's social media post praising the organisational strength of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)—the ideological fountainhead of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—is one such moment. What may have been intended as a tactical nudge for internal reform has instead exposed deeper fissures within the Congress and underscored existential questions about its direction in a rapidly shifting political climate.

At the heart of the controversy was a throwback photograph shared by Singh showing a young Narendra Modi—then a grassroots worker—sitting near senior BJP leader L.K. Advani. Singh described the image as "impactful" and used it to illustrate how organisational discipline and structure can elevate individuals from obscurity to power. His point, ostensibly, was not ideological admiration but a critique of Congress's own organisational weaknesses and a call for serious internal reforms.

However, in a political environment as charged and polarised as India's today, even a nuanced message can be weaponised. BJP leaders promptly seized on Singh's words, using them to embarrass Congress and portray it as disoriented and internally weak. Within Congress it-

self, reactions were mixed: some leaders defended Singh's intent, while others distanced themselves emphatically, stressing the party's ideological opposition to the RSS and its politics.

This episode reveals several uncomfortable truths for the Congress. First, the party's organisational rot is real. For decades, the Congress was seen as India's oldest political institution with deep grassroots roots. Today, by contrast, it appears top-heavy, factionalised, and struggling to connect with voters across states. Singh's message—that strength of structure matters—resonates not only because it is true, but because it reflects a widely shared frustration within the party's rank and file.

Yet the manner in which

his remarks were interpreted—both inside and outside the party—highlights a second problem: a lack of disciplined, coherent messaging. In contrast, parties like the BJP have cultivated a highly effective narrative machine that can amplify or deflate political statements with astonishing speed. When a senior leader from an opposition party expresses even a modest compliment about a rival's strategy or organisation, it becomes an opportunity for attack rather than introspection.

A third implication goes beyond Congress: it speaks to the current era of identity driven politics in India. The RSS is more than just an organisational affiliate; it is a symbol of a broader ideological movement that the BJP

has successfully mainstreamed. Praising its organisational capacity, even in abstract terms, is seen by many as crossing an invisible but potent ideological boundary. The fierce reactions—both supportive and critical—reflect the deep polarisation of political discourse where every gesture is loaded with symbolic weight.

Digvijaya Singh's clarification that he remains opposed to the RSS's ideology and to Prime Minister Narendra Modi may address the immediate backlash. But the larger debate his statement has stirred cannot be contained with a simple disclaimer. It has brought to the foreground the uncomfortable reality that Congress's political identity and organisational relevance are being contested not only by opponents, but from within its own ranks.

Ultimately, this controversy should prompt a moment of introspection for the Congress. Instead of reflexively rejecting internal criticism or squabbling over semantics, the party needs to engage honestly with questions of structure, morale, and strategy. Voters are watching a party that once dominated India's political imagination now flounder in messaging and coherence. The dilemma exposed by Singh's post is not just about one social media comment—it is a symptom of deeper anxieties about Congress's relevance in a changed political environment.

Without addressing these fundamental issues, the party risks continuing to be defined by its opponents' narratives rather than its own vision—a political predicament far more serious than any single social media misstep.

Tracking IAS Assets: Can Transparency Keep Corruption in Check?

The recent crackdown on a transport officer in Telangana, which unveiled hundreds of crores in assets, has reignited the debate on the accumulation of wealth by government officials in India. Previous raids on employees across revenue and other departments have repeatedly exposed similar hidden fortunes. While discussions around punitive measures often dominate headlines, the more pressing question is the scale of wealth amassed by bureaucrats and, in particular, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers—whose authority and influence are unparalleled. The very nature of their roles makes it difficult to imagine oversight strong enough to check potential malpractices. Yet, the central government has now intensified efforts to bring greater transparency, urging officers to disclose their assets comprehensively.

Recently, the Ministry of Personnel and the Department of Training issued directives to all IAS officers, instructing them to submit their property returns for the year 2024 by January 31, 2026. This annual exercise, long a part of India's administrative framework, aims to strengthen transparency in the governance of public servants. Officers failing to comply face strict disciplinary measures, including restrictions on promotions, overseas postings, and suspension of vigilance clearance.

The government's insistence underscores the importance it places on proactive accountability rather than reactive investigations. Asset disclosure is not merely a bureaucratic formality; it is a moral and professional obligation under All India Services Rules. By comparing an officer's assets at the time of joining service with those accumulated during tenure, authorities can track any unexplained growth. Online portals, such as the SPARO platform, have made asset declarations accessible, giving citizens a degree of oversight while providing investigators with crucial evidence in cases where declared assets exceed legitimate income.

In essence, it serves as a deterrent: officials are aware that concealment or falsification of assets is likely to be detected. The central government's push to make IAS and other senior civil servants disclose their assets represents a step in the right direction. By institutionalizing transparency and making data accessible, it lays the foundation for accountable governance. Yet, the challenge remains: can these measures penetrate the opacity that has long shielded bureaucratic wealth? For citizens, the hope is that this initiative will not only shed light on disproportionate assets but also foster a culture of integrity where public service is respected, and corruption is no longer tolerated.

Wedding Excess and the Lost Essence of Marriage



Weddings are supposed to be celebrations of love, commitment, and the beginning of a shared life. But in recent times, particularly in India, they have become something else entirely: elaborate displays of wealth, status, and social performance. The recent trend highlights how extravagant celebrations may actually distract from the very purpose of marriage, turning a sacred rite of passage into a spectacle consumed by optics rather than meaning.

Two high-profile weddings in Delhi, reportedly costing over ₹150 crore each, have become symbols of what some describe as "festival-scale nuptials" that outshine even the most lavish corporate events. These weddings, featuring stadium concerts and celebrity performers, dominate social media feeds and set new benchmarks for grandeur. But what does it say about society when people feel compelled to hire arenas and celebrities to mark an intimate personal union?

There's a distinct cultural shift embedded in these trends. Weddings once symbolised a transition from one stage of life to another—much like birth and death. They were occasions for family, community, and affection, marked by tradition, blessing, and restraint. Today, they have increasingly become performances—meticulously curated events meant to generate social media attention and public approval. The social pressure isn't unique to the wealthy elite; the desire to "keep up" has trickled into middle-class aspirations as well. Average wedding spending has climbed significantly, with families routinely shelling out ₹30–35 lakh on basic ceremonies, and luxury additions pushing costs even higher.

There is also a booming wedding industry behind all this, projected to generate more than ₹6.5 lakh crore in 2025 alone. These figures reflect not only rising incomes but also how deeply weddings are woven into cultural and economic life. The market now includes destination venue packages, high-end entertainment, culinary experiences, and even wedding insurance—a sign of financial risks tied to these expensive events.

But the moral of the story is not just about inflated bills; it's about misplaced priorities. When weddings become about lavish receptions, celebrity performances, exotic destinations, and designer outfits, the fundamental purpose of marriage can get lost. The messy but real work of building a life together, facing challenges, and nurturing emotional

bonds isn't showcased in a two-day celebration. In fact, when a wedding becomes overwhelmingly spectacular, the inevitable mundanity of married life can feel overwhelming—and that's precisely the irony critics point out.

Another troubling aspect is the social and economic pressure these expectations create. Many families, anxious to present an image of success, take on debt or redirect funds that might otherwise support education, housing, or long-term financial security. Many young couples express frustration about societal expectations, advocating for smaller, simpler ceremonies that focus on personal values rather than social performance. These voices reveal a growing sentiment that true fulfillment doesn't come from ornate trousseaus or large guest lists, but from meaningful shared experiences and financial prudence.

A wedding should be joyous, but it should not be a spectacle that consumes resources far beyond what is purposeful or sustainable. At its heart, marriage is about partnership—resilience, compromise, understanding, and growth. Extravagance can create dazzling memories, but it is not a guarantee of a successful partnership. Recognising this distinction is key to reclaiming the essence of what weddings, and marriage itself, truly signifies.

In a world where the wedding industry grows bigger every year, perhaps the bigger challenge is not the glitz, but reminding ourselves what we are celebrating—two lives coming together, not a contest of consumption.

Dhurandhar and the Politics of Cinema: Hard Storytelling as Soft Power



The rising buzz around Dhurandhar—a recent big budget Bollywood film steeped in politics, nationalism, and raw narrative energy—is not just another cinematic phenomenon. It reveals how mainstream storytelling has increasingly become an arena of cultural influence, ideological assertion, and what some commentators call soft power. What makes Dhurandhar different from its blockbuster predecessors is not merely its box office performance but the fierce debate it has sparked over the purpose of cinema in a politically charged age.

Traditionally, mainstream Indian films that touch upon cross border themes have tried to strike a delicate balance. Popular entertainments like Pathaan managed to weave India-Pakistan elements into sprawling action narratives while keeping the political and nationalist undercurrents relatively muted. By focusing on fantastical threats and shared human motives, such films left room for audiences of differing outlooks to interpret them as mere entertainment rather than political messaging. Pathaan's neutral stance allowed both conservatives and liberals to find comfort in its spectacle without feeling challenged by its subtext.

Dhurandhar, on the other hand, dispenses with such ambiguity. Its narrative openly foregrounds the idea that terrorism and existential threats directed at India stem from Pakistan, and presents Indian responses to such threats in a sharply political frame. Characters discuss a pre and post 2014 world, underlining a transformation in national resolve and strategy. Through its heroes and villains alike, the film draws direct lines between cer-

tain ideologies, religious identities, and global menace. This is not subtlety; this is a form of unfiltered national storytelling that refuses to divorce itself from contemporary geopolitical anxieties.

