



TRUE POINT

PRGI REGISTRATION NO. "TGENG/25/A2485"

HYDERABAD | VOL-1 | ISSUE-75 | 08th JANUARY 2025 | THURSDAY | PAGES 12 | PRICE: ₹ 5 PUBLISHED FROM: VIJAYAWADA • HYDERABAD • DELHI • BENGALURU

BUZZ POINTS

Union Budget 2026: Parliament Session Likely to Begin on January 28

India's Energy Security Strengthens: Guyana Emerges as New Oil Partner as Russia Imports Decline

CM Chandrababu Naidu Reviews Irusumanda Blowout Incident; Orders Swift Action and Rehabilitation Measures

Transparency in Inter Practical Exams Questioned: PAAP Demands Action Against Private Colleges

Nara Lokesh Reaffirms No Privatization of Vizag Steel Plant; Highlights Progress in IT and Infrastructure Projects

CM Chandrababu Urges Telangana to Avoid Politics Over Water Sharing

TPN Bureau | January 07



Polavaram: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has strongly asserted that raising objections to the Polavaram project was unjustified, emphasizing that the Godavari River has abundant water resources that should be shared for mutual benefit rather than becoming a political issue.

He made these remarks while inspecting the ongoing construction works at the Polavaram project site and addressing the media on Wednesday. The Chief Minister said that the water which ultimately flows into the sea can be utilized by any state and urged neighboring Telangana not to politicize water issues. "Political leaders should not compete in making divisive statements."

People of both states must realize that Telugu people share the same heritage. There should be a spirit of cooperation, not confrontation," Naidu said, stressing that emotional outbursts on water issues serve no purpose. He reminded that when Andhra Pradesh faced a shortage of water, his government had ensured the supply of water from the Jurala project to Mahabubnagar. "I personally inaugurated projects like Devadula and Kalwakurthi in Telan-

gana. We never objected to Devadula. If you conserve water properly, Telangana will also benefit. There are enough resources in river Godavari; complete your works and use them efficiently," he said. Naidu criticized the tendency of some political voices in Telangana to oppose Polavaram, saying such objections defied logic.

"When water was taken to Manjeera earlier, we welcomed it. So why object now when water naturally flows downstream?" he asked. The Chief Minister maintained that if projects are built upstream, downstream projects like Polavaram are automatically benefited, strengthening both states' irrigation capacities. He also pointed

out that when Krishna River levels are low, constructing more projects upstream could cause damage to existing systems. "Protecting Krishna Delta and interlinking it with the Godavari will help everyone. False propaganda cannot replace truth, no matter how often it's repeated," he remarked. Naidu reiterated that diverting water before it reaches the sea results in overall agricultural and economic advantages.

Turning to implementation delays, Naidu blamed the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government for the six-year delay in completing the Polavaram project. "Due to their negligence, the

diaphragm wall was damaged, and only after an IIT Hyderabad study did they realize the extent of the issue. We are now constructing a new diaphragm wall considering future safety factors, which will be completed by February 15," he announced. The Chief Minister accused the YSRCP regime of initiating several projects without approvals, spending over 2,000 crore unlawfully, and attracting a 100 crore penalty from the National Green Tribunal (NGT). "Instead of focusing on Polavaram's completion, they engaged in irregularities. Investigations are underway into these violations," he said.

Naidu added that his government is now working to restore order to systems "collapsed by the previous administration" and ensure that all water projects move forward transparently and efficiently. Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu and senior officials were present during the inspection.



Amaravati Has Legal Status, Says Minister Lokesh; Highlights Andhra's Growth and Investment Drive



TPN Bureau | January 07

Visakhapatnam: Andhra Pradesh Minister Nara Lokesh asserted that Amaravati retains legal status as the state's capital, which prevented the previous government from shifting the seat of administration. Addressing the media in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday, Lokesh said

the coalition government led by the TDP remains committed to balanced regional development while positioning Visakhapatnam as the state's economic capital.

Referring to the ongoing wave of investments, Lokesh said that Andhra Pradesh now ranks among the leading states in India in attracting new projects. "From Ichchapuram to Kuppam,

investments are flowing in. Top national and international companies are choosing Andhra Pradesh for their projects," he noted.

Amaravati Infrastructure and Development Push Lokesh emphasized that the government is undertaking land acquisition near Amaravati to establish a world-class airport and improve infrastructure. "Amaravati deserves a good airport,

which is why we are proceeding with land acquisition.

Major projects take time to complete, and we are steadily moving toward that goal," he said. Dismissing political allegations that the government was selling land to major companies at throwaway prices, Lokesh defended the policy as essential to growth. "Some people claim that we're offering land at one rupee per acre. Even if we provide land to big companies at lower rates, what's wrong with that? It will bring more investment, create employment for our youth, and strengthen the state economy," he stated.

He reiterated the government's focus on making Visakhapatnam a hub for industries such as information technology, pharmaceuticals, data centers, and steel. "Visakhapatnam is the financial capital of Andhra Pradesh, and that's why it is attracting large-scale investments. The development of all regions remains our government's fundamental principle," Lokesh explained. On Social Media Misuse and Law Enforcement Lokesh warned that harsh action would be taken against those who misuse social media platforms for harassment or spreading misinformation. "No one who vio-

lates the law will be spared. The government will act decisively against social media abuse," he affirmed, underscoring the administration's intent to maintain accountability and public discipline online.

Water Disputes and Regional Balance Responding to questions on interstate water issues, Lokesh advocated efficient water management and highlighted the need to channel surplus water for the benefit of drought-prone Rayalaseema. "If thousands of TMCs of water that currently flow into the sea can be conserved and diverted to Rayalaseema, what is wrong with that?" he asked. He pointed out that Andhra Pradesh has not objected to Telangana's irrigation projects. "We never opposed Telangana's projects. Let them use the surplus water and even share it with Chennai if possible.

"Taking a swipe at the previous YSRCP government, Lokesh recalled that Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had once criticized the Pattiseema project as a wasteful exercise, yet later relied on it for five years. "We have a duty to fulfill the promises made to the people, and that is exactly what we are doing," he concluded.



Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu Reviews Progress at Polavaram Project Site

TPN Bureau | January 07

Officials gave the Chief Minister a detailed briefing on the present status of the works, timelines for completion of the remaining components, and the measures being taken to address technical and environmental challenges. Mr. Naidu emphasized that the Polavaram project continues to hold a critical place in the state's irrigation and drinking water plans, as it is expected to provide water to multiple districts, boost agricultural productivity, and ensure sustainable resource management across the Godavari delta region.

He directed engineers to accelerate the pace of the works without compromising on quality or safety standards. The Chief Minister reiterated his government's commitment to completing the project at the earliest while en-

suring transparency and accountability at every stage. Mr. Naidu also interacted with local representatives and assured them that rehabilitation and resettlement measures for displaced families would remain a top priority. Speaking to reporters after the inspection, Mr. Naidu highlighted that continuous monitoring and coordination between departments had been strengthened to avoid delays. He expressed confidence that steady progress would soon lead to significant milestones being achieved in the construction of the main dam structure and spillway works.

The visit underscored the state government's renewed focus on fast-tracking mega irrigation projects to fuel Andhra Pradesh's development and ensure water security for future generations.



Supreme Court Expresses Concern Over Growing Stray Dog Menace, Questions Focus on Dogs Alone



TPN Bureau | Jan 06

New Delhi: The Supreme Court of India on Wednesday made sharp observations while hearing petitions related to the protection and management of stray dogs. The bench, which took up multiple petitions filed on the issue, expressed annoyance at the growing number of pleas seeking protection for stray dogs without addressing the broader concerns of public safety and other animals.

The apex court questioned the selective focus on dogs, asking senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who was representing one of the petitioners, why the same concern was not extended to other animals. "Why does everyone only talk about dogs? What about hens, goats, or other animals – don't they have lives too?" the bench asked, high-

lighting the need for a comprehensive and balanced approach to animal welfare.

Expressing concern over frequent stray dog attacks, especially near schools, hospitals, and railway stations, the Court said the situation had turned alarming in several parts of the country.

It observed that prevention was more important than a reactionary approach and stressed the need for effective population control measures. The bench directed authorities to intensify sterilization drives for stray dogs as a primary means of controlling their population and mitigating attacks.

It also emphasized the urgent need for cleanliness and proper waste management, calling uncollected garbage a major contributor to the stray dog problem. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, responding to the Court's observations, stated that globally, countries have suc-

cessfully reduced stray dog populations through a combination of vaccination, sterilization, and the creation of dedicated shelters.

However, in India, he pointed out, poor waste disposal practices and inadequate implementation of such programs have worsened the crisis. The Court reiterated that while animal protection was important, human safety and public health must also be safeguarded. It noted that the presence of stray dogs near public institutions created a constant threat, especially to children and the elderly.

The Supreme Court's remarks have reignited national debate on how to balance compassion for animals with the need for secure and hygienic public spaces. The next hearing on the matter is expected to further examine actionable measures to address both animal welfare and public safety concerns.

Pawan Kalyan Reviews “Great Green Wall of Andhra Pradesh” Project; Targets Completion by 2030

TPN Bureau | January 6

Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan chaired a high-level review meeting on the ambitious “Great Green Wall of Andhra Pradesh” project at the state secretariat on Tuesday. Officials from the Forest and Environment Department, including Principal Secretary Kantilal Dande and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests P.V. Chalapathi Rao, participated in the meeting.

During the review, the Deputy Chief Minister examined key aspects such as the project's objectives, implementation strate-

gy, time frame, ecological benefits, interdepartmental coordination, and funding mechanisms. He emphasized the need for a systematic, scientific, and time-bound approach to ensure successful execution.

A 2030 Completion Target

According to officials, the government aims to complete the mega environmental project by 2030. The “Great Green Wall” will stretch along the state's 1,034-kilometer coastline, covering a width of five kilometers with dense green belts. The initiative seeks to create a sustainable ecological barrier while enriching natural resources for future generations.



Officials noted that the green corridor will significantly strengthen the coastal ecosystem and act as a long-term measure to combat the adverse effects of cli-

Mate change, coastal erosion, and rising sea levels.

A Shield Against Natural Disasters

Speaking at the meeting, Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan described the

project as a “protective ecological shield” for the coastal and rural communities of Andhra Pradesh. He noted that the state's long and vulnerable coastline often faces the brunt of cyclones, increasing sea levels, and coastal soil degradation. The proposed green belt, he said, will serve as a buffer, safeguarding lives, livelihoods, and land from recurring natural disasters.

“This visionary initiative will set a new environmental benchmark for the state,” Pawan Kalyan asserted. He urged officials to adopt eco-scientific methods and collaborate with environmental experts to ensure the project's precision and sustainability.

Biodiversity, Livelihood Development in Focus

Besides ecological protection, the project also aims to enhance biodi-

versity and promote livelihood generation for local communities. It is expected to create employment for fishermen, coastal farmers, and those dependent on forest-based and marine resources. The initiative aligns with the government's dual vision of environmental resilience and inclusive development. Inspired by the African Great Green Wall

Officials informed that the project was inspired by Africa's “Great Green Wall Initiative,” which aims to curb desertification across the Sahel region. Andhra Pradesh's model, however, will focus on strengthening its coastal ecosystem rather than combating desert expansion. Special emphasis will be placed on planting mangroves and other salt-tolerant tree species that help prevent coastal soil erosion, improve biodiversity, and stabilize the delicate environmental balance. The meeting also addressed phase-wise planning, technical coordination among departments, and strategies for community involvement. By merging environmental conservation with sustainable development, the government aims to transform the state's coastal landscape into a green ecological corridor that will benefit both people and nature for generations to come.

India's Energy Security Strengthens: Guyana Emerges as New Oil Partner as Russia Imports Decline

TPN Bureau | Jan 6

New Delhi: India's path to energy diversification has taken a decisive turn, with emerging South American nation Guyana stepping in as a strategic crude oil supplier. Analysts believe that India's decision to gradually scale down crude imports from Russia will not significantly affect its energy security, as alternative sources like Guyana are beginning to fill the gap. In November last year, shipments carrying nearly 4 million barrels of crude oil departed from Guyana's shores bound for Indian refineries.

According to officials

tracking maritime data, these consignments are expected to arrive on the Indian coast later this month, marking the beginning of a deeper partnership between the two nations.

From Russia to Guyana:

A Strategic Shift Since the onset of global sanctions on Russia following the Ukraine conflict, India has played a careful balancing act buying discounted Russian oil to cushion rising global prices while simultaneously exploring sustainable, long-term alternatives. Analysts note that India's reduced dependence on Russian crude

highlights its ability to adapt and diversify.

Guyana, one of the fastest-growing oil producers in the world, fits neatly into India's diversification strategy. Discovered only a decade ago, Guyana's offshore oil reserves have turned it into a major player in the global energy market. The South American country currently produces over 600,000 barrels per day, a figure expected to triple within a few years as new production fields come online.

Investment Opportunities for India

Beyond mere trade, the partnership between New Delhi and

Georgetown (Guyana's capital) is poised for deeper cooperation. In a notable move, Guyana has reportedly offered Indian companies direct participation in its oil exploration and extraction projects. This would allow India not only to import crude but also to invest and operate oil wells in Guyana's rich offshore basins. Energy experts describe this as a “strategic win” for India.

The opportunity to participate in upstream activities gives Indian public-sector oil giants like ONGC Videsh Ltd and Indian Oil Corporation a chance to expand

their global footprint, secure stable supplies, and gain valuable technical experience.

Strengthening Bilateral Ties

India-Guyana relations, which have historically been warm due to cultural and diaspora connections, now hold new promise in the energy sector. Guyana's government, under President Irfaan Ali, has welcomed Indian cooperation, viewing it as a mutually beneficial step that brings investment, technology, and infrastructure development to the young nation. This development also aligns with India's broader foreign policy

goal of increasing engagement with Latin American nations. By broadening its supplier network across continents from the Middle East to Africa and now South America—India is bolstering resilience against potential supply disruptions.

Long-Term Gains

Analysts predict that such diversification will shield India's refining sector from global volatility and price shocks. Moreover, as energy demands continue to rise in the coming decade, access to multiple crude sources will be critical to sustaining growth. In essence, whether Russia stays or goes, India's energy strategy remains unshaken, defined by adaptability, foresight, and an unrelenting pursuit of energy security. With Guyana now entering the picture, the message is clear: for India, there's truly no stopping.

Centre Controls Fertilizer Prices and Subsidies: Clarifies Andhra Pradesh Agriculture

Amaravati, January 7, 2026 | TPN Bureau

Amaravati: The Department of Agriculture, Government of Andhra Pradesh, has issued a press statement clarifying that fertilized prices and subsidies are entirely under the control of the Central Government. The clarification comes amid speculation and public discussions on the recent fertilizer rates during the ongoing Rabi season.

According to the statement, the Department of Fertilisers (DoF), functioning under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, is the sole authority responsible for fixing fertilizer prices and determining the subsidies extended to farmers across the country. The Andhra Pradesh Agriculture Department emphasized that the State Government has no role in deciding the cost of fertilizers or the amount of subsidy disbursed.

The press note further highlighted that the Central Government has taken significant steps to prevent any increase in the prices of key fertilizers such as Urea and DAP, which are most commonly used by farmers for various crops. Complex fertilizers have witnessed only

a marginal variation in price compared to previous seasons, ensuring overall stability in input costs for cultivators.

To support farmers and reduce their financial burden, the Central Government continues to extend a massive fertilizer subsidy amounting to approximately 1.92 lakh crore. This subsidy aims to make fertilizers affordable and easily accessible while sustaining agricultural productivity across India. Under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) policy, the subsidy on different nutrient components Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), Potash (K), and Sulphur (S) in phosphatic and potassic fertilizers is reviewed and revised twice every year.

