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TRUE POINT

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Supreme Court Issues Landmark Directive on RTE Act Implementation, Seeks Reports by March 31



TPN Bureau | January 17



New Delhi: In a historic ruling emphasizing educational equity, the Supreme Court of India has directed the Centre and all state governments, including Andhra Pradesh, to ensure strict compliance with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. The bench mandated that governments submit detailed reports on actions taken by March 31, 2026, underscoring that education is not merely literacy but a fundamental, enforceable right.

Schools must fill these seats without fail, ensuring no discrimination based on caste, religion, or wealth. The judgment highlights how early integration fosters brotherhood, mutual respect, and societal unity. "Walls of prejudice must not divide young minds," the bench noted, warning against segregating students. Non-compliance could invite contempt proceedings, with the court monitoring progress closely.

Implications for Andhra Pradesh and Beyond

For Andhra Pradesh, where private schools dominate urban education, the directive poses a fresh challenge amid ongoing debates on school fees and infrastructure. Parents' groups like the Parents Association of Andhra Pradesh (PAAP) a registered body (No. 6/2022) advocating for affordable education hailed the ruling as a "wake-up call." PAAP Secretary, reachable at +91 63053 13558 or parentsassociationap@gmail.com, urged immediate audits of RTE seat allocations in districts like Ongole and Vijayawada.

State Education Minister Botsa Satyanarayana's office has yet to respond, but officials indicated compliance reviews starting next week. Nationally, the Ministry of Education must coordinate with states to verify admissions, reimbursements to schools, and anti-discrimination measures. Past reports show uneven implementation: only 60-70% of reserved seats filled in many states, per 2025 data.

Broader Social Impact

The ruling revives the RTE's original intent, enacted in 2010 to guarantee free education for ages 6-14. Critics argue commercialization has diluted it, turning schools into "profit packages for rulers." The court rejected such trends, prioritizing children's futures over business interests. Legal experts predict this could spur policy reforms, including better funding for reimbursements and teacher training.

As PAAP puts it: "Education is not a business or a begging bowl; it's the right of tomorrow's generations." With the March 31 deadline looming, governments face pressure to act. This verdict not only safeguards RTE but rekindles hope for a more equitable India, one classroom at a time.



Andhra Pradesh Set to Become Global Green Energy Hub, Announces Minister Nara Lokesh

TPN Bureau | January 17



Amaravati: In a bold vision for sustainable development, Andhra Pradesh Information Technology, Electronics and Communication Minister Nara Lokesh declared on Friday that the state is poised to emerge as a global hub for green energy. Speaking to the media in Amaravati, Lokesh highlighted ambitious plans to export green energy from Kakinada to major international markets including Germany, Singapore, and Japan.

The minister revealed that these initiatives will attract billions of dollars in investments, creating at least 8,000 direct jobs and positioning Andhra Pradesh at the forefront of the global renewable energy revolution. "From Kakinada's ports, we will supply clean energy to the world," Lokesh said, emphasizing the state's strategic coastal advantages and proactive policies under Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's leadership.

This announcement comes at a pivotal time for Andhra Pradesh, which has prioritized green energy since the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) returned to power in 2024. The state boasts vast solar potential, with over 300

shipments to energy-hungry nations. Germany, aiming for 80% renewable energy by 2030, Singapore's net-zero goals by 2050, and Japan's hydrogen society push make them ideal partners. Lokesh noted ongoing memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with firms from these countries, signed during recent investor summits. The minister promised a major update on Friday evening at 6 PM, where specifics on investment commitments, timelines, and partnerships will be unveiled. This could include details on the first phase, targeting 5 GW of capacity within three years.

Andhra Pradesh's green push aligns with India's national targets of 500 GW non-fossil capacity by 2030. Under Naidu's Vision 2050, the state aims for 50 GW renewables, with incentives like single-window clearances and land banks accelerating projects. Critics from the opposition YSR Congress Party (YS-RCP) have questioned feasibility, citing past delays, but Lokesh dismissed them, pointing to TDP's track record in IT and electronics. If realized, this could transform Andhra Pradesh's economy, reducing carbon emissions and boosting GDP. As the world races toward net-zero, the state's gambit positions it as a leader in the green economy.

NTR Vijayawada Commissionerate Achieves Breakthroughs with AI-Powered Policing

TPN Bureau | January 17, 2026

Vijayawada: The NTR (Vijayawada) Police Commissionerate is setting new benchmarks in law enforcement by leveraging artificial intelligence (AI)-based technologies. Over the past year and a half, these tools have transformed crime control, investigations, detection, traffic management, public safety, and crowd control.

City Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu spearheaded their introduction, yielding impressive results across multiple domains. A flagship initiative is 'ASTRAM' (Actionable Intelligence for

Sustainable Traffic Management), an AI system deployed to tackle urban congestion.

It monitors traffic in real-time across the city, pinpointing peak-hour bottlenecks, their causes, and affected areas. Alerts are instantly sent to traffic personnel, enabling swift diversions and management. Dramatic Traffic Decongestion Since its rollout in October 2024, ASTRAM has slashed average daily traffic congestion from 97 kilometers across 83 key junctions to just 48 kilometers by November last year a 50% reduction. "This real-time intelligence has made our roads smoother and safer," Commissioner Babu noted. Com-

plementing this, the commissionerate partnered with the public to install 10,000 CC cameras within its jurisdiction. These have proven game-changers in cracking thefts, robberies, and related crimes.

Record Recovery Rates Last year saw 816 such cases registered, with 596 (73%) solved a testament to the cameras' efficacy. Victims lost Rs 13.89 crore, but police recovered Rs 11.21 crore (80.70%), hailed as a national record. No other unit in the country matches this recovery figure. Criminals are now captured on at least four to five cameras per incident, boosting detection and restitution.

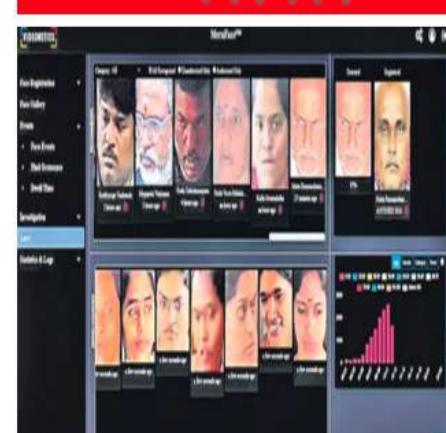
AI extends to crowd

management through real-time mounting cameras that count vehicles and people at temples, prayer halls, festivals, and fairs. This allows proactive measures to prevent stampedes.

Seamless Festival Security During last year's Durga Temple Dasara celebrations and Bhavani Deeksha conclusion, the system ensured no untoward incidents. It tracked devotee influx, vehicle counts, queue lengths for darshan, and wait times with pinpoint accuracy, averting overcrowding. Similar success marked Vaikuntha Ekadashi, with live crowd estimates at one temple providing vehicle and pilgrim tallies for

optimal flow.

Plans are underway to extend this to over 200 temples citywide, enhancing safety during peak events. Commissioner Babu emphasized holistic integration: "AI isn't replacing police but amplifying our capabilities. From predictive policing to data-driven decisions, we're building a smarter Vijayawada." These innovations have not only curbed crime but also fostered public trust, with citizens actively contributing cameras and data. As Andhra Pradesh pushes digital governance, the NTR Commissionerate's model could inspire statewide adoption, proving AI's potential in proactive policing.



Chandrababu Naidu Pushes for Youth-Led Future with AP FIRST Research Hub in Tirupati

TPN Bureau | Jan 09

Amaravati: Chief Minister N.

Chandrababu Naidu on Friday emphasized the Andhra Pradesh government's commitment to empowering the youth by identifying future job sectors and building skills from now onward. In a key meeting at his Undavalli camp office, Naidu greenlit the establishment of "AP Futuristic Innovation and Research in Science and Technology" (AP FIRST), a massive research center centered in Tirupati, poised to become the state's innovation powerhouse.

The discussions involved Aero Space Defence advisors, IT-Digital Transformation consultants, and senior officials from the Drone Corporation of Andhra Pradesh. Naidu outlined the government's comprehensive plans to drive development across all sectors, noting that companies are eager to invest.

He highlighted emerging fields like aerospace, defence, space technology, AI-cyber security, semiconductor devices-sensors, quantum technology, healthcare, biotechnology, green energy, and rural area technology as critical for the future. "The



state is crafting policies to align with these trends," Naidu stated, underscoring the need to attract investments and foster startups.

A standout announcement was India's first green ammonia plant in Kakinada, marking a milestone in green energy. Naidu stressed that Andhra Pradesh must serve as a launchpad for innovative startups in high-demand areas, beyond just infrastructure. To support this, AP FIRST will operate at full capacity to skill youth, combining the strengths of Tirupati's premier institutions IIT Tirupati and IISER Tirupati. "This will be a prestigious initiative; execute it with excellence," he directed officials, instructing them to engage the central government for effective implementation.

Naidu's vision aligns with his long-standing focus on technology-driven growth. Since assuming office, his administration has prioritized futuristic sectors to position Andhra Pradesh as a national leader. The AP FIRST hub, envisioned as the largest of its

kind, will bridge academia, industry, and government, creating job opportunities for the state's young population.

Officials revealed that the center will focus on research in cutting-edge domains, from quantum computing to biotech, ensuring Andhra Pradesh stays ahead in the global innovation race. This move comes amid rising investments in the state. Companies in defence and green energy have shown keen interest, buoyed by investor-friendly policies.

Naidu reiterated that youth skilling must start immediately identifying opportunities in AI, semiconductors, and renewables to prepare a future-ready workforce.

The government stands ready to support the youth in shaping tomorrow," he affirmed. Experts hail AP FIRST as a game-changer, potentially rivaling national hubs like those in Bengaluru or Hyderabad. With central collaboration, it could accelerate Andhra Pradesh's GDP growth through high-tech jobs.

Young Meta AI Chief Predicts 'Vibe Coding' Will Mint the Next Billionaires

TPN Bureau | Jan 16
Visakhapatnam: At just 28, Alexander Wang has not only become a billionaire but risen to the role of Chief AI Officer at tech giant Meta. Recently, he shared intriguing advice for children, forecasting that a 13-year-old mastering "vibe coding" with AI tools could become the next Bill Gates. "If you're 13, spend all your time on vibe coding. Live your life through it," Wang urged, emphasizing its potential to give the next generation a massive edge in future job markets.

What is Vibe Coding? This emerging trend revolutionizes program-

ming by relying on natural language and AI-assisted tools, bypassing traditional coding languages. Unlike conventional coding, which demands expertise in syntax-heavy languages like Python or Java, vibe coding lets anyone describe ideas in plain English via simple prompts. AI platforms such as Replit or Cursor then convert these into functional code, enabling users to build apps effortlessly. In essence, users just say what they want, and AI does the heavy lifting.

No deep technical knowledge required. Wang envisions this democratizing software



creation, allowing kids and non-engineers to innovate rapidly. Echoes of Tech Pioneers Wang draws parallels to leg-

ends like Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, who rose to billionaire status by tinkering with early computers in their

youth. "They gained a huge advantage playing with first-generation machines," he noted.

In today's AI era, he

predicts the same: those experimenting with AI tools early will dominate. "The next Bill Gates will emerge from kids vibe coding instead of gaming or sports," Wang advised youth, warning that AI will reshape products and services. Who is Alexander Wang? Wang's meteoric rise is legendary. At 19, he founded Scale AI, a startup revolutionizing data labeling for machine learning.

"People without engineering backgrounds are now building apps they dream up using vibe coding," Pichai said. He compared it to bloggers turning the early internet into careers, creating new job opportunities. "These technologies will evolve further—what people ultimately build with them excites me," Pichai added.

Wang's call to action underscores a shift: in an AI-driven world, early adoption of tools like vibe coding could define tomorrow's leaders. As Meta and Google bet big on AI, will a 13-year-old's prompts spark the next tech empire?

Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu Extends Heartfelt Kanuma Greetings to Farmers, Emphasizes Livestock's Role in Rural Life

TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu extended warm wishes to the people of the state, particularly farmers, on the occasion of Kanuma, a significant festival in the Sankranti celebrations. In a heartfelt message, Naidu highlighted Kanuma's special place in the agrarian lifestyle, describing it as a day dedicated to expressing gratitude towards livestock that supports farmers' agricultural efforts.

The Chief Minister portrayed Kanuma not merely as a traditional ritual but as a festival that reminds humanity

of its deep bond with nature. "Livestock is the true wealth of farmers," Naidu asserted, underscoring the indispensable role of animals in rural economies. He elaborated on how bullocks tirelessly plough fields, while dairy cows provide essential nutrition to families, making them inseparable from farmers' daily lives.

Naidu emphasized the critical support livestock offers to farmers' labor, calling the act of honoring them a noble tradition rooted in Indian culture. He urged the preservation of these values for future generations, stressing that it is everyone's duty to care for animals as if they

were family members. "Treating livestock with the affection reserved for one's eyes is a collective responsibility," he remarked. In his message, the CM linked respect for nature to its reciprocal benevolence. He opined that safeguarding animals and birds maintains environmental balance, which in turn makes agriculture more profitable. Naidu assured farmers of the government's unwavering support in providing proper fodder, healthcare, and other resources for livestock. "Our administration stands firmly by your side in ensuring the well-being of these vital companions," he promised.

Kanuma, observed on the third day of Sankranti, holds profound cultural significance in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, where farmers traditionally bathe and decorate their ani-

mals, feed them special meals, and pray for bountiful harvests. This festival underscores the symbiotic relationship between humans, animals, and the land, reinforcing sustainable farming practices amid modern challenges like climate change and mechanization. Naidu's greetings come at a time when the TDP-led government is prioritizing rural development, in-

cluding initiatives to boost dairy production, animal husbandry, and organic farming. Recent state budgets have allocated substantial funds for veterinary services and fodder banks, aligning with the CM's vision of a prosperous agrarian economy. Concluding on an optimistic note, Chief Minister Naidu wished for joy, prosperity, and abundant dairy yields to fill every farmer's home this Kanuma. His message resonates deeply in a state where over 60% of the population depends on agriculture, reminding citizens of the timeless wisdom in cultural festivals. As celebrations unfold across Andhra Pradesh, with vibrant processions of decked-out bullocks and community feasts, Naidu's words serve as a call to action for sustainable practices and cultural continuity.



Visakhapatnam Crime Police Crack Bag Theft Case in 24 Hours on Sankranti Day

TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Visakhapatnam: In a swift display of efficiency, Gajuwaka Crime Police resolved a brazen theft at a popular shopping mall on Sankranti festival day, recovering stolen cash and gold worth lakhs within just 24 hours. The incident, which unfolded amid festive shopping frenzy, has been hailed as a testament to vigilant policing, earning praise from Visakhapatnam City Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi. The theft occurred at Vizag Shopping Mall in Gajuwaka, where organizers had launched a massive sale offering items for just Rs 180 to attract crowds during the harvest festival. A woman, excited by the bargains, deposited her bag at the security counter before entering the mall. Seizing the opportunity, an unidentified man not only took her bag but also grabbed another one left nearby.