For many viewers, this unabashed approach feels like a breakthrough. It rejects the old notion that patriotism must be couched in euphemism or generalised heroism. Instead, it broadcasts a clear stance: India is a victim of perpetual hostility, and its leaders and institutions deserve recognition for responding decisively. To supporters, that represents honest cinema engaging head on with the realities of international conflict and national pride.

But the film's unflinching positioning also invites criticism. Detractors see in Dhurandhar a narrative that blurs the line

between dramatized fiction and political messaging so completely that it verges on propaganda. When films represent actual violence, historical conflict, or entrenched geopolitical rivalries without nuanced context, they risk reinforcing stereotypes and hardening attitudes.

The concern is not about the artistic quality alone but about the impact on public perception—especially when fictional narratives are received by wide audiences as reflective of reality rather than meta-political commentary.

Framing Dhurandhar as "soft power" in action acknowledges a deeper truth: cinema does more than entertain. It shapes collective imagination. During the Cold War era, Western spy thrillers and action films subtly influenced global attitudes toward enemies and

allies alike. Today, Indian cinema—with its vast domestic audience and growing international reach—can similarly frame narratives that resonate with cultural pride and political perspective.

The controversy around Dhurandhar is thus symptomatic of a larger cultural moment when storytelling, identity, and ideology intersect more visibly than ever. As cinema continues to evolve, so too will questions about the responsibilities of creators and storytellers. Is a film merely a film, or does it carry the weight of national sentiment in every frame? Dhurandhar suggests that in 2025, the answer is no longer so easily separated—and that cinema as soft power is not just a theoretical idea, but a lived debate playing out on screens across the country.

Congress Faces Fresh Turmoil Amid Digvijaya Singh's Controversial Remarks on RSS BJP Strength

New Delhi — India's principal opposition party, the Indian National Congress, has been thrust into fresh political turbulence following a series of remarks by senior leader Digvijaya Singh that appeared to praise the organisational strength of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The episode has triggered internal divisions, public backlash, and intense media scrutiny, raising broader questions about party unity and strategy.

The controversy began when Singh — a veteran Congress leader and former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh — shared a throwback photograph on social media showing Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his early political days alongside senior BJP leader L.K. Advani. In his post, Singh described the image as "impactful" and noted the rise of grassroots workers within the RSS BJP framework to positions such as chief minister and prime minister, highlighting what he termed the "power of organisation."

Critics inside and outside the party immediately seized on the remarks, accusing Singh of undermining Congress and offering praise to its ideological rivals. The BJP, which maintains close ties with the RSS, used the comments to question Congress's cohesion and political relevance.

Singh, sensing the growing backlash, moved quickly to clarify his stance. He reiterated that he opposes the ideolo-



gy of the RSS and the BJP, stressing that his intent was to comment on organisational efficiency rather than ideological alignment. He also rejected any suggestion that there was "nothing to learn" from the assassins of Mahatma Gandhi — a reference to Nathuram Godse, who had links with the RSS — amid the furor over his remarks.

Despite the clarification, reactions within Congress have been mixed. A significant faction backed Singh's call for organisational reform and stronger internal discipline, seeing value in candid discussions about strengthening the party's grassroots presence. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor,

for instance, pointed to the need for discipline and structural strengthening within the party.

However, other senior figures voiced sharp disagreement. Pawan Khera, in charge of the party's media strategy, rejected Singh's commentary, saying critics of Gandhi's philosophy cannot align with supporters of its historical opponents. Manickam Tagore, another party MP, went further by equating the RSS with extremist organisations, dismissing the notion that the Congress should learn from its rival's organisational model.

Party president Mallikarjun Kharge also weighed in, underscoring ideological dif-

ferences and insisting that the Congress remains committed to its founding principles, even as it acknowledges the need to bolster organisational effectiveness. "We may have less power, but our backbone is not weak," he said, rejecting the idea that the party is internally fractured.

As the debate continues, analysts suggest the episode reflects deeper tensions within the Congress over leadership, strategy, and identity at a time when it seeks to regroup ahead of future elections. Whether the party can turn this moment of discord into an opportunity for renewal remains to be seen.

Elon Musk Slams Canadian Healthcare After Indian Origin Man Dies Following Eight Hour Wait in Hospital



New Delhi — Tech billionaire Elon Musk has criticised the Canadian healthcare system after the death of a 44 year old Indian origin man who died following a prolonged wait in a hospital emergency room, sparking international attention and concern.

The tragedy occurred on December 22 at the Grey Nuns Community Hospital in Edmonton, Alberta, where Prashant Sreekumar, a Canadian of Indian origin, was brought after experiencing severe chest pain. According to his family, he was taken to the hospital around midday but was kept in the waiting area for more than eight hours despite repeatedly complaining of intense pain. His condition deteriorated, and he collapsed shortly after finally being moved to a treatment area, dying of what family members described as a suspected cardiac arrest. Family accounts indicate that during the long wait, staff reportedly provided minimal care, offering only basic pain relief, and allegedly dismissed the urgency of his

symptoms.

The hospital's response and the handling of the emergency have triggered a wave of criticism and debate about wait times and patient care in publicly funded healthcare systems. In a comment that drew widespread attention on social media platform X, Musk wrote that "when the government does medical care, it is about as good as the DMV," comparing the healthcare system's performance to the often criticised Department of Motor Vehicles in the United States. His remark underscored broader frustrations with what some see as systemic inefficiencies in government run healthcare.

The case has also provoked strong reactions from the Indian government. India's Min-

istry of External Affairs (MEA) acknowledged the incident and urged Canadian authorities to take responsibility and fully investigate the circumstances surrounding Sreekumar's death. The MEA noted that while Sreekumar was a Canadian national, his Indian origin and family's anguish make it crucial for clear accountability and examination of hospital procedures.

Within India and among the diaspora community, the incident has reignited conversations on emergency care protocols, hospital triage systems, and the challenges faced by patients in overcrowded healthcare settings. Relatives said Sreekumar described his pain to his father as "15 out of 10," and his father later recounted the rapid decline in

his son's condition once he was finally moved into the care area. Such accounts have intensified criticism of how urgent symptoms are prioritised in busy emergency departments.

The tragedy has not only drawn criticism of Canada's healthcare model but has also sparked broader debate on social media about public health care systems worldwide. Some commentators argue that delays in emergency response can have fatal consequences, while others caution against oversimplifying complex institutional challenges. Amid rising public scrutiny, the case highlights ongoing tensions between expectations of healthcare provision and the realities faced in many emergency departments globally.

Prashant Sreekumar, who leaves behind a wife and three children, has become a symbol in discussions about patient rights, emergency care standards, and the responsibilities of healthcare institutions to respond swiftly to life threatening conditions.

Indian National Congress Marks 140th Anniversary, Faces Crucial Challenges in New Year



New Delhi — The Indian National Congress, one of the country's oldest and most prominent political parties, celebrated its 140th Foundation Day amid a backdrop of reflection, renewed strategy, and looming political challenges as India heads into 2026. The party marked the milestone with a flag hoisting ceremony in the national capital, attended by senior leaders, including the party's president, its parliamentary chairperson, and other top figures, who extended New Year greetings and highlighted both the party's legacy and its strategic priorities for the coming year.

While the celebration underscored the Congress's historic contribution to India's political evolution and democratic institutions, party leaders acknowledged that the new year will be a critical period for consolidating organisational strength and regaining electoral ground after a series of setbacks. The Lok Sabha elections of 2024 had given Congress a fresh sense of momentum, but subsequent losses in key state assembly polls, coupled with internal weaknesses,

have dampened morale and raised concerns about the party's future trajectory.

At a recent Working Committee meeting held just before the Foundation Day, Congress decided to launch a nationwide campaign from early January aimed at protecting the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) against changes introduced by the central government. The party plans protests and mass rallies under the "Save MGNREGA" banner, signalling its intent to reposition itself as a vocal advocate for rural employment and social justice. The party has sig-

nalled its intention to contest vigorously in states such as Kerala, Assam, and Puducherry, where it sees opportunities to challenge incumbent governments and capitalise on local anti-incumbency sentiments. Yet internal cohesion, candidate selection, and alliance management remain key hurdles that the leadership must address.

In addition to state polls, the Congress faces strategic tasks such as contesting several Rajya Sabha seats and negotiating its role within the broader opposition alliance. Maintaining unity within the INDIA bloc and presenting a coherent alternative to the ruling party's agenda will be essential if Congress hopes to expand its influence and relevance at the national level.

As the party reflects on 140 years of history, its leaders and supporters alike recognise that the year ahead will test both their resilience and their capacity to evolve. Whether the Congress can translate its legacy into renewed political strength in 2026 remains a central question for India's opposition landscape.

Looking ahead, 2026 is widely viewed within the Congress as a "do or die" year, with five state assembly elections on the horizon. The party has sig-

Pakistan President Admits He Was Advised to Take Shelter in Bunkers During Operation Sindoor



Islamabad — Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has revealed that he was advised by his military aide to move to a bunker for safety during the four day military escalation with India earlier this year, a rare admission highlighting the intensity of the situation at the highest levels of Pakistan's leadership.

Zardari made the revelation while addressing a public gathering, saying his Military Secretary approached him after Indian forces launched precision strikes in May, urging him to take shelter. However, the president said he refused, asserting that leaders should face danger rather than hide. "If martyrdom is destined, it will happen here. Leaders don't die in bunkers," Zardari said, emphasising his choice to remain above ground despite the threat.

