

Collector recalls Ambedkar's contributions to nation

Glowing tributes paid to architect of Constitution at Smritivanam in city

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Marking Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar's 134th birth anniversary, NTR District Collector Dr G. Lakshmisha paid rich tributes to the 125-foot-tall statue of the social reformer at Swaraj Maidan (Ambedkar Smritivanam) in Vijayawada on Monday.

Dr Lakshmisha offered floral garlands and fondly recalled Babasaheb's invaluable contributions to the nation. Speaking on the occasion, he said that Dr Ambedkar's efforts in eradicating social inequalities and uplifting marginalised communities would forever be remembered. He emphasised that Babasaheb worked tirelessly to improve the lives of the downtrodden and build a more inclusive and just society.

The Collector called upon all citizens to draw inspiration from Dr Ambedkar's vision and ideals to contribute towards the development of the state and the nation. He described Ambedkar as a towering personality who played a pivotal role in shaping modern India and enhancing its image on the global stage.

Highlighting the strength of India's democracy, Dr Lakshmisha noted that the



freedoms and order enjoyed by citizens today were rooted in the greatness of the Constitution. He credited Dr Ambedkar's monumental role in its drafting, saying, "His legacy is the foundation of our democratic and disciplined society."

Vijayawada RDO K Chaitanya, District Social Welfare Officer K Srinivasa Shiromani, VMC Additional Commissioner D Chandrasekhar, and several Dalit welfare organisation representatives also participated in the event.

APCC vice-chief pays floral tributes

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) vice president Kolanukonda Sivaji paid rich tributes to the architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, on his 134th birth anniversary here on Monday. Shivaji garlanded a portrait of Dr Ambedkar at the memorial located at the PWD Grounds and later offered floral tributes at the Tummalapalli Kalakshetram. Speaking to the media on the occasion, the Congress leader recalled Ambedkar's lifelong struggle for the upliftment of marginalised and underprivileged communities. He strongly advocated for a caste census in Andhra Pradesh, stating that despite having a smaller population, upper caste leaders continue to receive a disproportionately higher number of election tickets compared to backward caste representatives.

The Congress leader pointed out that states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Karnataka have taken steps to conduct caste-



based surveys to ensure justice for Dalits and Backward Classes. He urged Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to initiate a similar caste census in Andhra Pradesh to empower backward communities. Further, Shivaji demanded that the state government enact legislation to ensure that funds allocated under the SC-ST sub-plan are utilised exclusively for the intended beneficiaries.

Pregnant woman strangled by husband hours before delivery

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a chilling case of domestic violence, a 25-year-old pregnant woman was allegedly strangled to death by her husband just hours before she was expected to deliver her baby. The incident occurred in VUDA Colony, PM Palem, Madhurawada, on Monday morning, sending shockwaves through the locality. The deceased, identified as Anusha (25), had been married to Gedda Gyaneshwar Rao (28) for the past two years. According to police sources, the couple had married for love, reportedly without the consent of their families, and had been living in a rented house in the area.

Gyaneshwar, who runs two fast food stalls near Sagar Nagar View Point, was said to be earning a modest income. However, their relationship had been marred by frequent quarrels and growing marital discord in recent months. On Monday, an argument between the couple is believed to have turned violent. In a fit of rage, Gyaneshwar allegedly strangled Anusha, ignoring her



advanced stage of pregnancy. Following the incident, Gyaneshwar is said to have called friends and relatives, claiming that Anusha had fallen seriously ill. She was rushed to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared her brought dead. Her body was later shifted to King George Hospital (KGH) mortuary for a post-mortem examination. Upon being informed, Anusha's parents rushed to the hospital and lodged a complaint with the PM Palem police. During initial interrogation, Gyaneshwar reportedly confessed to the crime.

A case has been registered under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and

Gyaneshwar, who runs two fast food stalls near Sagar Nagar View Point, was said to be earning a modest income. However, their relationship had been marred by frequent quarrels and growing marital discord in recent months. On Monday, an argument between the couple is believed to have turned violent. In a fit of rage, Gyaneshwar allegedly strangled Anusha, ignoring her advanced stage of pregnancy

the accused has been taken into custody. Further investigation is underway. The tragic incident has sparked widespread outrage, with women's rights activists and local residents condemning the act and demanding strict action against the accused.

Anna Konidela offers Rs 17 L for annadanam at Tirumala in son's name

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Anna Konidela, wife of Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, visited the sacred shrine of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala and participated in Suprabhata Seva on Monday morning. Entering the temple through the Vaikuntam queue complex during the early hours, she offered prayers to the presiding deity.

Following the darshan, she was received at the Ranganayakula Mandapam,



where Vedic scholars performed Vedasirvachanam (Vedic blessings) and presented her with Theertha Prasadam from the temple. Later, she offered traditional

harati to the deity at Akhilandam, located in front of the temple, and fulfilled her vows by offering a coconut.

Anna Konidela also visited the Tarigonda Vengamamba Annaprasadam Complex at 10 am and personally served food to the devotees. She also made a significant philanthropic contribution by donating Rs 17 lakh to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) towards the Nithya Annadanam (daily free meals) programme, in the name of her son, Konidela Mark Shankar.

SP orders heightened vigilance at religious sites after graffiti arrests

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

In the wake of arrests made on Monday linked to religious graffiti targeting Hindu temples in Yelamanchili village of Jalamuru mandal, Srikakulam District Superintendent of Police KV Maheswar Reddy has called

for heightened security and vigilance at all places of worship across the district.

The graffiti incident, which sparked communal unrest, led to the arrest of three individuals on charges of attempting to incite religious discord. Responding to the situation, the SP

issued a statement on Monday urging temple, church, and mosque committees to implement stringent safety measures to prevent criminal acts and safeguard public peace.

Highlighting the misuse of digital platforms, Maheswar Reddy warned that any social media content aimed at

spreading communal hatred, propagating false religious narratives, or inciting caste and political divisions would attract serious legal consequences. "Those who share or post provocative content that disturbs public order will face criminal prosecution and be presented before the court," he said.

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ANDHRA PRADESH GETTING BACK ON TRACK

Ghibli-fied: The rise of digital escapism

Generative AI has sparked a new cultural wave — one that's as enchanting as it is unsettling. The latest phenomenon? Ghibli AI — a trend that transforms ordinary selfies into dreamy, Studio Ghibli-style portraits, flooding our timelines with wide-eyed nostalgia

FIRST Column

In the ever-evolving landscape of technology, we are no strangers to artificial intelligence. Its integration into our daily lives has been gradual yet persistent — from recommendation algorithms curating our music playlists to predictive text completing our sentences.