The stolen bag reportedly contained Rs 50,000 in cash and 11 tolas of gold jewellery valuables the owner had carried for festi-

val purchases. Realizing her bag was missing upon return, the distraught woman immediately lodged a complaint at Gajuwaka Crime Police Station. "It was a nightmare on what should have been a joyous Sankranti," she later recounted, her voice trembling with relief after the recovery.

Police registered a case and dove into the investigation, poring over CCTV footage from the mall. The grainy videos proved pivotal. Investigators identified the suspect and traced the vehicle he used to flee the scene. Within a day, a dedicated team apprehended the culprit. During interrogation, the accused confessed to hiding the stolen bag at a nearby crematorium grounds a desperate bid to evade capture. Officers rushed to the location, retrieved the bag intact, and verified that the gold ornaments and cash remained untouched. In a heartwarming handover, Gajuwaka Crime Police returned the bag to the victim, restoring her faith in law enforcement. The festive theft had initially plunged her into panic, es-

Tirupati-Secunderabad Vande Bharat Train Shines in Unique Orange Livery with Expanded 20-Coach Capacity



TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Tirupati: The Tirupati-Secunderabad Vande Bharat Express, a flagship semi-high-speed train connecting two key pilgrimage and commercial hubs in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, has undergone a striking transformation.

Now operating in a vibrant orange color scheme, this train stands out as the only one among India's 102 Vande Bharat services painted in this distinctive hue, marking a bold departure from its previous white livery. Launched on April 9, 2023, by Indian Railways, the service initially ran with eight coaches to gauge passenger demand. It quickly gained popularity for its speed, comfort, and reliability, covering the 570-

km route in about 7-8 hours at an average speed of 80 kmph. Encouraged by overwhelming response, the train was upgraded to 16 coaches within months.

As demand surged further fueled by pilgrims heading to Tirupati's sacred Tirumala Venkateswara Temple and business travelers between Secunderabad and South India Railways expanded it to a full 20-coach configuration. The newly revamped orange train boasts a seating capacity of 1,440 passengers, making it one of the largest Vande Bharat trains passing through Tirupati.

Equipped with modern amenities like automatic doors, bio-vacuum toilets, Wi-Fi, and onboard entertainment, it offers three

classes: AC Chair Car, Executive Class, and a dedicated Chair Car for women and seniors. This expansion aligns with Indian Railways' push to enhance connectivity in South India, reducing travel time compared to conventional trains on the same route.

What makes this train special? Out of the 102 Vande Bharat trains operational across India as of early 2026, this is the sole service between Secunderabad and South India Railways expanded it to a full 20-coach configuration. The newly revamped orange train boasts a seating capacity of 1,440 passengers, making it one of the largest Vande Bharat trains passing through Tirupati.

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classes: AC Chair Car, Executive Class, and a dedicated Chair Car for women and seniors. This expansion aligns with Indian Railways' push to enhance connectivity in South India, reducing travel time compared to conventional trains on the same route.

"The Tirupati-Secunderabad Vande Bharat has become a lifeline for devotees and professionals alike," said a South Central Railway spokesperson. Daily occupancy often hits 90-100%, prompting calls for additional services or extensions to other destinations like Visakhapatnam.

This development underscores Indian Railways' commitment to modernizing rail travel, with Vande Bharat trains now forming the backbone of premium short-haul connectivity. As Andhra Pradesh ramps up tourism and infrastructure under state initiatives, expect this orange beacon to play a pivotal role in boosting regional mobility.



BJP MLA Sujana Chowdary Assures Amaravati Farmers of Coalition Government's Support

TPN Bureau | January 15, 2026

Amaravati: BJP MLA Sujana Chowdary has assured farmers in the Amaravati capital region that the coalition government is committed to resolving their issues definitively. Speaking at a meeting with farmers in Mandadam village on Thursday, she emphasized that farmers should unite as an association to bring their problems to the government's attention and monitor progress collectively.

During the gathering, farmers presented their grievances directly to the MLA. Chowdary advised them against approaching issues individually, instead urging them to select four representatives to act on behalf of the group. "I have explained to them how to choose these representatives effectively," she stated.

To aid in tracking application statuses and resolutions, she promised to provide software mechanisms from her side if needed.



Chowdary highlighted the strength of local leadership, noting that the area's MLA, Union Minister, Guntur MP Pemmasani Chandrasekhar, and Municipal Administration Minister Narayana are all capable leaders. She encouraged farmers to coordinate with them for swift action.

On the critical issue of the capital, she expressed confidence that the Amaravati Capital Act would soon become law, with technical processes underway at the center. "The central government will certainly enact this legislation," she affirmed. Farmers used the platform to voice deep frustrations. Several complained that officials' attitudes were complicating their problems, turning simple matters into protracted disputes.

Women from the capital region pointed out that unresolved issues for a few farmers were creating a perception of widespread problems across the community. One farmer illustrated

the escalation: "Earlier, we had issues related to 14 points; now, due to officials' inaction, they've crossed 20." Chowdary acknowledged these concerns, stressing the need for organized advocacy.

She reiterated the coalition government's comprising TDP, BJP, and JSP pledge to prioritize Amaravati as the sole capital, reversing previous uncertainties under the YSRCP regime. The meeting un-

derscored ongoing tensions in the region, where land pooling and compensation disputes have lingered since the capital project's revival post-2024 elections. This interaction reflects the NDA alliance's grassroots outreach in Andhra Pradesh, where farmer discontent remains a key political flashpoint.

Chowdary's proactive steps, including tech-enabled tracking, signal a structured approach to

TDP Leader Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy Hits Out at Jagan Over Bhogapuram Airport Remarks

TPN Bureau | January 05:

PAmaravathi: TDP senior leader and MLA Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy has strongly criticized YSRCP president Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for making what he described as "false and unethical" claims regarding the Bhogapuram International Airport project in north Andhra Pradesh. Speaking to reporters at Amaravati, Somireddy said Jagan was shamelessly claiming credit for the same project.

"Today, without any moral responsibility or sense of shame, he is trying to appropriate the efforts and vision of the previous government," Somireddy remarked. He accused Jagan of political hypocrisy, stating that when the airport's groundwork was being laid, the YSRCP leader attempted to obstruct progress through criticism and misinformation. Somireddy went on to ridicule Jagan's



tendency to make exaggerated claims, saying that if left unchecked, Jagan might one day go so far as to declare that his family had brought India's independence, conducted the Pokhran nuclear tests, or even designed the military's 'Operation Sindo'. He said such exaggerated self-glorification diminishes the seriousness of political discourse and erodes the credibility of public leaders.

The TDP MLA emphasized that the Bhogapuram project's

progress was the result of years of planning and administrative groundwork carried out during the tenure of former Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. He cautioned that attempts to misrepresent facts for political mileage would only mislead voters and create unnecessary divisions among the public.

"Politicians have a duty to uphold truth and dignity in public life," Somireddy asserted. "When leaders like Jagan resort to

false propaganda and selective amnesia, public respect for politics itself declines." He urged the people of Andhra Pradesh to recognize the facts behind key infrastructure projects and not to be swayed by "temporary political narratives crafted for election season." Somireddy reiterated that the TDP remains committed to completing the Bhogapuram International Airport and to ensuring balanced development across all regions of the state.

Job Mela on January 18 in Ramachandrapuram Targets Unemployment with Janpact, Empower Services Opportunities



TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Ramachandrapuram, Andhra Pradesh: In a continued push to eradicate unemployment across the state, Labour Department Minister Vasanthi Subhash is spearheading weekly job melas at the Ramachandrapuram Employment Exchange. The upcoming event, scheduled for this month on January 18 (Sunday) at 10 AM, will feature direct interviews with leading com-

panies Janpact and Empower Services, offering a range of positions for qualified candidates.

The initiative forms part of the minister's flagship program to connect job seekers with immediate employment opportunities, addressing the persistent challenge of youth unemployment in Andhra Pradesh. Held every week at the local employment office, these melas have gained momentum under the state government's pro-

tent management and process handling, ideal for fresh graduates seeking stable careers in Hyderabad, where selected individuals will be based. Empower Services, meanwhile, opens doors to a broader spectrum of technical and operational roles, including various engineers, associates, technicians, operators, and other positions. Opportunities suit candidates aged 18-35 who have completed 10th standard, Intermediate, Degree, ITI, or Diploma. Additionally, B. Tech graduates from 2022 to 2026 are eligible for specialized roles with monthly salaries between 18,000 and 30,000. This diversity ensures inclusivity, accommodating candidates from varied educational backgrounds and skill levels. All placements will require selected candidates to work in Hyderabad, providing urban job prospects while boost-

ing regional economies through skill development. The event promises on-the-spot interviews, streamlining the hiring process and minimizing delays for eager applicants. Minister Subhash emphasized the government's commitment to "Nirudhya Nirmoolana" (unemployment eradication), highlighting how such melas bridge the gap between talent and industry needs. Similar events have already placed hundreds in jobs statewide, fostering economic growth amid Andhra Pradesh's focus on infrastructure and services sectors. For more details or registration, contact 9515481671 or 8179329396. Job seekers are advised to bring resumes, educational certificates, and ID proofs. This mela represents a golden opportunity for East Godavari district residents and beyond to secure rewarding careers.

MLA Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy Slams Jagan, KCR Over Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation 'Sabotage'

TPN Bureau | January 16:

Ongole: YSRCP dissident and Addanki MLA Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy unleashed a scathing attack on former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and his Telangana counterpart K. Chandrashekhar Rao (KCR), accusing them of colluding to derail the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Project. Speaking to the media on Thursday, Reddy alleged that Jagan, swayed by KCR's influence, deliberately stalled the project, which is vital for drought-prone Rayalaseema districts.

Reddy mocked the "inseparable brotherhood" between the two leaders during their overlapping tenures as chief ministers. "When KCR was CM in Telangana, his brother Jagan was CM in AP. They couldn't be separated," he quipped, claiming Telangana's 2020 complaint led to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) imposing a stay on the project's lift works. The stay persisted for nearly four years until 2024, while both



held power, Reddy pointed out. "AP people have understood their crooked policies," he asserted.

Turning to current politics, Reddy ridiculed accusations from YSRCP leaders that Andhra Pradesh CM N. Chandrababu Naidu is in cahoots with Telangana CM A. Revanth Reddy. "Is this hypocrisy not absurd?" he asked, firing a barrage of questions: "Did Chandrababu impose an NGT stay when he was CM? Did he halt NGT works? Did NGT impose penalties then?" He accused Jagan's regime of never starting actual lift construction, limiting efforts to mere earthworks to siphon off hundreds of crores.

"They raised bills only for soil work; the

NGT stay conveniently blocked only the lift construction," Reddy lampooned, suggesting it was a ploy to loot public funds. Reddy warned YSRCP leaders to "keep their mouths shut," insisting people no longer believe Jagan's "cinema-like stories" of boldly standing up to KCR for Rayalaseema. "The public has seen through it all," he declared, urging an end to such open sabotage narratives.

The remarks come amid ongoing debates over the Rayalaseema Lift project, a long-standing poll promise aimed at irrigating 1.2 lakh acres by lifting water from Krishna River backwaters. Naidu's TDP-led government has vowed to revive it, blaming previous delays on legal h u r d l e s a n d mismanagement.

YSRCP has countered that environmental clearances and funding were priorities under Jagan. Reddy, who quit YSRCP last year citing internal issues, has emerged as a vocal critic, often targeting party leadership on governance lapses.

TDP Leader Zakir Succumbs to Injuries in Tragic Road Accident Near Medarametla



TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Ongole: In a heart-breaking incident, Nellore TDP leader and cluster in-charge Zakir (42-43) lost his life after a car he was traveling in veered off control and collided with a divider near Medarametla. The accident, which occurred earlier today, has sent shockwaves through the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) ranks and the local community. Eyewitnesses reported that the vehicle suddenly lost control on a stretch of road near Medarametla, slamming into the central divider with significant force. Zakir, a prominent TDP figure from Nellore serving as the in-charge for clusters 42 and 43, sustained severe injuries in the crash. Local police rushed to the scene upon receiving information and swiftly transported him to Ongole Government Hospital for emergency treatment.

Tragically, despite the medical team's best efforts, Zakir suc-

cumbed to his injuries while undergoing treatment. Hospital authorities confirmed his death, attributing it to the critical nature of the trauma sustained in the accident. The loss of the dedicated party worker has left his family, colleagues, and supporters in deep mourning. News of the accident reached Minister Ponguru Narayana promptly, who hurried to Ongole Government Hospital. Upon arrival, the minister inquired in detail about the sequence of events leading to the crash and the treatment provided to Zakir. Hospital doctors briefed him on the patient's condition and the intensive care administered, reiterating that Zakir had breathed his last during treatment.

The incident underscores ongoing concerns about road safety in Andhra Pradesh, with calls for improved infrastructure and stricter enforcement of traffic rules. Zakir's funeral arrangements are being finalized, with TDP leadership expected to attend in strength.

Dr. Ravi Shankar G Receives Prestigious Times Icon of Healthcare Award for Pioneering Urology and Kidney Transplant Work

TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Vijayawada: In a momentous celebration of medical excellence, Dr. Ravi Shankar G, Consultant Urology and Renal Transplant Physician at Manipal Hospital Vijayawada, has been honored with the Times Icon of Healthcare Award. The accolade recognizes his groundbreaking contributions to advanced kidney transplant surgeries, laparoscopic urology, and robotic urology procedures, solidifying his reputation as a trailblazer in Andhra Pradesh's healthcare landscape.

The Times Icon of Healthcare Award, organized by The Times of India Group, spot-

lights medical professionals who exemplify clinical mastery, innovation, and unwavering patient dedication. This year's edition, held amid a gathering of healthcare leaders in Vijayawada, highlighted Dr. Shankar's role in transforming urological care through minimally invasive techniques.

His work has not only elevated surgical success rates but also reduced recovery times, offering renewed hope to patients with complex renal and urological disorders. With over a decade of specialized experience, Dr. Ravi Shankar G has performed hundreds of high-volume kidney transplants and pioneered robotic-assisted

surgeries at Manipal Hospital. His adoption of state-of-the-art technologies like the da Vinci robotic system has minimized

risks in procedures such as prostatectomies and nephrectomies, making advanced care accessible in the region. Under his guidance, Manipal Hospital Vijayawada has emerged as a referral hub for urology and renal transplants, attracting patients from across Andhra Pradesh

and neighboring states.