The review occurs before the start of the Kharif season (April 1 - September 30) and again before the Rabi season (October 1-March 31). Based on the recommendations of the Fertilizer Price Committee, new prices are fixed and officially notified under the Fertilizer Control Order (FCO). Reiterating the Centre's commitment to farmers' welfare, the Department noted that timely interventions by the Union Government have ensured stability in the prices of Urea and DAP, protecting farmers

from cost fluctuations in global fertilizer markets.

However, the Department cautioned farmers about the overuse of Urea, which could lead to adverse effects such as loss of soil fertility, reduced crop yield, and environmental damage. Farmers are urged to adopt balanced and judicious fertilizer use through improved nutrient management practices.

To safeguard farmers' interests, the Agriculture Department has formed enforcement teams to monitor fertilizer sales across the state. These teams will take strict action against dealers who engage in malpractices such as selling fertilizers at prices higher than those prescribed or forcing farmers to buy additional, unwanted products. Farmers facing such violations can report their grievances to the nearest Mandal Agriculture Officer or lodge complaints through the toll-free helpline 155251. The Department assured that appropriate action will be taken promptly based on verified complaints. The press note also included a detailed table of fertilizer prices applicable for the current Rabi season, as notified under the Fertilizer Control Order.

Union Budget 2026: Parliament Session Likely to Begin on January 28



TPN Bureau | Jan 7

Andhra Pradesh MP and UNew Delhi: The Union Government is preparing to convene the Budget session of Parliament from January 28, 2026, according to highly placed sources. The annual Budget, a key event in India's economic calendar, is expected to be presented on February 1, continuing the practice followed since 2017. The final decision on the session schedule and Budget date will be taken by the Cabinet

29. The Parliament will then break for two days (January 30 and 31) before resuming detailed discussions. There has been some speculation about the Budget presentation date because February 1, the traditional day for the event, falls on a Sunday in 2026. On Sundays, stock markets and government offices remain closed, prompting discussions on whether the government might shift the date. However, government sources indicated that no change is being considered, as advancing or postponing the Budget would complicate the fiscal calendar and the passage of appropriation bills before the new financial year begins on April 1. The second phase of the session is expected to be held from March 9 to April 2, during which Parliament is likely to examine and

pass the Demands for Grants and the Finance Bill, completing the annual legislative cycle. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to present the Union Budget for the ninth consecutive time, extending her record as one of the longest-serving finance ministers in independent India. Historically, Morarji Desai holds the overall record, having presented ten budgets across two terms.

The upcoming Budget is expected to outline the government's priorities for infrastructure development, manufacturing, job creation, and fiscal stability ahead of the 2027 general elections. Economists and investors will be watching closely for tax reforms, welfare allocations, and measures to sustain economic growth amid global uncertainties.

NMC to Simplify Medical College Recognition Process, Says Chairman Abhijit Sethi

TPN Bureau | January 7, 2026

Vijayawada: The National Medical Commission (NMC) is planning to simplify and streamline the process for granting recognition to medical colleges across the country, NMC Chairman Dr. Abhijit Sethi announced on Wednesday. Addressing a press conference at the NTR University of Health Sciences in Vijayawada, Dr. Sethi said the new measures aim to reduce unnecessary delays in the counseling and admission process and ensure transparency in medical education governance.

Dr. Sethi was accompanied by NTR Health University Vice-Chancellor Dr.

Chandrasekhar and Registrar Dr. Radhika Reddy during the media interaction. The NMC chief stated that under the planned reforms, medical colleges operated under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model would remain under government control, ensuring that public health interests are safeguarded.

He emphasized that the PPP model would enable private entities to collaborate with the government in expanding healthcare infrastructure while ensuring that patients continue to receive free or subsidized treatment. Highlighting the seat allocation norms, Dr. Sethi clarified that, as per Supreme Court orders and

NMC guidelines, 50 percent of the seats in medical colleges must be filled under the state merit quota, ensuring opportunities for deserving students from within the state. The remaining 50 percent of seats may be utilized by private management as per existing policies. Discussing the role of state governments, Dr. Sethi noted that the implementation of the PPP model lies primarily with individual states. States like Gujarat, he said, have already achieved significant success by adopting this model, combining government oversight with private sector efficiency. Dr. Sethi also revealed that the NMC recently removed a long-standing restriction that allowed only not-for-profit organizations to establish new medical colleges. Following a recent board meeting, the commission decided to permit corporate companies to establish medical colleges under the PPP model. This policy shift, he said, is expected to attract greater investment, improve educational infrastructure, and expand healthcare accessibility, especially in underserved regions. He concluded by saying that closer cooperation between the public and private sectors would ensure optimal use of available resources while maintaining the quality and accessibility of medical education.



ప.సో	ఎరువు రకం	2025-26 దశ (రూ. లక్ష)
1	యూరియా (45 Kgs)	266.5
2	ఎ. ఎ. పి.	1350
3	ఎం. ఎ. పి.	1525-1850
4	16.20.0.13	1300-1400
5	24.24.0.08	1850
6	20.20.0.13	1400-1550
7	28.28.0	1850
8	14.35.14	1800-1900
9	10.26.26	1800-2000
10	15.15.15	1650
11	16.16.16	1675
12	ఎ. ఎ. పి. (G)	500-700
13	ఎ. ఎ. పి. (P)	470-650

Every step for the welfare and happiness of farmers

Vizianagaram, January 7, 2026 | TPN Bureau

Minister Nadendla Manohar assures record paddy procurement and timely payments. "Every step for the welfare and happiness of farmers" that was the message reiterated by Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar during his extensive tour of Vizianagaram district on Tuesday.

The Minister announced that the state government has set an ambitious target to procure a record 51 lakh metric tonnes of paddy this year, ensuring that farmers receive payments within 24 hours of procurement. Addressing a farmers' gathering at Rachakin-dam village in Bonda-palli mandal, Minister Manohar emphasized that the present government is fully committed to protecting the interests of farmers. "Ours is a farmer-friendly government."

We will stand by the farming community at every step, ensuring that no farmer faces hardship," he said. The



Minister personally visited paddy fields and interacted with farmers to review grain quality and procurement practices. Farmers, including Bandaru Krishnamurthy and Gulipilli Venkataramana, expressed satisfaction with the process, noting that payments are being deposited into their bank accounts within 24 hours.

Comparing the current government's efforts with the previous regime, Manohar pointed out that earlier, farmers had to wait for months for their dues. "Now, 97.6 percent of farmers are receiving payments within a day of paddy procurement," he stated. The state, he added, plans to surpass last year's 31 lakh metric tonnes record by purchasing 51 lakh tonnes this season. He assured that every grain will be procured at the minimum support price and that all arrangements have been made to avoid delays or difficulties at procurement centers.

All payments will be completed by January 10 to ensure a festive at-

mosphere in villages. Manohar also highlighted that paddy of fine varieties cultivated by farmers is being supplied to about 36,000 schools and 4,000 hostels under the Midday Meal Scheme. "We are labeling each rice bag with the name of the farmer who produced it," he said, adding that nearly 60 percent of the state's population depends on agriculture and that enhancing the income of farm families remains a top government priority.

Civil Supplies Corporation Vice Chairman and Managing Director S. Dillee Rao said the government is determined to ensure that no farmer incurs a loss af-

ter a season of hard work. He advised local farmers to consider reducing the cultivation of 1121 paddy variety, which tends to have more husk, and encouraged them to switch to more profitable varieties.

He noted that the moisture content in the procured paddy was below 17 percent and praised farmers for their quality standards. He also revealed plans to introduce wheat flour distribution soon. District Collector S. Ramsunder Reddy observed that 96 percent of the district's farmers are small and marginal cultivators. He reported that 95 percent of payments are

being credited the same day and that procurement is now in its final stages, accelerated by the new 1:3 bank guarantee facility for millers.

Joint Collector S. Sethu Madhavan informed that against a target of 4 lakh metric tonnes, 3.37 lakh tonnes of paddy have already been procured, with 687 crore disbursed to around 67,000 farmers. Several officials, cooperative leaders, and local representatives, including Nelli Marla MLA Lokam Nagamadavi, former minister Padala Aruna, and Civil Supplies DM Boddepalli Shanthi, participated in the event.

CM Chandrababu Naidu Reviews Irusumanda Blowout Incident; Orders Swift Action and Rehabilitation Measures

Amaravathi, January 7, 2026 | TPN Bureau

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday conducted a high-level review meeting with senior officials regarding the gas blowout incident at Irusumanda village in Malirkupuram Mandal, Konaseema district. The review focused on the ongoing containment measures, rehabilitation efforts, and long-term safety protocols to prevent such accidents in the future.

Top officials including Chief Secretary Neerabh Kumar Prasad, Home Minister Vangalapudi Anitha, senior police officers, and representatives from the Chief Minister's Office briefed the Chief Minister on the ground situation and the steps being taken by multiple departments to control the



gas leak and prevent further damage. According to officials, specialized teams have been deployed to the site, and necessary precautions are in place to prevent any escalation of the incident.

The Chief Minister inquired about the fire-control efforts and instructed officials to ensure coordination among state, national, and international agencies equipped with expertise in industrial blowouts. He emphasized that the government must utilize all available technology and resources to contain the situation quickly and safely.

During the review, CM Naidu expressed concern for the safety of the affected villagers, many of whom have been relocated to nearby rehabilitation centers. He directed the district administration to ensure that the

evacuees face no difficulties during their temporary stay. The Chief Minister stressed that it is the duty of the local administration to provide basic amenities and psychological reassurance to people grappling with fear and uncertainty following the blowout.

He directed the Revenue Department to take immediate steps to provide compensation to all those who suffered property loss and crop damage. The Chief Minister further instructed departments to closely coordinate relief operations and ensure that no family is left without assistance. In a broader perspective, Naidu underlined the need for strict safety audits in operations involving oil and gas exploration and instructed the government to convene a review meeting with ONGC officials and other industrial stakeholders soon.

The aim, he said, is to identify safety lapses, strengthen preventive mechanisms, and frame an effective strategy to avert such accidents in the future.

Polavaram Project to Be Completed by March 2027: CM Chandrababu Naidu



Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu announced that the state government has set March 2027 as the target for completing the long-delayed Polavaram irrigation project. During a review meeting on the project's progress, the Chief Minister strongly criticized the previous YSRCP government, alleging that its inaction and mismanagement not only delayed construction but also caused a severe escalation in project costs.

Speaking about the financial implications,

Naidu stated that the construction of the diaphragm wall, a key component of the project, could have been completed for around 440 crore if work had continued as planned during the Telugu Desam Party's (TDP) previous tenure. However, due to what he termed "negligence and poor management" under the YSRCP government, the cost of completing the same component has now ballooned by an additional 1,000 crore.

"This is the price the state is paying for administrative inefficiency and lack of commitment,

Naidu asserted that all efforts are being made to accelerate the remaining works and ensure quality construction.

He said that completing Polavaram by March 2027 is a top priority and assured that funds will not be a constraint for critical project components such as spillway gates, power generation structures, and rehabilitation works for displaced families.



"Polavaram is not just a project, it is Andhra Pradesh's lifeline," Naidu said, adding that once completed, it would provide irrigation benefits to lakhs of acres, ensure water supply to drought-prone regions, and support industrial and rural development. Senior irrigation officials have been instructed to prepare a detailed schedule to meet the new completion target.

He emphasized that the

Nara Lokesh files defamation case against Sakshi News Paper



TPN Bureau | January 7, 2026

Visakhapatnam: The defamation case filed by Andhra Pradesh Minister for Education and IT, Nara Lokesh, against the Sakshi daily witnessed key developments today as cross-examination proceedings were held at the 12th Additional District Court in Visakhapatnam.

Lokesh appeared before the court for the hearing and responded to the questions posed by Sakshi's legal counsel during the cross-examination. This marks the third round of cross-examination in the ongoing defamation case, which has drawn considerable political and public attention across the state. After today's proceedings, the presiding judge adjourned the hearing to January 21 for the next phase of arguments. The case

traces its origin to a report published by Sakshi, a Telugu daily owned by companies linked to former Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, which alleged that Lokesh was defamatory, misleading, and part of a deliberate conspiracy to damage his reputation.

In his petition, Lokesh asserted that the article tarnished his public image by spreading false and malicious claims. Consequently, he approached the court seeking Rs. 75 crore in damages as compensation for the alleged harm to his reputation. Given the political context with Sakshi perceived as being sympathetic to the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) and Lokesh being a senior leader of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the case has become a significant point of political contention in Andhra Pradesh.

Political observers believe the upcoming

NMC to Simplify Medical College Recognition Process, Says Chairman Abhijit Sethi

TPN Bureau | January 7, 2026

Vijayawada: The National Medical Commission (NMC) is planning to simplify and streamline the process for granting recognition to medical colleges across the country. NMC Chairman Dr. Abhijit Sethi announced on Wednesday, addressing a press conference at the NTR University of Health Sciences in Vijayawada. Dr. Sethi said the new measures aim to reduce unnecessary delays in the counseling and admission process and ensure transparency in medical education governance.

Dr. Sethi was accompanied by NTR Health University Vice-Chancellor Dr. Chandrasekhar and Registrar Dr. Radhika Reddy during the media interaction.

The NMC chief stated that under the planned reforms, medical colleges operated under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model would remain under government control, ensuring that public health interests are protected.

He emphasized that the PPP model would enable private entities to collaborate with the government in expanding healthcare infrastructure while ensuring that patients continue to receive free or subsidized treatment. Highlighting the

allocation norms, Dr. Sethi clarified that, as per Supreme Court orders and NMC guidelines, 50 percent of the seats in medical colleges must be filled under the state merit quota, ensuring opportunities for deserving students from within the state.

The remaining 50 percent of seats may be utilized by private managements as per existing policies. Discussing the role of state governments, Dr. Sethi noted that the implementation of the PPP model lies primarily with individual states. States like Gujarat, he said, have already achieved significant success by adopting this model, combining government oversight with private sector efficiency.

Dr. Sethi also revealed that the NMC recently removed a long-standing restriction that allowed only not-for-profit organizations to establish new medical colleges.



Following a recent board meeting, the commission decided to permit corporate companies to establish medical colleges under the PPP model.

This policy shift, he said, is expected to attract greater investment, improve educational infrastructure, and expand healthcare accessibility, especially in underserved regions. He concluded by saying that closer cooperation between the public and private sectors would ensure optimal use of available resources while maintaining the quality and accessibility of medical education and healthcare delivery.

Dr. Sethi's announcement marks a significant shift in India's approach to medical education policy, balancing regulatory oversight with flexibility to attract new players and investments in the healthcare sector.

Transparency in Inter Practical Exams Questioned: PAAP Demands Action Against Private Colleges

TPN Bureau |
January 07:

Vijayawada, Raising serious concerns over the conduct of Intermediate practical examinations in Andhra Pradesh, the Parents Association of Andhra Pradesh (PAAP) has accused private junior colleges of large-scale irregularities and exploitation of students. In a strongly worded open letter addressed to the Secretary of the Board of Intermediate Education, PAAP demanded immediate action and greater transparency in the examination process.



practical exams.

PAAP criticized the Intermediate Board for maintaining silence and called for a comprehensive inquiry into these fee irregularities. The statement further



highlighted that CCTV cameras are switched on only during exam days, serving merely as eyewash. PAAP demanded that footage showing laboratory activities throughout the

academic year be made available for public scrutiny.