However, the recent emergence of Generative AI or Gen AI has shaken the world like an earthquake, sending tremors through industries once thought impervious to automation.

Gen AI has wrapped netizens in its algorithmic embrace and disrupted the creative sector in ways few could have predicted. What began as a fascinating technological novelty has quickly transformed into a formidable force, expanding its tentacles to art, a domain historically defined by human expression and emotional depth.

Ghibli AI is the newest pop-cultural tsunami in the Gen AI family — sweeping across timelines, feeds, and filters with the quiet ferocity of a Studio Ghibli Forest spirit.

What began as a simple curiosity — “What would I look like in a Ghibli film?” — has now metamorphosed into a full-blown cultural phenomenon. But what is this trend telling us? Is it merely about the visuals, or is it about something far deeper; our collective yearning, our consumer anxieties, and the fragile state of contemporary art?

Let's call it what it is: The Ghibli Syndrome, a sweeping, almost obsessive need to see oneself rendered through the warm, nostalgic lens of Studio Ghibli's world.

With its signature soft palettes, melancholic charm, and wide-eyed whimsy, Ghibli's visual style speaks to our inner child while also satisfying our adult need for poetic escapism.

But the recent explosion of AI-generated Ghibli avatars isn't about Studio Ghibli at all, it's about us. It's about self-expression, identity branding, digital validation, and yes, fear of missing out (FOMO) in a culture that moves faster than we can scroll.

From a consumer behaviour perspective, this trend aligns with what psychologists call the “Proteus Effect”— the tendency for individuals to change their behaviour based on their digital self-representation.

In this case, AI doesn't just render us more beautiful, it renders us more narrative-worthy. And in a hyper-narrativised world, that's social currency. AI has always had a kind of Pied Piper effect, drawing the masses into whatever melody it happens to be playing.

But with the Ghibli generator, that effect feels amplified. The Ghibli AI trend marks a turning point in branding, where identity becomes fluid, re-skinning and reshaping at will. Smart brands are seizing this as an opportunity for immersive storytelling, letting users co-create narratives and inhabit stylised versions of themselves.

From skincare filters to dreamy travel avatars, brands that offer personal fantasy build deeper



CHAITANYA K. PRASAD

emotional connections. But there's a flipside: virality-driven branding risks becoming shallow and performative.

As trends like “Dalgona coffee” and “Barbiecore” show, the thirst for belonging can foster a culture of reinvention rooted in fear of irrelevance; alienating those who can't or won't keep up. Beneath the charm of

Ghibli-fied faces lies a stark reality: vast amounts of facial and emotional data are being fed into opaque AI systems.

These generators harvest biometric inputs, aesthetic preferences, and mood cues; treasured assets

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BEYOND THE REALM OF BRANDING AND PRIVACY, THERE LIES A MORE EXISTENTIAL CONCERN: WHAT BECOMES OF ART ITSELF? WHAT ARE WE LOSING IN THIS TIDAL WAVE OF ALGORITHMIC BEAUTY?

for advertisers and algorithmic profiling. Users may be unknowingly trading privacy for pixels. This gamified engagement masks a growing risk: manipulation, deepfakes, and surveillance capitalism.

As play blurs with peril, we must ask: are we surrendering control for digital prettiness? The Ghibli AI trend is both a mirror and a warning: a reflection of our yearning and a reminder of the agency we must not give away. Beyond the realm of branding and privacy, there lies a more existential concern: what becomes of art itself?

What are we losing in this tidal wave of algorithmic beauty? As everyone begins to look like a Ghibli protagonist, the uniqueness of the aesthetic begins to dilute. Mass replication may be the enemy of meaning.

In attempting to become art, we may be rendering art flat, predictable, and mechanised. Moreover, this frenzy sets a dangerous precedent, where the most consumed visuals are not the ones made by human hands but the ones conjured by code.

In this light, the Ghibli trend is not just a creative outlet, it's a cultural warning. A glimpse into a future where originality might become indistinguishable from imitation.

The Ghibli AI art generator is not merely a toy. It is a cultural artefact of our times, revealing everything from our psychological needs to our digital dependencies.

Gone are the days when art was defined by its process, from its conception stage to the technique and the presentation.

Traditionally, the journey of creating art was valued as the final product. Artists spent years mastering their craft, developing unique techniques, and pouring their lived experiences into their work.

The art appreciation was not just for the final product; it was also for the sheer amount of hard work, thought process, and passion for the craft.

A painter might spend months perfecting a portrait, a musician might iterate through countless melodies before finding the right composition, and a writer might revise a manuscript dozens of times before publication.

These processes were integral to the art itself, often visible in brushstrokes, musical motifs, or literary styles. Unfortunately, in the age of Generative AI, this elaborate creative process is now often reduced to a prompt — a few words typed into a text box. “Create a surrealist landscape in the style of Salvador Dalí with melting clocks by a seashore at sunset.”

Within seconds, an AI system can generate an image that bears a striking resemblance to Dalí's work, without any understanding of surrealism's philosophical underpinnings or Dalí's personal experiences that informed his distinctive style.

As we navigate this brave new world of AI-generated art, we must reconcile our fascination with technological possibility with our reverence for human creativity.

The Ghibli AI phenomenon isn't merely a passing trend but a pivotal moment that challenges our understanding of art itself.

Perhaps the solution isn't to resist these tools but to redefine our relationship with them — using AI not as a replacement for human creativity but as an extension of it.

In this delicate balance lies the future of art: one where technology amplifies human expression rather than diminishing its value, preserving the soul behind the creation.

(The writer is Former Civil Servant, writes on Cinema and Strategic Communication. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan. Views are personal)

A blow to public education's integrity

With thousands of appointments declared void in West Bengal and the State Government under fire, the scandal underscores the urgent need for transparency and accountability in public sector recruitment, especially in education

Last week, the Supreme Court concurred with the decision of Calcutta High Court and cancelled the 2016 recruitment of over 25,700 teachers and non-teaching staff recruited in 2016 for the schools of the West Bengal government.

A year earlier, on 22nd April 2024, Calcutta High Court had cancelled the selection process that was marred by manipulation and fraud on a large scale, and attempted cover-up by a state agency, resulting in a loss of credibility and legitimacy and thereby denting the entire process. The Supreme Court bench of Chief Justice Sanjeev Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar observed, “The entire selection process has been vitiated and tainted beyond resolution,” and also referred to the candidates' OMR (answer) sheets for illegal rank jumping, selection of those who did not qualify, and also those who submitted blank answer sheets.