Dr. Shankar's patient-first philosophy shines through in his holistic approach, blending cutting-edge tech with compassionate care. Colleagues praise his mentorship of young surgeons and his efforts to train teams in ethical, high-precision practices. "This award is a testament to his tireless pursuit of better outcomes," said Dr. M. Sridhar, Medical Director at Manipal Hospital Vijayawada.

The hospital's leadership echoed this sentiment, noting that Dr. Shankar's achievements align with their vision of world-class healthcare in tier-2 cities. Receiving the award on stage, Dr. Ravi

Shankar G shared his gratitude: "This recognition is deeply humbling. I dedicate it to my patients who entrust us with their lives, and to my dedicated team at Manipal Hospital Vijayawada. Their support turns challenges into successes."

We remain committed to ethical, compassionate care powered by the latest medical advancements." The event drew dignitaries, including local health officials and representatives from the Andhra Pradesh health department, underscoring the growing focus on specialized care amid rising chronic kidney disease rates in the state estimated at over 15% in coastal regions per re-

Mega Cricket Tournament Lights Up Sankranti Celebrations in Varikuntapadu

TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Varikuntapadu: In a vibrant display of community spirit amid the joyous Sankranti festivities, Varikuntapadu village witnessed an exhilarating mega cricket tournament organized under the auspices of local luminaries Sunkar and Boyidi. The event, held on the auspicious occasion of the harvest festival, drew enthusiastic crowds from surrounding areas, blending the thrill of competitive sports with traditional Pongal celebrations.

Five dynamic teams battled it out on the village grounds, transformed into a makeshift stadium adorned with mango leaves, rangoli patterns, and festive banners. The participating squads showcased fierce determination, skill, and camaraderie, captivating spectators who cheered under the winter sun.

Matches unfolded with high-energy overs, strategic fielding, and nail-biting finishes, reflecting the unifying power of cricket in rural



Organizers Sunkar and Boyidi presented the awards in a ceremonial function, flanked by village elders and panchayat members, emphasizing the event's role in fostering youth fitness and village harmony. The tournament not only celebrated Sankranti's themes of prosperity and new beginnings but also highlighted grassroots sports development in Prakasam district.

Events like these strengthen community bonds and inspire the younger generation," said Sunkar, addressing the gathering. Boyidi added, "We're grateful for the overwhelming participation and plan to make this an annual spectacle."

With over 100 players and thousands of onlookers, the mega event underscored the benefits of sports.

"Asmita signifies

self-confidence, independence, and personality," she said, urging participants to embrace discipline for success in sports. She noted that soft tennis has gained significant popularity in the state, offering promising growth opportunities for disciplined athletes. Distinguished guest Vallabhaneni Rajeshwari, Corporator of the 26th Division, praised the choice of Vijayawada as the venue. "It's heartening to host the South Zone Asmita event here. The Central Government is conducting these tournaments nationwide to promote women's development," she remarked, underscoring their role in empowering female ath-

Sports Build Discipline Beyond Physical Fitness, Says Krishna University Official



TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Vijayawada: Sports not only enhance physical fitness but also instill discipline and routine, emphasized Prof. J. Naveen Lavanya Latha, Secretary of Krishna University Sports Board, while inaugurating the South Zone Asmita Khelo India Women's Soft Tennis League here on Friday. The event, organized by the Andhra Pradesh Soft Tennis Association at the Tennis Complex of Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium, kicked off with great fanfare. Prof. Naveen Lavanya Latha, the chief guest, highlighted the multifaceted benefits of sports.

"Asmita signifies

self-confidence, independence, and personality," she said, urging participants to embrace discipline for success in sports. She noted that soft tennis has gained significant popularity in the state, offering promising growth opportunities for disciplined athletes. Distinguished guest Vallabhaneni Rajeshwari, Corporator of the 26th Division, praised the choice of Vijayawada as the venue. "It's heartening to host the South Zone Asmita event here. The Central Government is conducting these tournaments nationwide to promote women's development," she remarked, underscoring their role in empowering female ath-

letes. Tournament coordinator D. Naveen Kumar outlined the format: the four-day league will feature competitions in sub-junior, junior, and senior categories. Matches will include singles and doubles events.

Top performers those

securing the first eight positions—will advance to the national-level Asmita Soft Tennis League in Ahmedabad. This progression adds high stakes and motivation for the competitors from across the South Zone.

The inauguration drew a diverse group of dignitaries, including Tamil Nadu Secretary Semban, Odisha Secretary Ajaym, Andhra Pradesh Swimming Association Treasurer I. Ramesh, and 26th Division TDP in-charge Vallabhaneni Sateesh.

Their presence underlined the event's regional importance and the growing support for soft tennis in India. Soft

tennis, a variant of tennis played with softer balls on similar courts, is increasingly popular in India, especially through initiatives like Khelo India, which aims to nurture grassroots talent.

The Asmita series specifically targets women's participation, aligning with national goals for gender equity in sports.

Andhra Pradesh has emerged as a hub for the sport, with strong state-level associations foster-

Wikipedia Turns 25: A Global Treasure Trove of Free Knowledge Celebrates Milestone

TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh: From humble beginnings in a digital garage to an unparalleled repository of human knowledge, Wikipedia marks its 25th anniversary today, Thursday. Launched on January 15, 2001, by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, the free online encyclopedia has grown into a monumental platform boasting over 71 million articles in English alone and more than 66 million across 342 languages worldwide.

Now spanning 353 languages, it serves as an open gateway to information, available for free viewing or download by anyone, anywhere. What started as a collaborative experiment has become the internet's go-to destination, outshining search engines for everything from mango pickle recipes (avakaya) to atomic bomb history. Volunteers from across the globe numbering in the lakhs have digitized for



gotten archives, dusty manuscripts, local folklore, and cutting-edge science papers. They've unearthed knowledge trapped in village lofts, ancient scrolls, and obscure servers, making it accessible to the masses. On average, 15,000 new articles are added monthly, covering hyper-local histories, population data, and cultural treasures. The "Wiki" name, de-

rived from the Hawaiian word for "quick," embodies its rapid, democratic ethos: anyone can contribute text or photos.

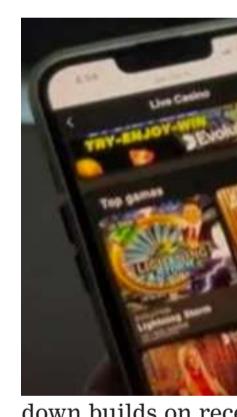
No formal credentials required just passion, curiosity, and a willingness to edit. This crowd-sourced model has propelled Wikipedia from a single-language site to a multilingual powerhouse, preserving endangered traditions and bridging knowledge

Central Government Blocks 242 Betting Sites, Cracks Down on Online Gambling to Protect Youth

TPN Bureau | January 16

Vijayawada | New Delhi: The Central Government is taking a firm stand against illegal betting and online gambling, blocking 242 betting and gambling websites to curb activities that are luring youth into addiction. In addition, the government has acted against nearly 8,000 websites promoting betting and gambling so far, as revealed by official sources. The move comes amid growing concerns over the devastating impact on young people.

Yet challenges persist: sustaining quality amid rapid growth and countering misinformation. Founders and volunteers urge more contributions, especially in regional languages. In an era of paywalls and algorithms, Wikipedia remains a beacon of openness. As Jimmy Wales once said, it's "the sum of all human knowledge" built by the people, for the people.



down builds on recent legislative efforts.

In October last year, the government enacted the Online Gaming Act, 2025, which bans real-money gaming, imposes strict regulations on such games, and introduces policies to restrict illegal betting and gambling. The Act has already forced major platforms like WinZO and Nazara Technologies to discontinue real-money games. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), authorities have identified and targeted

websites, foreign servers hosting illegal platforms, and those promoted via social media.

Approximately 8,000 such sites have faced action to date, with the latest blocking of 242 sites marking a significant escalation. The primary goal is to protect youth from mental and financial harm, curb online addictions, and foster a safer digital environment. The government has clarified that surveillance on illegal betting apps will intensify, with actions planned against social media promotions.

Organizations violating the law will face severe penalties. This initiative aligns with broader efforts to regulate the digital space, following the prohibition on real-money gaming apps.

As online vices proliferate, the government's proactive steps signal a zero-tolerance policy, aiming to preserve social stability and youth well-being in an increasingly digital India.

Prabha Festival in Jaggannathota Draws Lakhs Amid Grand State Celebrations

TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Ambedkar Konaseema District: The iconic Prabhalas festival unfolds today (Friday) in Jaggannathota, Ambajipeta Mandal, with unprecedented splendor, embodying the rich cultural heritage of Konaseema. Declared a state festival by the Andhra Pradesh government, this year's event promises even greater magnificence, attracting devotees and tourists from across the region. Boasting a 450-year-old tradition, the celebration features Ekadasha Rudra Prabhalas sacred idols from 11 villages converging in a vibrant procession to Jaggannathota.

Officials estimate around 5 lakh devotees will attend, underscoring the festival's growing stature. In light of



the massive influx, the government and local authorities have implemented comprehensive arrangements. Special parking zones have been

designated for incoming vehicles, with traffic diversions in place to en-

sure smooth movement. Essential amenities like drinking water stations, mobile toilets, and rest areas dot the venue, prioritizing pilgrim comfort. Security measures are robust, with heavy police deployment to prevent any untoward incidents. As a proactive step, medical teams stand ready with ambulances and first-aid kits. "We've coordinated with all departments to make this a seamless experience," said a district official, emphasizing the event's scale. The state festival status, granted by the AP government, elevates the Prabhalas Utsavam's profile, positioning it for global recognition.

Local residents express optimism that Jaggannathota's cele-

brations could soon rival major cultural events worldwide, boosting tourism and preserving age-old traditions. "This is our pride, and with state support, it will shine brighter," remarked a villager from Gangalakururu. The festival not only revives historical rituals but also fosters community unity.

Devotees clad in traditional attire, chanting hymns, will witness the Prabhalas' ceremonial entry, followed by poojas and cultural programs late into the night. As Konaseema pulses with fervor, the event reaffirms the enduring spirit of Andhra Pradesh's cultural tapestry.

CM Chandrababu Naidu Unveils 'Swarn Chandragiri' Plan to Transform Tirupati Mandal



TPN Bureau | January 15, 2026

Tirupati: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu announced the ambitious "Swarn Chandragiri" initiative on Thursday in Naravaripalle, aiming to develop Chandragiri mandal in Tirupati district as a model of progress. Drawing inspiration from the successful "Swarn Naravaripalle" and "Swarn Kuppam" projects, the plan focuses on sustainable development to elevate living standards across the mandal. Naidu directed senior officials to swiftly implement detailed plans modeled on these

precedents.

"We will transform Chandragiri mandal into a shining example of sustainable growth, just like Swarn Naravaripalle and Swarn Kuppam," the Chief Minister declared, emphasizing comprehensive infrastructure, economic upliftment, and welfare delivery. The blueprint prioritizes raising residents' quality of life through targeted interventions. Last year, during Sankranti, the government merged Kandulavariपाल, Chenna Ramapuram, and A. Rangampeta villages into the Swarn Naravaripalle project.

In just one year, it delivered remarkable results, showcasing the potential of focused development. Key achievements included installing 100% solar panels in every household, achieving fuel self-sufficiency and providing free electricity to all. Scientific poultry farming, organic agriculture expansion, and related initiatives boosted per capita income by 20%. Special skilling and upskilling programs enhanced employment opportunities for women and youth, while ensuring full delivery of state welfare schemes to beneficiaries alongside basic infrastructure upgrades.

The project is expected to create jobs, improve in-

comes, and set a benchmark for other mandals. Local leaders hailed the announcement as a game-changer for Chandragiri, a region with historical significance near the iconic Chandragiri Fort. Residents expressed optimism, anticipating rapid improvements in power, water, roads, and livelihoods. Naidu's push reflects his long-standing focus on model villages, a hallmark of his governance since his earlier tenure.

With Andhra Pradesh marking two decades of statehood this year, such projects signal renewed commitment to inclusive growth.



Record-Breaking Cockfight in Tadepalligudem Draws Crores on Sankranti

TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Tadepalligudem, West Godavari District: The vibrant Sankranti festivities in Tadepalligudem exploded into high-stakes excitement as massive cockfights lit up the arena, with crores of rupees changing hands on the festival's second day. Local enthusiasts flocked to the event, turning it into the biggest betting spectacle of the year in West Godavari district.



"This is by far the grandest cockfight we've seen in years," said a local resident, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The energy is unmatched during Sankranti, and this one sets a new benchmark."

At the center of the action was the star-studded Pai Boina Venkataramayya arena, where fierce battles between champion roosters captivated thousands. Among the highlights, a blockbuster clash unfolded between birds owned by Gudivada Prabhakar and Rajamandri Ramesh. In a nail-biting finish, Ramesh's rooster emerged victorious, clinching a staggering 1.53 crore for its owner—the single largest payout reported in the district this season.

Roosters, bred and trained for months, were paraded with utmost care, their handlers whispering encouragements amid the chaos. Cockfighting, a traditional rural sport deeply embedded in Andhra Pradesh's Sankranti celebrations, draws massive crowds despite ongoing debates over animal welfare. In West Godavari, known for its fertile

deltas and festive fervor, these events double as social gatherings where farmers, traders, and villagers bond over the thrill.

This year's edition shattered records, with total transactions estimated in the crores, fueled by rising stakes and enthusiastic participation. Authorities monitored the event for compliance with local regulations, ensuring no major incidents occurred. As the sun set on the second day of Pongal, winners like Ramesh celebrated their windfalls, while losers vowed comebacks for next year's showdows.

For Tadepalligudem, Sankranti 2026 will be remembered not just for sweets and kite-flying, but for this epic cockfight that united the community in pulsating anticipation.

Makar Jyothi Celebrations Conclude in Narasipatnam with Grand Procession and Honors for Assembly Speaker

TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Narasipatnam, Anakapalli District: The vibrant Makar Jyothi Utsavams at the Ayyappa Swamy Temple premises in Narasipatnam, Anakapalli district, drew to a magnificent close today, marked by a majestic rathotsavam procession and a prestigious award ceremony honoring Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Speaker Ayyanna Patrudu.

The festivities peaked with a grand chariot procession that commenced from the confluence of five local roads, weaving through Krishna Bazaar and culminating at the Venkateswara Swamy Temple. Devotees lined the streets in large numbers, chanting hymns and showering flowers on the ornate chariot carrying the deity.

The event symbolized the culmination of the Makar Jyothi rituals, a key highlight of the Sabarimala pilgrimage season, fostering a sense of communal devotion and cultural pride in the region. At the Venkateswara Swamy Temple, Assembly Speaker Ayyanna Patrudu, accompanied by his wife, performed special poojas, invoking



blessings for prosperity and harmony.