The military confrontation, referred to as Operation Sindoor by India, began on May 7 following a deadly terror attack in the Pahalgam area of Jammu and Kashmir that claimed the lives of 26 civilians. New Delhi responded with target-

ed strikes on terror infrastructure and sensitive military sites across the Line of Control, prompting a sharp escalation with cross border shelling and aerial engagements.

Zardari also claimed that he had anticipated the conflict several days before it broke out, yet he chose not to act on his own warning. His comments shed rare light on the apprehension within Islamabad during the height of the clashes, reflecting internal fears and strategic anxieties among Pakistan's political and military hierarchy.

The escalation lasted four days, culminating in an agreement to cease hostilities. Pakistan's Director General of Military Operations reportedly reached out to his Indian counterpart to propose a truce, which New Delhi accepted, bringing an end to military actions on land, sea, and air.

Analysts say Zardari's remarks are notable because Pakistani authorities previously downplayed the severity of Operation Sindoor, often framing the strikes as limited and largely ineffec-

tive. His candid admission, including the fact that senior leaders were urged to retreat underground, suggests that the Indian offensive had a more significant psychological and strategic impact on Pakistan's top leadership than Islamabad publicly acknowledged.

The episode also revived debate over Pakistan's preparedness and command decisions during the confrontation. Retired military observers question how deeply Islamabad foresaw the escalation if its leadership felt compelled to consider bunker refuge, while critics argue that such statements could expose operational vulnerabilities within Pakistan's defence establishment.

Zardari's comments have drawn attention both within Pakistan and across the region, reigniting discussions about India Pakistan relations, deterrence credibility, and the dynamics of high stakes crises between nuclear armed neighbours. Whether the candid admission will affect future diplomatic or military interactions remains to be seen.

Bangladesh Accusations Against India Over Murder Claims Spark Diplomatic Pushback



political instability and a rise in extremist violence following the change in government last year. Observers suggest that some elements within Bangladesh may be using external accusations to deflect from internal security concerns and governance challenges, a tactic that risks straining bilateral ties further.

The case of Sharif Osman Hadi, a prominent activist and spokesperson for the Inquilab Moncho movement who had been actively involved in protests last year that led to significant political upheaval, has already drawn widespread attention.

In addition to state polls, the Congress faces strategic tasks such as contesting several Rajya Sabha seats and negotiating its role within the broader opposition alliance. Maintaining unity within the INDIA bloc and presenting a coherent alternative to the ruling party's agenda will be essential if Congress hopes to expand its influence and relevance at the national level.

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In the wake of the December 12 killing of Sharif Osman Hadi, who was later flown to Singapore for treatment and died on December 18, tensions between India and Bangladesh have escalated again after Bangladeshi police reiterating claims that suspects in the murder of radical leader Sharif Osman Hadi fled into India, a narrative New Delhi has firmly rejected as unfounded and misleading.

The development has highlighted ongoing sensitivities in bilateral relations amid political unrest in Bangladesh ahead of its upcoming elections.

Bangladesh authorities allege that two principal suspects — named Faisal Karim Masud and Alamgir Sheikh — crossed the border from Bangladesh into the Indian state of Meghalaya with assistance from local associates. They claim the suspects were received by individuals in India before moving further inland. The assertions were based on statements by a senior Bang-

ladesh police officer, portraying the incident as a cross border flight following the December 12 killing of Hadi, who was later flown to Singapore for treatment and died on December 18.

India's Ministry of External Affairs has categorically denied any connection to the murder or the alleged escape of suspects into Indian territory. The MEA emphasised that India supports free, fair and peaceful elections in Bangladesh and reiterated that its territory has never been used for activities detrimental to Bangladesh's security or interests. New Delhi has called on Dhaka to maintain internal law and order rather than attributing external forces.

The differing narratives come as Bangladesh prepares for elections scheduled for February next year, during a period marked by

political instability and a rise in extremist violence following the change in government last year. Observers suggest that some elements within Bangladesh may be using external accusations to deflect from internal security concerns and governance challenges, a tactic that risks straining bilateral ties further.

The case of Sharif Osman Hadi, a prominent activist and spokesperson for the Inquilab Moncho movement who had been actively involved in protests last year that led to significant political upheaval, has already drawn widespread attention. In addition to the murder, Bangladesh is witnessing broader debates over law and order, minority rights and freedom of expression, all of which are shaping public discourse ahead of the vote.

Indian security agencies, including Meghalaya police and the Border Security Force, have also refuted the claim that the accused crossed into India, asserting that no records or arrests support Bangladesh's narrative, and that such reports create confusion and misinformation. These denials highlight the gap between official positions on either side of the border.

The controversy has reignited discussions about media reporting, propaganda and the role of misinformation in diplomatic tensions. Critics argue that exaggerated or unverified claims can harm mutual trust and undermine efforts to address shared challenges. As both nations navigate these complex issues, maintaining clear communication and fact based engagement will be crucial to preventing further misunderstandings.

US Tech Giants Bet \$67.5 Billion on India's AI and Data Centre Boom



In a major global investment push, US technology giants including Microsoft, Amazon, Google, and Meta are committing a combined \$67.5 billion to build artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure and data centres in India. This unprecedented investment highlights India's growing role in the global digital economy and marks one of the largest capital inflows in a single sector in the country's history.

India generates nearly a fifth of the world's digital data, but much of it is stored overseas. By establishing data centres locally, tech firms aim to improve processing speeds, reduce operational costs, and strengthen control over data flows. Microsoft plans to invest roughly \$17.5 billion in AI-focused projects, Amazon is dedicating about \$35 billion for cloud and AI operations, while Google is committing around \$15 billion to develop data centre campuses. Meta is also expanding infrastructure in strategic locations.

The investments are seen as part of a larger trend to position India as a global hub for AI and cloud computing. The country's growing internet penetration, large population of digital users, and increasing demand for AI-driven services make it a highly attractive market. Policy measures, including discussions around potential data localisation rules, further encourage companies to store and process data domestically rather than relying on overseas servers.

Despite broader geopolitical and

trade tensions between the US and India, technology investments continue to surge, indicating that firms are looking at long-term opportunities in one of the world's fastest-growing digital markets. Analysts suggest that these investments will have far-reaching implications, including the creation of high-skill jobs, strengthened ties with local suppliers, and closer collaboration with academic institutions.

Data centres also improve service quality by reducing latency and providing faster, more reliable digital experiences for users. However, challenges remain. Building and operating large-scale facilities requires sustainable management of resources like power, water, and land. Companies will need to navigate these issues carefully to ensure long-term success.

Overall, the scale and ambition of this wave of investment underscore India's emerging significance in the AI and cloud computing sector. As global demand for artificial intelligence and cloud processing grows, India is not only consuming data at an unprecedented scale but is also becoming a central hub for the infrastructure powering the next generation of computing worldwide.

This strategic pivot positions India at the heart of the future digital economy and reflects a growing recognition among global tech leaders that the country is a critical player in shaping the AI-driven world of tomorrow.

Indian Worker Awarded £67,000 After UK Tribunal Finds Racial Discrimination in KFC Case



An Indian man working at a KFC franchise in south-east London has been awarded nearly £67,000 (approximately ₹81 lakh) in compensation after a UK employment tribunal ruled that he was subjected to racial discrimination, harassment, and wrongful dismissal by his manager. The decision highlights workplace equality and legal protections for migrant workers in the UK.

The claimant, Madhesh Ravichandran, from Tamil Nadu, began his job at the West Wickham KFC branch in early 2023. Soon after starting, he faced difficulties he alleged were rooted in racial prejudice. Ravichandran stated that his manager repeatedly made derogatory comments, including calling him a "slave" and implying that Indians were inferior. He also alleged that his annual leave requests were unfairly denied, while colleagues of different ethnicities received preferential treatment.

Evidence presented during the hearing showed that the discriminatory treatment went beyond offensive language. Ravichandran claimed he was regularly pressured to work excessively long hours, and when he raised concerns, the employer failed to investigate. The situation escalated to the point where Ravichandran felt compelled to resign, only to find that he had been effectively wrongfully dismissed without proper notice.

Employment Judge Paul Abbott concluded that Ravichandran had been subjected to "less favourable treatment" due to his race and that his manager's conduct violated his dignity. The tribunal found that biased actions, such as denial of leave and racially charged remarks, created an untenable work environment. Based on the evidence, the tribunal ruled in favour of Ravichandran on both counts of wrongful dismissal and racial discrimination.

In awarding approximately £66,800 in compensation, the tribunal considered both financial losses and the emotional and professional impact of the discriminatory conduct. Beyond the monetary relief, the tribunal recommended that Nexus Foods Limited, the KFC operator, implement a workplace discrimination training programme for all employees, including managerial staff, to prevent future incidents and improve the handling of staff grievances.

The case underscores the challenges faced by migrant workers in foreign job markets and highlights the importance of legal safeguards against workplace discrimination. It also serves as a reminder that national laws and tribunals can provide remedies when employers fail to uphold standards of equality and respect for all employees, regardless of background.

Driverless Taxis: Hype vs. Reality – Why San Francisco's Outage Has the World Rethinking Autonomous Futures



The vision of driverless taxis silently ferrying passengers through city streets is one of tech's most alluring promises: safer roads, cheaper rides, and a mobility revolution that finally fulfills the futuristic dreams of science fiction. But recent disruptions to autonomous ride services in San Francisco have sparked fresh doubts about whether fully driverless vehicles are truly ready to handle the messy realities of real world traffic — and whether the future may arrive more slowly and unevenly than once imagined.