CBI, on the direction of Calcutta High Court in 2022, had investigated the entire matter of teachers' recruitment in West Bengal and found that 6,515 recruited persons out of total recruitment of 25,753 were tainted. However, the investigating agency could not conclusively conclude that all the remaining were untainted because OMR sheets were not found maintained and kept in PDF/digital form by the school service commission.

The Supreme Court bench also added that the tainted candidates should be required to refund any salaries/payments received as the appointments were the result of fraud, which amounts to cheating. For the remaining candidates, the bench clarified that they lost the jobs, as the entire selection process has been cancelled, but they are not required to refund salaries and other reimbursements received.

The Supreme Court provided further relief to those who were not found on the list of tainted candidates and were in a job in the government department/autonomous body before the 2016 recruitment. These candidates can apply back to their respective organisations, where their jobs will have to be restored, protecting their pay and seniority.

Even if there were no vacancies, the concerned organisation would create supernumerary posts to accommodate the can-



BK SINGH

didates. The court on humanitarian grounds allowed differently abled candidates to continue in the job and draw salaries, even though the entire process of selection was cancelled.

The bribe for job controversy had led to the 2022 arrest of former state's education Minister Partha Chatterjee, who was charged by ED for money laundering. Authorities had seized more than 49 crore rupees in cash from the flats of his aide and Chatterjee has been in jail for years. West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, refused to accept the court's verdict and vowed to take it up for review. She accused BJP and CPM of trying to destabilise Bengal's education system and questioned why other recruitment scandals,

such as Madhya Pradesh's Vyapam scam, had not faced similar legal consequences. She met the teachers terminated by the Supreme Court a few days ago at Netaji Indoor Stadium, Kolkata, and promised them to provide jobs in other departments, in case the state fails to find a favourable decision in review.

Her Education Minister Bratya Basu constituted a liaison committee with representatives of affected school staff, who would deal with the state's legal team comprising Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Kapil Sibal, Rakesh Dwivedi, Kalyan Banerjee, and Prashant Bhushan to safeguard the rights of the eligible teachers.

First and foremost, the state should have a check and balance system so that the irregularities found in recruitment are not carried forward. The recruitment by the School Service Commission, where fraud has occurred, has been in progress from 2016 to 2021.

Even after the scam came to light in 2021, it was incumbent on the state to

make alternative arrangements and take up a transparent and impartial process to recruit a new set of teaching staff. There is no dearth of talent in the state. There are sincere and meritorious candidates, who do not have any Godfather to promote their candidature. They are generally from a humble background and will not have sufficient money to pay the bribe. Only a fair and impartial examination system for recruitment can provide them with an opportunity.

Nearly half a century ago, government schools in West Bengal and many other states provided a platform for students from humble backgrounds to rise in life. The teachers those days used to be extraordinary. Once they explained the topic in the class, one only needed to revise at home and there was never any need for tuition in extra hours. Teachers were also available to students to clear any doubt during breaks and when they had free periods. Further, before taking up a fresh topic in the class, they were in the habit of review-

ing how students had understood the previous chapter and took pleasure in explaining the concepts again, where the understanding was lagging. Besides, some brighter students took it upon themselves to help those who lagged. There was no culture of tuition even in subjects like Science and Mathematics. My several friends cracked Indian Institute of Technology's entrance examination for admission in Engineering trades for graduation. They were attentive in classes, and did not undergo any IIT coaching.

These days, no one gets admission even in ordinary Engineering and Medical colleges without two years of rigorous coaching. Government schools and colleges often imparted superior training to students, as compared to private institutions. In my case, I did not get admission to a Government intermediate college, as my 10th standard marks were below the cut-off. Nevertheless, I got wonderful teachers of Physics and Mathematics in a private institution named DB Inter College

Goalkhpur, who nicely trained me to utilise my full potential in learning the subjects. I am especially thankful to my Mathematics Teacher Sri Sambhoo Saran Dubey, whose meticulous training to approach any problem in the subject led to immense confidence building in me, which helped to crack UPSC's Indian Forest Service Examination in 1975. Dubey sir spent time on weak students too. He conducted extra classes on holidays without any additional emoluments.

The trends in the education system differ these days; Science, Engineering and Mathematics students do not opt for the subjects they graduated from in UPSC's competitive examinations. Engineering graduates from even IIT opt for Geology and Forestry in Indian Forest Service exams and Anthropology/Geography in Civil Services.

The course materials in altogether new subjects as well as the coaching are available in all major cities of the country helping them to crack the exams. Why these days students lack confidence in their core Science subjects? It adversely reflects on the system. They do not have a solid foundation in the subject. Imagine the degeneration in the system visible to present-day senior citizens over five decades.

What worse can we expect when there is corruption in the recruitment of the teaching staff? Such teachers' heads hang in shame and cannot face students and parents when questioned regarding the payment of bribes for their appointments.

The most striking part is the degradation of standards in government schools over this period. The corruption and inefficiency in the governments is to fully account for such downfall.

Society has also changed and there has been a mushrooming of private institutions, which is unaffordable for students from humble backgrounds.

Let the governments focus on corruption-free administration in the education system. When the wrongdoing was pointed out in selection of West Bengal teachers in 2021-22, the state should have immediately gone for fresh recruitments and saved four years for students.

(The writer is Retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Karnataka. Views are personal)

'Will blow up his car': Chilling threat sent to Salman Khan sparks panic

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan has received yet another death threat, escalating security concerns around the actor. The latest threat was delivered via WhatsApp to the Mumbai Traffic Police helpline on Sunday, prompting immediate police action and tighter security around Khan's Bandra residence.

According to police sources, the message stated that the actor would be "killed" by someone who would "barge into his house and blow up his car with a bomb."



Prior to that, reports emerged of an assassination plot at his Panvel farmhouse, with shooters allegedly tracking his movements. Some earlier threats included ransom demands ranging from Rs 2 crore to Rs 5 crore.

In response, authorities have repeatedly heightened Khan's security, upgrading him to Y+ category protection. At a recent public event, the actor addressed the ongoing threats, saying, "Life and death are not in our hands. I will live as long as God wants me to." He also shared that he now limits his outings to only essential work commitments.