The rituals underscored the deep spiritual significance of the occasion, blending tradition with community participation. Prominent attendees included music director Kotri, whose presence added a celebrity touch, and Anakapalli MP Ramesh, who joined the celebrations, engaging with locals and emphasizing the event's role in preserving cultural heritage. The day's highlights extended beyond the temple grounds to the NTR Stadium, where Andhra Saraswati Parishad organized a felicitation program.

In a momentous ceremony, the Parishad bestowed the "NTR Jeevana Saaphalya Puraskaram" upon Speaker Ayyanna Patrudu, recognizing his exemplary contributions to public service, legislative leadership, and promotion of Telugu language and culture. Parishad President Gajala Srinivas presented the award, along with copies of resolutions from the Third Telugu Maha Sabha, highlighting Patrudu's unwavering commitment to the state's linguistic and cultural renaissance.

Music director Kotri enthralled the audience

with his soulful renditions, infusing the event with melody and energy. The gathering included a distinguished array of dignitaries: local IAS and IPS officers, UP Additional DIG Killad Satyanarayana, Satya Sai district Joint Collector Bharadwaja, Parishad members, and numerous community leaders. Their presence reflected the event's broad appeal, bridging administration, arts, and spirituality.

Speaker Patrudu, in his address, expressed gratitude for the honor, dedicating it to the people of Andhra Pradesh and crediting the NTR legacy for inspiring his

journey. He reaffirmed his dedication to advancing Telugu prosperity through governance and cultural initiatives. The program concluded with cultural performances, leaving attendees inspired amid chants of "Jai Telugu Tyagam."

"This celebration not only revived age-old traditions but also reinforced community bonds in Anakapalli district, showcasing the enduring spirit of Andhra's cultural ethos. Organizers hailed the seamless execution, crediting volunteer efforts and administrative support."

TPN Bureau | January 16, 2026

Srikalahasti: Revered as the "Southern Kashi," the sacred pilgrimage town of Srikalahasti has been thrown into dismay as its Hindu cremation ground remains uncleared this Sankranti season, denying families the chance to honor their ancestors. Every year, municipal workers meticulously clean the site, allowing sons, daughters, and relatives to visit family tombs, offer prayers, and perform rituals in remembrance of departed parents. This year, however, officials have completely overlooked their duties.

Overgrown with thorny bushes, the cremation ground has become inaccessible, preventing any family from approaching the samadhis (memorial tombs) for worship. The neglect has shattered a cherished tradition, leaving residents heartbroken during the festive Sankranti period. Yesterday, the poignant scene at the site underscored the disparity. Srikalahasti MLA Bojjala Sudheer Reddy, accompanied by family

members, peacefully conducted prayers at the samadhis of his father, Gopal Anna, and Baba Hari Anna. This ritual, a hallmark of Sankranti, symbolizes reverence for forebears. Yet, while the MLA upheld the custom, ordinary citizens of Srikalahasti found themselves barred from similar observances due to the site's deplorable state. Local voices express frustration over municipal authorities' failure to fulfill responsibilities. "This is a yearly tradition that binds our community to its roots," said one resident, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Overgrown weeds and thorns make it impossible to even reach the tombs. Even those unable to visit on Sankranti plan to come on Tai Amavasya or Ratha Saptami now that's not feasible either." The

lapse highlights a broader accountability gap. Elected representatives like MLA Sudheer Reddy are urged to intervene, issuing directives to municipal staff. "Authorities show no response, so leaders must step forward," the resident added. As a media conduit, we echo this plea: Commissioner Anjuru Taraka Srinivasulu must ensure immediate cleanup to restore the sacred space. This negligence is deeply distressing, especially in a town synonymous with piety. With festivals like Tai Amavasya approaching, prompt action could salvage the rituals for grieving families.

Municipal inaction not only disrespects traditions but erodes public trust in governance. Residents await swift measures to reclaim their right to ancestral homage.

India–Taliban Engagement Marks a Strategic Shift in South Asian Geopolitics

For the first time since the Taliban returned to power in Kabul in August 2021, an officially appointed Taliban diplomat has assumed charge in New Delhi. Noor Ahmad Noor, the Taliban's newly designated ambassador to India, took over the Afghan Embassy in the Indian capital last week. Shortly thereafter, he met Anand Prakash, Joint Secretary in charge of the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran Division at India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). According to a statement issued by the Taliban's embassy, discussions focused on strengthening political and trade ties, including easing visa procedures.

This development marks a significant milestone in the evolving relationship between India and the Taliban-led Afghan government. It also reflects a broader recalibration of regional alignments, particularly as relations between the Taliban and Pakistan continue to deteriorate.

From Reluctance to Engagement

India's engagement with the Taliban has been cautious but steadily progressive. Nearly a year ago, on January 8, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Taliban Foreign Minister Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai. That meeting, described as involving "detailed discussions" on bilateral relations, was the first high-level interaction between the two sides since the Taliban takeover, coming after a four-year gap in

formal engagement.

Following the Dubai talks, the Taliban described India as a "significant regional partner," a notable endorsement at a time when tensions between Kabul and Islamabad were rapidly escalating. Pakistan had launched airstrikes in Afghanistan's border regions, ostensibly to target militants. The Taliban, however, accused Islamabad of causing civilian casualties. India publicly criticised Pakistan's actions and expressed concern over the loss of innocent lives, further widening the diplomatic gap between Pakistan and the Taliban.

A Spate of High-Level Visits

Since then, India-Taliban relations have gathered momentum. Over the past year, three senior Taliban officials have visited New Delhi in quick succession. These include Taliban Foreign Minister Muttaiq in October, Trade Minister Haji Nooruddin Azizi soon after, and Acting Health Minister Noor Jalal Jalali in December. Parallelly, New Delhi announced its decision to upgrade its representative office in Kabul to a full-fledged embassy.

The arrival of Noor Ahmad Noor as the Taliban's official envoy in India is thus part of a broader pattern of deepening engagement rather than an isolated event.

Pakistan's Anger and Accusations

Noori's appointment coincided with sharp criti-



cism from Islamabad. Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar publicly questioned the nature of India-Taliban cooperation, accusing Kabul of allowing Afghan soil to be used for attacks against Pakistan under "foreign designs." In a particularly provocative remark, he asked, "What kind of Islam is this where you take money from India to carry out explosions here?"

Pakistan has long accused both India and the Taliban of supporting Baloch separatists and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). These accusations come amid a sharp surge in militant violence inside Pakistan, with more than 5,000 terror incidents reported in 2025

alone.

However, blaming India for Pakistan's internal security crisis reflects Islamabad's longstanding tendency to externalise its failures. Historically, Pakistan has found itself at odds with every regime in Kabul, regardless of ideology. The Taliban, once considered Pakistan's strategic asset, are no exception.

Regional Consensus on Taliban Engagement

The appointment of Noor Ahmad Noor also highlights the Taliban's broader effort to expand their diplomatic footprint and gain international legitimacy. India is neither the first nor the only country to accept an official Taliban envoy. China was the earliest to do so, fol-

lowed by Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, and Pakistan itself.

In that sense, India's move aligns with an emerging regional consensus that pragmatic engagement with the Taliban is preferable to isolation, particularly when it comes to humanitarian assistance, regional stability, and economic connectivity.

India's Strategic and Humanitarian Calculus

From New Delhi's perspective, Afghanistan stands out as a rare foreign policy success in an otherwise volatile neighbourhood. As Bangladesh deepens its engagement with Pakistan—where the military and intelligence agencies are increasingly influential—India's grow-

ing presence in Afghanistan offers strategic depth and leverage in the region.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has repeatedly emphasised India's "people-centric" approach to Afghanistan. This includes humanitarian aid, medical assistance, food supplies, and vaccines—efforts that have sustained India's goodwill among ordinary Afghans even amid political upheaval.

At the same time, engagement with the Taliban opens significant economic opportunities. Afghanistan requires massive investment across sectors, from healthcare and textiles to infrastructure and mining. The country is home to mineral reserves estimated to be worth trillions of dollars, and India has prior experience implementing large infrastructure projects there under the previous Afghan government.

Trade Dynamics: India Gains, Pakistan Loses

Pakistan's frequent closure of border crossings and its weaponisation of trade and transit routes have forced Afghanistan to seek alternative pathways. India has emerged as a major beneficiary of this shift. Afghan trade has increasingly been rerouted through Central Asia and Iran, particularly via the Chabahar port, bypassing Pakistan entirely. Afghanistan has also begun substituting goods previously imported from Pakistan with supplies from other countries, notably India.

Pharmaceuticals are a key example, with Indian exports replacing Pakistani products in Afghan markets. The numbers underscore this transformation. Transit trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan has collapsed from \$6.7 billion in FY23 to just \$1.01 billion in FY25. Bilateral trade fell to \$594 million in the first half of FY 2025-26, down from \$1.26 billion during the same period the previous year.

In contrast, India emerged as Afghanistan's largest export destination in October 2025, importing \$103.9 million worth of goods out of Afghanistan's total exports of \$274.9 million during that month.

Trade Suspension and Economic Fallout

Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid has publicly acknowledged the progress in relations with India, praising New Delhi's humanitarian assistance and expressing a desire to expand cooperation, particularly in healthcare and commerce.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan has suspended trade with Pakistan entirely, refusing to reopen border crossings until Islamabad significantly improves relations. While the closures have hurt Afghanistan, the economic impact on Pakistan has been far more severe. Pakistani exporters are reportedly losing around \$177 million every month, alongside losses to transport companies, warehouses, port operations, and transit revenues linked to Karachi Port. Though Pakistan has

called for reopening the borders, Afghanistan appears in no rush, insisting that any resumption must occur under strict conditions.

Timing Is Everything

India's strategy goes beyond merely filling supply gaps. Alongside increased use of the Chabahar port, New Delhi has moved to activate air corridors between Indian cities and Kabul. These initiatives reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan while incentivising the Taliban to ensure stability for Indian trade with Central Asia—a region Pakistan has historically sought to block India from accessing.

Conclusion

The recalibration of relations between India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan is increasingly being shaped by economics rather than ideology. In this evolving equation, India has positioned itself as a reliable partner, Afghanistan as a pragmatic actor seeking alternatives, and Pakistan as the principal loser—largely due to its own inability to maintain stable and constructive relationships with its neighbours.

What began as a diplomatic shift has now become a strategic realignment, one in which timing, trade, and trust are redefining regional power dynamics.

Iran on the Brink: Why a US Strike Would Shake the Gulf and the World

Tehran's Immediate Response

Iran's leadership reacted swiftly and sharply. Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Speaker of Iran's parliament, warned that any attack on Iran would render American military bases, ships, and assets across the region legitimate targets. More strikingly, he said Iran would not wait to retaliate after an initial strike but would act upon what it perceives as clear indicators of an imminent threat.

Whether this was bluster aimed at domestic audiences or a genuine operational warning remains unclear. What is certain is that such statements dramatically raise the cost of miscalculation. They suggest that Tehran is prepared to abandon strategic patience in favour of pre-emptive action—an alarming prospect in an already volatile region.

Why the Gulf Is Nervous

To understand the anxiety sweeping through the Gulf, one must understand the scale of the American military footprint in the region. Iran does not lack for visible targets.

In Qatar lies Al Udeid Air Base, the largest US air base in the Middle East and the forward headquarters of US Central Command. It is critical for American air operations across the region. Bahrain hosts the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, responsible for overseeing operations in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and parts of the Indian Ocean. Kuwait houses tens of thousands of American troops and functions as a major logistics and staging hub. Saudi Arabia once again hosts US personnel and

air defence systems. The United Arab Emirates provides access to ports and airfields regularly used by American forces. US warships patrol Gulf waters continuously.

These installations are fixed, known, and within Iranian missile range. When Iranian officials warn that retaliation would not be confined to

inside Iran

If President Trump authorises military strikes, the immediate effect inside Iran is unlikely to be regime collapse. More plausibly, it would trigger regime consolidation. Nationalism would almost certainly override internal grievances. The Iranian state would shift into survival mode. Protesters

ed. Hardliners would be empowered. Longstanding Iranian suspicions of foreign interference would be validated. This is the central irony of intervention: the louder Washington cheers pro-testers, the more aggressively Tehran tightens its grip.

History offers sobering lessons. External pres-

ened. It has spent decades preparing for precisely this scenario. While it may be weaker today than at any point in recent decades, a limited strike would not neutralise its capabilities. Iran's response would likely be calibrated and symmetrical. A symbolic American strike would invite a symbolic Iranian retaliation.

warfare. Regional and Global Fallout

The regional consequences would be immediate. Shipping lanes could be threatened. Insurance premiums would soar. Energy markets would react violently.

Gulf states would publicly call for restraint while privately preparing for worst-case scenarios.

Iran-aligned militias, weakened but not eliminated by Israeli strikes, remain capable of disruptive action. They would not require direct orders. A single drone attack or misjudged response could trigger an escalation driven more by momentum than strategy.

Globally, the ripple effects would be profound. Russia would quietly welcome the distraction, hoping it eases pressure on its war in Ukraine. Moscow has already warned Washington that military action against Iran could destabilise the world. China would position itself rhetorically as a stabilising force while exploiting economic opportunities, potentially accelerating non-dollar energy trade with Tehran and reinforcing its narrative of American-driven instability.

India would once again find itself walking a diplomatic tightrope. With longstanding ties to Iran and deepening strategic relations with the United States, New Delhi would oppose military escalation without directly confronting Washington. Rising energy prices would be particularly damaging for India's economy.

What the Protesters Actually Want

It is crucial to remember why protests erupted in Iran in the first place. Years of sanctions have crippled the economy. In-

flation, unemployment, and declining living standards pushed people onto the streets in December. These are fundamentally domestic grievances. External attempts at regime change would only complicate the protesters' objectives.

Change, if it comes, must come from within. Outside intervention has historically made that harder, not easier.

President Trump is undoubtedly aware of Iran's history with the United States. The 1979 Islamic Revolution, the seizure of the US embassy, and the 44-day hostage crisis left deep scars. President Jimmy Carter watched diplomacy collapse and his presidency unravel after a failed rescue mission in the Iranian desert. Those images—burning helicopters and blindfolded hostages—became symbols of American humiliation. Carter never recovered politically.

The world is different today, but memories linger.

An Uncertain Road Ahead

Iran's protests are now inseparable from geopolitics. Diplomacy is becoming harder. Escalation looms closer. President Trump has the power to strike Iran. His military is unmatched. What remains elusive—just as it was four decades ago—is certainty over outcomes.

History is instructive. Intervention in Iran has never delivered the control or transformation Washington seeks. It has delivered instability, resentment, and consequences that far outlast any presidency. Afghanistan in 2021 should serve as a final reminder: overwhelming power does not guarantee strategic success.



one theatre, these are precisely the assets they are referring to.