It also raised doubts about the purchase of laboratory materials and chemicals, asking the education board to

ensure that invoices for all lab equipment be displayed on official websites to verify the existence of proper facilities. Questioning the credibility of the marks awarded, the associa-

tion asked how students who never had proper lab exposure were still being given full marks. To restore fairness, PAAP urged the Board to collect random samples of practical answer sheets for re-evaluation. It also recommended quarterly inspections of labs and maintenance records by board officials. Other demands included: central supply of all examination papers directly by the Board, random evaluation of exams, cancellation of unscientific admissions exceeding classroom capacity, and

Amaravati Second Phase of Land Pooling Begins for Key Capital Projects



January 6, 2026 | TPN Bureau

Amaravati: The state government of Andhra Pradesh has launched the second phase of land pooling in the Amaravati Capital Region, marking a renewed push toward the long-pending development of the state's official capital. Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development P. Narayana formally initiated the process at Vaddamanu village in Thullur mandal, accompanied by local MLA Sravan Kumar.

Officials have begun collecting consent forms from farmers willing to participate in the latest land pooling initiative. The process will cover seven villages across Thullur and Amaravati mandals—Vaddamanu, Harishchandrapuram, and Pedaparim in Thullur; and Vaikunthapuram, Pedamadduru, Endroy, and Karlapudi in Amaravati. In total, the government plans to acquire approximately

16,666.57 acres of land from these areas.

According to officials, the pooled land will be used for developing major public infrastructure projects forming the core of Amaravati's master plan. This includes the proposed international airport, sports city, smart industrial zones, the railway track, and the inner ring road. These projects are aimed at strengthening Amaravati's position as a modern administrative, economic, and logistics hub for the state. Minister Narayana stated that this phase of land pooling is being undertaken with farmers' cooperation and transparency as key principles. He emphasized that the government is committed to ensuring timely delivery of developed plots to farmers who contribute land for the capital's growth. The Amaravati Development Authority (ADA) has taken significant decisions to expedite the handover of plots

to farmers. As part of the new approach, the development works in the allocated layouts will begin immediately, starting with two parallel road networks and electric lines to facilitate quick possession. These basic amenities are expected to be completed in the initial stage to enable the smooth transfer of plots to land contributors. Later in the day, the minister is scheduled to address a village meeting at Endroy, where he will interact directly with farmers and local residents to explain the benefits and procedural details of the land pooling scheme.

The renewed momentum in Amaravati's development marks a crucial phase for the capital region after several years of uncertainty. With this initiative, the government aims to translate its revised master plan for Amaravati into visible on-ground progress over the next few months.

Andhra Pradesh Liquor Scam: Crucial FSL Report Reaches Court, SIT Awaits Key Digital Evidence

January 7, 2026 | TPN Bureau

Amaravati: A major development has taken place in the sensational Andhra Pradesh liquor scam case, with the forensic report related to the accused persons' mobile phones reaching the court on Tuesday. The Special Investigation Team (SIT), which is probing the case, is expected to collect the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) report from the court on Wednesday, potentially altering the course of the investigation.

According to sources, the FSL has completed an in-depth forensic analysis of several mobile phones allegedly used by the accused in connection with the scam. Earlier, after the liquor scam came to light, some of the accused are believed to have attempted to destroy crucial evidence by damaging

or wiping their mobile devices.

However, forensic experts reportedly managed to retrieve significant portions of the deleted and damaged data using advanced recovery tools. The FSL report is understood to contain detailed information about call records, message logs, deleted files, chat histories, and other digital traces from the seized phones.

Investigators are particularly keen to examine whether this digital trail reveals a wider conspiracy, financial links, or possible involvement of more individuals, including political leaders and officials. The prospect of these findings has triggered anxiety in political circles and among sections of the bureaucracy. Leaders and officials whose names have been informally mentioned during the probe are said

to be closely tracking the developments, amid speculation that the report may expose previously unknown connections in the alleged liquor racket.

Legal experts believe that the FSL report could become a turning point in the case. If the recovered digital evidence is strong and legally admissible, it may significantly strengthen the prosecution's case, help establish the chain of conspiracy, and support charges related to destruction of evidence.

It may also assist investigators in corroborating statements recorded so far and identifying discrepancies in the versions given by key accused. Once the SIT formally obtains the FSL report from the court, it is expected to examine the contents in detail and may summon additional witnesses or re-question existing accused

Nara Lokesh Reaffirms No Privatization of Vizag Steel Plant; Highlights Progress in IT and Infrastructure Projects

Visakhapatnam, January 7, 2026 | TPN Bureau

: Andhra Pradesh IT and Education Minister Nara Lokesh reiterated that the government has no plans to privatize the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. Speaking to reporters in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday,

he reminded reporters that it was under the previous YSRCP government that land allotted to GMR Group had been taken back, but the present coalition government reinstated the allotment to ensure the project's continuity.

He sarcastically remarked that if credit for progress was what the opposition wanted, they were free to take it. Recalling Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's earlier comments questioning the need for an airport where "even red buses don't reach," Lokesh pointed out that the same project was now nearing realization. He stated that work on connecting roads to the Bhogapuram Airport had been prioritized.

The minister also accused the YSRCP of driving away major investors during its tenure, citing examples such as Amara Raja Batteries' exit from Chittoor district, cancellation of PPAs, and vandalism of corporate offices. In contrast, he said, the present government was focused on attracting investments

and fostering industrial growth across Andhra Pradesh. Lokesh announced that works on the much-anticipated Google Data Center in Visakhapatnam would commence within the next one or two months. He asserted that land allotments for industrial projects were being made at lower prices only to capable companies that could guarantee employment generation. Emphasizing Visakhapatnam's role as the state's financial capital, Lokesh said the coalition government was pursuing cluster-based development. He warned that anyone vio-

lating the law or engaging in anti-social behavior would not be spared, noting that police action against rowdy elements was already underway in several districts. The minister concluded by reaffirming his government's commitment to women's safety and sustainable development.



Minister Atchannaidu Reviews Measures for Stable Chilli Market This Season

Guntur, January 7, 2026 | TPN Bureau

Visakhapatnam is set to Andhra Pradesh Agriculture Minister Kinnarapu Atchannaidu has announced that the government is taking proactive steps to avoid the difficulties faced by farmers during the last chilli season. He said that a detailed review meeting had been held to assess past problems and formulate advance measures to stabilize the chilli market this year.

Speaking after the review, the minister stated that chilli prices in the market are currently promising, reflecting

improved supply-demand balance. He recalled that last year excessive chilli cultivation had caused market distortions. "Due to the high prices, farmers across the state cultivated chilli in a very large area, around 1.90 lakh hectares," he explained.

"This year, following Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's advice, farmers have restricted the cultivation area to around 1.06 lakh hectares to maintain healthy price levels." Atchannaidu also noted that many farmers diversified into maize cultivation this

year, which would help prevent overproduction of chilli. Addressing one of last year's major concerns, he pointed out that farmers who stored their produce in cold storage had faced difficulties in accessing loans.

"This year, following the Chief Minister's advice, banks have provided loans against chilli stocks stored in cold storage so that farmers do not face liquidity issues," he said. The minister added that chilli stocks are being brought from other states to the Guntur agricultural yard, which remains the country's major trading

hub for the crop. The government is recording all details of chilli farmers systematically and ensuring 100 percent compliance with the e-Crop registration platform to maintain transparency.

Atchannaidu also emphasized that the transitory issues which disrupted the market last year have been fully resolved this season. He reported that the Agriculture Department is taking strong preventive measures against the spread of the "Nalli Tamara" virus, which poses a threat to chilli crops. Field-level officers are on alert, and



Minister Kollu Ravindra Directs Officials to Rectify Deficiencies in Sand Supply System

Focus on effective implementation of free sand policy and curbing illegal mining activities

TPN Bureau | Jan 7
Rajamahendravaram, East Godavari District: Andhra Pradesh Minister for Mines and Geology and Excise, Kollu Ravindra, has directed officials to promptly identify and address deficiencies in the sand distribution system across the state. He emphasized that Andhra Pradesh is implementing a unique free sand policy, not seen in any other state in the country, and underscored the government's commitment to ensuring transparency and efficiency in its execution.

The Minister conducted a comprehensive review meeting on Tuesday at the Rajamahendravaram Collectorate, focusing on the perfor-

mance of the Mines Department. The review covered key issues such as sand supply, free sand policy implementation, illegal mining and transport, and public satisfaction levels.

Addressing the meeting, Minister Ravindra stated that lapses in earlier sand policies had adversely affected the construction sector, but the current administration is determined to prevent such setbacks. He instructed officials to remain alert and enforce all legal procedures strictly. "Issues in areas with sufficient sand availability should be detected immediately and corrected," he said, stressing that bills must accompany all sand transport activities.



He also issued firm instructions to curb illegal mining, transportation, and overloading of sand lorries. Highlighting that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu places special importance on efficient sand transportation, the Minister said that public satisfaction must re-

main the key metric of success. He also noted that the department's positive public percep-

tion index had improved by nearly 10 percent over the past three months, a trend he called



encouraging and urged officials to enhance field-level performance to boost satisfaction further. District Collector (FAC) and Joint Collector Y. Megha Svaroop assured the Minister that the district administration would take all necessary steps as per his directions. She said strict measures would be implemented, in coordination with the police, mining, revenue, and transport departments, to curb overloading, illegal mining, and unauthorized sand transportation. District Superintendent of Police D. Narasimha Kishore, Joint Collector Y. Megha Svaroop, Mines Officer D. Phani Bhushan Reddy, RDO Rani Sushmita, and representatives from the Mines, Revenue, Police, Panchayati Raj, Irrigation, and Groundwater Departments, along with members from the Boatsmen Society, Quarry Union, and Sand Reach associations.

that enforcement actions have reduced sand bookings in border villages by around 83 percent and that fines totaling 39.31 lakh were collected for illegal excavation of gravel, open earth, and road metal.

The review meeting was attended by MLAs Adireddy Srinivas and Muppidi Venkateswara Rao, SP D. Narasimha Kishore, Joint Collector Y. Megha Svaroop, Mines Officer D. Phani Bhushan Reddy, RDO Rani Sushmita, and representatives from the

Police, mining, revenue, and transport departments, to curb overloading, illegal mining, and unauthorized sand transportation. District Superintendent of Police D. Narasimha Kishore expressed concern over increasing road accidents caused by sand lorry overloading. He said the police

Government Extends 10 Lakh Relief to Fisherman's Family

TPN Bureau | Jan 7
Srikakulam District: In a compassionate gesture, the Andhra Pradesh coalition government has sanctioned financial assistance of 10 lakh to the family of a fisherman who lost his life in an unfortunate accident during a fishing expedition. State Agriculture Minister Kinjarpur Atchanna Reddy announced the relief package and reaffirmed the government's commitment to the welfare of coastal communities. The deceased, Gopala Rao, a resident of Devunalthada village in Vajrapukotturu mandal of Srikakulam district, died tragically while venturing out to sea for fishing.

Following the incident, the minister per-

sonally conveyed condolences to the grieving family, stating that the government stands firmly beside them in this hour of distress. According to Minister Atchanna Reddy, the relief sum includes 5 lakh from the state government and an additional 5 lakh from the Labour Department, ensuring immediate support for the bereaved family. He emphasized that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu responded swiftly after learning about the incident and directed officials to expedite compensation measures without delay. Atchanna Reddy further underlined the coalition government's priority towards the welfare and safety of fishermen operating along the state's



long coastline. He called upon fisheries department officials to launch awareness campaigns on safety measures for marine workers. "Every fisherman going into the sea must follow safety protocols strictly to prevent such mishaps in the future," he said.

would continue to extend all possible assistance to ensure their long-term security.

Local officials and representatives accompanied Minister Atchanna Reddy during his visit, expressing solidarity with the affected family. Community members appreciated the government's quick action and called for enhanced safety infrastructure, life-saving equipment distribution, and regular training programs for coastal fishermen. This incident once again highlighted the inherent risks faced by fishing communities and the pressing need for stronger safety systems and weather-alert mechanisms to protect livelihoods dependent on the sea.

TTD Introduces Online Allocation for Srivani Darshan Tickets from January 9

TPN Bureau | Jan 7

Tirupati: In a move aimed at enhancing transparency and convenience for devotees, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has decided to introduce an online current booking system for Srivani Trust Darshan tickets, starting January 9, 2026. This new system will be implemented on a trial basis for one month. Until now, around 800 Srivani Darshan tickets were being issued daily through offline counters in Tirumala. As part of the new initiative, TTD will discontinue the offline issue of these tickets and instead release them online every day at 9:00 a.m. on the official TTD website. Devotees can book tickets until 2:00 p.m. or until they are sold out. Those who secure tickets must report for Darshan the same day at 4:00 p.m. The daily online current booking will follow

the "first-come, first-served" model.

To prevent misuse, TTD has made Aadhaar verification and a valid mobile number mandatory for all bookings. Each family can book tickets for a maximum of four members (1+3). The new arrangement is expected to significantly reduce the need for devotees to stand in long queues at Tirumala to obtain Srivani Darshan tickets through offline counters.

In addition to the daily online current bookings, TTD will continue to release 500 Srivani Darshan tickets through the online advance booking system, which is already in operation. Devotees can plan their visits using either the advance or same-day current booking option as per their convenience. Furthermore, the existing system of issuing 200 Srivani Dar-

shan tickets offline at the Tirupati Airport will continue without any change.

This ensures that air travelers arriving at the airport can still avail themselves of Darshan opportunities. TTD officials have stated that the new online system will be observed closely for a month, after which the process will be reviewed and modified if necessary. Depending on feedback from devotees and administrative evaluation, TTD may decide to continue, expand, or adjust the system after three months of implementation.

By introducing this online mechanism, TTD aims to streamline ticket issuance, prevent overcrowding at counters, and provide a more efficient and convenient experience to thousands of devotees visiting Lord Venkateswara's shrine at Tirumala every day.



Tension in Tenali Over Removal of Flex Banners Featuring MLC Alapati Raja



TPN Bureau | January 7

Tenali: Tense scenes unfolded in Tenali town of Guntur district on Tuesday following a dispute over the removal of flex banners featuring MLC Alapati Raja. The incident led to heated arguments between Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leaders and municipal officials, bringing local traffic to a standstill for some time. According to reports, the flex banners were installed at Wahab

Chowk, placed in the middle of a road divider to highlight MLC Alapati Raja's recent activities and developmental works. Municipal staff, citing civic rules and unauthorized usage of public spaces, removed the banners early in the morning. Their action triggered strong protests from local TDP leaders and supporters. Soon after the removal, agitated TDP activists gathered at the spot and staged a protest

ers. Arguments broke out between both sides, with the TDP cadre questioning the grounds on which the banners were taken down. The verbal clash soon escalated, prompting police intervention to prevent the situation from worsening. Traffic movement was disrupted for nearly an hour in the busy Wahab Chowk area due to the protest. Commuters experienced delays as police personnel diverted vehicles to alternate routes.

Local sources stated that the municipality had earlier issued notices warning against placing unauthorized advertisements and political hoardings in public places. However, TDP workers argued that similar banners of other politi-

cal leaders were allowed to remain, suggesting a selective approach by officials.

Police and municipal officials urged the protesters to disperse peacefully, assuring them that the issue would be examined as per regulatory procedures. The situation was later brought under control after sustained persuasion from senior police officers.

Meanwhile, political analysts observed that such incidents reflect growing local tensions between the opposition TDP and ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) cadres in the lead-up to upcoming local body elections. As of evening, normalcy returned to Tenali, though officials remain alert to prevent further disturbances.

DRM Conducts Intensive Inspection from Simhachalam North to Chipurupalli



TPN Bureau | Jan 7
Amaravati: In a comprehensive review aimed at bolstering operational excellence, passenger convenience, and safety standards, Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of Waltair Division, Shri Lalit Bohra, conducted a detailed inspection of the main railway line covering several key stations between Simhachalam North and Chipurupalli on Wednesday.