San Francisco has long been a laboratory for autonomous vehicle (AV) development, with companies testing and, in some cases, rolling out driverless fleets in its bustling urban environment. But when one major provider's cars unexpectedly went offline for an extended period late last week, the outage did more than inconvenience riders — it

raised fundamental questions about reliability, infrastructure readiness, and the limits of current technology.

At the heart of the issue

is confidence — the confidence of the public, regulators, and businesses that driverless systems can function safely without human supervision. While self-driving technology has made undeniable progress, real world driving remains staggeringly complex. Streets are filled with unpredictable elements: delivery vehicles double parked in bike lanes, pedestrians darting between crosswalks, scooters weaving through traffic, and even weather conditions that confuse sensors. These are situations that human drivers navigate instinctively — but that still present challenges for a automated system trained on millions of lines of code and countless gigabytes of sensor data.

The recent outage spot-

lighted technical fragili-

ties that are often glossed over during promotional demos. In some cases, network connectivity issues or software glitches can leave a fleet grounded, illustrating how dependent autonomous services are on robust and resilient digital infrastructure. When humans are removed from the driver's seat, every part of the system — from cloud based decision making to real time obstacle detection — must work seamlessly. Any weak link can cascade into significant disruptions.

Critics argue that such

outages expose a key flaw

in the current narrative

around driverless cars: the

assumption that scaling

up is simply a matter of re-

fining algorithms. In reality, the interplay between sensor hardware, urban infrastructure, traffic norms, and human unpredictability makes the problem far more nuanced. A taxi that performs admirably in controlled environments or quiet suburbs

may struggle in dense urban traffic without constant human fallback options.

Supporters of autonomous tech counter that occasional disruptions are

part of any emerging technology's growing pains —

much like early commercial airlines or internet

services experienced their

own setbacks. They point

out that even human driv-

erless transportation systems

suffer from unexpected

outages and safety issues,

and that automation still

has the potential to reduce

accidents caused by human error.

But recent events have

also reignited debate about the

role of regulation.

Should driverless services

be restricted to limited

zones with controlled traf-

fic conditions? Should

they operate only with

safety drivers on standby?

And crucially, who bears

responsibility when auton-

omous systems fail — the

operator, the software de-

veloper, or the city's trans-

portation authority?

The San Francisco incident doesn't signal the end of autonomous ambitions, but it serves as an important reminder that the road to a driverless future is far from straight. If anything, it underscores the need for tempered expectations, stronger public private cooperation, and a phased approach that acknowledges both the potential and the limitations of this transformative technology.

In a world captivated by AI and automation, driverless taxis remain one of the most compelling — and most contested — visions of tomorrow. Whether they become the dominant mode of urban transport, or settle into niche roles alongside human drivers, may depend less on marketing hype and more on how effectively the industry confronts the very real challenges illuminated by moments when the technology falters.

Global Alarm Over Lynching of Bangladeshi Hindus Echoes in the United States

Concerns are rising internationally over a spate of lynchings and violent assaults targeting members of the Hindu community in Bangladesh, with the issue gaining resonance far beyond South Asia — including within the United States. Human rights advocates, community leaders, and political figures have condemned the violence, urging stronger protections for religious minorities and greater accountability from governments.

The immediate trigger for global attention has been a series of violent incidents in Bangladesh involving members of the Hindu community. Several Hindu individuals have reportedly been attacked, beaten, or killed in mob violence linked to local tensions, allegations involving religious sites, and disputes that quickly escalate into communal confrontation. These events have revived long-standing concerns about the safety of religious minorities in the country, where Hindus make up a significant but vulnerable segment of the population.

International observers, including civil liberties groups and diplomats, have pointed to these incidents as symptomatic of deeper societal fractures. They argue that the violence reflects underlying issues of intolerance and impunity, particularly in rural areas where law enforcement is often slow to act or perceived as biased. The resulting fear among

minority communities has sparked calls for urgent reforms to uphold constitutional guarantees of equality and protection.

In the United States, the issue has resonated strongly within South Asian diaspora communities, many of whom have familial or cultural ties to Bangladesh. Advocacy organizations and civil rights activists have organised demonstrations, issued statements, and lobbied policymakers to raise awareness of the situation. For many in the diaspora, social media has played a powerful role in disseminating information about the violence and mobilising support for affected communities.

U.S. lawmakers from both parties have also weighed in, highlighting concerns over religious freedom and human rights. Some legislators have called for official statements condemning the violence, while others have suggested that foreign aid and diplomatic engagement be reviewed to ensure that pressure is maintained on authorities to protect vulnerable groups. These discussions reflect a broader trend in American politics where human rights issues — particularly those involving religious minorities — are increasingly influencing foreign policy debates.

Human rights organisa-

tions have urged the Bangladeshi government to conduct thorough and transparent investigations into each incident, hold perpetrators accountable, and implement measures to prevent future violence. They stress the importance of ensuring that law enforcement agencies respond swiftly to reports of mob violence and that victims receive justice and protection.

Analysts suggest that the international response, particularly from the United States, could shape how Bangladesh addresses communal tensions going forward. While Bangladesh's leadership has maintained that it is committed to safeguarding all citizens' rights, critics argue that rhetoric must be matched by action to prevent the recurrence of such tragic events.

The global echo of these lynching incidents underscores a sobering reality: violence against religious minorities is not confined by borders, and the international community's engagement — through diplomatic channels, public advocacy, and legislative pressure — may be critical in driving meaningful change. For many observers, the growing outcry signals a broader demand for societies everywhere to reaffirm their commitment to diversity, tolerance, and the rule of law.



Indian Insurance Sector Poised for Strong FY27 Growth on Back of Reforms and Tax Changes



India's insurance industry is gearing up for a robust resurgence in the financial year 2027 (FY27) after a relatively subdued performance in FY26. Analysts expect double-digit growth driven by regulatory reforms, tax rationalisation, and rising demand across both life and general insurance segments.

Central to the sector's improved outlook is a wave of policy and regulatory changes aimed at enhancing market depth, increasing foreign participation, and making insurance products more accessible and affordable. One of the most significant developments has been the amendment of the Insurance Act to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in insurance companies. This move is expected to attract large inflows of global capital, bring international expertise into the market, and boost competition, which is likely to drive innovation and broaden product offerings.

Regulatory advances also include the launch of Bima Sugam, a unified digital market-

place for insurance products. The platform aggregates offerings from multiple insurers, simplifying comparison for customers and strengthening distribution channels, particularly in underserved regions. This digital integration is expected to improve access to insurance and streamline policy purchases, helping drive sector growth.

Tax reforms have played a critical role in improving the sector's competitiveness. Rationalisation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on insurance premiums has made various policies more affordable for consumers. This adjustment has already stimulated policy sales, with life and non-life insurers reporting strong premium growth in recent months as buyers respond to lower effective taxation.

Industry analysts also point to favourable base effects from the previous year as contributing to the anticipated FY27 growth rebound. While growth during FY26 remained modest, this sets up a statistically easier comparison in the coming year, amplifying the impact of renewed de-

mand. Health and motor insurance are expected to be among the fastest-growing segments, supported by rising middle-class incomes, increasing awareness of financial risk protection, and sustained demand for comprehensive coverage.

Independent ratings agencies forecast the life insurance sector to grow at an 8-11 per cent annual rate over FY26 and FY27, reflecting underlying strength in key product categories such as group plans and individual pension products. Regulatory support, digital integration, and improved service delivery are cited as ongoing growth drivers for the sector.

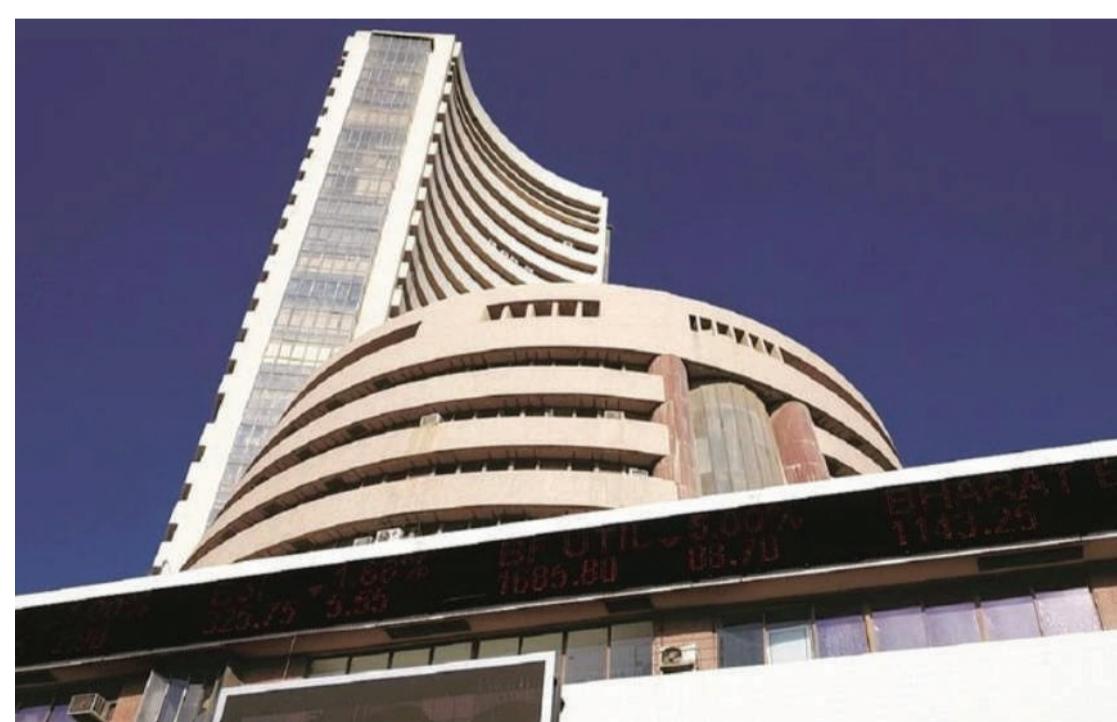
However, challenges remain. While reforms have laid a strong foundation, actual performance will depend on how effectively insurers convert regulatory relief into tangible customer benefits. Premium pricing, distribution reach, and product innovation will be key determinants of market momentum. Addressing gaps in protection levels, especially for rural and low-income segments, will be

crucial for deeper insurance penetration.