Recent moves by Washington and London have added to the uncertainty. Both countries have reduced personnel at Al Udeid, describing the partial pullback as precautionary. Britain has temporarily closed its embassy in Tehran, relocating operations outside Iran. Whether these steps signal preparation for conflict or merely heightened caution is difficult to determine—but the message to regional capitals is unmistakable.

The Likely Impact In-

would be labelled collaborators or traitors—indeed, Western media reports already suggest more than 250 individuals have been identified and charged. Security forces would justify crackdowns as matters of existential necessity.

This is the typical response of authoritarian systems under external attack. Space for reform shrinks, not expands.

A US strike would not bring Western-style democracy closer. It would likely push it further out of reach. Legitimate economic and political grievances would be discredit-

sure helped weaken Syria's Bashar al-Assad over time, but his eventual collapse came from internal fractures, not symbolic strikes. He ultimately fled to Russia when the regime imploded from within—not because of Western air campaigns.

Military Options, Strategic Dilemmas

The United States has no shortage of military options—long-range bombers, cruise missiles, cyber operations, and covert action among them. All are feasible. None are easy.

Iran is large, militarised, and battle-hard-

BJP Set for Another Landslide in Nagpur Civic Polls, Congress Stagnant



The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) appears set for another emphatic victory in Nagpur, the ideological stronghold of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), as counting trends for the Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) elections point to a near-repeat of its dominant 2017 performance. As of 5 pm, the ruling alliance is comfortably ahead in the

151-member civic body, leaving the Congress once again struggling to translate an aggressive campaign into electoral gains.

According to the latest trends, the BJP is leading on 109 seats, while its ally, the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, is ahead on three seats. The Congress, despite mounting a "Mission Hundred" campaign, is leading on

only 27 seats—almost identical to its 2017 tally of 28. If these trends hold, the BJP could equal or even surpass its previous performance, when it won 108 seats and secured a clear majority in the civic body. Nagpur holds immense symbolic and political importance for the BJP. The city is the birthplace and headquarters of the RSS, while municipal elections are typically driven by hyper-local civic issues, Nagpur remains a prestige battle for the BJP due to its ideological significance.

Polling for the Nagpur Municipal Corporation was held on Thursday alongside elections for 28 other municipal corporations across Maharashtra. The results also indicate a shifting political landscape in the city. Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) is poised to enter the NMC for the first time, with one of its candidates leading in her ward. Meanwhile, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) appears to be gaining a foothold, with four of its candidates currently leading. These include Alisha Khan, Reshma Nandgawli, Sofia Sheikh, and Pawan Koye, all of whom are ahead in ward number 3 in the Asinagar zone, an area with a significant Muslim population.

This development suggests a fragmentation of the minority vote bank that the Congress has traditionally relied upon, further weakening its prospects in the city.

In terms of seat-sharing, the BJP contested 143 seats, with eight allotted to the Shiv Sena. Ajit Pawar's NCP fielded candidates in over 90 seats, while the Congress chose to contest all 151 seats independently, without any alliance. The Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) contested 79 seats, and the AIMIM fielded candidates in six wards.

BMC Setback Signals Existential Crisis for Raj Thackeray's MNS

Mumbai's evolving political landscape is posing an existential challenge for Raj Thackeray and his Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), once known for its aggressive, street-level politics inspired by the late Bal Thackeray. The party's underwhelming performance in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections has underlined the steady erosion of its support base and raised serious questions about its future relevance in Maharashtra politics.

As counting continues for the 2026 BMC elections, the MNS is leading in just 10 wards, a modest presence in India's richest civic body. In contrast, the Shiv Sena (UBT), led by Raj Thackeray's cousin Uddhav Thackeray, has managed to remain competitive, leading in around 75 seats by successfully holding together its alliance. However, even this alliance has fallen well short of challenging the dominant BJP-Shiv Sena



(Eknath Shinde) combine, which is together leading in approximately 118 wards.

The results are particularly damaging for Raj Thackeray, who mounted an intense campaign marked by fiery speeches and a renewed emphasis on Marathi identity. His recent rapprochement with Uddhav Thackeray had briefly sparked hope among supporters that a reunited Thackeray brand could reshape Mumbai's political equations. Instead, the elec-

torate appears unconvinced, signalling waning appetite for the confrontational politics that once defined the Thackeray legacy. Perhaps the most serious consequence of this poor showing is the growing threat of derecognition for the MNS as a state party. The party's vote share had already plummeted to just 1.55 per cent in the 2024 Assembly elections, with defections to the BJP or Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena increasingly likely as work-

ers seek political security. The results also reveal that the attempted consolidation of the Marathi vote through identity politics failed to materialise. The "Thackeray nostalgia" factor appears insufficient to counter the BJP's superior organisation and ground-level machinery. With diminishing institutional relevance, Raj Thackeray may increasingly turn to street politics, language agitations, and media-centric activism to stay visible. In the long term, the MNS could even be forced to consider aligning with the BJP-led Mahayuti as a junior partner, though no such talks have surfaced yet.

Compounding the party's troubles is the lack of a clear succession plan. Amit Thackeray's third-place finish in Mahim during last year's Assembly elections has raised doubts about his ability to revive the party. As Maharashtra politics crystallises into a bipolar Mahayuti versus MVA contest, the MNS now

Congress at a Crossroads in Tamil Nadu: DMK Deadlock, TVK Temptation and High-Stakes Talks Ahead

The Congress leadership has begun a series of high-level consultations ahead of the five Assembly elections scheduled for April–May, with Tamil Nadu emerging as one of the most sensitive and closely watched battlegrounds. Later today, Rahul Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge are set to meet senior Tamil Nadu Congress leaders, a discussion that could finally clarify the party's alliance strategy in the state.

For nearly two decades, the Congress has been allied with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu. However, internal divisions have surfaced within the state unit, with some leaders now pushing for a potential alliance with actor Vijay's newly launched party, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK). Whether the Congress is willing—or able—to break away from its long-standing partnership with the DMK remains uncertain.

At the heart of the seat-sharing and power-shar-



ing. Traditionally, the DMK has restricted its alliances with Congress and other partners to electoral arrangements, keeping governance firmly under its own control. This time, however, Congress is demanding a share in the government if the alliance returns to power. Sources say the party is seeking at least six ministerial berths in Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's cabinet. DMK leaders, however, have categorically ruled out any such arrangement, insisting there is no scope for Congress to join the

government. Seat-sharing talks have been equally fraught. In the 2021 Assembly elections, Congress contested 25 seats as part of the DMK-led alliance. For the 2026 polls, the party had expected an expanded presence. Instead, sources indicate the DMK is offering only 19 seats. Congress, citing its historical performance, is demanding around 35 seats. In earlier elections, the party contested 41 seats in 2016, 63 in 2011, and 48 in 2006. Negotiations, which were supposed to conclude by mid-December,

remain unresolved more than a month later. The emergence of TVK has added a new dimension to the talks. Senior Congress sources claim Vijay's party is willing to offer Congress more than 60 seats and even include it as a partner in government. Internal Congress surveys reportedly show TVK commanding close to 30 per cent vote share, prompting the party to view Vijay's popularity as a way to loosen the DMK's dominance. Congress leaders also believe Vijay's appeal, particularly among Christian voters,

could have spillover benefits in neighbouring Kerala.

Rahul Gandhi's recent gestures have further fuelled speculation.

He publicly supported Vijay's film "Jana Nayagan" amid censorship issues and spoke to the actor after the Karur stampede.

Rahul's aide Praveen Chakravarty has also met Vijay and openly criticised the DMK government's financial management, signalling growing warmth towards TVK.

Despite this, many Tamil Nadu Congress leaders favour sticking with the DMK for reasons of electoral practicality.

Analysts suggest the Congress may be using TVK as leverage to extract better terms from its traditional ally rather than seriously planning a break. Given the DMK's importance to the INDIA bloc and Congress's weak independent base in Tamil Nadu, the high command may ultimately prioritise national considerations over state-level ambitions.

With Congress having failed to produce a chief minister in Tamil Nadu, the party is likely to face a difficult decision. The DMK's support is crucial for Congress to form a government, but the party's alliance with TVK would be a significant blow to the DMK's political influence in the state.

TVK's entry into the political arena has created a new dynamic in Tamil Nadu politics. The party's popularity, particularly among younger voters, has raised hopes of a political revolution. However, the party's lack of political experience and internal divisions pose significant challenges. The DMK's alliance with TVK would be a major setback for Congress, but the party's continued support of the DMK would be a significant blow to the DMK's political influence in the state.

India's Highways to Go Cashless: Toll Payments to Shift Fully Digital from April 1

India's highway travel is on the verge of a major digital transformation. The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is preparing to ban cash payments at all national highway toll plazas starting April 1. Commuters will be required to use either FASTag or UPI for toll payments, marking a significant step toward faster, more efficient, and transparent highway travel.

While an official notification has not yet been issued, the ministry is reportedly finalising preparations for a smooth transition. The move is expected to significantly reduce congestion at toll plazas. Long queues caused by cash transactions will become a thing of the past, and travel efficiency is set to improve dramatically.

The ban on cash payments aims to tackle several challenges associated with traditional toll collection. Faster Travel: With digital payments, there is no waiting for change or manual receipts, allowing vehicles to pass through toll plazas more quickly.

Fuel Savings: Frequent stops and starts at toll booths consume extra diesel and petrol. Streamlining payments will reduce fuel wastage and contribute to more eco-friendly travel.

Transparency: Digital payments create a clear, trackable record of all transactions, reducing discrepancies and enhancing accountability.

Looking Ahead: Barrier-Free Tolling

This digital transition is only the first step toward smarter, faster, and more efficient highways, promising a better experience for commuters while paving the way for the future barrier-free tolling system.



Supreme Court Directs Karisma Kapoor to Respond to Priya Kapur's Divorce Records Application



New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday directed actor Karisma Kapoor to file her objections within two weeks regarding a fresh application submitted by Priya Kapur, seeking access to details of Karisma's 2016 divorce proceedings with late businessman Sunjay Kapur. The matter was listed before a bench headed by Justice AS Chandrakar.

In a closed-chamber hearing, Karisma Kapoor's legal team opposed Priya Kapur's application, arguing that it was not maintainable. Her lawyers contended that the consent terms and the divorce decree had already been filed in another matter involving Karisma Kapoor's two children in the Delhi High Court. They described the new application as unnecessary and potentially intrusive into confidential family court proceedings.

Priya Kapur's lawyers, however, stated that the application aims to obtain certified copies of pleadings, documents, and orders

from the divorce proceedings to provide the full factual background in an ongoing estate dispute.

This dispute revolves around the Rs 30,000 crore estate left behind by Sunjay Kapur, with Karisma Kapoor's children alleging that the will attributed to their father was forged by their stepmother, Priya Kapur.

Maninder Singh, representing Priya Kapur, emphasized that clarity on the divorce settlement is crucial to determine whether the issues currently raised by Karisma Kapoor's children were already addressed and resolved during Sunjay Kapur's lifetime.

The application was originally filed by Priya Kapur in November 2025, seeking access to court documents related to the matrimonial settlement between her and Karisma Kapoor. Karisma's lawyers, Ravi Sharma and Apoorv Shukla, countered that the application was "frivolous" and intended solely to extract personal information from a private

family law matter. During the hearing, the Supreme Court directed Karisma Kapoor to submit her objections in the form of a reply within two weeks. No formal notice has yet been issued in the matter.

The 2016 divorce between Karisma Kapoor and Sunjay Kapur had been resolved amicably, with mutual consent. The consent terms recorded by the court granted custody of their two children to Karisma Kapoor, while Sunjay Kapur was granted visitation and access rights. At that time, the Supreme Court had acknowledged that all disputes between the couple had been amicably settled following a hearing before Justices AK Sikri and RK Agrawal.

The case now highlights the intersection of family law and high-profile estate disputes, with the Supreme Court's intervention emphasizing the need for procedural clarity and protection of sensitive personal records.

One Year In, Trump Dominates U.S. Politics — But Questions Loom Over How Long His Hold Will Last

One year after Donald Trump returned to the White House, his influence over American politics and global affairs remains unmistakable — but an increasingly uncertain future raises questions about how long his dominance will last.

Since being sworn in for a second term in January 2025, Trump has stamped his imprint on the presidency with an assertive, highly personal leadership style that critics say has weakened traditional checks and balances. Observers note that ordinary presidential norms have given way to an approach driven more by impulse and individual will than by established institutional processes.

The past year has been marked by a flurry of headline-grabbing actions. Early in his term, Trump issued sweeping pardons to hundreds of pro-Trump rioters involved in the Capitol attack, a move that symbolised his readiness to reshape legal and political norms. On the international stage, he ordered military action against Venezuela and pursued controversial policies on tariffs and foreign relations — dramatic gestures that have unsettled allies and rivals alike.

Legal and political analysts say Trump's presidency has often operated as if the usual constraints of governance do not apply. A law professor in New York described the current era as one in which the presidency has been "personalised" like never before, reflecting Trump's

own approach to power and public messaging.

Yet experts also stress that Trump's grip on leadership is not unassailable. The United States faces several key tests this year that could reshape his influence. Midterm elections in November loom large, with control of Congress at stake. Historically, these elections act as a referendum on the sitting president, and low approval ratings coupled with public discontent over economic pressures could spell trouble for Republicans if voters shift their support.

Political observers warn that a significant loss in Congress could leave Trump in a weakened position, effectively a "lame duck" leader for the final two years of his term. Legal challenges also present hurdles: the Supreme Court may limit the administration's use of tariffs, and Congress might push back against executive orders seen as bypassing legislative authority. Foreign policy, a major focus of Trump's agenda, has also drawn mixed reactions. Some supporters applaud his bold moves abroad, but critics argue that focus on international interventions has distracted from domestic issues that matter deeply to many voters.

As 2026 unfolds, the central question facing Trump and his allies is whether a media dominating, personality-driven presidency can withstand electoral realities and institutional limits — or whether the moment of Trump will soon wane.



Pakistan Expands Defence Footprint in the Arab World with "Islamic NATO" and Major Arms Deals



Pakistan is significantly expanding its military and defence presence across the Arab world, pursuing major arms deals and exploring a trilateral security partnership with Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which analysts have termed an "Islamic NATO." These moves highlight Islamabad's growing ambition to play a more prominent role in regional security beyond its traditional sphere of influence.

At the centre of this expansion is Pakistan's effort to formalise a defence cooperation framework with Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Officials say the proposed pact would commit all three countries to collective security measures similar in principle to NATO's mutual defence clause. Although negotiations are ongoing, the agreement reflects a shared interest in closer military collaboration among Muslim-majority nations. In parallel, Pakistan is negotiating multi-billion-dollar arms deals with several countries. Reports indicate that Islamabad is close to finalising a \$1.5 billion contract to supply weapons and aircraft to Sudan's military, including light attack aircraft, drones, and air-defence systems.