Senior officials from various departments of Waltair Division accom-

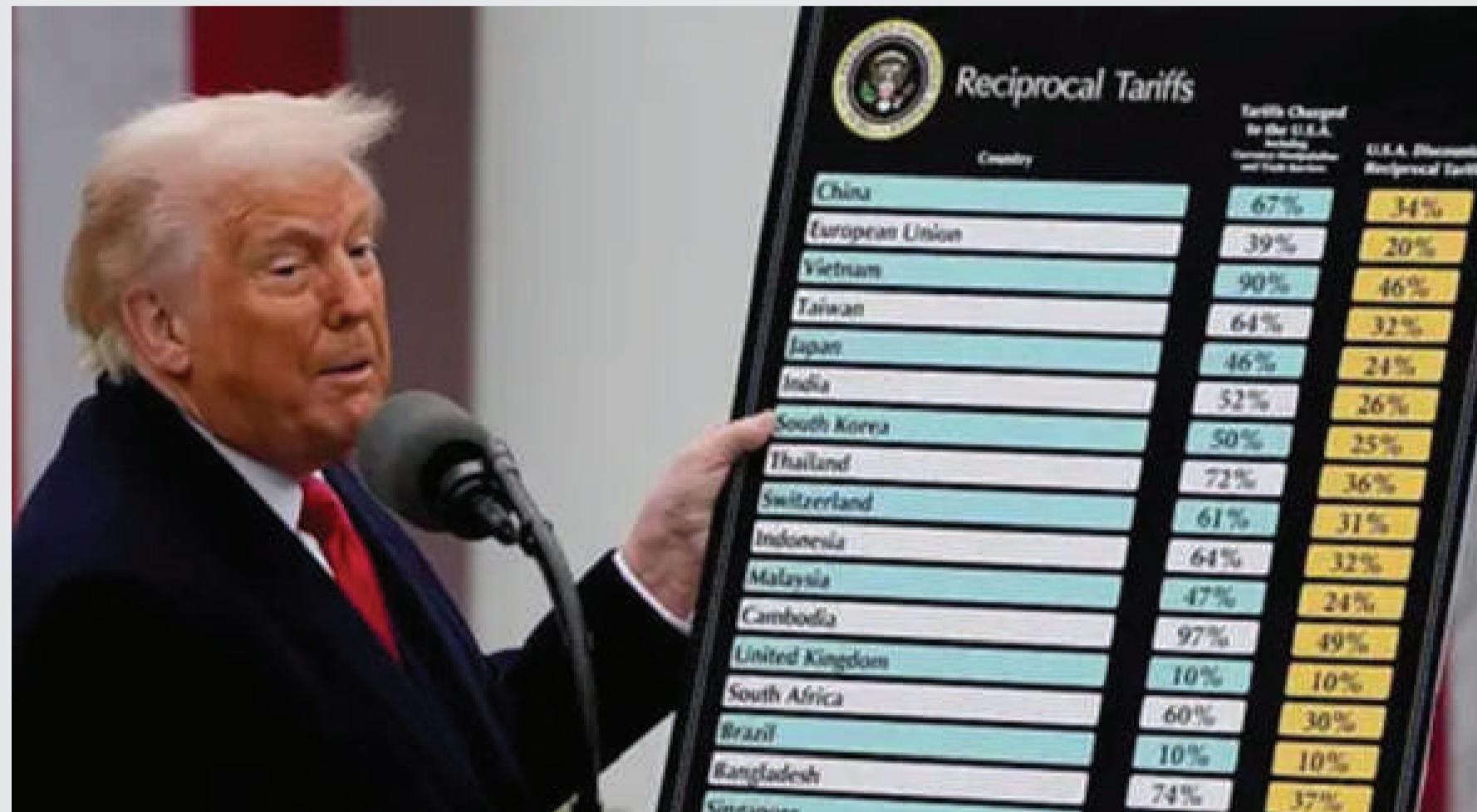
panied him during the inspection. Shri Bohra began the day's inspection at the proposed site for the upcoming Rail Over Road (RoR) project near Simhachalam North, emphasizing the importance of completing the project on time to ease congestion and improve connectivity. The inspection drive covered major stations and critical junction points including Simhachalam North, Pendurthi, Kottavalasa, Kantakapalli, Alamanada, Vizianagaram Yard, Nellimalla, Garividi, and Chipurupalli. At each location, the DRM reviewed station premises, circulating areas, yards, bridges, Foot Over Bridges (FOBs), and Level Crossing (LC) gates, assessing infrastructure conditions and ongoing developmental works.

He also interacted with station staff and field teams, issuing on-the-spot directions for timely completion of works and ensuring quality compliance across all projects. A primary focus of the inspection was the progress of works under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, which aims to modernize stations with improved passenger amenities, upgraded facilities, and enhanced aesthetics.

Shri Bohra stressed the need for coordinated efforts across departments to meet deadlines and maintain high standards of execution. During his visit, the

DRM carried out detailed reviews of signaling systems, points and crossings, yard remodeling projects, and freight handling facilities. He also conducted a comprehensive inspection of staff welfare amenities, including an in-depth evaluation of running rooms, rest areas, and sanitation facilities provided for employees engaged in continuous operations. Highlighting the importance of safety and efficiency, Shri Bohra instructed the engineer-

Why Trump's Tariffs Failed to Stop the World From Trading



Last year was meant to be a turning point for the global economy. With President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs returning to centre stage, many analysts predicted that international trade would enter a period of rapid decline. The scale and ambition of the tariff regime, it was argued, would be enough to fracture global supply chains, choke cross-border commerce, and possibly reverse decades of globalisation. Some even suggested the world was witnessing the beginning of a new economic isolationism reminiscent of the 1930s.

But in 2026, the data tells a strikingly different story.

According to the latest figures from the United Nations Conference on

Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the total value of global trade in 2025 likely surpassed \$35 trillion for the first time in history—an increase of roughly 7 per cent over the previous year. This growth came despite heightened trade barriers, tariff uncertainty, and persistent geopolitical tension. Far from collapsing, global trade has shown a stubborn resilience that defies both political rhetoric and economic pessimism.

This is not to say tariffs had no effect. They clearly did. In the first half of 2025, global trade patterns were distorted by a wave of panic-buying and front-loaded orders. Importers rushed to move goods across borders before new duties took effect, while export-

ers scrambled to secure contracts ahead of possible restrictions. For a time, it appeared as though companies were desperately racing against politics itself, trying to outrun an approaching shutdown of the global marketplace.

Yet this short-term turbulence masked a deeper reality: the structure of global trade has changed fundamentally. This is no longer an economy defined solely by shipping containers, steel slabs, or factory floors. Goods still matter, but they are no longer the whole story—or even the most dynamic part of it.

Trade in services grew by 9 per cent in 2025, outpacing merchandise trade and underscoring how rapidly the global economy is dematerialis-

ing. Governments can impose tariffs on washing machines, aluminium, or automobiles, but it is far more difficult to restrict the flow of cloud computing services, software licences, financial products, chip designs, or digital content. In an era of remote work, cross-border data flows, and platform-based commerce, value increasingly moves in forms that customs officials cannot easily tax or block.

Even when tariffs apply to physical goods, their economic effects can be counterintuitive. Higher trade barriers often raise prices, increasing the total value of trade even if the volume of goods exchanged declines. In the first six months of last year, prices for many tradable

goods rose sharply, likely reflecting uncertainty driven by US trade policy. As a result, the dollar value embedded in global trade continued to climb even as friction increased.

This dynamic becomes even clearer if the United States succeeds in reshoring parts of its manufacturing base. Producing T-shirts or basic consumer goods domestically may reduce imports of finished products, but it will not eliminate the need for expensive machinery, specialised components, and advanced intermediate goods. In fact, these inputs often carry higher value than the final products themselves. The paradox of protectionism is that it can shrink trade volumes while inflating

trade values.

Technology only reinforces this reality. Trade policy can be reversed or rewritten, but technological progress moves in one direction. The rise of artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, and clean energy systems is creating supply chains that no single country can fully internalise. Demand for critical inputs—metals from Africa, semiconductors from Taiwan, precision equipment from Japan, and specialised software from Europe—continues to grow regardless of tariff regimes.

When production is geographically dispersed and demand is both global and urgent, governments cannot simply shut down imports. At best, they can shift bot-

tlenecks from one part of the supply chain to another. More often, they raise costs for domestic consumers while a select group of “trusted partners” adapts and continues to profit. Trade does not disappear; it reroutes.

This is why several export-oriented economies have continued to post record numbers despite US trade pressure. South Korea, though frequently targeted by Washington over tariffs and investment demands, appears to have crossed \$700 billion in exports for the first time. Taiwan estimates that its trade expanded by 7.37 per cent in 2025, its fastest growth rate in more than 15 years. These outcomes would have seemed improbable to those predicting an imminent collapse of global commerce.

Many of those forecasts failed to account for three critical forces: services, technology, and the peculiar mathematics of value addition. But perhaps the most underestimated factor was human behaviour. Entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and traders are remarkably adept at navigating constraints. When one market becomes more hostile, they search for alternatives. When one supply chain becomes risky, they build another.

In recent years, much corporate energy was devoted to reducing dependence on Chinese suppliers. Increasingly, that focus is shifting toward de-risking exposure to US buyers. The pursuit of resilient supply chains is evolving into a search for reliable and predictable markets. UNCTAD's data reflects this shift: South-South trade is growing faster than the global average, while intra-regional trade in East Asia

rose by 10 per cent in 2025. Regional integration is no longer a fallback option; it is becoming a central pillar of global commerce.

None of this diminishes the importance of the United States. It remains the world's largest consumer market and a critical node in global demand. Trade barriers imposed by Washington will have uneven and, in some cases, devastating effects. Certain countries and sectors will lose contracts, factories will close, and workers will bear real costs. But the impact will not be uniform or terminal. Most economies will adapt by diversifying export destinations, building regional partnerships, or finding indirect pathways into the US market.

UNCTAD has cautioned that the full impact of rising trade friction may still lie ahead, warning that a slowdown in 2026 remains possible. There will be difficult moments, disruptions, and painful adjustments. But the lessons of 2025 are already clear. The global economy is far more resilient than it is often given credit for, and the forces pushing nations toward integration—technology, specialisation, and human ingenuity—are stronger than the political impulses pulling them apart.

Even if America chooses to shut its doors, the marketplace beyond its borders will not stand still. New models of trade are emerging, built on regional networks, cross-border services, and technological transformation. Globalisation is not ending; it is evolving. And despite the noise of tariffs and trade wars, the world continues to find ways to do business.

When Arunachal Becomes a “Core Interest”: China’s Quiet Challenge to India’s Sovereignty

The United States Department of Defense's annual report to Congress has sounded a fresh alarm for India by noting that China has expanded its definition of “core interests” to include Arunachal Pradesh. This development is not merely rhetorical. In Chinese strategic thinking, the term “core interests” carries deep political, diplomatic, and military significance, and its expansion has far-reaching implications for India’s territorial integrity, border negotiations, and regional security.

The concept of “core interests” entered Chinese diplomatic vocabulary in the early 2000s. While the term itself is not formally codified, it has been used consistently by Beijing to describe issues on which it claims zero tolerance for compromise. In 2003, then Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan told his US counterpart that Taiwan constituted a core interest for China, warning that any mismanagement of the issue could damage Sino-US relations. The message was unmistakable: challenges to China’s core interests could invite serious consequences.

In the years that followed, Beijing repeatedly invoked the concept to signal red lines. In 2004, when the United States approved the sale of a radar system

to Taiwan, China’s foreign ministry warned that it would not tolerate actions by foreign powers that harmed its core interests.

The term resurfaced in 2008 after French President Nicolas Sarkozy met the Dalai Lama, with Beijing asserting that Tibet was an issue of sovereignty and territorial integrity. By the 2010s, Japanese media reported that China had widened the scope of its core interests to include the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, underscoring its growing assertiveness in territorial disputes.

Against this backdrop, Arunachal Pradesh’s apparent inclusion in China’s core interests represents a troubling escalation rather than a sudden departure.

An Old Dispute, Renewed Aggression

China’s claims over Arunachal Pradesh are not new. However, the intensity and frequency with which Beijing has pressed the issue have increased markedly since the mid-2000s. In 2006, China denied a visa to an Indian bureaucrat from Arunachal Pradesh, triggering a practice that would become emblematic of Beijing’s approach: issuing visas on loose sheets of paper rather than stamping Indian passports, thereby implicitly

questioning India’s sovereignty over the state. In 2009, China went a step further by opposing an Asian Development Bank loan for a water project in Arunachal Pradesh, explicitly challenging India’s right to undertake development activity in the region. These actions were early indicators of a strategy aimed at internationalising the dispute and gradually eroding India’s claims.

The issue has gained even greater salience since the India-China military standoff that began in eastern Ladakh in 2020. Arunachal Pradesh has increasingly featured in China’s diplomatic protests and military signalling. In 2021, Beijing objected to then Vice President Venkaiah Naidu’s visit to the state. Tensions peaked in December 2022 when Chinese troops attempted to alter the status quo in the Yangtse area of the Tawang sector, leading to a physical confrontation with Indian forces.

Concurrently, China has sought to reshape the narrative through language and cartography. Beijing has replaced the term “Tibet” with “Xizang” and now refers to Arunachal Pradesh as “Zangnan,” or South Tibet. Over the past few years, China has repeatedly told her that her Indian passport was invalid

and insisted she obtain a Chinese travel document. This was despite the fact that she had travelled to China without incident just weeks earlier. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs subsequently reiterated that Arunachal Pradesh—referred to as Zangnan—belongs to China and that Beijing has never recognised the “so-called Arunachal Pradesh.” The Chinese ambassador to India echoed this position, linking it to unresolved issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

A similar but less-publicised incident occurred in December 2025, when an Indian-born Tibetan tourist was detained at Shanghai airport. He was subjected to extensive questioning about his Indian citizenship, his family connections, and his travel history. Chinese officials reportedly searched his belongings, scrutinised his social media accounts, accessed his phone, and even photographed his family members. Ultimately, he was escorted out of China on a flight to Bangkok.

These cases suggest a deliberate pattern: using travel and transit as tools to question the legitimacy of Indian nationality for individuals linked to Arunachal Pradesh or Tibet. This represents a low-cost, high-impact tactic that allows China to assert its claims without overt military escalation.

India’s Response and Strategic Dilemmas

New Delhi has responded

ed firmly, reiterating that Arunachal Pradesh is an inalienable part of India and that its residents are entitled to travel on Indian passports like any other citizen. The government has sought assurances from Beijing that Indian nationals will not be selectively targeted while transiting through China and has advised citizens to exercise discretion when travelling there, though it has stopped short of issuing a formal travel advisory.

However, the strategic implications of China elevating Arunachal Pradesh to the status of a core interest are profound. By tying the issue to sovereignty and territorial integrity, Beijing has effectively hardened its negotiating position, making any resolution of the LAC dispute even more complex and protracted.

Compounding India’s concerns is the fact that China’s position on Arunachal Pradesh has found support from Pakistan. This alignment, combined with Beijing’s initiative to convene a trilateral meeting with Pakistan and Bangladesh in June 2025, signals a broader regional strategy aimed at constraining India’s strategic space.

The expansion of China’s core interests to include Arunachal Pradesh is not just a semantic shift—it is a strategic signal. Ignoring it would be a mistake India can ill afford.



es, mountains, and rivers in Arunachal Pradesh, assigning them Chinese names. Official Chinese maps increasingly depict large portions of the state as Chinese territory, reinforcing Beijing’s claims domestically and internationally.