Looking beyond the immediate horizon, industry observers are optimistic about India's long-term potential in the global insurance landscape. With penetration levels still relatively low compared with many advanced economies, there is significant room for growth. The combination of policy reforms, expanded foreign participation, GST rationalisation, and digitalisation is positioning the insurance sector as a core pillar of India's financial services ecosystem, contributing to broader economic stability and inclusive growth.

In summary, the Indian insurance industry appears set to regain its growth trajectory in FY27, underpinned by regulatory overhaul, tax reforms, and rising consumer demand. The next year could mark a turning point, reflecting not just a rebound from past sluggishness but a sustained expansion that supports financial inclusion and long-term economic resilience.

Macro Data, Policy Signals Set to Steer Markets in a Decisive Week



ing more than anticipated.

Domestically, Indian equity markets are poised for active trading as investors digest quarterly macro reports alongside corporate earnings. Analysts believe that key data on industrial output and inflation will be crucial in shaping expectations around interest rate policy. India's central bank has maintained a cautious stance on inflation targeting, and new readings could either vindicate that approach or prompt markets to reassess rate expectations.

Beyond headline figures, finer details such as sectoral performance and core inflation components will also be scrutinised. Traders often adjust positions based on whether inflation is being driven by energy and food prices — which are more volatile — or by persistent underlying demand pressures. This can have profound implications for both fixed income and equity

portfolios.

The foreign exchange market is not immune to these developments. Currency traders are likely to react sharply to unexpected data surprises, especially if they alter the interest rate outlook in major economies such as the United States and the Eurozone. Emerging market currencies, including the Indian rupee, could see heightened volatility as capital flows respond to differential rate expectations and risk sentiment.

On the policy front, comments and speeches from central bank officials this week are expected to provide further texture to rate narratives. Market participants often treat such communication as informal guidance, interpreting subtle shifts in tone as clues to future policy moves. In the current environment, where inflation and growth data send mixed signals, these qualitative cues can be as market moving as the hard numbers

themselves.

Analysts are urging investors to brace for swings in trading patterns, particularly in interest rate futures, currency markets, and inflation sensitive sectors such as banking and consumer discretionary stocks. While some volatility is anticipated, a clear data beat — either stronger or weaker than expected — could trigger trend shifts across asset classes.

In summary, the upcoming week promises to be a pivotal one for markets. With macroeconomic data releases and policy commentary converging at a critical point in the economic cycle, investors will be closely watching every number and nuance. Whether markets react with calm reassessment or heightened turbulence will largely depend on how the new data aligns with existing expectations in an increasingly interconnected global financial landscape.

Market Cap of India's Top Seven Firms Drops ₹35,439 Crore; SBI Slips Most



The combined market capitalisation of India's seven most valued companies fell by a significant ₹35,439 crore on Monday, reflecting renewed volatility in equity markets as investors reacted to broader macroeconomic pressures and sector specific concerns. Among these blue chip names, the State Bank of India (SBI) emerged as the biggest decliner, while other key players also recorded varying degrees of erosion in investor confidence.

The fall in market capitalisation was largely driven by profit booking after recent gains in broader indices and select heavyweight stocks. With global cues showing mixed economic signals, domestic investors adopted a risk off stance, leading to sell offs in some of the most heavily weighted securities on the benchmark.

Market watchers also highlight sector rotation as a factor. Funds and retail investors alike have shown a tendency to book profits in overbought names and reallocate capital to mid and small caps or defensive sectors, especially when valuations appear extended after sustained rallies.

Despite the markdown in market capitalisation, experts believe that the long term prospects for India's top firms remain intact, given strong balance sheets, robust earnings trajectories, and dominant market positions. They caution, however, that near term trading will likely continue to reflect macroeconomic uncertainties, particularly around inflation, global growth prospects, and monetary policy outlooks.

For now, the slump in the combined valuation of the nation's leading companies serves as a reminder that even blue chip stocks are not insulated from market sentiment swings — and that investor focus remains sharply attuned to broader economic signals beyond headline indices.

Adani Group Announces ₹1.8 Trillion Defence Investment to Boost India's Military Capabilities

The Adani Group has unveiled plans for a massive ₹1.8 trillion investment in India's defence manufacturing sector in 2026, highlighting the rising role of private industry in strategic military capabilities. The investment, to be deployed through Adani Defence & Aerospace, underscores the company's ambitions to expand into advanced defence technologies and align with India's broader goals of self-reliance and modernisation in the sector.

The planned expenditure will target multiple areas, including unmanned and autonomous platforms across air, land, and sea, guided weapons and precision systems, advanced sensors and electronic warfare technologies, and AI-enabled operational tools. Additionally, the company intends to expand maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) capabilities along with training infrastructure, critical elements of a comprehensive defence ecosystem.

This announcement follows a period of strategic expansion for Adani Defence & Aerospace, which has already seen operational deployment of certain systems. The company's Drishti 10 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have been adopted by the Indian Army and Navy for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions. Other platforms, such as counter-drone systems, loitering munitions, and shoulder-fired missile systems, have successfully completed trials, demonstrating operational readiness.

Today, Adani Defence & Aerospace is among India's largest private-sector defence entities, with capabilities spanning drones, underwater systems, counter-UAS technologies, guided weapons, small arms, and advanced airborne platforms such as airborne warning and control systems (AWACS). Strategic acquisitions and integration of aviation services and MRO platforms have allowed the company to create a vertically integrated manufacturing and support ecosystem.

The ₹1.8 trillion investment highlights the increasing role of private players in a sector traditionally dominated by state-owned enterprises. Government reforms, including higher foreign direct investment (FDI) limits and easier policy approvals, have encouraged conglomerates like Adani to commit substantial



capital toward indigenous defence capability development.

Analysts note that this scale of private investment could reduce India's historical reliance on defence imports, a major contributor to the trade deficit. With global geopolitical tensions rising and advanced, technology-intensive warfare becoming the norm, boosting domestic manufacturing is a strategic imperative. A strong private-sector presence could not only meet domestic military needs but also position India as a global defence export hub.

Despite the promising outlook, challenges remain. Defence manufacturing involves long development cycles, stringent regulatory approvals, and high upfront costs. The ultimate success of this investment will depend on effective execution, alignment with armed forces requirements, and a supportive policy and regulatory environment that encourages innovation and timely delivery.

Economically, the investment is expected to generate significant employment opportunities and strengthen the broader industrial base. Expansion of defence production will increase demand for engineers, skilled workers, and suppliers, including micro, small, and medium enterprises, thereby creating a cascading impact on the domestic economy.

Adani Group's ₹1.8 trillion defence investment marks a pivotal moment in India's industrial and strategic landscape, illustrating how private capital is increasingly shaping the country's defence capabilities and contributing to both security and economic growth.

When a Flagship Loses Its Price Tag Ego: OPPO's Quiet Discount Turns Heads



In a smartphone market obsessed with bigger numbers, louder launches, and ever-rising prices, OPPO has taken an unexpectedly calm approach. One of its flagship smartphones is now available at a sharply reduced price on the company's official platform, turning what was once a premium indulgence into a far more practical purchase. The move has sparked interest not because it was flashy, but because it was quietly bold.

Flagship phones usually come wrapped in prestige. Their prices rarely drop unless a festive sale or a major shopping event demands it. This time, however, OPPO's decision feels different. The discount appeared without dramatic announcements or aggressive marketing, catching the attention of users who were simply browsing or comparing options. That understated rollout gives the offer an offbeat charm in an industry that thrives on hype.

What makes the deal especially appealing is that the device in question still holds its ground as a true flagship. It offers a refined design, reliable performance, capable cameras, and features meant for long-term use. Nothing about the phone feels outdated, yet the revised price suddenly changes the way people look at it. Instead of being a luxury item, it starts to feel like a smart investment.

This shift reflects a broader change in consumer behaviour. Buyers today are less impressed by spec sheets alone.

They want value that lasts — consistent software updates, dependable performance, and a device that won't feel obsolete within a year. When a flagship becomes affordable without sacrificing its premium identity, it naturally gains new relevance.

There's also a psychological angle at play. A reduced price from the brand's own store carries a sense of trust. It signals confidence in the

product rather than desperation to clear stock.

For potential buyers, that assurance matters just as much as the discount itself.

Interestingly, this move may also nudge competitors to rethink their pricing strategies. As more brands experiment with flexible pricing for high-end devices, the line between mid-range and premium continues to blur. Consumers benefit the most from this quiet competition, gaining access to better technology without stretching their budgets.