Discussions with Saudi Arabia could result in a fighter jet agreement worth around \$2 billion, further strengthening defence ties between the two countries. These developments signal a shift in Pakistan's role from primarily providing military training and support to becoming a significant exporter of

defence equipment in the Middle East. The JF-17 Thunder fighter jet, co-produced with China, has attracted interest from nations such as Iraq and other states seeking cost-effective military platforms. Analysts note that Pakistan's expanding clientele enhances its strategic influence but also requires careful diplomatic navigation.

Experts caution that Islamabad must manage complex regional dynamics, as conflicts in countries like Sudan, Libya, and Yemen involve rival factions backed by different powers. Selling similar weaponry to opposing sides could complicate Pakistan's relations with key partners and affect its long-term credibility as a defence supplier.

Pakistan's increased engagement comes amid intensified geopolitical competition, with several countries reassessing military procurement strategies. As Islamabad strengthens its strategic agreements and expands its defence exports, the regional security architecture could evolve, reflecting new patterns of cooperation outside traditional Western-led alliances. Overall, Pakistan's push into the Arab defence market marks a notable chapter in its foreign policy and military diplomacy. With the combination of high-profile arms deals and proposed security partnerships, Islamabad is positioning itself as a key player in Middle Eastern security, potentially reshaping regional power balances in South and West Asia.

India and EU Poised for Landmark Trade Deal Amid Republic Day Visit



India is preparing for a historic diplomatic engagement as top leaders of the European Union (EU) arrive in the country for the 77th Republic Day celebrations, with a potential trade deal expected to be a highlight of their visit. European Council President António Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen are scheduled to be chief guests at the Republic Day parade in New Delhi. Their visit will be followed by the 16th India-EU Summit, where officials aim to finalise negotiations on a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

The proposed Broad-based Trade and Investment (BTIA) has been in discussion since 2007 but faced several delays over the years. Talks gained renewed momentum in 2022 amid shifting global economic dynamics and strategic interests. Sources say that most chapters

of the agreement have been concluded, with only a few sensitive issues pending resolution, including matters related to agriculture and the EU's carbon tax policies. Indian and EU officials are optimistic that these remaining

concerns will be addressed ahead of the leaders' summit.

Alongside the formal summit, an India-EU Business Forum is expected to take place, emphasising economic cooperation and showcasing opportunities

for bilateral trade and investment. The potential agreement is expected to cover sectors including manufacturing, technology, clean energy, pharmaceuticals, and services, paving the way for stronger economic ties and

greater market access on both sides.

If signed, this FTA would mark one of India's most significant trade agreements to date and would represent a milestone in EU engagement in Asia. Both sides have high-

lighted their shared commitment to a rules-based international order and sustainable economic growth, reinforcing the strategic and economic importance of the partnership.

The Republic Day invitation reflects the growing significance of India-EU relations, which have expanded across technology, security, sustainability, and trade. The EU leaders' visit also follows increased diplomatic and commercial engagement in recent years, including previous high-level visits and the establishment of new economic initiatives.

As India welcomes its European guests, attention is focused on the potential announcement of the landmark trade agreement, which could redefine bilateral economic relations and create a new chapter of cooperation between the world's fifth-largest economy and one of its major trading blocs.

Trump Accepts Symbolic Nobel Peace Prize Medal from Venezuelan Opposition Leader in Unprecedented Gesture



In a highly unusual diplomatic moment at the White House on Thursday, former U.S. President Donald Trump was presented with the Nobel Peace Prize medal by Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado — a gesture he described as "wonderful" but which has sparked controversy and clarification from Nobel officials.

Machado, who was awarded the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to promote democracy and human rights in Venezuela, presented the medal to Trump during a private meeting. She said the act was in recognition of his perceived support for Venezuelan freedom and democratic transition, describing the transfer as a "symbol of mutual respect" and gratitude on behalf of the Venezuelan people. Trump took to his social media platform to thank Machado, calling her "a wonderful woman who has been through so much" and praising the gesture as one of respect and honour.

A framed version of the Nobel Peace Prize medal was

handed to Trump inside the White House, and a senior White House official confirmed that he intends to keep it. The meeting, which lasted more than an hour, also included discussions between Machado and lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

However, the Norwegian

Nobel Institute has been unequivocal in stressing that Nobel Peace Prizes cannot be transferred or shared. Under the rules of the Nobel Foundation, once a prize is awarded, the title of laureate is permanent and non-transferable, even if the physical medal changes hands. The committee's clarification underscores that Machado's gift does not make Trump a Nobel laureate. The extraordinary exchange comes amid a backdrop of political upheaval in Venezuela. U.S. forces recently captured long-time Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, a move that re-

shaped the nation's leadership landscape. Machado, once a leading figure of the Venezuelan opposition and expected to lead the country, has struggled to maintain political momentum after Trump's administration chose to back Vice President Delcy Rodríguez as interim leader, a decision that disappointed many of Machado's supporters. Critics have described Machado's action as symbolic and lacking institutional significance, while analysts say the gesture illustrates broader political manoeuvring rather than a substantive recognition of Trump's global peace efforts. Nobel officials reiterated that while the physical medal may be possessed by someone else, the honour and status of Nobel Peace Prize remain solely with the original laureate.

The controversy has reignited debate about the meaning of prestigious international awards, political symbolism, and the boundaries between personal admiration and official recognition.

British MP Raises Alarm Over Violence Against Minorities in Bangladesh Ahead of Elections



A senior British lawmaker has sounded the alarm over escalating violence against religious minorities in Bangladesh, describing the situation as "disastrous" and urging urgent international attention ahead of the country's upcoming national elections.

Conservative Member of Parliament Bob Blackman, speaking in the House of Commons, highlighted reports of attacks targeting minority communities, particularly Hindus. He said individuals are being murdered, homes and temples destroyed, and other reli-

gious groups are facing similar persecution. Blackman's remarks have intensified concerns among Western lawmakers about human rights conditions in the South Asian nation.

During his speech, Blackman called on the British government to take decisive

action to protect minorities and ensure that the upcoming elections are free, fair, and inclusive. He noted that he had raised the matter in parliamentary discussions and urged the Foreign Secretary to outline concrete steps to address the crisis.

The lawmaker also linked the rise in violence to the tense political climate ahead of the February 12 national elections. He pointed out that one of Bangladesh's major political parties has been barred from contesting under the current interim government, raising concerns about the credibility of the electoral process. Blackman warned that exclusion of significant political forces, combined with the rise of extremist rhetoric, could further destabilise the country.

In his address, Blackman stated: "Hindu men are being murdered on the streets; their houses are being burned; the temples are being desecrated; and other religious minorities are suffering similar fates." He emphasised that the UK must use its diplomatic influence to encourage Bangladesh to uphold democratic norms

and protect vulnerable communities.

Other British MPs from multiple parties have expressed similar concerns, stressing that credible elections cannot take place if major political groups are excluded. They supported Blackman's call for Parliament to receive a clear action plan from the government on promoting inclusive elections and safeguarding minority rights.

The UK government has reiterated its longstanding commitment to human rights and stated that it continues to engage with Bangladeshi authorities to support peaceful and credible elections. Officials condemned all acts of violence based on religion or ethnicity and stressed the importance of ensuring the safety and dignity of all citizens.

As Bangladesh approaches a pivotal electoral moment, the issue of minority rights and political inclusivity remains under intense international scrutiny, highlighting the challenges the country faces in maintaining social stability and democratic norms.

Indian Markets Set for Cautious Trade as Global Cues Remain Mixed



Indian equity markets are expected to begin the trading session on a muted note, with early indicators pointing to a flat to marginally positive opening. Signals from the Nifty suggested limited movement at the start, reflecting cautious investor sentiment amid mixed global cues and ongoing assessment of corporate

earnings.

Overnight, U.S. markets ended on a positive note, supported by selective buying in technology and financial stocks. Improved confidence around the U.S. economic outlook and expectations of policy stability helped Wall Street close higher. However, this optimism was only partially reflected across Asian

markets, where trading trends remained mixed in early hours. While some Asian indices registered modest gains, others traded lower, weighed down by concerns over regional growth and currency movements.

Back home, domestic benchmarks have been showing resilience but remain largely range-

bound. In the previous session, the Sensex and the Nifty witnessed intraday volatility, trimming gains after touching higher levels. The Nifty managed to hold above key psychological and technical levels, indicating underlying support, though profit-taking at elevated valuations capped further upside. Market par-

ticipants continue to remain selective, preferring stock-specific opportunities over broad-based buying.

Sectorally, trends have been mixed. Information technology stocks have shown relative strength, supported by recent quarterly results and improved outlook commentary from major companies. Banking and financial stocks, which carry significant weight in benchmark indices, have been trading cautiously as investors assess asset quality trends, credit growth, and margin outlooks. FMCG and other defensive sectors have provided stability, while metal and energy stocks have reacted to fluctuations in global commodity prices.

Investor focus is now firmly on the ongoing earnings season, which is expected to play a decisive role in shaping near-term market direction. Quarterly results from large corporates are being closely tracked for insights into demand conditions, cost

pressures, and margin sustainability. Any earnings surprises could trigger sharp stock-specific movements, even as the broader indices remain confined within a narrow range. In addition to earnings, global macroeconomic developments, foreign institutional investor activity, crude oil prices, and currency movements are likely to influence market sentiment. The rupee's trajectory against the U.S. dollar and trends in global bond yields will also be monitored for cues on capital flows. Overall, market experts believe that while the near-term outlook points to consolidation, the broader trend remains supported by domestic fundamentals. Investors are advised to remain cautious, focus on fundamentally strong companies, and avoid aggressive positions until clearer signals emerge from global markets and corporate earnings.

Global Bond Index Snub Raises Odds of RBI Expanding Debt-Buying Program



The unexpected deferral of Indian government bonds' inclusion in a major global index has triggered market speculation that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may expand its record debt-buying program in the current fiscal quarter. Investors and analysts say the central bank could step up purchases to stabilize yields and support liquidity amid subdued foreign inflows.

Bloomberg Index Services recently postponed the inclusion of Indian debt in its flagship Global Aggregate Index, disappointing market participants who had anticipated significant foreign capital inflows. Analysts had estimated phased investments of roughly \$10-\$20 billion had the integration proceeded as planned. The postponement has heightened uncertainty in the bond market, pushing up yields on India's benchmark 10-year government securities by nearly 10 basis points. This comes at a time when the market is already grappling with heavy government borrowing and weaker overseas demand.

Since December, the RBI has been aggressively intervening in the sovereign debt market through open market operations (OMOs), purchasing around 2.54 trillion of government securities to anchor yields and support market liquidity. Additional purchases of roughly 500 billion are scheduled in the coming week. Market participants had largely expected such interventions to wind down as the financial year approaches its close in April. However, the global index snub has revived expectations that the RBI may continue buying government bonds, potentially adding another 1.5-2 trillion between February and March.

Market experts note that the central bank's actions are critical to maintaining investor confidence. Treasury officials have emphasized the importance of targeting liquid benchmark securities to send clear signals to the market. Traders, meanwhile, have expressed concern that purchases of less liquid securities may limit the effectiveness of yield management and constrain activity in the secondary market.

The bond market's reaction underscores the influence of global index inclusion, which is widely viewed as a catalyst for passive foreign investment flows into local debt markets. With the postponement, domestic liquidity and RBI intervention are expected to remain the primary support mechanisms for stabilizing yields.

As the fiscal year progresses, all eyes will remain on the RBI's next moves and how the market responds to evolving supply-demand dynamics. Analysts suggest that continued central bank support may be essential to offset the impact of heavy government borrowing and to maintain orderly functioning of India's sovereign bond market.

Budget 2026: Making the New Tax Regime a Clear Winner



As preparations intensify ahead of India's Union Budget 2026, tax experts and financial planners are focusing on ways to strengthen the new personal income tax regime so it appeals more broadly and becomes the preferred choice for taxpayers. While previous reforms have simplified the structure and offered significant relief, analysts believe targeted tweaks could further boost adoption and make the system more equitable and practical.

The new tax regime, redesigned in recent budgets, has already delivered notable benefits to taxpayers. By widening tax slabs and enhancing rebates, especially for middle income earners, the overhaul has reduced tax liabilities for many and simplified compliance by removing most deductions and exemptions. This shift has encouraged a growing number of taxpayers to opt for the new regime over the older, more complicated structure.

Still, there are concerns about gaps that could be addressed to "clear the runway" for the new regime to become a clear winner. One of the biggest criticisms is the absence of commonly used deductions such as house rent allowance and medical insurance, which many argue should be reintroduced in a limited form. Experts point out that allowing essential deductions would improve the regime's appeal without undermining its core objective of simplicity.

Another key suggestion is to increase the standard deduction, which has become the main source of relief under the new regime after most exemptions were removed. Raising this deduction could help offset the loss of other benefits and better reflect inflation and rising living costs, particularly for

SEBI's Mutual Fund Regulation Revamp to Reshape Industry from April 1



Mumbai, January 16 — The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has notified a comprehensive overhaul of mutual fund regulations, set to come into effect from April 1, marking a major step toward strengthening investor protection and improving transparency in the fast-growing

asset management industry. The revised framework is expected to significantly impact how mutual fund houses operate, disclose costs, and maintain governance standards.

A central feature of the new regulations is tighter control over expenses charged to investors. SEBI has clear-

ly defined which costs can be included in the Total Expense Ratio, ensuring that only legitimate and essential expenses are passed on to unitholders. Any costs falling outside the prescribed list will have to be borne by the asset management companies, sponsors, or trustees themselves. This

move is aimed at preventing hidden charges and ensuring that investors have a clearer understanding of what they are paying for.

The regulatory overhaul also places greater responsibility on trustees and independent directors. They will be required to actively monitor fund management agreements, compensation structures, related-party transactions, and overall fee reasonableness. Trustees must identify regulatory lapses, ensure timely corrective measures, and formally report compliance issues.

Another important change relates to the treatment of transaction-related costs. Expenses incurred directly for trade execution,

such as brokerage and exchange fees, have been clearly segregated from the base expense ratio. This distinction is expected to improve cost transparency and allow investors to make more accurate comparisons across different mutual fund schemes.

Disclosure norms have also been significantly strengthened. Mutual funds will now be required to provide more detailed and standardized reporting in their annual disclosures. Trustees will need to include comprehensive commentary on scheme performance, justification for expense levels, historical unit data, and detailed expense break-ups. These reports must be shared with investors in a timely digital format, enhancing accessibility and investor awareness.

From an industry perspective, the new rules may lead to high-

er compliance and operational costs in the short term, particularly for smaller fund houses. However, market participants believe the long-term benefits will outweigh these challenges. Improved transparency, stronger governance, and clearer cost structures are expected to boost investor confidence, encourage higher retail participation, and support sustainable growth in the mutual fund industry.