Delegitimising Indian Citizenship

Perhaps the most worrying evolution in China’s approach is its apparent attempt to delegitimise the nationality of Indian citizens from Arunachal Pradesh. In November last year, an Arunachal woman residing in the United Kingdom was detained and harassed during transit at Shanghai airport. Chinese officials reportedly told her that her Indian passport was invalid

east, including one reportedly presented by Muhammad Yunus to a Pakistani general. Such symbolic gestures, while seemingly minor, contribute to a narrative that challenges India’s territorial integrity.

Looking Ahead

China’s evolving approach towards Arunachal Pradesh reflects a broader “low-risk, high-returns” strategy. By leveraging bureaucratic harassment, cartographic aggression, linguistic rebranding, and proxy actors, Beijing can steadily apply pressure without crossing thresholds that might provoke a strong international response.

For India, this should serve as a wake-up call. Beyond diplomatic protests, New Delhi must strengthen infrastructure, governance, and military preparedness in Arunachal Pradesh. Equally critical is securing the Siliguri Corridor, the narrow stretch of land connecting India’s north-east to the rest of the country, which remains a strategic vulnerability.

The expansion of China’s core interests to include Arunachal Pradesh is not just a semantic shift—it is a strategic signal. Ignoring it would be a mistake India can ill afford.

Shiv Sena Candidate Stabbed While Campaigning Ahead of Mumbai BMC Elections

Mumbai:

Political tensions in Mumbai escalated sharply on Wednesday after a Shiv Sena candidate was stabbed during campaigning ahead of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections. Haji Salim Qureshi, the official candidate of the Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, was attacked while conducting door-to-door outreach in the Bandra area, police said.

The incident took place in the Dnyaneshwar Nagar locality of Bandra East, a densely populated area that has seen intense political activity in recent weeks. According to preliminary information, Qureshi was interacting with residents as part of his campaign when he was confronted by a group of unidentified individuals. An altercation reportedly followed, during which one of the assailants stabbed him in the stomach with a knife before fleeing the scene.

Qureshi was immediately rushed to Mahatma Gandhi Hospital, where he was admitted for treatment. Hospital sources said his condition is stable, though doctors are keeping him under close observation. The attack has raised serious concerns over the safety of candidates and party workers as the high-profile civic body elections draw closer.



The stabbing triggered tension in Bandra and nearby localities, with supporters of the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena gathering in large numbers to protest the incident. Many alleged a major security lapse and demanded swift action against those responsible.

The incident comes at a critical time in the BMC election campaign, with polling scheduled for January 15 and the counting of votes set for January 16. Control of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation is considered politically significant, making the campaign particularly intense.

A senior police official said the area was immediately cordoned off and that investigators were examining CCTV footage from nearby buildings to identify the attackers. "The

motive behind the assault is under investigation. We are exploring all possible angles, including political rivalry and personal enmity," the official said, adding that no arrests had been made so far.

With election day approaching, the police have placed sensitive areas across the state on high alert and appealed to political parties and their supporters to maintain restraint during the final and crucial phase of campaigning.

election season in Maharashtra. Earlier on Wednesday, tensions flared in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar during the campaign of former Member of Parliament and AIMIM leader Imtiaz Jaleel, after a mob allegedly attempted to attack his vehicle. Jaleel later accused rival political groups of attempting to intimidate voters.

With election day approaching, the police have placed sensitive areas across the state on high alert and appealed to political parties and their supporters to maintain restraint during the final and crucial phase of campaigning.

Thieves Steal Two Sandalwood Trees from Kerala Police Academy Campus

Thrissur: In a shocking incident, thieves managed to steal two sandalwood trees from the Kerala Police Academy campus in Thrissur district, one of the state's most heavily guarded locations. The trees, estimated to be over 30 years old, are believed to be worth several lakhs of rupees.

The theft came to light days after it allegedly occurred, as personnel on the campus were initially unaware of the incident. Sathesh TU, the academy estate officer, filed a complaint with the Viyyur police, prompting the registration of a case and the launch of an investigation.

The location of the crime has raised serious concerns. The Kerala Police Academy is among the most secure premises in the district, with armed personnel stationed around the clock. Hundreds of police officers and trainees are present on the campus daily. Spread over nearly 348 acres, the academy is Kerala Police's largest training facility after the state police headquarters.

Despite the extensive security arrangements, the thieves reportedly managed to enter the campus and cut down two valuable sandal-



wood trees. Investigators said only the core portions of the trees, considered the most valuable, were removed, indicating the operation may have been carried out by individuals with experience handling such high-value wood.

Police believe the theft took place sometime between December 27 and January 2, although no concrete evidence or clues have emerged so far. A large portion of the academy campus is forested, with sandalwood, teak, and rose-

wood trees spread across the estate. Officials acknowledge that monitoring such a vast and partially overgrown area remains a challenge, despite round-the-clock security.

In response to the theft, the academy administration has issued a special circular directing heightened vigilance across the campus. Night patrols are to be intensified, and stricter checks on all individuals entering or exiting the campus have been mandated. The circular, issued by the ad-

ministrative Deputy Superintendent of Police, also emphasizes the need for closer monitoring of the forested sections of the academy grounds.

The incident has prompted police to review security protocols and consider additional measures to protect high-value natural resources within police properties. Investigators are continuing their probe and examining possible leads to identify and apprehend the perpetrators.

Supreme Court Grants Interim Protection to Folk Singer Neha Singh Rathore in Pahalgam Case

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted interim protection from arrest to folk singer Neha Singh Rathore in a case related to her social media posts about the Pahalgam terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir. The posts allegedly referenced the killing of 26 tourists in Pahalgam and targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and the BJP.

A bench of Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Atul S. Chandrasekhar issued notices to the Uttar Pradesh government and the complainant in the case, directing that no coercive action be taken against Rathore. The court also instructed the singer to appear before the Investigating Officer and cooperate with the ongoing probe.

Rathore had earlier approached the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court seeking anticipatory bail, but her plea was rejected on December 5 last year. The court had noted that she had not cooperated with the investigation, despite earlier directions



issued by another bench that had dismissed her petition seeking quashing of the FIR.

The First Information Report (FIR) against Rathore was registered at the Hazratganj police station in Lucknow on April 27, 2025. The FIR, filed by one Abhay Pratap Singh, accused Rathore of targeting a specific religious community

and attempting to incite communal tensions, thereby threatening the unity and integrity of the country. Singh alleged that Rathore had "repeatedly attempted to incite one community against another on religious grounds" through her social media posts.

In her legal plea, Rathore

contended that she had been wrongfully implicated under multiple sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including charges of promoting communal hatred, disturbing public peace, and endangering India's sovereignty, unity and integrity. She also faces allegations under the Information Technology Act for content shared online.

The Supreme Court's interim protection comes as a relief to Rathore, who continues to face scrutiny over her social media activity. The court's directive ensures that she will not be arrested until further orders, while allowing the investigation to proceed.

The case has drawn significant attention, highlighting the legal challenges faced by artists and public figures in India regarding freedom of expression, social media use, and accountability for comments on sensitive national issues. Investigators continue to examine the content of Rathore's posts as part of the broader inquiry.

MK Stalin Safe After Tyre Issue in Convoy During Return from Dindigul



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin had a narrow escape on Tuesday after the vehicle in which he was travelling developed a tyre problem while he was returning to Madurai airport from Dindigul district, police officials said. The Chief Minister was unharmed and was immediately shifted to another vehicle as a precaution.

The incident occurred at the end of a day-long official visit to Dindigul, where Stalin attended a major government function. He was travelling in a Land Rover Defender SUV when the tyre issue occurred. Police sources clarified that the vehicle was not part of the official fleet but belonged to a DMK functionary. While one senior police officer described the incident as a tyre-related issue, another official said it was a routine puncture rather than a tyre burst. Authorities confirmed that there was no threat to the Chief Minister's safety.

Earlier in the day, Stalin presided over a large public programme in Dindigul during which he inaugurated completed development projects, laid foundation

stones for new works, and distributed welfare assistance. According to an official release, the combined value of the projects and schemes unveiled during the event stood at 1,595 crore.

During his address, the Chief Minister launched a sharp political attack on Union Home Minister Amit Shah, particularly over remarks relating to religious rights and temple administration in Tamil Nadu.

Responding to Shah's recent allegation that Hindu religious practices were being restricted in the State, Stalin dismissed the charge as "baseless" and said it did not reflect the ground reality.

Stalin said that under the current DMK government, consecration ceremonies, or kumbhabhishekam, had been conducted in nearly 4,000 temples across Tamil Nadu. He also highlighted that temple lands worth approximately 7,701 crore, covering more than 7,600 acres, had been recovered from encroachments. "The Dravidian model government safeguards the rights of all religions and ensures dignity for every faith," he

said.

His remarks came against the backdrop of a recent order by the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, which upheld a single-judge ruling permitting the lighting of a deepam on a pillar adjacent to the Thiruparankundram hilltop dargah. Without referring directly to the case, Stalin accused sections of the BJP of attempting to politicise religious issues and disrupt communal harmony in the State.

"The people of Tamil Nadu will not allow religious harmony to be disturbed for political gain," the Chief Minister said. He added that the 2026 Assembly election would be a decisive contest over whether Tamil Nadu would continue to be governed from Chennai or be "remote-controlled from Delhi."

Following the convoy incident, Stalin proceeded to Madurai airport and departed as scheduled. Officials said security arrangements were reviewed after the incident, and the situation was brought under control without any disruption to his travel plans.

Fadnavis Pays Tribute to Vilasrao Deshmukh, Assures Development for Latur



Latur: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday emphasized that while the BJP contests elections against the Congress, it respects the legacy of former Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh for his significant contributions to the state. His remarks came amid a controversy triggered by recent comments from state BJP chief Ravindra Chavan, who had said that memories of Deshmukh would be "wiped out" from his hometown, Latur.

Chavan's statement on Monday sparked backlash from the Congress and emotional reactions from Deshmukh's son, Bollywood actor Riteish Deshmukh. The BJP leader later apologized for his remarks. Addressing a 'Vijay Sankalp Sabha' rally in Latur ahead of the January 15 municipal elections, Fadnavis clarified the party's stance.

"Latur has given several prominent leaders to Maharashtra, including former

Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil Chakurkar and former CM Shivaji Patil Nilangekar.

Chakurkar served as municipal council chief of Latur and later became Lok Sabha Speaker, which is a rare achievement," Fadnavis said.

He added, "Former Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh, who transformed Latur, is respected beyond political boundaries. His role in shaping Maharashtra is acknowledged by everyone."

On Chavan's remarks, Fadnavis explained that there was "confusion and disarray" during his visit, noting that the BJP state president had intended to highlight the party's political ambitions in Latur but had used "wrong words," which he later corrected through an apology.

The CM also recalled former BJP leader Gopinath Munde, noting that though Munde was not from Latur, he worked extensively for the region, highlighting the

district's legacy of producing influential leaders.

Speaking on local development, Fadnavis said Latur faced severe water scarcity in 2016, prompting his government to send trains carrying water. "We turned this challenge into an opportunity through schemes like Jalyukt Shivar," he said.

Fadnavis announced several upcoming projects aimed at modernizing Latur, including the operationalization of the railway coach factory, which will manufacture Vande Bharat trains and provide employment to 10,000 people. He also revealed plans for a new expressway connecting Latur to Mumbai, expected to boost industrial growth in the region.

The BJP is contesting all 70 seats in the Latur Municipal Corporation elections independently, while the Congress is also fielding candidates for all seats, setting the stage for a direct political contest.

Trump Administration Demands Exclusive US Oil Partnership from Venezuela



The United States has reportedly laid down strict conditions for Venezuela's interim government in exchange for access to its crucial oil reserves, according to sources cited by ABC News. The demands, which come after a dramatic US military intervention that ousted Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro last week, seek to reshape Caracas's geopolitical alignments and place the country's oil industry firmly under Washington's influence.

At the centre of the US strategy is a call for Venezuela to sever economic ties with key global players including "China, Russia, Iran and Cuba". Washington insists that before Venezuela can be allowed to increase oil production or export more crude, it must end its strategic and economic partnerships with those nations — ties that have historically underpinned Caracas's economy and political support.

In addition, the Trump administration wants Venezuela to "partner exclusively with the United States on oil production" and to favour American buyers when selling its heavy crude. The move is seen as an effort to shift Venezuela's long-standing energy partnerships, especially with China — traditionally one of its largest oil customers — toward the US market.

According to these reports, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has briefed lawmakers in private about

the approach, arguing that Venezuela's oil logistics — including full tankers and limited storage — give Washington leverage to push for compliance. US officials estimate that Caracas could face financial strain in the coming weeks if supplies remain unsold due to a US-imposed export blockade, increasing pressure on the interim government to agree to Washington's terms.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker also confirmed that the broader strategy is focused on gaining control of Venezuela's oil infrastructure without the need for additional US troop deployments. This includes overseeing tankers and shipments to ensure Venezuelan oil flows to markets preferred by the United States rather than rival consumers.

President Trump himself has publicly asserted that Venezuela would turn over "between 30 million and 50 million barrels of oil to the United States", with the proceeds to be managed under US control "to benefit the people of Venezuela and the United States."

The reported demands represent a significant shift in Washington's approach to Venezuelan oil policy and geopolitical positioning, raising questions about sovereignty, global energy markets and the future of Venezuela's relations with long-standing partners such as China, Russia and Cuba.

India Calls for Peaceful Resolution in Venezuela, Emphasises Citizens' Welfare



India has voiced "deep concern over the unfolding political situation in Venezuela", particularly after the United States carried out a military operation that resulted in the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar emphasised that New Delhi's foremost priority is the well-being and safety of the Venezuelan people as the country navigates a period of intense uncertainty and change.

Speaking at an event in Luxembourg, Jaishankar called on all parties involved in the crisis to come together and work toward a peaceful and constructive resolution. "We are concerned at the developments, but we would really urge all the parties involved to now sit down and sort of come to a position which is in the interest of the well-being and the safety of the people of Venezuela," he said, highlighting India's long-standing diplomatic relations with the South American nation.

India's concern stems from its historic bilateral relationship with Venezuela, a country with which India has maintained good ties for many years, particularly in the energy sector. Jaishankar underlined that whatever direction events take, New Delhi wants to ensure that Venezuelans themselves emerge from the crisis in a safe and positive manner.

The crisis escalated after a dramatic US military operation in early January, during which elite forces entered Caracas and ultimately flew

Maduro and his wife to New York. The couple appeared in a Manhattan court and pleaded not guilty to federal drug trafficking and related charges. Maduro, defiant in court, declared in Spanish that he was "innocent, not guilty, and a decent man." The trial is set to continue, with the next hearing scheduled for March 17.

Following Maduro's removal, Venezuela's vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, was sworn in as interim president by the country's top court, leading to a leadership transition amid significant political upheaval.

International reactions have been mixed, with some countries condemning the US action and others calling for a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

In its official response to the Venezuela situation, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) also reiterated India's support for peace and dialogue. The MEA has been closely monitoring developments and has urged all concerned to address the crisis through diplomatic channels. India has also advised its nationals to avoid non-essential travel to Venezuela and has advised Indians currently in the country to remain in close contact with the Indian Embassy in Caracas for their safety.

As the situation continues to evolve, India's stance reflects "a balanced diplomatic approach", avoiding overt criticism of any single party while emphasising humanitarian concerns and the need for peaceful political dialogue in Venezuela.

Russian Tanker Marinera Seized by US Forces Amid Sanctions Dispute



The United States has seized a Russian-flagged oil tanker in the North Sea, escalating tensions with Moscow and highlighting Washington's continued enforcement of sanctions against vessels linked to illicit oil trade. The tanker, now named Marinera, had been under US surveillance for more than two weeks before the operation was carried out.