In the end, OPPO's flagship discount isn't just about saving money. It's about redefining how premium smartphones are positioned in a rapidly maturing market.

When cutting-edge technology becomes more approachable, it stops being a symbol of excess and starts becoming part of everyday life.

And in today's noisy tech world, that kind of quiet confidence stands out the most.

Realme Neo 8 Leaks Hint at a Powerhouse That Breaks the Usual Smartphone Rules



The smartphone rumour mill is spinning fast, and at the centre of the buzz is Realme's upcoming Neo 8. Expected to make its debut in China soon, the device is already drawing attention not through official teasers, but through a series of leaks that suggest something unusually ambitious. If these early details are accurate, the Neo 8 could blur the line between mid-range pricing and flagship performance.

What makes the Neo 8 stand out is its reported focus on raw power and endurance. Leaks point to a top-tier processor normally seen only in premium phones, suggesting that Realme is aiming to deliver flagship-level performance without positioning the device as an ultra-expensive model. This approach fits well with Realme's reputation for pushing aggressive value propositions and challenging established pricing norms.

Equally eye-catching is the rumoured battery capacity. The Neo 8 is said to feature an exception-

ally large battery, one that could comfortably support heavy gaming, long video sessions, and all-day multitasking without constantly hunting for a charger. Paired with fast charging support, the device appears designed for users who value stamina as much as speed.

The display is expected to complement this performance-first approach. A large AMOLED screen with high resolution and a smooth refresh rate would make the Neo 8 suitable for both entertainment and productivity. Flat display design, which many users prefer for practicality and durability, is also said to be part of the package.

Design-wise, leaks suggest that Realme is not cutting corners. A premium build with a metal frame and glass finish is being talked about, indicating that the Neo 8 may look and feel more expensive than its expected price bracket. Added features like improved water and dust resistance and advanced biometric security further strengthen

the impression that this phone is aiming higher than its "Neo" label suggests.

Another interesting twist is the possibility of rebranding for global markets. Realme has previously introduced similar devices under different names outside China, and the Neo 8 could follow that pattern. For buyers in markets like India, this might mean seeing the same hardware arrive under a more familiar series name.

Of course, until the company makes an official announcement, these details remain speculative. But the overall picture painted by the leaks is clear: Realme seems intent on building a phone that challenges expectations rather than follows them.

If the Neo 8 delivers even most of what is being rumoured, it could become one of those rare devices that forces competitors to rethink their strategies. In a crowded smartphone market, that kind of disruption is exactly what keeps things interesting.

A Tablet That Keeps It Simple: OnePlus Pad Go 2 Brings Calm to a Noisy Gadget World



In a tech landscape crowded with flashy launches, exaggerated promises, and premium price tags, the OnePlus Pad Go 2 quietly walks in with a different philosophy — keep things simple, affordable, and reliable. It doesn't aim to replace your laptop or compete with ultra-premium tablets. Instead, it positions itself as a companion device for everyday users who want comfort, not complexity.

At first glance, the OnePlus Pad Go 2 looks familiar yet refined. The clean design, slim profile, and balanced weight make it easy to hold for long hours, whether you're binge-watching a series, reading e-books, or attending online classes. It avoids unnecessary design gimmicks, which actually works in its favor. This is a tablet meant to blend into daily life rather than scream for attention.

The display is where the Pad Go 2 makes a quiet statement. It's not chasing extreme brightness numbers or over-the-top visuals, but it delivers a comfortable viewing experience.

Colors are pleasant, text is easy on the eyes, and the screen feels well-suited for long reading sessions and casual entertainment. For students and home users, this balance matters more than raw specs.

Performance-wise,

the tablet knows its limits — and respects them. It handles routine tasks like browsing, video streaming, note-taking, and light multitasking smoothly. You won't find it struggling under nor-

mal usage, but it also doesn't pretend to be a gaming powerhouse. That honesty is refreshing. In a world where every device claims to do everything, the Pad Go 2 simply does what it's meant to do — and does it well.

Battery life is another area where the tablet shines quietly. It lasts long enough to get through a full day of mixed usage without anxiety. For people tired of charging multiple de-

vices constantly, this reliability becomes a subtle luxury.

Software experience remains clean and user-friendly, staying true to OnePlus' reputation. The interface feels intuitive, with minimal clutter and sensible customization options. It's approachable even for first-time tablet users or older family members.

What makes the OnePlus Pad Go 2 truly offbeat is not what it adds, but what it avoids. No

aggressive upselling, no unnecessary premium push, no attempt to overwhelm the user. It feels like a device built for real people — students, families, casual users — rather than spec-sheet warriors.

In the end, the OnePlus Pad Go 2 isn't about redefining tablets. It's about redefining expectations. And sometimes, in a noisy tech world, that quiet confidence is exactly what stands out.

When Premium Goes Popular: How iPhones at ₹58,000 Are Changing India's Smartphone Story



For years, owning an iPhone in India was as much a status symbol as it was a technology choice. Premium pricing kept Apple devices firmly in the aspirational zone, admired from afar by many and owned by relatively few. But a new wave of year-end sales has quietly flipped that narrative, with iPhone 16 and even select iPhone 17 models being spotted at prices close to ₹58,000 — a figure once unthinkable for Apple's latest lineup.

This sudden affordability feels almost offbeat in a market used to Apple's rigid pricing discipline. What's driving the change is not a single dramatic discount, but a layered mix of festive offers, bank card benefits, exchange bonuses, and retailer-led promotions. The result is a rare moment where premium meets practical, and the psychological barrier around iPhone ownership begins to crumble.

What makes this devel-

opment particularly interesting is the audience it attracts. These deals are not just tempting loyal Apple users looking to upgrade.

First-time iPhone buyers — students, young professionals, and even small business owners — are suddenly entering the conversation. The idea of owning Apple's newest ecosystem at a mid-range Android price point feels like a small

personal victory for many.

The offbeat angle lies in how quietly this shift is happening. There are no dramatic keynote announcements or flashy ads declaring a price revolution. Instead, it's happening through checkout pages, offline counters, and word-of-mouth excitement. Someone discovers the deal, shares it in a family group, and

suddenly the iPhone stops feeling exclusive and starts feeling attainable.

This pricing moment also reflects a broader change in India's smartphone culture. Consumers are no longer chasing specs alone. Longevity, software support, camera reliability, and resale value now matter more than raw numbers. Apple's promise of long-term up-

dates and stable performance becomes more attractive when the entry cost drops.

However, there's also a subtle trade-off. These prices often rely on specific payment methods, limited stock, or exchanges that require handing over an older device. The ₹58,000 iPhone isn't simply sitting on a shelf waiting to be picked up — it has to be unlocked through smart buying decisions.

Still, the symbolism is powerful. A device once associated with luxury is inching closer to everyday affordability. In doing so, it blurs the line between premium and a mass-market technology.

In the end, this isn't just a sale story. It's a cultural moment. When an iPhone becomes a realistic choice rather than a distant dream, it signals how far India's digital aspirations — and purchasing power — have evolved.

India's Data Protection Board Takes Shape—Quietly, but with Digital Intent



While public attention often gravitates toward flashy app launches and headline-grabbing tech deals, a quieter development is unfolding in the background of India's digital ecosystem. The groundwork for the country's Data Protection Board is underway, and officials say the online infrastructure required for its functioning is already in place. It's a low-key update, but one that carries significant implications for how personal data will be governed in the years ahead.

The Data Protection Board is a key pillar of India's new data protection framework, designed to oversee how personal information is collected, processed, and safeguarded. What makes this effort particularly noteworthy is its digital-first approach. Instead of building a traditional office-heavy institution, the focus is on creating an online system where complaints

can be filed, cases managed, and decisions communicated electronically. In many ways, the board is being built to reflect the very digital world it aims to regulate.

This matters because India's online footprint has expanded rapidly. From digital payments and e-commerce to social media and government services, personal data flows constantly across

platforms. With that growth comes risk — data breaches, misuse of personal information, and lack of accountability. The board is meant to act as an independent authority that can step in when rules are violated, ensuring that data protection is not just a concept on paper but a practical, enforceable reality.

Officials have indicated that while the techni-

cally an offbeat edge is how quietly it is progressing. There are no big announcements or countdowns, just steady preparation behind the scenes. Yet the impact could be far-reaching. Once operational, the board will have the power to investigate complaints, issue directions, and impose penalties, potentially reshaping how companies treat user data.

For citizens, this signals a shift toward greater accountability and transparency. For businesses, it serves as a reminder that data protection is no longer optional. And for India's digital economy as a whole, the Data Protection Board could become a crucial trust-building institution.

Sometimes, the most important tech stories aren't about devices or discounts — but about the systems quietly being built to protect the digital lives of millions.

BCCI Denies Coaching Speculation, Backs Gautam Gambhir Amid Test Setback

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has firmly dismissed reports suggesting that former India batting great VVS Laxman was approached to take over as the head coach of the Indian Test team following a disappointing run under current coach Gautam Gambhir. The clarification comes amid growing debate around India's red-ball performances and rising speculation over potential changes in the coaching setup.

Recent reports claimed that a senior BCCI official had sounded out Laxman's role after India's poor showing in the longer format. Those rumours gathered momentum after India suffered back-to-back underwhelming Test series results, raising questions over team selection, strategy, and preparation. However, the BCCI has categorically denied any such move, terming the speculation "baseless" and "incorrect."