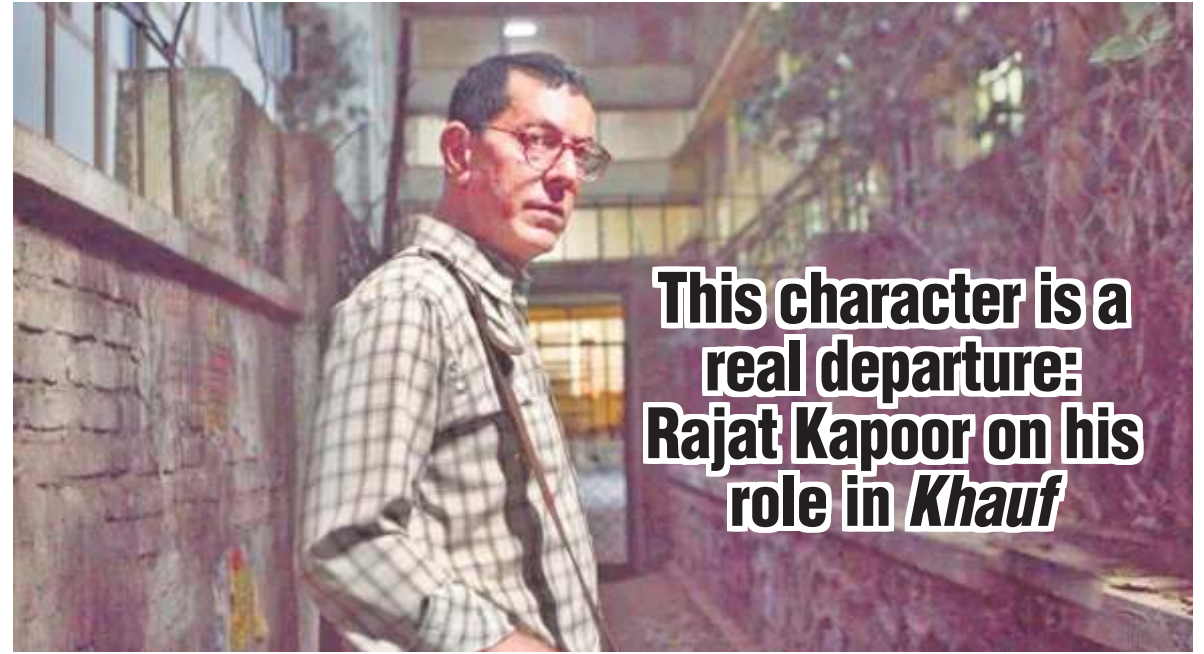
A case has been filed against an unidentified person at the Worli Police Station, and the Mumbai Police are currently tracing the origin of the message.

This is the fifth threat directed at the 59-year-old actor in the past two years.

Khan has been on the radar of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, which has repeatedly targeted him in connection with the long-standing 1998 blackbuck poaching case. Although the court has dismissed the charges, Bishnoi

has demanded a public apology from Khan in Rajasthan, warning of severe consequences if he fails to comply. The threats have grown increasingly alarming. Last year, gunshots were fired outside Khan's Bandra home.

As the investigation into the latest threat continues, law enforcement agencies remain on high alert, determined to ensure the actor's safety amid mounting concerns.



This character is a real departure: Rajat Kapoor on his role in *Khauf*

Known for his nuanced performances and experimental approach to filmmaking, actor Rajat Kapoor is once again stepping outside the box—this time into the chilling world of horror with the upcoming series *Khauf*. Long admired for roles that lean into realism and complexity, Kapoor says

this project marks a bold and refreshing departure from anything he's done before.

"The character is unlike anything I've done before," Kapoor admits. "All I knew was, when I got the call and read the material, I was genuinely excited. It felt like a big shift for me—a real departure from what I've done in the past."

Kapoor, who has carved a niche with films that push artistic boundaries, found himself intrigued by the series' gripping narrative. "The reading material itself was very thrilling. That's what hooked me right away. There's something unique about the atmosphere *Khauf* creates—it's eerie, layered, and extremely char-

acter-driven," he adds. As the actor ventures into the horror genre, *Khauf* promises to bring an unsettling yet captivating tale to life, with Kapoor at its enigmatic core. For someone who has never shied away from experimentation, this marks yet another fascinating chapter in his ever-evolving cinematic journey.

Abhishek Banerjee excited to now have 4 major franchises to his credit

In just past six years, Abhishek Banerjee has become a cornerstone of Bollywood's biggest franchises, carving out a unique space for himself in the industry. With his unique acting prowess and ability to seamlessly adapt to diverse roles, the actor is now associated with four major franchises that promise to dominate the big screen in the coming years.

Banerjee shot to fame with *Stree* (2018), where his role as Jana became an instant hit with audiences. The film's massive success gave birth to a universe now expanding with *Stree 2* and *Stree 3* announced. He also joined the world of *Bhediya*, another hit horror-comedy and with *Bhediya 2* officially announced, Banerjee's presence in this growing cinematic universe is firmly established. His roles in these films have already garnered immense praise from critics and audiences alike, making his return to these franchises highly anticipated.

On OTT, Banerjee's role in the gritty series *Mirzapur* added depth to his repertoire. Now, as the franchise evolves into a film, Banerjee is set to reprise his role, bridging the gap between digital and cinematic storytelling.

In the comedy space, Banerjee has delivered standout moments in *Dream*

Girl and *Dream Girl 2*, effortlessly complementing A y u s h m a n n Khurana's lead. With the first two films becoming major hits, his return in the potential *Dream Girl 3* feels inevitable.

Commenting on this milestone, Abhishek Banerjee said, "I'm grateful for the opportunity to be part of such iconic franchises that have captured the imagination of audiences. It's exciting to reprise roles that are so close to my heart and to explore new stories within these universes."

With *Stree 3*, *Bhediya 2*, *Mirzapur: The Film* and possibly *Dream Girl 3*, Abhishek Banerjee is the face of modern Bollywood franchises. In a world of mega-franchises, he's not just part of the narrative—he's essential to it. Where there's a hit franchise, there's Abhishek Banerjee, cementing his legacy as a true Bollywood all-rounder.



Randeep Hooda reconnects with *Jaat* roots

Actor Randeep Hooda surprised fans with an unexpected visit to a local theatre screening his latest hit film *Jaat*, where he plays the much-loved character Ranatunga. The star was mobbed by an enthusiastic crowd as he greeted audiences and expressed his gratitude for the immense love pouring in for his performance. Randeep chose to mark the festival of Baisakhi with a heartfelt visit to his hometown in Rohtak, Haryana. Following the success of *Jaat*, the actor paid homage to the land that shaped him, meeting with locals and his family to celebrate the occasion with warmth and reverence.