Russia responded sharply to the move. In a statement issued through state news agency Tass, the Russian Foreign Ministry urged the United States to ensure the "humane and dignified treatment" of Russian citizens aboard the vessel and to respect their rights and interests. Russia's Ministry of Transport also condemned the seizure, arguing that under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, no country has the right to use force against vessels legally registered under another state's jurisdiction. While the US has not formally ratified the convention, it generally recognises many of its provisions as customary international law.

The US military's European Command confirmed the seizure in a post on X, stating that the tanker was taken over for violating American sanctions. According to the statement, the operation involved multiple US agencies, including the Justice Department, Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Defense. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth later re-shared the post, emphasising

that the US blockade on sanctioned Venezuelan oil remains in force worldwide.

The United Kingdom also acknowledged its role, saying it provided "enabling support" to the operation. The UK Ministry of Defence said British forces assisted US military assets in interdicting the vessel in the UK-Iceland-Greenland gap following a request from Washington. Reports from The New

The tanker was originally named Bella 1 and was sanctioned by the US in 2024. It later changed its name to Marinera and was reportedly transporting oil from Iran to Venezuela. After attempting to evade a US-led blockade near Venezuelan waters, the vessel altered course and headed back into the Atlantic. In December, its crew reportedly resisted a previous boarding attempt near Venezuela. Shortly afterward, a Russian flag was painted on the hull and the ship was added to Russia's shipping registry, prompting Moscow to lodge a diplomatic protest.

US authorities say the seizure is part of a broader crackdown on so-called "ghost fleet" tankers used to bypass sanctions. On the same day, the US Coast Guard boarded the tanker, avoiding a potential confrontation between US and Russian forces. Russian state broadcaster RT released images showing a helicopter approaching the ship and claimed that a boarding operation was underway. Reuters, citing US officials, also confirmed the attempt.

US, Denmark Set Talks on Greenland as Trump Raises Military Option



The United States is set to hold talks with Denmark next week regarding Greenland, amid heightened tensions sparked by renewed statements from President Donald Trump about the strategic importance of the island. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirmed that he will meet with Danish officials to discuss the issue, following weeks of speculation about America's interest in acquiring the territory.

Trump reignited controversy on Tuesday by suggesting that the US could take control of Greenland by force if necessary, stating, "US military is always an option." The remarks have drawn criticism from European leaders and Danish officials, who emphasize the island's status as part of the Kingdom of Denmark and its importance within NATO.

In response, Denmark's Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said that both the Danish and Greenlandic governments had formally requested a meeting with Rubio. Rasmussen

described the talks as an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings about Washington's intentions. "When we want this, it is of course because we have the impression that part of this discussion is based on a misreading of what is what," he told reporters. "We believe it makes sense to try to arrange a meeting with our American counterparts in order to clear up some of the misunderstandings that may exist."

Greenland's Foreign Minister, Vivian Motzfeldt, echoed this sentiment in a Facebook post, noting that the purpose of the upcoming discussions would be "to discuss the United States' strong statements regarding Greenland." Both officials emphasized the goal of resolving tensions diplomatically rather than escalating the situation.

European leaders have weighed in, issuing a joint statement warning Trump

that administration prefers a diplomatic resolution. According to the Associated Press, Rubio told a select group of lawmakers that the administration's goal is to purchase Greenland rather than resort to military intervention. Trump has repeatedly framed the island as strategically critical for US security, particularly in light of increased Russian and Chinese activity in the Arctic region.

Greenland is a self-governing territory of Denmark and holds significant geopolitical and natural resource value, including minerals, oil, and gas reserves. The island's location also makes it a strategically important outpost in the Arctic. The upcoming meeting between Rubio and Danish officials is expected to focus on addressing misunderstandings, clarifying US intentions, and ensuring that diplomatic channels remain open, in hopes of preventing further escalation in the transatlantic relationship.

US Executes Complex Raid, Captures Venezuelan President Maduro



In a high-stakes operation described as the most complex since the 2011 Abbottabad raid that killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, the United States captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. President Donald Trump announced the operation on social media, stating that the US had "successfully carried out a large-scale strike against Venezuela and its leader" and confirmed that both Maduro and his wife had been "captured and flown out of the country" with the operation conducted "in conjunction with US Law Enforcement."

The couple was later taken to New York, where they appeared in court on Monday, pleading not guilty to drug trafficking and other charges. Following the capture, Maduro's former deputy, Delcy Rodríguez, was sworn in as interim president.

The mission involved a significant deployment of manpower, intelligence, and advanced military as-

sets. Among the elite forces engaged was Delta Force, the United States' premier special operations unit specializing in high-risk missions such as counter-terrorism, hostage rescues, and capturing high-value targets.

The Delta Force has a history of covert operations, including the hunt for Osama bin Laden, Operation Gothic Serpent in Somalia, and the raid on

ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Supporting the ground forces was the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), known for its nighttime operational capabilities and expertise in deploying specialized helicopters, including Black Hawks, Chinooks, and Little Birds. Over 150 US warplanes participated in the operation, including B-1

Lancers, F-22 Raptors, F-35 Lightning IIs, F/A-18 Super Hornets, EA-18 Growlers, and E-2 Hawkeyes. The stealth drone RQ-170 Sentinel, operated by the US Air Force for intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance, also played a key role in the mission.

Intelligence from a small CIA team on the ground since August, including an asset close to

Maduro, helped pinpoint his location and monitor his patterns of life, making the operation more precise. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine noted that team members ranged in age from 20 to 49 years old.

After being captured, Maduro was first flown to a US military base and later transported aboard the USS Iwo Jima, a high-capacity amphibious assault ship capable of deploying troops, helicopters, and vehicles directly to shore.

The operation was deadly. Venezuela's military reported that at least 24 of its security officers were killed, bringing the total confirmed death count to 56, including 32 Cuban military and police personnel stationed in Venezuela. Cuban authorities declared two days of mourning, while Venezuela's Attorney General, Tarek William Saab, said prosecutors would investigate the deaths, describing them as a potential "war crime."

Indian Equity Markets Slip as Sensex Drops Around 200 Points, Nifty Near 26,100

Indian equity markets ended lower on Wednesday as benchmark indices came under selling pressure, driven by profit booking, weak global cues, and investor caution ahead of key corporate earnings. The BSE Sensex declined by nearly 200 points, while the Nifty 50 hovered close to the 26,100 mark, reflecting a cautious mood across Dalal Street.

The market opened on a muted note and remained volatile throughout the session. Heavy-weight stocks in the banking, IT, and metal sectors witnessed selling, dragging the indices lower. Although a few defensive stocks provided limited support, it was not enough to offset the broader weakness seen across frontline and mid-cap shares.

Market experts pointed to three major factors behind the decline.

First, profit booking after the recent rally weighed on sentiment. Over the past few sessions, benchmark indices had moved closer to record highs, prompting investors to lock in gains. Banking and IT stocks, which had led the recent uptrend, saw notable selling as traders adopted a short-term cautious approach.

Second, mixed global cues and geopolitical uncertainties played a role in dampening investor confidence. Asian markets showed divergent trends, while global investors remained wary



amid ongoing geopolitical tensions and concerns over global economic growth. This uncertainty reduced risk appetite, leading to cautious participation in domestic equities.

Third, the approaching corporate earnings season added to the wait-and-watch sentiment. With several large companies scheduled to announce their quarterly results in the coming days, investors refrained from taking aggressive positions. Expectations around earnings growth, margins, and manage-

ment commentary have kept traders on the sidelines.

Sector-wise, financial services, information technology, metals, and consumer discretionary stocks ended in the red. On the other hand, select FMCG and utility stocks showed relative resilience, as investors sought safety in defensive segments. Market breadth remained weak, with declining stocks outnumbering advancing ones on both major exchanges.

Despite the day's decline, analysts believe the broader market structure remains stable. They expect near-term volatility to continue, with indices likely to trade in a range until clearer signals emerge from corporate earnings, inflation data, and global central bank policy outlooks.

Going forward, investors are advised to remain selective, focus on fundamentally strong stocks, and closely track global developments and earnings announcements, which are expected to set the tone for market direction in the coming weeks.

Morgan Stanley Predicts Sensex Could Rise to 107,000 by End-2026 on Macro, Valuation and Growth Drivers

Global brokerage Morgan Stanley has reiterated a highly optimistic outlook for the Indian equity market, forecasting that the BSE Sensex could climb to as high as 107,000 by December 2026 under its bull-case scenario. This projection implies a significant upside from current levels and reflects improving valuations, supportive macroeconomic trends, and an anticipated rebound in corporate earnings.

According to Morgan Stanley analysts, the Indian market is positioned for a broad recovery after underperforming global peers in 2025. Relative valuations, which have been subdued for several years, are now attractive compared with short-term interest rates, laying the groundwork for a potential market re-rating. The modified earnings yield gap—a key valuation indicator—is signaling a renewed upside for equities, a phenomenon not seen in nearly five years.

Under its base-case scenario, Morgan Stanley projects the Sensex to reach around 95,000 by the end of 2026, still reflecting a healthy gain from current levels. This outlook is underpinned by expectations of a sharper earnings growth trajectory, driven by policy support and economic momentum. The brokerage highlights a combination of monetary easing by the Reserve Bank



of India, cuts in the cash reserve ratio, deregulation of banking, enhanced liquidity, front-loaded government capital expenditure, and substantial goods and services tax (GST) rate reductions as key growth catalysts.

Analysts also point to structural macroeconomic shifts that favor a more stable and lower-risk environment for investors. A declining oil intensity of GDP, a rising share of services exports, ongoing fiscal consolidation, and reduced inflation volatility are all factors expected to

contribute to lower real interest rates and sustainable growth dynamics. These trends could further bolster investor confidence and support a sustained upward move in equity valuations.

Morgan Stanley's sector strategy favors domestic cyclical such as financials, consumer discretionary, and industrial companies, which are seen as better positioned to benefit from a rebound in economic activity. In contrast, the firm remains underweight on sectors such as energy, materials, utilities, and

healthcare.

While the bull case assumes supportive conditions continue, the brokerage acknowledges downside risks. Adverse developments such as a sharp rise in crude oil prices, tightening of monetary policy, or a global economic slowdown could temper market gains. However, overall, the firm's outlook reflects a constructive stance on India's long-term growth potential and the equity market's ability to recover and outperform over the coming years.

Defence Stocks Attract Investor Attention Ahead of Budget 2026; BEL, HAL, GRSE Among Top Picks

Mumbai, Jan 7: Indian defence sector stocks have come into sharp focus among equity investors as anticipation builds around possible increased budgetary allocations in the upcoming Budget 2026. Analysts and brokers are highlighting select defence companies as potential outperformers, driven by strong order books, government indigenisation initiatives, and technical price signals.

In the early days of 2026, several listed defence names have already recorded gains of up to 5 per cent, reflecting pre-Budget optimism among traders and long-term investors. Market watchers point out that expectations of higher defence spending, continued modernisation initiatives, and improved execution by public and private defence firms are key reasons behind the renewed interest.

Among the top recommended stocks, Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL), Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Bharat Dynamics Ltd (BDL) and MTAR Technologies are highlighted for potential upside in the near term. Technical ana-



lysts suggest that these names could deliver returns in the range of 10 to 12 per cent from current levels, especially if positive momentum continues in the weeks following the budget announcement.

HAL, a major defence electronics manufacturer, has attracted buying interest as its share price stabilises above key moving averages, signalling renewed strength. HAL, one of In-

dia's largest aerospace and defence firms, also shows signs of sustained demand, supported by robust volumes and solid technical patterns on price charts. GRSE, a leading naval shipbuilder, has rebounded from recent lows and is trading above long-term support levels, indicating improving market sentiment.

BDL, a key producer of guided missiles and defence equipment,

and MTAR Technologies, a precision engineering firm catering to defence and space customers, are also on analysts' radar owing to their technical breakthroughs and healthy momentum.

Broader sector trends point to a strong pipeline of defence contracts signed by the government in the current financial year, covering weapons systems, missiles, aircraft, and naval platforms. The expectation that these will feed into higher capital expenditure in Budget 2026 is central to bullish views on the sector.

While valuations in parts of the defence space have become rich following recent gains, many analysts remain constructive on the medium-term outlook, citing India's ongoing push for self-reliant defence manufacturing, export potential, and strategic geopolitical positioning.

Investors are advised to combine technical signals with fundamental strengths, monitor global cues, and track official budget announcements to capitalise on opportunities in this structurally significant segment of the market.

Avenue Supermarts Shares Jump 5% in Sharpest Intra-Day Rally in Five Months



Mumbai, Jan 7:

Shares of Avenue Supermarts Ltd, the operator of the D-Mart retail chain, surged nearly 5 per cent on Wednesday, registering their strongest intra-day rally in about five months. The stock outperformed the broader market, which remained under pressure amid weak global cues and cautious investor sentiment.

The sharp rise came as investors turned positive ahead of the company's upcoming quarterly earnings announcement. Market participants expect Avenue Supermarts to report stable performance, supported by steady consumer demand and continued store expansion. This optimism triggered strong buying interest during the session, lifting the stock to its highest levels in several weeks.

Market experts believe that while short-term volatility cannot be ruled out, the medium- to long-term outlook for Avenue Supermarts remains constructive. India's organised food and grocery retail sector continues to offer significant growth opportunities, driven by rising urbanisation, changing consumer preferences, and increasing formalisation of retail.

Analysts note that expectations of improved revenue growth and operational efficiency are key factors driving the rally. The company has shown resilience in maintaining sales momentum despite rising competition in the organised retail segment. Its focus on cost control, efficient supply chain management, and value pricing continues to support margins, even in a challenging

LIC Shares Slip as 'Death Cross' Appears on Technical Charts



Mumbai, Jan 7:

Shares of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) have shown renewed weakness on technical charts as the stock formed a 'Death Cross' pattern, a trend signal often interpreted as bearish by traders and analysts. This development comes after a period of subdued performance in LIC's share price, which has been under pressure amid broader market selling and ongoing discussions around a possible government stake sale.

A 'Death Cross' occurs when a stock's short-term moving average, typically the 50-day moving average, crosses below its long-term 200-day moving average. This suggests that recent price momentum is weakening relative to longer-term trends and is considered a warning sign for further downside risk in the near term.

In LIC's case, the 50-day average has moved below the 200-day average, signaling that the stock's short-term trend has turned negative after several months of struggle. Previously, a 'Golden Cross'—where the 50-day average crossed above the 200-day average—was seen around mid-2025, indicating a period when momentum had turned positive. The recent shift back to a Death Cross represents a reversal of that earlier strength.

Market participants note that LIC has been trading below both key moving averages for several weeks, reinforcing the technical bearishness. The stock's downward bias has persisted for the sec-

ond consecutive month, reflecting a lack of directional strength. In addition to moving average patterns, the stock has also been below key trend indicators used by traders to gauge near-term direction.

The appearance of a Death Cross often leads technical traders to expect continued selling pressure or at least a period of consolidation at lower levels. This pattern suggests that any rallies could face resistance, and downside risk may remain until more positive momentum returns or fundamental catalysts emerge.

On the weekly timeframe, LIC's price action has been more mixed, with the stock consolidating around longer-term averages. This suggests that while short-term technical signals are negative, the broader medium-term trend may still offer support around more extended moving average levels.

Investors and market watchers are also factoring in broader concerns, including the impact of government plans to offload a portion of its holdings. Reports of a proposed stake sale of around 6.5 per cent have added to selling pressure, as uncertainty around timing and pricing influences sentiment.

Overall, the formation of the Death Cross is seen as a bearish technical development, reinforcing caution among traders. Investors are likely to watch closely for price reactions around key support levels and any changes in momentum that could signal a reversal of the current trend.