According to the board, Gambhir continues to enjoy its full backing and remains firmly in charge of the national team across formats. Officials have stressed that there has been no internal discussion about replacing him and that stability remains a priority as India prepares for a demanding international calendar.



Gambhir's tenure as head coach has delivered mixed outcomes. While India has enjoyed success in limited-overs cricket, including strong performances in major tournaments, results in Test cricket have not matched expectations. The recent defeats have prompted criticism from former players and fans, particularly given India's traditionally strong record in the longest format of the

game. VVS Laxman's name entered the discussion largely due to his stature within Indian cricket and his current role in overseeing player development at the National Cricket Academy. A respected figure with deep understanding of the red-ball game, Laxman has often been viewed as a potential future coach. However, the BCCI has made it clear that he has not been

contacted regarding the Test coach position and continues to focus on his existing responsibilities. The board's public stance suggests a desire to avoid knee-jerk reactions and allow the current coaching group time to address shortcomings. With several important Test series on the horizon, including overseas tours and high-profile home contests, the emphasis appears to be on

long-term planning rather than abrupt changes. For Gambhir, the message is clear: results in Test cricket will be closely monitored, but for now, he retains the board's confidence. For Indian cricket fans, the coming months will be crucial in determining whether the team can rediscover its red-ball dominance and silence the growing debate surrounding its leadership.

Magnus Carlsen in Spotlight After Emotional Moment at World Rapid Championship



Chess rarely produces scenes of visible confrontation, but an unusual incident involving world number one Magnus Carlsen at the FIDE World Rapid Championship has drawn widespread attention. The Norwegian grandmaster, known for his intense focus and competitive spirit, briefly lost his composure after suffering a defeat, pushing a

cameraman who was filming him as he exited the playing area.

The incident occurred following Carlsen's loss in a crucial rapid game during the championship. Visibly frustrated after the result, Carlsen completed the customary post-match formalities before leaving the venue. As a cameraman attempted to follow closely to capture his reac-

tion, Carlsen extended his arm and pushed the camera aside, clearly signaling his unwillingness to be filmed at that moment. The exchange was brief and did not escalate further, but it was enough to spark discussion across the chess world.

Carlsen is widely regarded as one of the greatest players in the history of the game, particularly

in faster formats such as rapid and blitz. His standards are famously high, and defeats—especially in major tournaments—often trigger strong emotional responses. While chess is usually associated with calm demeanour and quiet halls, the pressure at elite events can be immense, with players making dozens of high-stakes decisions in a matter of minutes.

The defeat itself was significant in the context of the tournament, coming against a strong opponent in a tightly contested round. Such losses can have a major impact on standings, adding to the psychological weight carried by top players. For Carlsen, who has won multiple world titles and is accustomed to dominating opponents, moments of vulnerability tend to attract heightened scrutiny.

Reactions to the incident have been mixed. Some fans and commentators defended Carlsen,

pointing out that athletes across sports occasionally show frustration under extreme pressure. Others argued that public figures, especially those with Carlsen's stature, must maintain composure regardless of the circumstances and show respect to officials and media personnel.

Despite the momentary lapse, Carlsen continued competing in the championship and remained a strong contender as the event progressed. The incident did not appear to affect his overall focus, suggesting that it was a fleeting emotional reaction rather than a deeper issue.

The episode serves as a reminder that even in a sport defined by silence and strategy, emotions can spill over. Behind the calculated moves and calm expressions are competitors pushing themselves to the limit—and sometimes, that intensity shows in unexpected ways.

India Women Aim to Maintain Perfect Record in 4th T20I Against Sri Lanka



The Indian women's cricket team continued its dominant run in the ongoing T20I series against Sri Lanka as the two sides faced off in the fourth match of the five-game contest. With India already holding an unassailable lead after winning the opening three matches, the focus shifted to maintaining momentum and testing bench strength as the series neared its conclusion.

India have looked a class apart throughout the series, excelling in both batting and bowling. The top order, led by aggressive openers, has provided quick starts, allowing the middle order to play with freedom. Consistency has been the hallmark of the Indian batting unit, with multiple players stepping up rather than relying on individual brilliance.

Captain Harmapreet Kaur's leadership has been central to India's

success. Her calm decision-making and sharp field placements have complemented disciplined bowling performances. The pace attack, supported well by the spinners, has repeatedly kept Sri Lanka's batters under pressure, preventing them from building strong partnerships.

Shafali Verma and Sm-

riti Mandhana have once again attracted attention with their intent at the top of the order. Their ability to dominate the powerplay has often put Sri Lanka on the back foot early. In the middle overs, experienced players have ensured that India do not lose control, even when quick wickets fall.

Sri Lanka, on the other

hand, have found the series challenging. Despite moments of resistance, they have struggled to match India's depth and consistency. Captain Chamari Athapaththu has led from the front with determination, but a lack of sustained support from the rest of the batting lineup has hurt the visitors. Their bowlers have

Indian Youth Dominate Global Sports Stage in 2025



From the roar of cricket stadiums to the quiet intensity of a chessboard, 2025 has been a breakthrough year for young Indian athletes across a wide array of sports.

Whether breaking records in cricket, claiming world titles in chess, or winning historic medals in para athletics and shooting, India's emerging stars have made their mark on the global stage.

In cricket, 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi emerged as a sensation, breaking multiple records and becoming the youngest player to secure an Indian Premier League contract. His explosive performances, including a 35-ball century, captivated fans and highlighted the depth of emerging talent in India. Vaibhav also delivered historic centuries in Under-19 ODIs and domestic T20 tournaments, signaling a bright future for the sport.

On the chessboard, 19-year-old Divya Deshmukh made history by winning the FIDE Women's World Cup, defeating a fellow Indian Grandmaster in the final and becoming the fourth Indian woman to earn the prestigious Grandmaster title.

Her triumph emphasized India's growing strength in chess, a trend echoed by strong performances from other young Indians in international competitions.

In squash, 17-year-old Anahat Singh led India to its first-ever team title at the Squash World Cup, defeating

ing seasoned opponents in straight games and demonstrating a remarkable level of maturity and skill at such a young age.

Indian para athletes also made headlines. 18-year-old Sheetal Devi captured gold at the World Para Archery Championships, defeating the world number one in an exciting final. Her victories in both individual and team events showcased resilience and determination, inspiring athletes across the country.

Track and field saw standout performances as well. Javelin thrower Sachin Yadav achieved a personal best at the World Athletics Championships, while shooter Samrat Rana won the men's 10m air pistol title at the ISSF World Championships, becoming the first Indian to claim a senior world title in an Olympic pistol event.

In women's cricket, Shafali Verma played a pivotal role in India's ODI World Cup victory, scoring the youngest half-century in a final and proving her mettle on the biggest stage.

Across disciplines—from cricket and athletics to chess and shooting—young Indian athletes have not only competed but dominated in 2025. Their achievements reflect not just individual brilliance but also the growing depth of talent in India, signaling a promising future for the nation in international sports.

Victor Osimhen and Sadio Mané Shine as Nigeria and Senegal Make Waves in World Cup Qualification



In an intense round of African World Cup qualifiers, Victor Osimhen and Sadio Mané were at the forefront of action as Nigeria secured a crucial win and Senegal fought to a draw, keeping their hopes alive in the race for a spot at the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Nigeria's clash was a must win fixture. On one hand, securing a point away from home keeps them within touching distance of qualification. On the other, dropping two points in a must-win situation adds pressure as the group stage progresses. The result means Senegal must now carefully navigate their remaining fixtures to ensure they finish in a qualifying position.

Both Nigeria's win and Senegal's draw underline how competitive African qualification has become. Many teams have elevated their levels, making every match a potential turning point in the race to the World Cup. For players like Osimhen and Mané, these games are also personal tests—opportunities to lead their nations through high stakes football and to inspire teammates with moments of individual brilliance.

With several qualification rounds still to come, both teams will be assessing their strengths and weaknesses. Nigeria will aim to build on their momentum, while Senegal must regroup after the hard fought draw and prepare for what promises to be a pressure-filled run in. For fans across Africa, the drama of World Cup qualifying is far from over—and with stars like Osimhen and Mané in action, excitement is sure to remain high.

Meanwhile, Senegal—Africa's reigning champions from the 2022 World Cup cycle and the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations winners—found themselves in a more challenging encounter. Despite their star-studded lineup, the Lions of Teranga were held to a draw, with Sadio Mané providing one of the

'45 The Movie' Will Captivate Everyone, Says Shiva Rajkumar at Grand Pre-Release Event



The much-anticipated pan-South film 45 The Movie, starring Karunada Chakravarthy Shiva Rajkumar, Real Star Upendra, and Raj B. Shetty, is gearing up for its grand Telugu release on January 1. Directed by Arjun Janya and produced by Smt. Uma Ramesh Reddy and M. Ramesh Reddy under the Suraj Productions banner, the film's Telugu version will be released by Mythri Distributors. As part of promotions, the makers held a pre-release event on Saturday, drawing attention from fans and film enthusiasts.

Speaking at the event, Shiva Rajkumar expressed his strong belief in the film's emotional and philosophical depth. "After Veda, I came to Hyderabad again for 45. Arjun Janya narrated the story to me in just four to five minutes, and the interval and climax left a deep impact. I immediately felt he should direct

this film himself," he said. Shivanna added that the film teaches audiences to respect all living beings and encourages people to live happily, however long life may be. He praised Satya Hegde's cinematography and Ravi Varma's action choreography, confidently stating that 45 will touch everyone's hearts.