A source close to the actor adds, "Randeep has always worn his identity with pride. This visit was personal and symbolic—the success of *Jaat* brought him back to where it all began. It was an emotional, proud moment for him to share this triumph with his people. To be around his family truly meant the world to him."

He expressed, "I went to the heart of *Jaat* land and my ancestral town, Rohtak with my brother, director and honorary, the visionary behind *Jaat* the film. We have some delicious home cooked Haryanvi food and choorma at my Kaka's house and what better to see packed screens for *Jaat* with audiences showering so much love along with seetis and taalis."

As *Jaat* continues to win hearts across the country, Randeep Hooda remains grounded in his heritage, proving once again why he remains one of the most authentic and admired actors in Indian cinema today. The film has had a stellar weekend making it one of the biggest box office successes for Hooda, who has been touted to be one of the leading stars to embrace the most spoken about anti-hero character in a film in recent times.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



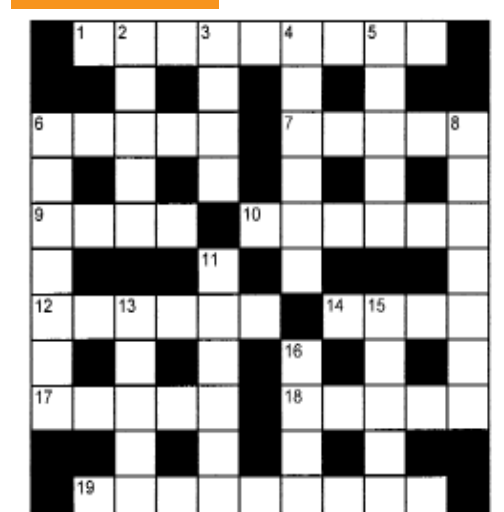
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

1	2	6	7	4	9	3	8	5
8	5	4	2	6	3	9	1	7
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9	7	3	4	1	6	8	5	2

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- Marked with the fingernails
- In front
- A keyboard instrument
- Painful to touch
- Something that is not to be told to anyone else
- A baby's toy
- A hired car
- Have a quarrel
- Incorrect
- Played make-believe
- Vienna is the capital of this country
- Nil
- Opposite of newest
- A large jungle cat
- By yourself
- A brother or sister born at the same time

DOWN

- A shout of approval
- Counts up
- Shut
- Very keen, enthusiastic



BLENDING BEATS AND BONDS

TEJAL SINHA
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Rishabh and Sanchit—better known as KhoslaRaghu—are two Delhi boys who turned their jam sessions into a full-blown musical vibe. Think: one loves Western beats, the other swears by Indian classical, and together they create magic that hits you right in the feels. Their breakout track *Barse More Naina* was the spark, but it's their real-life bond and infectious energy that keep listeners hooked. Their latest song, *Tera Yaar*, is a total heartwarmer—written by Khosla as a surprise for Raghu during his sister's wedding, it's the kind of track that makes you smile, sway and maybe tear up a little. For KhoslaRaghu, music isn't just sound—it's stories, friendships, and a whole lot of soul. *The Pioneer* connects with Risabh Raghuwanshi aka Raghu and he gets all candid about the duo and their music

Excerpts from the interview:

Tera Yaar has a deeply personal backstory, written during Raghu's sister's wedding. Can you share more about the emotions that went into creating this song?

RAGHU: *Tera Yaar* has been a very special song for us because the inspiration behind it is deeply personal. It was both challenging and exciting since we had never made a wedding song before. We wanted to stay honest to the inspiration and the fact that we created it for our sister makes the song and the journey even more special.

How did you balance personal emotions with making the song relatable to a wider audience?

RAGHU: This feeling is something we believe every Indian household is familiar with. So, for us, it was about staying true to that emotion, and we hope that everyone else relates to it.

The song has a nostalgic and heart-felt vibe. How did you approach the composition and production to capture that essence?

RAGHU: Indian weddings have their own sound and that's what we aimed for in the composition and production. We wanted to bring in that nostalgia. Growing up, we heard so many wedding songs and we didn't want to miss that essence. At the same time, we wanted to add our own unique touch to it.

What was the creative process like for *Tera Yaar*? Did you face any challenges while making it?

Tera Yaar was an exciting project for us. It was also fun because the



process was different from our usual songs. Since it was our first wedding song, we got to work with a lot of session musicians—like Sarangi, Tabla and Dholak—which made the experience even more enjoyable.

How has your audience responded to *Tera Yaar* so far?

RAGHU: The response has been amazing! People are really connecting with the song, and we're grateful for all the appreciation.

Any special reactions that stood out to you?

RAGHU: Yes! Some of our listeners have created amazing reels using the song and some have even told us they plan to use it at their own weddings. That's really special for us.

You both come from different musical backgrounds—Sanchit with Western influences and Rishabh with Indian classical roots. How do you blend these styles while making music?

RAGHU: We don't think in terms of "styles" too much. It's more about what feels right and sounds right. If a melody fits the vibe of the song, that's what we go for, rather than consciously differentiating between Western and Indian classical styles.

Your breakout song *Barse More Naina* gained massive traction on Spotify. Did its success shape your approach to music moving forward?

RAGHU: Not really! Every song is a new opportunity to experiment. *Barse More Naina* itself was a result of experimentation, and its success definitely motivated us to keep making music. But every song has its own journey, and we approach each one with fresh creativity.

From high school jamming sessions to becoming an emerging music duo, how has your journey evolved over the years?

RAGHU: We've always been friends first and a musical duo later. In many ways, things haven't changed—our bond and friendship remain the same. But as artists, we've grown by learning new things, meeting more like-minded people, and collaborating with artists across the country. The more we work, the more grateful we feel for this journey.

Were there any defining moments where you realised that music was more than just a passion for you?

RAGHU: Yes! The first time we made a song together back in 2019 and released it, the appreciation we received from friends and listeners really motivated us. That's when we realised we could take this forward and create something meaningful.

Your music blends modern and traditional elements. Are there specific artists or genres that influence your sound?

RAGHU: We listen to a wide range of music and artists from around the world. As musicians, it's important to keep an open perception and a broad creative canvas. That's what helps us blend different elements naturally.

Do you ever find it challenging to merge Western and Indian musical elements? How do you make them work together seamlessly?

RAGHU: Not really! For us, it's all about what feels right at the moment. We don't force a fusion—it just happens organically when we're working on a song.

Your songs tell stories and evoke strong emotions. How important is storytelling in your music?

RAGHU: Storytelling is very important for us. It not only shapes the lyrics but also helps guide the entire direction of the song.

What can we expect next from KhoslaRaghu? Any upcoming projects or collaborations?