Snow Brings Schiphol to a Standstill, Viral Videos Show Staff Making Snowman



Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, one of Europe's busiest aviation hubs, has been thrown into major disruption after heavy snowfall and extreme winter weather forced the cancellation of hundreds of flights. As operations slowed to a crawl, videos of airport ground staff building a "snowman" near a parked aircraft and engaging in a playful snowball fight went viral on social media, offering a light-hearted moment amid widespread travel chaos.

The severe weather has caused significant operational challenges since January 2, with more than 2,700 flights cancelled so far, affecting over 350,000 passengers travelling to and from Amsterdam. According to flight tracking platform Flightradar24, as many as 675 flights were cancelled on January 7 alone—nearly 59 per cent of all scheduled arrivals and departures for the day. The update, shared at 1:31 pm, warned that additional cancellations were possible as conditions continued to deteriorate.

Schiphol Airport confirmed that only limited air traffic would be possible on January 7. "As a

precaution, more than 600 flights are cancelled. More cancellations are expected," an airport spokesperson said, as quoted by aviation news outlet AeroTime. Authorities have advised passengers to closely monitor their flight status and prepare for delays or cancellations.

The viral videos, shared on X (formerly Twitter), show ground staff attempting to make the most of the situation. In one clip, a staff member is seen constructing a snowman on a snow-covered grassy area beside an aircraft, while another video captures employees engaging in a snowball fight on the airport grounds. While the exact dates of the videos are unclear, they reflect the unusual scenes unfolding as snow blanketed the airport.

The winter storm has placed immense strain on runway operations and aircraft de-icing procedures. KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Schiphol's largest carrier, has been particularly affected, canceling hundreds of flights due to a shortage of de-icing fluid. The airline said its Germany-based supplier was unable to guarantee timely replen-

ishment after supplying 85,000 litres of fluid. Other major airlines, including British Airways and easyJet, have also faced delays and cancellations. On Tuesday evening, KLM warned of continued snowfall combined with strong southerly to southeasterly winds. "KLM has therefore had to cancel 600 flights for Wednesday," the airline said in a statement, adding that early decisions were taken to provide passengers with clarity and avoid last-minute disruptions.

KLM also noted that staff across departments, including office employees and flight crew, were working extra hours to assist stranded passengers. Beyond air travel, the disruption extended to rail services, with train connections between Schiphol Airport and Amsterdam Central Station also being suspended.

Airport authorities continue efforts to clear runways and restore normal operations, though travellers have been urged to plan ahead as freezing temperatures and snow are expected to persist across parts of Europe.

Working Nights on Rapido: Bengaluru Rider Reveals 4-Day Earnings Details



A Bengaluru resident's firsthand account of working as a part-time bike driver for ride-hailing platform Rapido has gone viral on social media, offering a rare and transparent look into the earnings potential of gig-based delivery and mobility jobs. Shared through a Reddit post titled "Rode as a Rapido Captain in Bangalore for 4 days (part-time, mostly night rides)", the breakdown has sparked widespread discussion among users considering short-term or emergency income options.

The individual explained that they worked purely part-time over four days, primarily taking rides after 10 pm when incentives tend to be higher. "I worked as a Rapido bike captain in Bangalore for four days, purely part-time. Thought I'd share a transparent earnings breakdown for anyone curious," the user wrote.

Using a Hero Super Splendor motorcycle with an average mileage of 45 km per litre, the rider covered roughly 200 kilometres during the four-day period. In total, they spent around 17 hours on the road, mostly during late-night hours. According to the post, the most profitable shift was on the second day, when the rider earned 750 in

about five hours.

The detailed cost and earnings summary shared in the post is as follows:

- Total earnings: * ₹2,220
- Petrol expenses: * Approximately ₹400
- Net earnings: * Around ₹1,820
- Total working time: * About 17 hours

While the user did not describe the income as exceptional, they suggested that Rapido could be a viable option for people seeking quick cash, especially if they already own a bike and are comfortable working night shifts. The post noted that late-night riding often comes with better incentives, making it more lucrative than daytime hours.

As the post gained traction, several social media users shared their own experiences and insights into how flexible gig work can supplement income when approached strategically.

commenter said their roommate works a regular office job from 2 pm to 10 pm and then rides for Rapido overnight, often earning close to ₹1,000 per night. Another user from Mumbai mentioned considering Rapido as a side gig limited to Saturdays.

Some users also highlighted Rapido's business model. One comment pointed out that Rapido does not operate on a per-ride commission system but instead charges riders a fixed daily fee, allowing captains to keep the full fare from passengers. Others shared examples of drivers maximizing income by working across multiple platforms, such as combining Rapido rides with Porter deliveries during the same shift.

Overall, the viral post has provided valuable insight into how flexible gig work can supplement income when approached strategically.

Gujarat's Skies Set to Dazzle as International Kite Festival Returns in January 2026

Gujarat is once again preparing to paint its skies with colour as it gears up to host the Vibrant International Kite Festival (IKF) 2026, one of India's most celebrated cultural events. Held every January, the festival is deeply rooted in the traditional celebration of Uttarayan, when kite flying becomes a cherished ritual across the state. In 2026, the festival will be organised from January 10 to January 14, aligning with Makar Sankranti, which marks the transition of the sun into Capricorn and signifies the end of winter and the beginning of the harvest season.

Organised by the Gujarat Tourism Department, the International Kite Festival attracts kite flyers, artists, and tourists from across the globe. The primary venue for the grand celebrations is the Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad, which transforms into a vibrant hub of activity during the festival. Alongside Ahmedabad, several other cities and heritage locations across Gujarat will also host kite-flying events, including Surat, Rajkot, Vadodara, Dwaraka, Dholavira, Vadnagar, Shrivardhan, Palitana, and Hanol.

The festival is re-



nowned for its impressive international participation. Kite enthusiasts from countries such as Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and Indonesia bring giant, innovative, and artistically designed kites that fill the sky with breathtaking visuals. At the same time, traditional Indian kite makers showcase colourful patangs and tukals, celebrating Gujarat's rich

kite-flying heritage. Beyond kite flying, the International Kite Festival offers a rich cultural experience. Visitors can enjoy folk music and dance performances, explore handicraft exhibitions, and savour authentic Gujarati cuisine at local food stalls, featuring favourites like undhiyu, laddoos, and other festive delicacies. Special workshops on kite-making and kite-flying techniques are organised, particularly for

children and tourists, making the festival both entertaining and educational.

International Kite Festival 2026: Schedule and Dates

- January 10: Rajkot, Surat, and Dholavira
- January 11: Shrivardhan, Statue of Unity (Ekatanagar), and Vadnagar
- January 12-14: Ahmedabad (main celebrations at Sabarmati Riverfront)
- January 13: Vadodara

• January 14: Hanol and Palitana, along with ongoing events in Ahmedabad

Entry and Timings

Entry to the festival venues, including the Sabarmati Riverfront, is free for all visitors. Events generally take place from 10 am to 5 pm, with cultural performances and festivities continuing into the evening, making IKF 2026 a truly unforgettable experience.

US Man Misses \$1.87 Billion Powerball Jackpot by Just One Number



A man in the US state of Virginia narrowly missed out on one of the biggest lottery prizes in history after falling short by just a single number in the Powerball draw.

Jeffrey Dimond, a resident of Spotsylvania County, came agonisingly close to winning the massive Rs 16,809 crore (\$1.87 billion) Powerball jackpot during the Christmas Eve drawing, which had been billed as the second-largest lottery prize ever.

Dimond purchased his Powerball ticket using the Easy Pick option, allowing the system to randomly generate numbers.

He bought the ticket at a Wawa convenience store located at 9235 Court

house Road in Spotsylvania. The winning numbers for the draw were 4, 25, 31, 52 and 59, with the Powerball number being 19. While lottery officials did not disclose exactly which number Dimond missed, he successfully matched four of the five

main numbers along with the Powerball.

Although he missed

the life-altering jackpot by a whisker, Dimond did not walk away empty-handed. His ticket earned him a prize of \$100,000 (approximately Rs 89.8 lakh).

Normally, matching four of the first five numbers plus the Powerball wins \$50,000 (Rs 44.9 lakh). However, Dimond

had opted for the Power Play feature when purchasing his ticket, paying an additional dollar. This option doubled his winnings, significantly boosting his payout.

Interestingly, Dimond and his wife were initially unaware of their good fortune.

The couple only realised they

had won a substantial amount after scanning

their tickets and receiving a notification indicating a major prize.

The Virginia Lottery later confirmed the details of the win in an official statement released on Tuesday, January 6. Despite missing out on a jackpot that could have changed their lives forever, the couple remains content with their winnings. They have al-

ready decided to use the prize money for practical home improvements, including installing a new roof and building a new deck. Powerball is known for its extremely long odds, which stand at 1 in 292.2 million for winning the jackpot. These steep odds are designed to allow prizes to grow larger as jackpots roll over when no player matches all the numbers. In contrast, the overall odds of winning any Powerball prize are much better, at 1 in 25.

Powerball drawings

take place three times a week—on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays at 10:59 pm. Tickets cost \$2 and are available across 45 US states, as well as Washington, DC, Puerto Rico and the US

Virgin Islands. Lottery officials often highlight that while the jackpot odds are daunting, the game offers numerous smaller prizes that many players win regularly.

₹118 for 100 Feet? Uber Booking Mistake Goes Viral on Social Media



A social media post describing an unusually short Uber ride has gone viral, triggering renewed discussion about how ride-hailing platforms calculate fares and apply minimum charges. The incident was shared by X user The Kaipullai, who recounted an awkward but humorous booking mistake after exiting a metro station.

According to the post,

the user booked an Uber intending to travel home but accidentally selected the same metro station as the destination. The error only became apparent after he had already entered the cab. The total distance involved was barely around 100 feet. The driver quickly pointed out the mistake and, rather than completing the comically short trip, chose to cancel the ride, sparing the passenger an uncomfortable experience.

However, what truly

caught the internet's attention was not the mistake itself, but the fare shown by the Uber app. "That is not the funny part. The funny part is Uber actually showed me a fare. Initially it showed Rs 160. Then it graciously revised it down to Rs 118. For travelling about 100 ft," the user wrote in his post.

Although no screen-

shots were shared, the anecdote resonated widely, spreading quickly

services typically operate with a base fare. This minimum charge is meant to compensate drivers for factors such as the distance travelled to reach the pickup point, time spent, fuel costs, and availability. "The cab would have come with 2-3 km of dry run to pick you up. It would probably be their base fare," one user explained.

The episode has reignited curiosity around how ride-hailing apps determine pricing, particularly in cases involving negligible travel distances. Uber has previously stated that its fares are algorithm-driven, factoring in distance, travel time, demand, and base operational costs. Even extremely short trips can generate a fare if the ride is technically valid within the system.

POINT has reached out to Uber for comment on the viral post, but the company has not issued an official response so far.

India U19 Complete Dominant 3-0 Series Sweep Against South Africa U19

India Under-19 capped off a commanding tour of South Africa with a resounding 233-run victory in the third Youth One-Day International, completing a clean 3-0 series sweep at Willowmoore Park, Benoni. The visitors delivered a ruthless all-round performance, underlined by explosive batting at the top and clinical bowling, to stamp their authority on the series.

Batting first, India U19 produced a stunning display of power and composure to post a massive 393 for 7 in their 50 overs. Leading from the front was captain Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who continued his sensational form with a blistering 127 off just 74 balls. The left-hander attacked from the outset, striking the ball cleanly to all parts of the ground and keeping the South African bowlers under constant pressure.

Suryavanshi found ideal support in opener Aaron George, who played a contrasting yet equally effective knock of 118. The duo stitched together a monumental 227-run opening partnership, setting the tone for India's innings and effectively taking the match away from the hosts. Their stand combined aggres-



sion with smart shot selection, punishing loose deliveries and rotating strike efficiently during the middle overs.

Despite some late breakthroughs by South Africa, India's strong foundation ensured the scoring rate never dipped. Contributions from the middle order helped India finish with one of their highest totals in youth ODI cricket, leaving the

hosts with an almost impossible chase.

South Africa U19 struggled from the start in reply, losing early wickets against India's disciplined pace and spin attack. The bowlers maintained tight lines and lengths, extracting movement and bounce to keep the batters in check. Regular wickets prevented any meaningful partnerships from developing, and the hosts were eventually bowled out for 160.

The margin of victory reflected India's dominance throughout the match and the series. Suryavanshi's outstanding performances across all three games earned him both Player of the Match and Player of the Series honours, highlighting his growing reputation as one of the most exciting prospects in Indian cricket.

The emphatic series win showcased India U19's depth, balance, and maturity, with strong performances in both batting and bowling departments. As the team looks ahead to future international youth tournaments, this clean sweep in South Africa will serve as a major confidence booster and a clear statement of intent.

Anand Makes Triumphant Return at Tata Steel Chess India 2026

The 2026 Tata Steel Chess India Rapid & Blitz tournament in Kolkata has kicked off with excitement and anticipation, featuring a stellar lineup of grandmasters, including the return of Indian chess legend Viswanathan Anand after a six-year competitive hiatus. The event, held at the Dhono Dhanyo Auditorium, hosts both Open and Women's Rapid and Blitz competitions, making it one of the first major chess events of the year.

Anand's comeback has been the highlight of the tournament. The five-time world champion, who has largely focused on coaching and commentary in recent years, chose this event to return to competitive chess. His participation has thrilled fans and added invaluable experience to a field filled with top international talent. On the first day, Anand impressed by winning key games and finishing as a joint leader, demonstrating that his tactical sharpness and



strategic understanding remain world-class.

Another Indian star to watch is R Praggnanandhaa, who continues to impress with his consistent performances. After a strong previous season, he enters the tournament with a measured approach, treating each game as preparation for upcoming major events. Praggnanandhaa's ag-

gressive style and deep opening knowledge make him a formidable opponent in both rapid and blitz formats.

American grandmaster Hans Niemann adds further intrigue to the competition. Known for his dynamic and sometimes unpredictable style, Niemann arrives determined to make a mark in the rapid and blitz games. His

strong recent form ensures he will be a tough competitor for the top spots. On day one, Niemann matched Anand's performance, remaining unbeaten and sharing the lead, highlighting the competitive intensity at the top.

The tournament also features India's rising talents, including Arjun Erigaisi, Vinit Gujrathi, and

Nihal Sarin, who are competing with energy and creativity. Their participation ensures a strong Indian presence in the Open section and adds to the excitement for local chess enthusiasts.

The Women's Rapid and Blitz section is equally competitive, featuring top international masters and national champions. The high standard of play and fast-paced format promise thrilling matches across all sections of the tournament.

As the rapid portion concludes and the blitz rounds begin, the Tata Steel Chess India 2026 tournament is shaping up to be a spectacular start to the chess calendar. With veterans like Anand competing alongside rising stars such as Praggnanandhaa and dynamic challengers like Niemann, the event promises intense battles, high-quality games, and a showcase of both experience and youthful talent. Fans can look forward to several days of enthralling chess action in Kolkata.

Mustafizur Rahman Controversy Sparks Political Storm Ahead of IPL 2026

The cricket world has been rocked by an unexpected political controversy involving Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman and the Indian Premier League's Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) ahead of the 2026 season. What began as a routine signing at the IPL auction quickly escalated into a diplomatic flashpoint, highlighting how sport and geopolitics can collide in unpredictable ways.

Mustafizur, one of Bangladesh's most celebrated pacers, was a surprise buy at the IPL 2026 mini auction, securing a lucrative contract with KKR worth several crore rupees. The left-arm seamer, known for his deceptive slower deliveries and cutters, was expected to bring valuable experience and skill to the franchise's pace attack. However, his inclusion drew immediate controversy due to rising political tensions between India and Bangladesh.

Within days of the signing, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)



intervened and directed KKR to release Mustafizur from their squad. The decision was framed as a response to escalating bilateral sensitivities and concerns within India linked to recent unrest and strained relations. Despite strong initial enthusiasm for his IPL debut, the pacer's journey in the tournament was abruptly halted, leaving fans and cricket officials stunned.