As the implementation date approaches, asset management companies are likely to accelerate system upgrades and internal audits to ensure compliance. Overall, SEBI's regulatory revamp is being viewed as a structural reform that aligns India's mutual fund industry with global best practices, reinforcing its role as a key pillar of the country's financial markets and household savings ecosystem.

Foreign Fund Rebalancing Triggers Equity Stake Changes in Aavas Financiers and IndiaMART



Institutional portfolio rebalancing by global investors has led to notable shifts in shareholding patterns of two prominent Indian listed companies, signalling dynamic flows in equity markets. Small Cap World Fund Inc., a global investment vehicle managed by Capital Group, exited its entire holding in Aavas Financiers and trimmed its stake in IndiaMART InterMESH through open market transactions on January 14. This move reflects active allocation strategies by foreign funds in response to evolving market conditions and investment outlooks.

Small Cap World Fund sold its entire 2.48 percent stake in Aavas Financiers, offloading 19.64 lakh shares at around 1,440 apiece for approximately 282.8 crore. Aavas Financiers, a housing finance company focused on retail and affordable housing segments, has been a favorite among institutional investors

due to its consistent growth in net sales and strong asset quality. The exit by the fund underscores shifting priorities among global small-cap investors, potentially influenced by valuation considera-

tions and broader macroeconomic signals. Stepping in to acquire these shares, HDFC Mutual Fund purchased 19.5 lakh equity shares, amounting to a 2.46 percent holding in Aavas Financiers for

segment, even as foreign portfolios recalibrate exposures.

Simultaneously, Small Cap World Fund reduced its stake in IndiaMART InterMESH, selling 6.26 lakh shares — roughly a 1.04 percent holding — for around 132.2 crore. Prior to the sale, the fund held about 1.83 percent in the B2B online marketplace company. This repositioning by a global fund highlights active risk management and profit-taking behaviour after periods of stock-specific or sectoral gains.

Acquiring the trimmed stake in IndiaMART, Nalanda India Equity Fund, managed by Singapore-based Nalanda Capital, bought 11.18 lakh shares, representing nearly a 1.86 percent stake valued at about 236 crore. The participation of another foreign institutional player indicates sustained interest from global equity investors in India's digital and technology-enabled ser-

vice providers, albeit with recalibrated risk frameworks.

The stock market responded to these bulk deals with modest price movements. Shares of Aavas Financiers saw a slight dip, while IndiaMART's stock fluctuated due to the change in major shareholdings. Such block transactions — particularly when involving foreign funds — often influence short-term liquidity and price discovery, as domestic and global institutions adjust portfolios in line with shifting investment priorities.

Market watchers view these developments as part of broader trends in institutional investing, where global funds periodically rotate holdings across sectors and geographies to optimise returns. The active participation of domestic mutual funds as buyers in these deals reflects robust local demand for solid growth stories in the financial and digital commerce arenas.

salaried individuals.

Experts also urge extending loan linked tax benefits to the new regime. Deductions for education loan interest and home loan interest, currently only available under the old regime, could be incorporated since they are administratively straightforward and tied to formal financial records.

There is a strong case for improving provisions for senior citizens, who currently receive fewer benefits under the new regime despite facing higher health related expenditures. Revisiting basic exemption limits and offering targeted relief for older taxpayers could make the system more inclusive.

Finally, observers note that tax policy should not stop at compliance ease but also support long term financial planning. Introducing capped incentives for retirement savings, health insurance, or first home purchases could strike a balance between simplicity and financial security, encouraging responsible financial behaviour without adding undue complexity.

With these refinements, Budget 2026 has an opportunity to deepen the new tax regime's appeal, helping it transition from a simplified alternative into the mainstream choice for a broader cross section of India's taxpayers.

A Sewing Mistake Creates an Unlikely Mascot for the Year of the Horse

A minor production error at a toy factory in eastern China has unexpectedly given birth to a viral sensation, turning what was once considered a defective product into an internet favourite. Toy ponies with unusually sad, weeping expressions have captured public imagination online and are now being celebrated as unlikely mascots for the Year of the Horse.

The unusual toys first gained attention in January when a social media user shared an image of a pony with tearful eyes and a sorrowful expression. What appeared to be a deliberate design choice was, in fact, the result of a simple sewing mistake. The toys were produced in Yiwu International Trade City in Zhejiang province, widely regarded as the world's largest wholesale market for small commodities, according to a report by the "South China Morning Post".

Standing about 20 centimetres tall and priced at 25 yuan, the toy pony was originally designed as a festive symbol of the Year of the Horse. It features a bright red body—traditionally considered an auspicious colour in Chinese culture—and is embroidered with a golden message meaning "wealth will arrive soon." However, a technical error during production caused the toy's mouth and nostrils to be stitched incorrectly, giving it a downturned, tearful expression.

Initially, the crying face was viewed as a flaw. But instead of rejecting the product, internet users found the pony's emotional appearance oddly endearing. Nicknamed the "Crying Horse," the toy quickly went viral, with



Couple Uncovers Secret Rooms in 130-Year-Old Home After Receiving Eerie Letter



What began as the purchase of a charming 130-year-old home quickly turned into a real-life mystery for a millennial couple, who uncovered secret rooms, hidden compartments, and long-forgotten spaces after receiving an eerie handwritten letter. Courtney and her husband Matt were drawn into the house's hidden past when a message addressed simply to "Purchaser" arrived at their doorstep, promising to reveal secrets about the historic property they had just bought.

Courtney later shared the entire experience in a TikTok video that quickly went viral, amassing more than 1.5 million views. According to her account, the letter was sent from Canada and claimed to be written by the last surviving member of the Madison family, the former owners of the house. The writer said she had grown up in the home and wanted to ensure the new owners knew about hidden rooms and features that may not have been disclosed during the sale.

While the exact location of the house remains undisclosed, Courtney and Matt confirmed that the property is a large Victorian-style home purchased from a historical institution. They have also chosen not to release any detailed information about the Madison family.

Intrigued by the letter's clues, the couple began searching their new home and soon discovered several concealed spaces. Their first major find

Nebraska Grandmother's 40-Year-Old Porch Pot Sells for 29 Lakh on Her 91st Birthday

What began as an ordinary plan to hold a garage sale turned into a once-in-a-lifetime moment for Lois Jurgens, a 91-year-old Nebraska resident, when a stoneware crock she had kept on her porch for four decades sold at auction for an astonishing 29 lakh (around \$32,000).

Jurgens had originally intended to sell the 30-gallon Red Wing crock for no more than \$50, unaware that it was a rare collector's item. Just before finalising her garage sale plans, she noticed that Bramer Auction and Realty was hosting an auction featuring antique crocks. On a whim, she called to ask if they might be interested in including her pot.

With the auction only days away and all advertisements already published, the request came late. Still, auc-



tioneer Bramer decided to visit Jurgens' home to inspect the crock. When he turned it around, he immediately noticed a set of distinctive blue butterfly markings—an extremely rare feature among Red Wing stoneware.

What truly stunned him, however, was that the crock was stamped twice, something collectors consider a "once-in-a-lifetime" find. The markings instantly elevated the pot from a household item to a prized collector's piece.

Jurgens, meanwhile, modestly estimated the crock might fetch about \$100. Bramer reportedly laughed and told her she was "going to be surprised."

On auction day, nearly 300 bidders gathered, with intense competition driving the price upward. By the time bidding crossed \$19,000, only three bidders re-

mained—hailing from Texas, Kansas, and Iowa—locked in a fierce bidding war.

Jurgens couldn't attend the auction initially, as she was spending her 91st birthday volunteering at her local church. When she later arrived at the fairgrounds, the bidding had ended.

"We did a little better than \$100," Bramer joked before revealing the final price: \$32,000.

Overwhelmed by the news, Jurgens reportedly felt weak in the knees and was helped onto the stage to sit beside the crock that had changed her life. She later said that in her 91 years, nothing had been more exciting than the sale of that humble porch pot.

What she once saw as a simple household item turned out to be a rare treasure—proving that sometimes, history is hiding in plain sight.

BSF Soldier's Soulful Rendition of 'Sandese Aate Hain' Wins Hearts Online

Music has a unique ability to transcend boundaries and touch the deepest emotions, and a recent viral video of Border Security Force (BSF) soldier Chakrapani Nagiri is a powerful reminder of that truth. The video, which has been widely shared on social media, shows Nagiri singing the iconic patriotic song **"Sandese Aate Hain"** from the film *Border*, accompanied by his fellow soldiers. What makes the clip truly special is not just the song itself, but the heartfelt emotion with which it is performed.

Set against a simple, intimate backdrop, the video captures a quiet moment among soldiers stationed far from home. Nagiri's voice carries warmth, sincerity, and calm strength, instantly resonating with viewers. There is no elaborate setting or professional arrangement—just a soldier singing from the heart, reflecting the longing, sacrifice, and devotion that the song represents. Each note conveys a deep sense of connection to family, country, and duty, making the performance all the more moving.

Nagiri shared the video on his Instagram account, offering a glimpse of his musical



talent and a rare, personal moment from a soldier's life. The clip quickly gained traction online, drawing praise not only for his melodious voice but also for the genuine emotion that shone through his singing.

Social media users flooded the comments section with admiration and gratitude. One user wrote, **"Real owner of the song,"** suggesting

that Nagiri's rendition captured the soul of the track. Another commented, **"Your voice is so sweet,"** while a third added, **"Hats off to you sir. I can feel the emotions of the soldiers who stand on the border for our motherland."** Many viewers said the video gave them goosebumps and brought tears to their eyes.

The heartfelt performance

also caught the attention of Bollywood celebrities. Actor Varun Dhawan responded to the video with appreciation, writing, **"What a great thing."** Actor Ahan Shetty also reacted, sharing a heart emoji along with the Indian flag, signalling pride and respect.

Beyond its viral success, the video stands as a gentle yet powerful reminder of the

human side of soldiers—men and women who, despite their tough duties and challenging environments, carry emotions, talents, and deep love for the nation. Chakrapani Nagiri's soulful rendition of "Sandese Aate Hain" is more than a song; it is a tribute to the spirit of those who guard the country's borders, often in silence.

A Small Act of Kindness on Bengaluru Metro That Touched the Internet



Metro journeys are often associated with overcrowded coaches, rushed commuters, misplaced belongings, or occasional unpleasant encounters. Yet, every once in a while, an ordinary commute offers a moment so gentle and unexpected that it restores faith in human

kindness. One such moment from a Bengaluru Metro ride has recently captured the hearts of people online.

A woman, while travelling on the metro, noticed a little girl sitting nearby wearing a beautifully designed "gold" bangle. Struck by its

intricate craftsmanship, the woman casually complimented it and politely asked the child if she could take a photograph to show her goldsmith. She expected a simple yes or no. What followed, however, completely caught her off guard.

Instead of allowing a photo, the young girl calmly removed the bangle from her wrist and handed it to the woman, saying it would help the goldsmith understand the design better. The woman was left stunned by the child's spontaneous trust and generosity. In a crowded metro, surrounded by strangers, such an unguarded act felt rare and deeply moving.

Moments later, the girl smiled and casually revealed that the bangle was not made of real gold but was artificial. Rather than diminishing the gesture, this revelation made it even more meaningful for the woman. The child's willingness to hand over something she cherished—without hesitation or suspicion—felt like a powerful reminder of innocence, honesty, and warmth.

Touched by the experience, the woman decided to keep the bangle with her as a memento of that fleeting yet unforgettable moment. For her, it symbolised a quiet act of kindness that made an otherwise routine journey extraordinary.

She later shared the story

on X (formerly Twitter), recounting how she had admired the bangle, requested a photo, and instead received the entire ornament in her hand. In her post, she described how the child's simplicity and trust left a lasting impression on her.

Concluding her reflection, the woman wrote that not every metro ride is defined by negativity. Some journeys leave behind soft, heartwarming memories—moments that make no noise but stay with you long after the destination is reached.

The post resonated widely on social media. Users praised both the child's innocence and the woman's appreciation of the gesture. One commenter wrote, **"This post brought a smile to my face! She's such a kind person."** Another added, **"This is the best thing on the internet today!"**

In a world often dominated by hurried lives and guarded hearts, this small metro moment served as a gentle reminder that kindness can appear anywhere—even between strangers on a daily commute.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru Set Competitive Total as Gujarat Giants Eye Chase in WPL 2026 Clash

In a high-voltage Women's Premier League (WPL) 2026 encounter at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) posted a competitive total against the Gujarat Giants, setting up a thrilling contest under lights. RCB continued their promising start to the season, while the Giants aimed to bounce back after mixed results in recent matches.

Gujarat Giants captain Ashleigh Gardner won the toss and opted to bowl, hoping to exploit the conditions under lights and restrict RCB to a manageable total. The pitch, while generally favorable for batters, had early move-

ment that posed challenges in the first few overs, but the expected dew later in the evening was likely to favor the chasing side.

RCB came into the match with momentum, riding high on back-to-back victories. The team's confidence was evident as they looked to post a score that could put pressure on the Giants' batters. However, their innings started cautiously, with early wickets falling and threatening to destabilize the batting line-up.

A crucial partnership between Radha Yadav and Richa Ghosh steadied the innings, frustrating the Giants' bowlers and building a

platform for a competitive total. Yadav's com-

posed stroke play com-

posed hitting ensured fluent hitting ensured RCB remained in control. In the final overs, Nadine de Klerk provid-

ed rapid acceleration, helping RCB finish strongly at 182/7 in 20 overs.

For Gujarat Giants, the bowling unit showed promise early on. Young pacers applied pressure in the powerplay, with key breakthroughs slowing the scoring rate. Despite these efforts, RCB's middle order responded effectively, balancing caution with aggression at critical moments.

Chasing 183, the Giants started cautiously, looking to build a solid foundation. Experienced players such as Beth Mooney and Sophie Devine contributed crucial boundaries, keeping the required run rate manageable.

As the innings progressed, the Giants began to pick up the pace, aiming to keep the pressure on RCB's bowlers.

This match highlighted the growing competitiveness of the WPL, with both sides demonstrating batting depth, strategic bowling plans, and fielding sharpness. RCB's balanced performance keeps them firmly in contention for the title, while Gujarat Giants will aim to capitalize on their chase and secure a morale-boosting win in the second innings. The encounter promises to go down to the wire, showcasing the excitement and intensity of the women's game at its best.



Shreyas Iyer Recalled to India T20I Squad Ahead of New Zealand Series



India's senior men's cricket team has strengthened its preparation for the upcoming T20 World Cup 2026 with the recall of experienced middle-order batter Shreyas Iyer to the national T20I squad for the five-match series against New Zealand. The series, beginning on January 21, serves as India's final bilateral assignment before the global tournament, and selectors have moved decisively to bolster the squad amid injury concerns.