RAGHU: We'll be releasing our latest EP *Aawara* very soon! Apart from that, we're really looking forward to performing more this year with fresh new music, and we're very excited about it.

JACKKY BHAGNANI

Film writing must tap into authentic human experiences to have a universal connect

PNS|EXCLUSIVE

Actor and producer Jackky Bhagnani, who has studied at Lee Strasberg's Theatre and Film Institute, often draws from his own experiences to analyse the current state of Indian cinema. He says, "Lee Strasberg's teaching method encourages aspiring actors to tap into their own lived experiences and emotions to create authenticity in their performances. This training not only sensitised me to the importance of channelling personal experiences as an actor but also to the role that good writing plays in creating a powerful experience for the audiences."

Referring to latest OTT sensations like *Baby Reindeer* and *Adolescence*, he says, "These shows amalgamate compelling storytelling about the human condition, primal emotions and stunning performances. They take the audience beyond entertainment and spark conversations about gender, culture and make us look within and introspect. That is what cinema needs to do as well. We are in the throes of a huge cultural and social transition and our stories need to reflect that. People may enjoy watching larger-than-life heroes but they also want to see themselves in the stories that are being told."

As an actor and as an avid movie watcher, he believes good writing and histrionics go hand-in-hand. As he says, "No actor, no matter how accomplished he or she may be, can do much if their role is not written well. Today particularly, when audiences have become more discerning, compelling storytelling is more important than ever. Mere star power cannot serve as a primary draw for people."

He points out that there is a marked dearth of good screenplays in cinema today and says, "Screen writing is an art and today not enough emphasis is placed upon it. Sourcing good stories is also very important and I feel film writing must tap into authentic human experiences to have a universal connect. The regional industries are getting this right to some extent and you see well-etched characters and also compelling performances."

He concedes that today, the challenges before the industry are varied considering its audiences are very diverse. As he says, "We are competing with international content that the urban segment consumes and also struggling to connect with rural sensibilities and audiences in Tier-2 and Tier 3. To get a story out

there which checks all the boxes is not easy but I think well-written, meaningful narratives coupled with good acting never fail to resonate. We are past the era of celebrity driven films. Today, the audience will spend money on a theatrical release only if we offer them something truly unique. Content fatigue is a real phenomenon and we need to experiment with genres, themes, out-of-the-box ideas and develop the confidence to invest in a good idea regardless of what is trending. Trends come and go but good stories live forever. This is why so many films from the past are now being re-released and doing so well."

As a producer he is also aware of the importance of factors like marketing, production costs and sensible budgets in making or breaking a film. He says, "At Puja Films, we want to strategically balance economic considerations and creativity to tell non-formulaic stories that connect with audiences on a deeper level. Good storytelling is something that has been a part of Hindi cinema since its inception and we just need to embrace this legacy as we move forward towards the future."



Ultimate summer salad guide with extra virgin olive oil & vinegars

As the temperature of summer prevails, light and easy foods become the staple option for most. A crisp and colorful salad not only seems easy but also serves as the tastiest option to indulge in seasonally harvested ingredients.

Be it an everyday weekday lunch or a simple dish during the weekend get-togethers, it is the intentional and mindful choice of fresh and quality ingredients such as Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO) and natural vinegars that really give a salad from common to gourmet.

This guide will take you through all you want to know about making summer-perfect salads, from the produce of the season to the best dressing tricks.

UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

A great salad starts with choosing great ingredients which do not just mean what is in the bowl, but also how each of them interacts with the others. The secret is knowing about seasonality and how textures and tastes interact. It is always good to have in store the basic ingredients like crisp leafy greens (cabbage, lettuce), firm vegetables (cucumbers, bell peppers, carrots) and soft fruits (peaches, mangoes, watermelon). Don't forget olives. Black olives of Hojiblanca variety offer a mild, earthy flavor, while green olives of Manzanilla variety provide a tangy, zesty flavour. Combining these elements creates a symphony of flavors, transforming your salad into a culinary experience. For added texture and natural crunch, add Borges zero pesticide residue almonds.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT OLIVE OILS

The oil used in a salad isn't just about fat content or gloss; it influences the dish with its flavors, texture, and aroma. Today, people are experimenting with vibrant, fusion-style bowls that bring together global flavours. Some popular salads include Mediterranean Chickpea Salad, Crispy Rice Salad, Quinoa Avocado Salad, Grape Salad and Lentil Salad with Walnuts and Honey Mustard Dressing. A key ingredient that enhances these salads is Extra Virgin olive oil (EVOO), which brings a captivating flavour & aroma to every bite. Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is the perfect companion for any salad. It is manufactured through a cold-extraction process, it retains a wealth of antioxidants and natural flavour.

With its smooth richness and enticing aroma, Choose one that compliments your ingredients—a mild EVOO enhances delicate greens and fruits, while a bolder EVOO stands up beautifully to quinoa or cheese. Additionally, extra virgin olive oils with distinct natural profiles—whether smooth, fruity, or full of character—are becoming increasingly popular for their ability to enhance salad flavours without needing additional ingredients.

As a brand, we recently introduced two single variety Extra virgin olive oils: Fruity and Character offering a range of choices for all tastes. These are recent additions to its existing Extra virgin olive oil that has been in India since inception.

- Made from Arbequina olives, Fruity Extra Virgin Olive Oil has a gentle taste, ideal for summer greens and fruit-topped salads. Its fresh, light flavour suits ingredients such as berries, melon and baby greens and adds a note of subtlety to salads such as strawberry and spinach.

- Produced from Picual olives, Character Extra Virgin Olive Oil is a full-bodied, spicy, and intense taste. It's perfect for grain or vegetable salads. It can hold up to ingredients such as roasted root vegetables, quinoa, or chickpeas. Use it in a healthy kale salad with roasted vegetables for a filling meal.

EXPLORING NATURAL VINEGARS

Vinegar is the secret to a great salad—it brings contrast, brightness, and balance, making every bite tangy. But choosing the right one is key. The right vinegar enhances your ingredients. Look for clarity, a well-balanced flavour, and a good ageing process. Steer clear of anything overly sharp or artificial tasting. A well-aged natural vinegar adds depth and a smooth finish, complementing your salad's natural flavour rather than overshadowing them. Aside from these, flavourful products such as table olives & vinegars can give plain salads a depth, especially when working with limited ingredients.