The backlash from Bangladesh was swift and strong. The country's

cricket board and government officials expressed deep disappointment and termed the decision unfair, arguing that Mustafizur had done nothing to warrant exclusion and should not have become entangled in politics. In protest, the authorities in Dhaka ordered a suspension of IPL broadcasts within the country, effectively blocking fans from watching the highly popular league.

Political figures and

commentators in both countries weighed in on the issue, with some urging that cricket should remain separate from political disputes. Critics argued that the controversy could set a dangerous precedent where geopolitical tensions directly impact players' careers and franchise competitions.

Former players and analysts also highlighted the potential damage to the longstanding cricketing ties between India and Bangladesh, which have historically seen players

David Gower Lauds Jacob Bethell After Magnificent Century in Sydney Ashes Test



Jacob Bethell announced his arrival on the biggest stage with a magnificent maiden Test century during the fifth and final Ashes Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground, earning glowing praise from former England captain David Gower. The young left-hander produced a performance of rare composure and class, offering England a much-needed highlight in a challenging Ashes campaign.

England were under immense pressure after Australia piled up a huge first-innings total, leaving the visitors fighting to stay competitive in the match. Early wickets in England's second innings only added to the tension, but Bethell responded with maturity well beyond his years. Walking in at a critical juncture, the 22-year-old settled quickly and began the task of rebuilding with patience and assurance.

Bethell's innings was a blend of sound technique and controlled aggression. He absorbed pressure from Australia's relentless bowling attack, defended solidly when required, and punished loose deliveries with authority. As the innings progressed, his confidence grew, and he began to dictate terms, finding gaps with precision and timing his strokes beautifully.

Reaching his maiden Test hundred was a landmark moment in Bethell's young career. The century was greeted with applause from all corners of the ground and marked a significant personal achievement,

especially coming against Australia in an Ashes Test at Sydney. He remained unbeaten deep into the final day's play, anchoring the innings and helping England secure a valuable lead.

Former England great David Gower was quick to acknowledge the brilliance of the knock. In a short but powerful reaction, Gower described Bethell's effort as "brilliant," expressing delight at seeing such composure and quality from a new face in England's batting line-up. The praise carried extra weight, coming from one of England's most elegant batsmen of the past.

Bethell's innings stood out not just for the runs scored, but for the context in which they came. England had struggled for consistency throughout the series, particularly in their batting, and his performance offered a glimpse of hope for the future. It was a reminder that even in difficult tours, new talent can emerge and make a lasting impression.

While the Ashes series outcome may not swing England's way, Bethell's century in Sydney could prove to be a defining moment for his career. With technique, temperament, and confidence on display, he has given selectors and supporters plenty to be optimistic about. Backed by praise from legends like Gower, Jacob Bethell's Sydney hundred may well be remembered as the beginning of a promising Test journey.

PV Sindhu Opens 2026 Season with Gritty Win at Malaysia Open



Indian badminton star PV Sindhu made a confident start to her 2026 season with a hard-fought victory in the opening round of the Malaysia Open in Kuala Lumpur. Returning to competitive action after an injury-affected period, the former world champion showed resilience and composure to defeat Sung Shuo Yun of Chinese Taipei in straight games, signaling a positive beginning to the new season.

Sindhu began the match cautiously, taking time to settle into rhythm against an opponent who looked sharp early on. The opening exchanges were closely contested, with Sung attempting to control rallies and test Sindhu's movement. As the first game progressed, however, Sindhu began to find her range. Using her trademark powerful smashes and precise placement, she steadily pulled away to take the opening game 21-14, asserting control at crucial moments.

The second game proved far more challenging. Sung raised her intensity, forcing Sindhu into longer rallies and pushing her deep into the court. At one stage, Sindhu trailed and appeared under pressure as her opponent sensed an opportunity to level the match. Drawing on her vast experience, Sindhu responded with calm shot selection and improved defensive work, gradually closing the gap.

The closing stages of the second game turned into a tense battle of

nerves. With both players trading points, Sindhu held her composure under pressure, producing key winners when it mattered most. She clinched the game 22-20, sealing the match and confirming her place in the next round after a demanding contest.

This victory holds special significance for Sindhu, as it marked her first competitive match of the season following time away from the court due to injury. While there were moments of rust, her ability to fight through a tough second game underlined her mental strength and competitive instinct. The match also offered encouraging signs in terms of her attacking play and court coverage as she builds momentum.

With the win, Sindhu moves into the pre-quarters, where she is set to face a higher-ranked opponent in what promises to be a stern test of her readiness. Progressing in a Super 1000 tournament at the very start of the season provides valuable confidence and ranking points.

For Indian badminton fans, Sindhu's opening-round performance offers optimism. Her ability to dig deep, adapt to match situations, and close out tight games remains one of her greatest strengths. As the Malaysia Open progresses, all eyes will be on Sindhu to see how far she can go in what could be a crucial season for the experienced shuttler.

'Tarasuki Ram' Lyrical from Draupathi 2 Blends Celebration, Faith, and Power



The newly released lyrical song "Tarasuki Ram" from the upcoming historical drama Draupathi 2 offers a striking example of how music can function as narrative rather than mere spectacle.

The song seamlessly transitions into its second stanza, "Jai Rama Rama Rama Hare Ram," set against the backdrop of prâna pratisthâ celebrations. This segment features Richard Rishi's character carrying the idol of Lord Rama alongside members of his clan. While the celebratory mood continues, the emotional register shifts toward faith, unity, and shared conviction. Here, celebration becomes an act of consecration and collective belief, rooted in devotion rather than display.

Composed as a song of contrasts, Tarasuki Ram is structured around two distinct stanzas, each representing a different emotional and ideological space. The opening section, "Tarasuki," depicts the sultana clan immersed in grand celebration. Marked by pulsating rhythms, expansive choreography, and visually dominant staging, this portion presents celebration as an assertion of authority and power. The energy is outward-facing

and collective, driven by scale, momentum, and a sense of dominance that reflects political strength rather than spiritual depth.

Produced by Sola Shakkavarthi under Netaji Productions, in association with G. M Film Corporation, Draupathi 2 expands into a broader historical canvas set in the 14th century. The film draws inspiration from the reign of Hoysala emperor Veera Vallalar III and the legacy of the Kadavarayans of Sendhamangalam, exploring themes of imperial conflict, resistance, and cultural upheaval.

Directed by Mohan G., the film stars Richard Rishi and Rakshana Induchoodan as Draupathi Devi, with a strong ensemble cast including Natti Natraj, Y. G. Mahendran, Nadodigal Barani, Vel Ramamoorthy, and others. With music by Ghibran Vaibodha and cinematography by Philip R. Sundar, Draupathi 2 continues to build momentum as a historical drama where music serves as an extension of its ideological and emotional storytelling.

"Sahakutumbaanam Brings Fresh Layers to Family Entertainment" – Hero Dheekshith Shetty



Sahakutumbaanam, the latest family entertainer produced under the HNG Cinemas LLP banner, is steadily winning hearts at the box office following its New Year release. Written and directed by Uday Sharma and produced by Mahadev Goud and Nagarjuna, the film features Ram Kiran and Megha Akash in the lead roles. Since its release, the film has been receiving a positive response from audiences, particularly family viewers who are appreciating its emotional core and relatable storytelling.

One of the key strengths of Sahakutumbaanam lies in its impressive ensemble cast. The film brings together seasoned performers such as Nata Kireeti Rajendra Prasad, Comedy Brahma Brahmanandam, Subhalekha Sudhakar, Satya, Rajashree

Nair, Racha Ravi, Giridhar, Tagubothu Ramesh, and Bhadram, among others. Their presence adds depth and credibility to the narrative, making the family dynamics more engaging and authentic on screen.

Renowned music director Mani Sharma has composed the soundtrack, which has been well received for its melody and emotional resonance. Madhu Dasari's cinematography enhances the visual appeal of the film, while Shashank Mali's editing ensures a smooth and engaging narrative flow.

With its blend of emotion, humor, music, and strong performances, Sahakutumbaanam is emerging as a wholesome entertainer. Its refreshing narrative approach and family-centric theme continue to strike a chord with audiences in theatres, positioning the film as a notable New Year release in the entertainment space.

After watching the film, hero Dheekshith Shetty shared his appreciation for the team and the concept of Sahaku-

tumbaanam. Praising the film, he said it offers a refreshing take within the family entertainer genre by adding new layers to a familiar format. He particularly lauded the well-written characters and highlighted Ram Kiran's confident performance, noting that he never appears like a newcomer. Dheekshith also appreciated the appealing songs, Ram Kiran's energetic dance performances, and the strong production values.

With its blend of emotion, humor, music, and strong performances, Sahakutumbaanam is emerging as a wholesome entertainer. Its refreshing narrative approach and family-centric theme continue to strike a chord with audiences in theatres, positioning the film as a notable New Year release in the entertainment space.

After watching the film, hero Dheekshith Shetty shared his appreciation for the team and the concept of Sahaku-

Samantha's 'Maa Inti Bangaram' Teaser Trailer to Release on January 9

Star actress Samantha is all set to return to the big screen with her latest film Maa Inti Bangaram, in which she plays the central role. The makers of the film have officially announced that the teaser trailer will be released on January 9 at 10 AM, raising excitement among fans and film enthusiasts. According to the production team, the teaser promises to deliver a powerful and intense cinematic experience, offering a glimpse into a gripping story driven by strong emotions and high-impact drama.

Maa Inti Bangaram marks another collaboration between Samantha and director Nandini Reddy, who earlier delivered the super hit Oh Baby. While that film was known for its light-hearted humor and emotional warmth, the makers clarify that this new project explores a com-

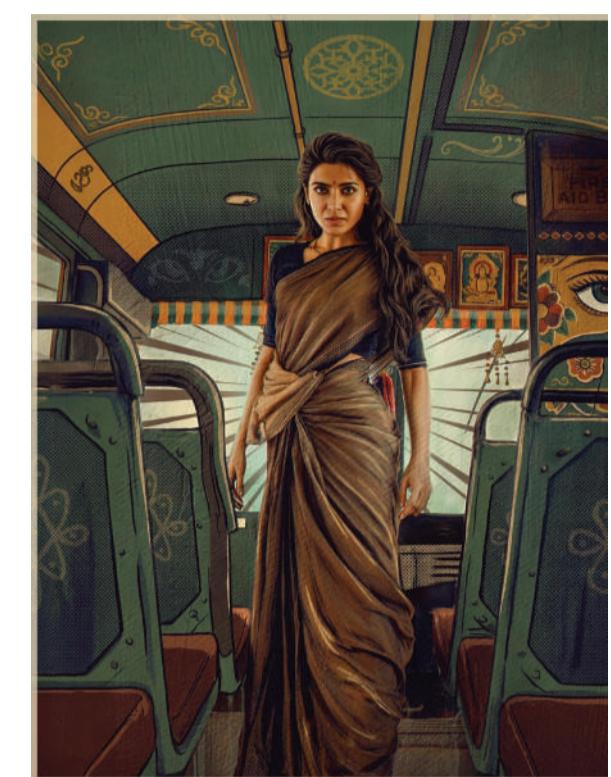
pletely different emotional space. This time, the duo is venturing into a bold and gripping family action drama, blending intense storytelling with strong character arcs.

The successful combination of Samantha and Nandini Reddy has already set high expectations, and the film is being positioned as a significant step forward in Samantha's career.

In addition to playing the lead role, Samantha is also co-producing the film under the Tralala Moving Pictures banner, along with Raj Nidimoru and Himanshu Duvvuru. This dual role highlights her growing influence behind the scenes and her commitment to backing content-driven cinema. The first-look poster released earlier created a strong buzz on social media, with Samantha's fierce and commanding appearance receiving widespread appreciation.

With the teaser trailer set to drop on January 9,

anticipation continues to build around Maa Inti Bangaram, as audiences



eagerly await a powerful preview of Samantha's intense new avatar.

Nata Kireeti Rajendra Prasad Unveils Title and First Look Poster of Trendy Comedy Panchali Pancha Bhartruka



Veteran actor Nata Kireeti Rajendra Prasad officially unveiled the title and first look poster of the upcoming trendy comedy entertainer Panchali Pancha Bhartruka, creating strong buzz among moviegoers and industry circles. The film is being jointly produced by Royal Throne Productions and Om Sai Ram Arts and promises to offer a fresh, youthful take on comedy with the intriguing tagline, "Less Logic, More Magic."

The launch event was held today in a cheerful atmosphere, with renowned music director RP Patnaik gracing the occasion. The unveiling marked an important milestone for the film, which is being directed by Ganga Saptashikha and positioned as a fun-filled entertainer with contemporary sensibilities.

Panchali Pancha Bhartruka features Venkat Duggireddy, Raj Pavan, Gemini Suresh, and popular rap singer Roll Rida in the lead roles. Adding strength to the cast, Nata Kireeti Rajendra Prasad will be seen in an important supporting role, along with Prudhvi Raj and Srikanth Iyengar. The film is produced by Venkat Duggireddy (USA), with Srikanth Settivari and Sainadh Manyam serving as co-producers.

Speaking at the event, Rajendra Prasad expressed his confidence in the project and praised the young team behind it. He described the film as a youthful entertainer with a fresh storyline by a new director. Without revealing details about his role, he said audiences should experience his character on the big screen. He also noted that it had been a long time since he acted in such a strong comedy film and urged audiences to encourage new talent.

Music director RP Pat-

naik shared his excitement about the unique title, stating that while the term Panchali Pancha Bhartruka is familiar, no one had dared to use it as a film title before. He felt the title itself reflects the fun nature of the film and extended his best wishes to the entire team, especially Gemini Suresh and Roll Rida.

The film's music is composed by Mahesh Narayana and Bishek, with editing by Johnny Basha and cinematography by KV Prasad. The story is penned by Bobby KSR, while the screenplay is written by Raj Pavan.

With a quirky title, youthful cast, and a promise of pure entertainment, Panchali Pancha Bhartruka is gearing up for a grand theatrical release soon and is expected to strike a chord with audiences looking for light-hearted comedy.

'Assalu Cinema' Song Released from Action King Arjun's Pan-India Film Seetha Payanam

Sri Ram Films International has unveiled the energetic song "Assalu Cinema" from the much-anticipated pan-India film Seetha Payanam, directed by the multi-talented Action King Arjun. The film has already generated strong buzz due to its scale, star-studded cast, and Arjun's all-round involvement as writer, producer, and director.

"Assalu Cinema" stands out as a lively and visually appealing number, composed by Melody King Anup Rubens. The song features catchy, vibrant music that instantly connects with audiences, while the lyrics penned by renowned lyricist Chandrabose add a stylish and playful flavor. Lending her soulful and melodious voice to the track is Shreya Ghoshal, whose vocals elevate the song and give it a strong emotional and musical appeal. The song prominently showcases Aishwarya Arjun, whose glamour, expressive performance, and confident screen presence add charm and energy to the visuals.

The technical crew behind the film is equally notable. G. Balamurugan handles cinematography, ensuring rich visuals, while Dr. Sai Madhav Burra pens impactful dialogues. Editing is managed by Ayoob Khan, and the film's art direction is led by Mohan B. Carey, Shiva Kamesh D., and CH Krishna. Action sequences are choreographed by Kickas Khalee, promising gripping stunt choreography. UL. Murthy serves as co-director, with Sai Satish as PRO and Star Circle oversee-



ing digital marketing.

With the release of "Assalu Cinema," excitement around Seetha Payanam has intensified. The song offers a vibrant

glimpse into the film's tone and style, setting the stage for what promises to be a major pan-India release this Valentine's Day.