Iyer's inclusion comes alongside leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi, replacing Washington Sundar and Tilak Varma, both sidelined due to injuries. Sundar is out with a side strain sustained during the preceding ODI leg of the tour, while Varma will miss at least the first three T20 internationals due to an abdominal issue.

A seasoned campaigner, Iyer last appeared for India in T20Is in late 2023. His recall highlights the selectors' confidence in his ability to anchor the middle order and provide stability under pressure. He is slated to

feature in the first three matches of the series, with participation in the final two games to be assessed based on workload and team requirements.

For Iyer, this call-up represents a major step in his return to international cricket following a period on the sidelines due to injury. He has been actively working to regain full fitness, performing in domestic competitions and franchise tournaments, including the Indian Premier League. His consistent form and readiness have earned him this timely opportunity, offering a chance to cement his place in India's T20 plans ahead of the World Cup.

The New Zealand series carries added significance as it allows India to fine-tune combinations and acclimatize to high-pressure scenarios expected in the upcoming tournament, which will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka in February. With a strong batting lineup already in place, Iyer's experience and tactical versatility are expected to strengthen India's middle order and deepen their options both with the bat and in crucial finishing roles.

As the team navigates injuries and finalizes combinations, fans will be keenly watching how Iyer seizes this chance to make an impact, enhance India's balance, and contribute meaningfully to the team's T20 World Cup preparations. His performance in the New Zealand series could well shape his role and significance in India's pursuit of T20 glory later this season.

KL Rahul Seeks Blessings at Mahakaleshwar Temple Ahead of Third ODI

Indian wicketkeeper-batter KL Rahul visited the revered Mahakaleshwar Temple in Ujjain ahead of the crucial third and final ODI against New Zealand. The visit was a spiritual preparation as Team India geared up for the series decider at the Holkar Stadium in Indore.

Rahul offered prayers at one of the twelve sacred Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva, including ritual worship of Nandi, the bull revered as Shiva's vehicle. The calm and devotional visit reflected Rahul's personal faith and his focus on mental readiness ahead of a high-pressure encounter.

This was not Rahul's first visit to the historic temple. In the past, he has sought divine support here on significant occasions, including ahead of the Indian Premier League season and previous matches in Indore.

His family has also accompanied him during some visits, demonstrating the personal and familial importance of these spiritual rituals.

Rahul enters this series decider in excellent form. In the second ODI

against New Zealand, he played a commanding innings, remaining unbeaten on 112 with a mix of elegant boundaries and well-timed aggression. Despite his stellar performance, India fell short as New Zealand chased down the target, leveling the series at 1-1 and setting the stage for a decisive final match.

Ahead of Rahul's visit, Indian head coach Gautam Gambhir and batting coach Sitantha Kolkata also participated in the temple's morning rituals, including the Bhasma Aarti, to pray for the team's success in the final ODI. Their involvement highlighted the blend of tradition and team-wide focus, emphasizing the importance of mental and spiritual preparedness before major matches.

The series decider in Indore promises to be an intense contest, with India looking to leverage both form and focus to secure the win. Rahul's temple visit not only underscores his personal approach to handling pressure but also reflects a broader culture within the team of seeking bal-

ance, calm, and concentration before critical games.

As fans eagerly anticipate the clash, attention

will now turn to the field, where India and New Zealand are set to battle for the series. KL Rahul's blend of skill, form, and

spiritual focus may well prove decisive in helping India clinch the final ODI and finish the series on a high note.



Jamal Musiala Set to Return for Bayern Munich After Six-Month Injury Layoff



Bayern Munich are poised to welcome a major boost as midfielder Jamal Musiala nears his return from a six-month injury layoff, with head coach Vincent Kompany confirming that the 22-year-old could be part of the squad for the upcoming Bundesliga clash against RB Leipzig. Musiala has been sidelined since suffering a serious leg injury, but his recent progress in training indicates he is finally ready to rejoin competitive action.

Musiala has been out of action since July last year when he suffered a broken leg and dislocated ankle during the Club World Cup. The injury ruled him out for the start of the season and left Bayern without one of their most creative attacking players for much of the campaign. Despite his absence, the German champions have performed strongly, maintaining an unbeaten run in the league and building a commanding lead at the top of the Bundesliga.

Coach Kompany noted that Musiala's inclusion in the matchday squad will depend on his training and fitness levels in the coming days. While he is steadily regaining full fitness, any return to competitive minutes will be carefully managed to ensure he is fully prepared before being reintegrated into the team. Bayern are taking a cautious approach to avoid any risk of setbacks.

Musiala, who joined Bayern's senior team in 2019, has been a central figure in the club's success. Over more than 200 appearances, he has contributed consistently with goals and assists, helping Bayern secure multiple Bundesliga titles as well as Champions League honours. His return is expected to add creativity and

unpredictability to an already strong side, giving the team an additional attacking weapon.

Alongside Musiala, Bayern may also see the return of other key players from

injury, including German captain Joshua Kimmich and Canada skipper Alphonso Davies, further strengthening the squad's depth as they pursue domestic and European titles. As the season enters a crucial

phase, Musiala's comeback is a timely lift for Bayern Munich. His technical skills, pace, and attacking flair could prove decisive in high-stakes matches ahead. Fans and teammates alike will be eagerly

watching to see how he reintegrates after his long spell on the sidelines and how he contributes to Bayern's push for continued success in the Bundesliga and beyond.

Sankranthi Box Office Boom: Anaganaga Oka Raju Emerges as Major Economic Driver

The resounding success of Anaganaga Oka Raju has reinforced the growing economic strength of Telugu cinema, particularly during the high-stakes Sankranthi festive season. Starring Naveen Polishetty in the lead, the film has rapidly transformed into a significant commercial force, collecting an impressive 41.2 crore worldwide within just two days of its release on January 14.

Produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya under the banners of Sithara Entertainments and Fortune Four Cinemas, and presented by Srikara Studios, the film's per-

formance highlights the financial impact of well-timed festive releases. Sankranthi remains one of the most lucrative windows for the film industry, driving increased footfalls, higher ticket pricing, and strong ancillary revenues across distribution, exhibition, and hospitality sectors.

Trade analysts point out that Anaganaga Oka Raju benefited from strong word-of-mouth from its opening show, translating into sustained occupancy levels across urban and mass centres. Despite competition from other big-ticket releases, the film secured adequate screens and show tim-



Pan-India Music Launch Strengthens Market Buzz for Arjun's Seetha Payanam

Hyderabad, January 16 — The unveiling of the energetic mass track Basavanna from Action King Arjun's upcoming pan-India film Seetha Payanam has added fresh momentum to the film's commercial prospects, underlining the growing role of music-driven promotions in the Indian film economy. Released ahead of the film's theatrical debut, the song has quickly captured audience attention and boosted pre-release market visibility across multiple languages.

Produced under the Shree Raam Films International banner, Seetha Payanam is positioned as a large-scale multilingual project, set for release on February 14 in Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, and Hindi. Such a simultaneous multi-language rollout significantly enhances revenue potential by tapping into diverse regional markets while optimizing marketing and distribution costs. Industry analysts note that pan-India films with strong music assets often see higher advance bookings and better opening-weekend footfalls.

The Basavanna track introduces Ac-

tion Prince Dhruba Sarja in a powerful cameo, a strategic move that adds star value and widens the film's reach, particularly in Karnataka and neighbouring markets. Cameo appearances by popular stars have increasingly become a calculated commercial tool, helping producers attract cross-regional audiences and strengthen satellite, digital, and music rights valuations.

Composed by Anup Rubens, the high-energy song is designed to appeal to mass audiences, a segment that remains critical for box-office sustainability. Lyrics by Kasarla Shyam and vocals by Nakash Aziz and L. Keerthana further enhance the song's recall value, while dynamic choreography by Laltha Shobi and Srishti Varma adds visual appeal suited for both theatrical screens and digital platforms.

Trade circles observe that such mass tracks often translate into higher repeat viewership, especially in single-screen and semi-urban centres.

Seetha Payanam also marks the silver-screen debut of Aishwarya Arjun as the female lead, introducing



new talent while maintaining commercial balance through the presence of seasoned actors like Sathyaraj, Prakash Raj, and Kovai Sarala. Arjun himself takes on multiple responsibilities as producer, director, writer, and actor, reflecting a vertically integrated production model that allows for tighter budget control and unified creative vision.

With shooting and post-production completed, the film now enters a crucial marketing phase. The release of Basavanna serves as a cost-effective promotional catalyst, driving social media engagement and strengthening the film's pre-release business across audio, digital, and theatrical rights.

10-Minute Short Film Could Lead to ₹10-Crore Feature: AVAA Contest Launched

In an exciting move for aspiring filmmakers, AVAA Entertainments has announced the launch of the AVAA International Short Film Contest – Season One, coinciding with the festive celebrations of Sankranthi and Pongal. The initiative aims to identify and encourage new directorial talent across India, providing a unique platform for storytellers to showcase their creativity. Unlike typical talent contests, this program is entirely director-centric, focusing on storytelling and cinematic vision rather than celebrity appeal or commercial viability. Filmmakers are invited to submit short films with a maximum duration of ten minutes, giving them a concise canvas to demonstrate their narrative and technical skills. The emphasis is on originality, creativity, and directorial execution, offering participants a rare chance to be evaluated purely on their craft.

The contest's most enticing feature is its grand prize: the winning director will have the opportunity to helm a 10-crore feature film, produced by noted actor and film producer Vishnu Manchu. Known for his consistent support of emerging talent, Vishnu Manchu has long championed initiatives that bridge the gap between aspiring directors and mainstream cinema. His involvement ensures that the winner's vision receives the resources, guidance, and platform needed to transform a short film idea into a full-fledged blockbuster.

AVAA Entertainments, through this initiative, seeks to strengthen its commitment to nurturing fresh voices in Indian cinema. By spot-



lighting promising directors early in their careers, the contest aims to create a pipeline of innovative storytellers capable of shaping the future of the industry. The production house also extended warm festive wishes to all participants and cinema enthusiasts, aligning the launch with the spirit of celebration and new beginnings that Sankranthi and Pongal represent. Industry observers see this contest as a game-changer in the Indian entertainment space, offering both exposure and substantial professional support to talented filmmakers who might otherwise struggle to break into the competitive film industry. The initiative also underscores the growing trend of short films becoming stepping stones to larger cinematic

Regional Cinema Fuels Local Economy as Prabhas Nimmala's "Miracle" First Look Unveiled

Hyderabad, January 16 — The unveiling of the first look of "Miracle," directed by Prabhas Nimmala, has brought renewed attention not only to regional cinema but also to its growing contribution to the local and allied economies. Released as a Sankranthi special, the announcement highlights how mid-budget action entertainers are emerging as significant economic drivers within the Telugu film industry.

Produced jointly by Ramesh Eggidi, Srikanth Mogadasu, and Chander Goud under the Saida Family Entertainment banner, Miracle represents a collaborative production model that is increasingly common in regional cinema. Such partnerships help distribute financial risk while enabling steady investment in content creation, employment generation, and technical infrastructure.

With shooting and post-production completed, the film now enters a crucial marketing phase. The release of Basavanna serves as a cost-effective promotional catalyst, driving social media engagement and strengthening the film's pre-release business across audio, digital, and theatrical rights.

The film stars Randeep Bheesu and Hebah Patel as the lead pair, with senior actors Sriram and Suresh playing pivotal roles. Akshara Nunnna Sujana appears as another heroine, while Naidu Pendra is being introduced as the antagonist.

The casting reflects a balanced mix of emerging talent and established performers, a strategy that helps control costs while ensuring market appeal across different audience segments.

The first schedule of Miracle, dominated by high-octane action sequences, has been completed successfully, injecting revenue into local economies through spending on sets, equipment rentals, transport, and daily wages for technicians and support staff. The second schedule, scheduled to begin from January 22 in and around Hyderabad, is expected to further benefit the city's hospitality, logistics, and ancillary service sectors.

Industry observers note that films like Miracle contribute to a sustainable production ecosystem. By employing a large ensemble cast and crew—including cinematographer Surender Reddy, editor Vishwanath, action choreographer Srinu, lyricist Rambabu Gosala, and PRO Dheeraj Appaji—the project underscores cinema's role as a multi-layered economic activity rather than just a cultural product. Veteran film journalist Dheeraj Appaji's special appearance as a forensic officer also reflects

the cross-pollination between media professions within the industry. Speaking on the occasion, the producers expressed confidence that director Prabhas Nimmala, who earlier delivered Satya Gang and Fighter Shiva, is poised to strengthen his

market standing with Miracle. They emphasized that strong performances, glamour appeal, and action-driven storytelling would enhance the film's commercial prospects.

As regional films continue to scale up production values and pro-

fessional management, projects like Miracle illustrate how cinema remains a reliable engine for employment, regional spending, and creative entrepreneurship, reinforcing its importance in the broader entertainment economy.



'Awwal Dawath' From Ameer Log Goes Viral: Rahul Sipligunj & Annie Master Win Hearts

The latest mass number from the youthful comedy Ameer Log is creating a buzz across social media, with viewers praising the catchy beats and infectious dance moves. Fans are sharing clips of the song, further boosting its reach and cementing its position as a viral sensation. The song's appeal lies in its ability to combine music, rhythm, and visuals in a way that resonates with youth audiences, making it a perfect fit for the film's vibrant tone.

Directed by Ramana Reddy Soma and produced by Madhavi Reddy Soma, with Manohar Reddy Manchuri as co-producer, Ameer Log promises a lively, youth-oriented cinematic experience. The title and first-look poster, unveiled by popular actor Sree Vishnu, went viral instantly, hinting at the film's potential to strike a chord with the audience. Early promotional materials had already generated excitement, but the newly released song has taken the online audience by storm.

Ameer Log's energetic vocals of Rahul Sipligunj and the

dynamic choreography by Annie Master. The duo's efforts have become the talk of social media, with viewers praising the catchy beats and infectious dance moves. Fans are sharing clips of the song, further boosting its reach and cementing its position as a viral sensation. The song's appeal lies in its ability to combine music, rhythm, and visuals in a way that resonates with youth audiences, making it a perfect fit for the film's vibrant tone.

On the technical front,

the film boasts cinematography by SVK, music composition by Smaran Sai, and editing by Rohith Penumatsa, ensuring a polished and engaging cinematic experience. The production team, including Shakthi (posters & publicity design), Swapnil Rao (sound & mixing), and Sai Satish (PRO), has worked meticulously to maintain high production standards.

Ameer Log is positioned as a fun-filled, contemporary comedy aimed at young audiences, and the viral response to 'Awwal Dawath' indicates that the film is off to a promising start.

With the soundtrack making waves online, anticipation for the movie continues to grow, leaving fans eagerly

awaiting further updates and the official release.

The film's combination of energetic performances, catchy music,

and youthful storytelling suggests that Ameer Log could become one of the upcoming hits in the comedy genre.



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