CREATING FLAVOURFUL DRESSINGS

A great dressing ties everything together, enhancing flavor without overpowering them. Extra virgin olive oils and natural vinegars serve as the foundation, but the key lies in balancing them to complement your ingredients—and, most importantly, your taste. The typical approach can be to use more oil than natural vinegar, but the exact ratio is entirely up to you. While many people prefer a sharp flavour, others prefer something more mellow. A fruity or smooth EVOO can add depth with minimal effort, working particularly well with summer salads. Similarly, using natural vinegar with subtle sweetness can change the tone of an otherwise simple salad. Above all, taste as you go—your salad is unique, and your dressing should be too. A quick mix, a small taste, and a slight adjustment are often all it takes to perfect it. The beauty of salads lies in their versatility—experiment with ingredients, play with dressings, and make every bowl your own. So next time you prepare a salad, don't settle for the ordinary—elevate it with the magic of EVOO and natural vinegar. Healthy eating has never been this delicious.

(The author, Vishal Gupta, is the managing director of Borges India.)

Test becomes first film shot at Chepauk Stadium



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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A few days ago, the Tamil film *Test* was released directly on an OTT platform. Featuring Madhavan, Nayanthara, Siddharth and Meera Jasmine in the lead roles, this film marks the directorial debut of S. Shashikanth, who previously produced several films. He co-directed this project along with Chakravarthy Ramachandra under their YNot Studios banner. *Test* has become a major success on OTT and has also received critical acclaim.

The film is set against a cricket backdrop, with Siddharth playing a cricketer named Arjun. His character, having lost form, seeks redemption in a Test match against Pakistan at the Chepauk Stadium in Chennai. This is notably the first film to be shot in the iconic Chepauk (MA Chidambaram) Stadium.

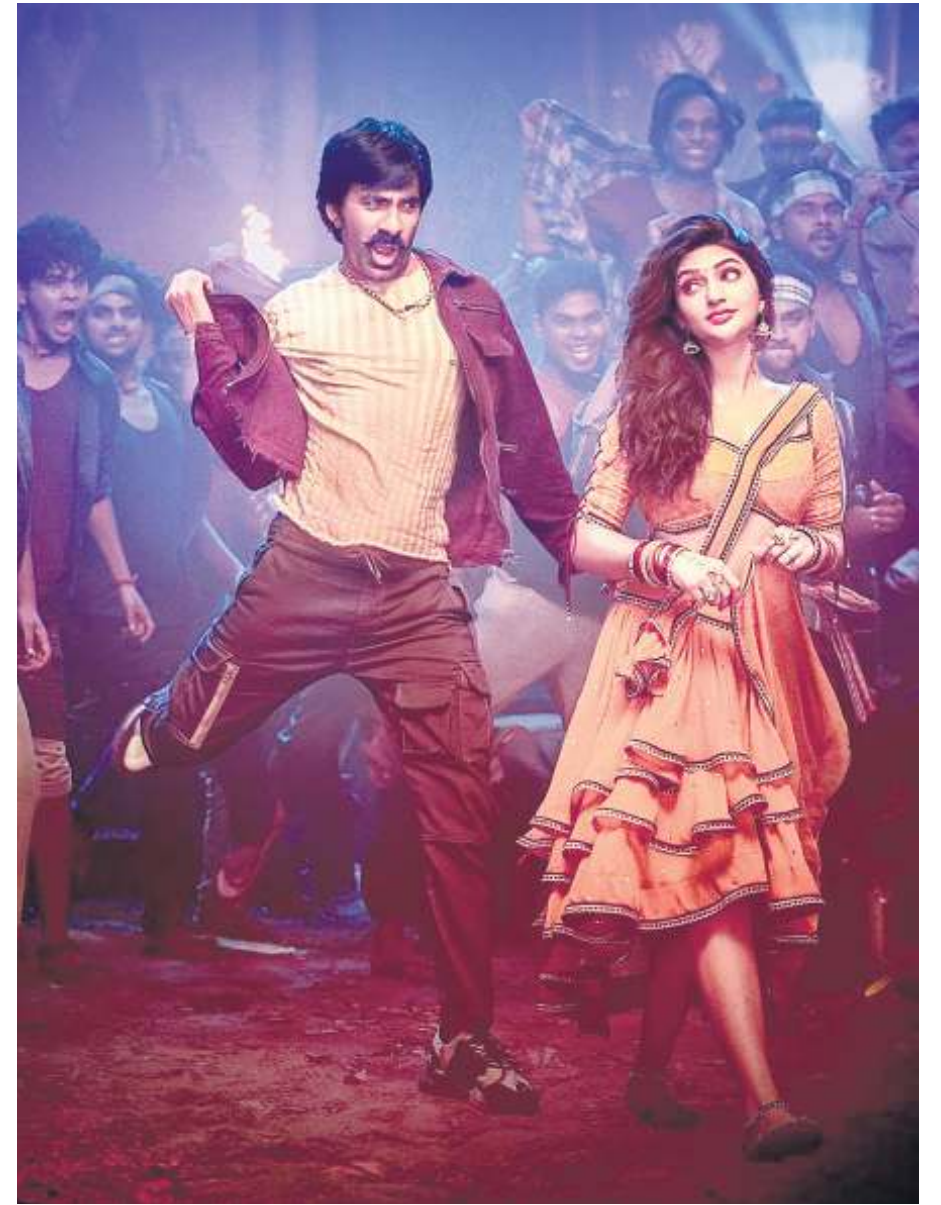
"We hired Star Sports cameras, the ones used for broadcasting actual cricket matches. We did a lot of homework before shooting scenes at Chepauk," said producer Chakravarthy Ramachandra. He added that this preparation

is the reason the scenes looked so realistic. "We also hired professional cricketers for those scenes and Siddharth underwent months of cricket training," said the producer. If you observe closely, Siddharth's body language and walk resemble those of a professional cricketer.

"Not only did we use professional cameras and cricketers, but we also hired extra artists to fill the stadium with cricket fans. We didn't want to use graphics for the crowd, so nearly 3,000 junior artists sat in as fans during the shoot," he explained.

Many scenes were filmed in the style of live cricket broadcasts, without using a single traditional film camera on the ground. "We used only those cameras typically employed for actual Test matches," said the producer.

Huge crowds gathered outside the stadium during IPL matches, and the filmmakers made use of this real crowd presence in the film. The makers paid close attention to every detail, which is why the cricket scenes came out so realistically. Cricketer R. Ashwin also supported the filmmakers by helping with cricket-specific details and personally trained Siddharth on how to play.