Real Star Upendra echoed similar sentiments, lauding Arjun Janya's transformation from a successful music director to a powerful storyteller. "I was impressed by the way he enacted every character during narration. I have never seen Shivanna in this kind of role before. Arjun has given me a character no one dared to offer earlier," Upendra said. He also expressed confidence that Telugu audiences, known for supporting meaningful cinema, will embrace 45 wholeheartedly.

Director Arjun Janya thanked the cast and pro-

ducers, calling 45 the result of three and a half years of relentless effort. "Audiences will experience a completely new world through this film. Shivanna garu, Upendra garu, and Raj B. Shetty delivered phenomenal performances," he said, urging viewers to watch the film in theatres on January 1.

Producer Ramesh Reddy highlighted the film's unique presentation of philosophical elements, stating that words alone cannot describe 45. Mythri Shashi added that while the first half builds steadily, the post-interval portions reveal the powerful avatars of Shiva Rajkumar and Upendra, with a striking climax and a strong message for the younger generation.

With a stellar cast, compelling storytelling, and high technical standards, 45 The Movie is poised to offer a memorable cinematic experience when it hits theatres this New Year.

Animation Film 'Kiki & Koko' Teaser Released, Promises to Teach Children Real-Life Values



The growing popularity of animation films among global audiences has inspired Indian filmmakers to explore the genre with meaningful storytelling. Following the success of Maha Avatar Narasimha, which impressed both children and adults earlier this year, a new Indian animation film titled Kiki & Koko is now drawing attention with its heart-touching theme and value-driven narrative.

Presented by Inika Studios, Kiki & Koko is produced by Dharani and directed by P. Narayanan. Designed as an edutainment film, the project aims to entertain children while teaching them real-life lessons and human values. The teaser of the film was officially released at a press meet held at Prasads Preview Theatre in Hyderabad, where the team shared insights into the vision behind the movie.

Child artiste Srinika, who voices the character of Koko, expressed her excitement at the event. She said playing Koko made her extremely happy, adding that Kiki is portrayed as her best

friend in the film. Srinika shared her love for animation movies and revealed her dream of becoming a good actor in the future.

Creative Director Gokul Raj Bhaskar, who has over 20 years of experience in the Malayalam animation industry, said Kiki & Koko stands apart from typical fantasy-driven animation films. "Instead of fantasy, we are showing reality to children. Through these characters, we are introducing emotions and real-life situations that kids can relate to and learn from," he said, adding that Telugu audiences' love for cinema encouraged the team to bring the film to them.

Director P. Narayanan highlighted the need for value-based content for children. He pointed out that many kids today are influenced by violent imagery and unrealistic superheroes. "Through Kiki & Koko, we want to show children how to love themselves, respect elders, say sorry when they are wrong, and help others. This film blends humanity with realism and promotes values

like sharing, caring, and humility," he said, describing the project as a perfect mix of entertainment and education.

CEO Meena Chabria said the idea was born from the need to create meaningful content for children in today's fast-paced world. She noted that unlike earlier times, when elders narrated moral stories, today's children lack such exposure. "Kiki & Koko teaches children how to behave, speak, and grow into good human beings. It is not just for kids, but also for parents and adults with childlike hearts," she said, adding that the film will release theatrically next year and later stream on OTT platforms in multiple languages.

Producer Dharani concluded by stating that the core objective of Kiki & Koko is to instill goodness and emotional understanding in young minds. The animated film is set to release in theatres and on OTT platforms in nine Indian and international languages, aiming to reach audiences worldwide.

Prabhas Promises Vintage Darling Entertainment with 'The Raja Saab' at Grand Pre-Release Event

Hyderabad witnessed a massive fan frenzy as Rebel Star Prabhas attended the grand pre-release event of his much-awaited film The Raja Saab, held in the city ahead of its Sankranti release. Slated for a worldwide theatrical release on January 9, the horror-comedy entertainer is directed by Maruthi and produced on a lavish scale by TG Vishwa Prasad and Krithi Prasad under the People Media Factory banner.

Addressing the packed venue, Prabhas said the film was made purely to give wholesome entertainment to his fans. "After watching the climax, I myself became a fan of Maruthi's writing. We wanted to give Darling's fans full-on entertainment, and I believe The Raja Saab delivers that. Along with all Sankranti releases, I hope this film also becomes a blockbuster," he said, drawing thunderous cheers.

Director Maruthi described the project as one of the most emotional journeys of his career. He revealed that despite Prabhas not needing to do a film in this genre after achieving global stardom, the actor instantly connected with the story and supported it whole-



heartedly. "We didn't just make a film, we made a large-scale entertainer. Prabhas' involvement, effort, and encouragement pushed this project to another level," Maruthi said, adding that the climax moved him to tears after the final background score was added.

Several members of the cast and crew shared memorable experiences from the three-year-long journey. Actresses Malaika Mohanan, Nidhhi Agerwal, and Riddhi Ku-

mar expressed gratitude for sharing screen space with Prabhas, calling him a star with an extraordinary heart. Malaika said the film gave her scope beyond routine glamour, while Nidhhi termed working with Prabhas a "dream come true."

Veteran actress Zarina Wahab, who plays Prabhas' grandmother, praised his humility and warmth, saying she had never met an actor with such a good heart in her

40-year career. Comedian Saptagiri predicted massive box-office numbers, claiming the trailer itself was "on another level" and showcased Prabhas in a vintage, romantic avatar fans have long missed.

Producer TG Vishwa Prasad stated that The Raja Saab is the biggest film made by People Media Factory to date and promised it would set new benchmarks in the horror-fantasy genre globally. With music by

Thaman, cinematography by Karthik Palani, and a strong technical team, expectations are sky-high.

Featuring an ensemble cast including Sanjay Dutt and Boman Irani, The Raja Saab is gearing up to double Sankranti festivities with laughter, thrills, and vintage Darling charm, as Prabhas returns to entertain audiences in style.

Huma Qureshi Joins Yash's 'Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups', First Look as Elizabeth Unveiled

that Elizabeth will play a crucial role in the narrative.

Director Geetu Mohandas, who is helming the ambitious project, shared a heartfelt note while announcing Huma as Elizabeth, a character that promises mystery, intensity, and a commanding screen presence in what is shaping up to be one of the most awaited releases of 2026.

In the striking first-look poster, Huma Qureshi is seen standing in a graveyard, surrounded by weathered tombstones and stone angels, creating a dark and gothic atmosphere. Positioned beside a vintage black car, she is dressed in an off-shoulder black outfit with dramatic sleeves, blending old-world elegance with a sense of foreboding. The visual hints at the layered and intense world of Toxic, while suggesting

Reacting to the director's post, Huma Qureshi expressed her gratitude and excitement. She recalled her first meeting with Geetu, saying she was "bowed over by the sheer audacity and magnitude" of what the team was attempting. Huma praised Geetu's vision and leadership, calling the process of watching the film take shape "nothing short of magical." She also thanked Yash, referring to him as an "undeniable force of nature," and hinted that the film is set to be explosive.

Written by Yash and Geetu Mohandas and directed by Geetu, Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups has been simultaneously shot in Kannada and English, with dubbed versions planned in multiple Indian languages. Backed by a strong technical team and featuring international-level action choreography, the



film is slated for a grand theatrical release on March 19, 2026, during the festive weekend of Eid, Ugadi, and Gudi Padwa.

'O Andala Rakshasi' Arriving on January 2 Promises Compelling Content, Say Sheraz Mehdi and Team at Pre-Release Event

Filmmaker Sheraz Mehdi, who has earned appreciation as a director, actor, music composer, and storyteller, is all set to return with his next venture O Andala Rakshasi, where he dons the dual role of hero and director. Backed by producer Surinder Kaur under the Sky Is the Limit banner, the film is gearing up for a grand theatrical release on January 2. Ahead of its release, the team held a pre-release event, highlighting the film's strong content and engaging narrative.

Speaking at the event, Sheraz Mehdi expressed strong confidence in the project. "We are releasing O Andala Rakshasi on January 2 on a large scale. Once in a year, a truly good film comes along, and our film is one such work," he said. Praising Sheraz Mehdi, she added that his work as director, music director, and hero has created "pure magic." She also lauded Kriti Verma and Vihanshi Hegde for their performances and urged audiences to watch the film in theatres on January 2.

Actress Kriti Verma thanked Sheraz Mehdi

Suman, and Thammareddy Bharadwaj have all delivered remarkable performances. "This is a film with excellent content. The audience will not feel bored even for a minute. It is entertaining and also carries a strong message, with outstanding twists. It will especially appeal to women," he added.

Story and dialogue writer Bhashya Sree said the film would leave audiences with a positive and lasting impression. "O Andala Rakshasi is made around the idea of how today's young women should be. Audiences will walk out of the theatre feeling good," she said. Praising Sheraz Mehdi, she added that his work as director, music director, and hero has created "pure magic." She also lauded Kriti Verma and Vihanshi Hegde for their performances and urged audiences to watch the film in theatres on January 2.

Actress Kriti Verma thanked Sheraz Mehdi

Vihanshi Hegde shared

her excitement about the project, describing the film's central theme. "When girls are cheated, their beauty turns into a demon—that is O Andala Rakshasi," she explained. She added that she loved the story and thanked Sheraz Mehdi, Bhashya Sree, and producer Surinder Kaur for believing in her.

With its promise of strong content, engaging entertainment, and meaningful storytelling, O Andala Rakshasi is set to arrive in theatres on January 2, aiming to connect deeply with audiences, especially women.