Tu Mera Lover song from Ravi Teja's Mass Jathara lights up music charts

Ravi Teja and Sreeleela, who previously delivered a hit with *Dhamaka*, reunite in the upcoming film *Mass Jathara*. The makers have now kicked off the musical promotions by releasing the first song, *Tu Mera Lover*. The music is composed by Bheems Ceciroleo, with lyrics penned by Bhaskarabhatla. The much-awaited *Tu Mera*

Lover from *Mass Jathara* is now out and already climbing the music charts. The dynamic duo of Ravi Teja and Sreeleela has once again lived up to expectations, delivering electrifying chemistry.

This song is a treat for fans, paying tribute to Ravi Teja's iconic chartbuster *Chupultho Guchi Guchi Champake* from the blockbuster film *Idiot*. The makers recreated Chakri's

voice using AI, making this a one-of-a-kind musical tribute. The song highlights Ravi Teja's signature dance moves and Sreeleela's energetic presence, making it an instant crowd favorite.

Directed by Bhanu Bhogavarapu and produced by Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya, the film is creating a lot of buzz ahead of its release.

CHAGANTI VOICES OVER FOR VIOLENT HIT 3 TRAILER, RAISES EYEBROWS

Popular spiritual orator Chaganti Koteswara Rao lent his voice for the trailer of Nani's upcoming film *Hit 3*. However, the trailer is filled with violence and gore—an unexpected pairing, considering Chaganti is known for promoting Sanatana Dharma and spiritual values.

It appears that this might be the first Telugu trailer where such a spiritual figure has voiced over something so

graphic. The question arises: Did the director fully explain the content and violent tone of the film to Chaganti?

Sources suggest the director may have only narrated the storyline without discussing the visual intensity. Chaganti, impressed by the story alone, possibly agreed without viewing the trailer. Now, after seeing the violent visuals, he may feel disappointed about being associated with it. Nani plays a cop

fighting evil in this third installment of the *Hit* series. In previous parts, Vishwak Sen and Adivi Sesh portrayed law enforcement roles. This time, director Sailesh Kolanu seems inspired by violent films like the Malayalam *Marco*, Hollywood's *John Wick* and Bollywood's *Kill*, all known for their brutal action.



ANNA LEZHNEVA OFFERS PRAYERS AT TIRUMALA AFTER SON'S RECOVERY

Anna Lezhneva, wife of Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, visited the sacred Sri Venkateswara Temple in Tirumala on Monday to offer her prayers. In a deeply personal gesture of devotion and gratitude, Anna chose to undergo tonsure at the temple. This spiritual offering was made in thanksgiving for what she described as the miraculous recovery of her son, Mark Shankar Pawanovich. Seven-year-old Mark had sustained injuries during a tragic fire accident at a summer camp in Singapore—an incident that had left the family and their well-wishers in distress. Mark's remarkable recovery, following the ordeal, has been a source of relief and faith for the family. Anna's act of tonsure, often seen as a symbolic surrender and offering to the deity, highlights her deep sense of gratitude to Lord Venkateswara.

'Daveed' isn't just a boxing movie — it's layered with family and heart,' says Anthony Varghese

PNS|HYDERABAD

Malayalam actor Anthony Varghese, known for his intense performances and physical transformations, is all set to surprise audiences with *Daveed* streaming on Zee5, a film he says breaks away from genre stereotypes. In an exclusive conversation, Anthony shares what drew him to the script, and how stepping into the shoes of his character demanded not just a physical shift, but a deep emotional and mental reworking.

"When Govind narrated the story of *Daveed*, I immediately

ly connected with it—especially the family sequences," Anthony recalls. "That's when I realised this film isn't just about boxing or action. There's a strong family layer that truly stands out."

For the actor, this wasn't just another action-packed sports drama—it was a refreshing blend of genres that offered something more nuanced. "I felt like I had something new to explore in this movie as an artist," he explains. "Even the genre of *Daveed* carries a certain freshness. It's not every day you get to work on a family-sports action-entertainer."

Portraying the character Ashiq Abu came with its own

set of unique challenges—both exciting and unexpectedly tough. "The most exciting and challenging part of playing this role was transforming myself into a family guy—more specifically, a lazy one," Anthony says with a laugh. "Initially, I thought it would be easy since I'm a little lazy in real life. But things turned out to be quite the opposite."

The transformation wasn't just skin-deep. "To become Ashiq Abu, I needed a total transformation—not just physically, but mentally as well," he shares. "The actor in me was not familiar with someone like Ashiq Abu. So, it required a lot of observation and homework."

The physical transformation was particularly intense. Coming off *RDX*, Anthony had to drastically alter his physique for the role. "I shredded almost 23 kilos for *Daveed*," he reveals. "During *RDX*, I was 96 kg. By the time we shot the boxing sequences in *Daveed*, I had dropped to 73 kg."

He credits his transformation to an unwavering routine: "It was gym twice a day, daily boxing practice, and a strict diet. All of it came together to help me embody the character fully."



BINDU MADHAVI PORTRAYS BOLD, POIGNANT ROLE IN DHANDORAA

Actress Bindu Madhavi has joined the sets of the upcoming film *Dhandoraa*, directed by Muralikanth and produced by Ravindra Banerjee Muppaneni. Known for the National Award-winning *Colour Photo* and the hit *Bedurulanka 2012*, the producer is now backing this compelling village drama set in rural Telangana. The story explores harsh social realities, and the film is currently in its second shooting schedule in Dharipally village, Medak district. Actor Shivaji also joined the shoot recently. Bindu Madhavi plays a complex and emotionally deep character named Sreelatha, a prostitute and mother of a young daughter. The makers have unveiled her first look, revealing a nuanced portrayal unlike typical depictions in Indian cinema. Sreelatha is shown as a woman of philosophical depth, with no intimate scenes, highlighting the maturity of the character. This role is expected to be one of the most significant in Bindu Madhavi's career. The cast also includes Navdeep, Ravi Krishna, Nandu, Mounica Reddy and others.

'Yedo Yedo' lyrical video unveiled from KKDB

Debutant director Ashok Reddy is all set to bring a fun-filled entertainer titled *Khel Khatam Darwajaa Bandh*. Featuring Rahul Vijay and Neha Pandey in lead roles, the film is produced by Arjun Dasyam. As part of the promotional campaign, the makers have released the first lyrical video, *Yedo Yedo*.

The song's lyrics are penned by Poornachari, with a beautiful composi-

tion by Suresh Bobbili. Renowned playback singers Karthik and Harini have lent their voices to the track, delivering it with heartfelt emotion. The lyrics evoke a sense of longing and a special emotional connection.

The song stands out for its expressive lyrics, soulful melody and the strong chemistry between the lead pair, adding significant visual appeal.

