



The Pioneer

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PM-CARE fund more transparent than UPA's PM relief

fund: Shah

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FINANCE BILL

2025 OFFERS UNPRECEDENTED TAX RELIEF: FINANCE MINISTER

8

Lyrics that set the screen on fire: Kasarla Shyam's musical MASTERY

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

I never insulted former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao and would never do so in future. I've immense respect for the Telangana movement & KCR's role. Telangana came into existence because Sonia Gandhi gave it, even though it caused political damage to her party. We won't neglect 125Ft Ambedkar Statue and Martyrs Memorial, just because BRS built them

- Jupally Krishna Rao, Minister

P4

DON'T MISS...

Centre's nod for rly projects urged

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar has urged the Central Government to sanction key railway projects to boost the development of the Eluru parliamentary constituency. During the parliamentary sessions, he submitted a report on developmental works to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday. He requested funds for the construction of the Bhadrachalam-Kovvur broad gauge line via Sathupalli and sought approval for a new railway line from Gudivada Junction to Madhira via Nuzvid and Vissannapeta. Highlighting the need for infrastructure...

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B'desh: Awaiting India's response

Bangladesh on Tuesday said it was awaiting a response from India to its proposal for a meeting between Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok next week. "From our side, we are fully ready for the meeting. Now, we await a positive response from India," Foreign Secretary Md. Jashim Uddin said at a media briefing here, outlining the Chief Adviser's forthcoming visits to China and Thailand. Dhaka earlier sent a letter to India proposing...

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'India top milk producer in world'

India is the top producer of milk in the world and has set a target of producing 300 million metric tons (MMT) of milk in the next five years from the present 239 MMT, Union Minister of Animal Husbandry and Dairying Rajiv Ranjan Singh said in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. Singh also said that ever since the Modi government has launched the Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM) in 2014, the milk production in the country has increased by 63.5 per cent and the government is hopeful of further...

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Smriti, Deepti retain spots in ICC rankings

India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana and all-rounder Deepti Sharma held on to their third positions respectively in the latest ICC Women's T20I batter and bowlers' rankings issued here on Tuesday. Besides Mandhana, no other Indian is in the top-10 with skipper Harmanpreet Kaur placed 11th position, Jemimah Rodrigues ranked 15th and Shafali Verma a rung below. The batters' list is led by Australia's Beth Mooney, followed by teammate Tahlia McGrath. Mooney increased her lead at the top...

-SPORTS



No private lands under 22A, says Minister Anagani

The Andhra Pradesh government is committed to ensuring that no private lands remain under 22A, and district collectors must work towards this goal, said Revenue, Registration and Stamps Minister Anagani Satya Prasad. Speaking at the third District Collectors' Conference held at the Secretariat on Tuesday, the minister highlighted that land is a sensitive issue, particularly for the poor, who see it as a source of security. He urged district collectors to resolve land disputes promptly and ensure that citizens live without fear or uncertainty regarding their property. Minister Anagani emphasised Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's dedication to improving the lives of the poor. He noted that, within nine months of assuming office, the government has held three District Collectors' Conferences to address public grievances.

Continued on Page 2

CM Naidu vows to rebuild AP

Announces release of Mega DSC notification for 16,347 teacher posts in April

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has reiterated his commitment to rebuilding and developing Andhra Pradesh, highlighting his government's efforts over the past nine months to restore the state from previous administrative setbacks. Addressing the third district collectors' conference at the Secretariat on Tuesday, he urged officials to prioritise public welfare and development. Speaking at the two-day conference, the Chief Minister emphasised the need for sincere governance to address challenges inherited from the previous administration. He stressed that welfare schemes should be delivered efficiently and with dignity to ensure they reach the grassroots level. The government is closely monitoring all programmes, including citizen feedback on 22 essential services, to enhance public service delivery, he added. Naidu announced that the long-awaited Mega DSC notification will be issued in the first week of April to fill 16,347 teaching posts. He noted that his first official decision upon assuming office was to approve these recruitments, aiming to complete appointments before the new academic year begins.

Continued on Page 2



- CM asks officials to prioritise public welfare and efficient service delivery
- The 'Swarnandhra 2047' vision aims for 15% GSDP growth, with district collectors playing a key role in execution
- Infrastructure projects worth Rs 55,000 crore, including national highways, are being expedited for completion within two years
- Sustainable welfare initiatives are a priority, with efforts to boost revenue instead of relying on borrowing
- Public welfare schemes include Anna Canteens, the Deepam-2 scheme for free LPG cylinders, increased pensions, and enhanced housing assistance
- The Polavaram project is on track for completion by 2027, while work on Amaravati's development has resumed under a self-financing model
- Road repairs covering 20,000 km are nearly complete, and the PM Surya Ghar Scheme will promote solar energy adoption
- Economic growth targets include reaching a Rs 308L crore economy by 2047, with a focus on agriculture, industry, and green energy investments
- Revenue collection and law enforcement are being strengthened, with measures to recover GST arrears and combat illegal activities

'Govt committed to house site distribution'

Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday made it clear that the State government's agenda is to distribute house sites of three cents each in rural areas and two cents in urban areas to beneficiaries. Chairing the third district collectors' conference at the State Secretariat here, the Chief Minister said every effort is being made to sanction houses for all eligible beneficiaries over the next five years. Chandrababu directed district collectors and departmental heads present at the meeting to gather feedback from those who have already received benefits and take steps accordingly to distribute either house sites or financial assistance. The CM stressed that officials should explore all possible ways to assist people using technology. Expressing concern over the growing revenue-related issues, he noted that no concrete steps were being taken to address them.

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'ManaMitra' launch in April: RTG chief

WhatsApp governance set to revolutionise public services in A P

In a major step towards digital governance, the State is set to launch the 'ManaMitra' programme in April to enhance awareness and accessibility of WhatsApp governance among citizens. Under this initiative, government officials will visit households across the State, educating residents on the benefits of WhatsApp governance and ensuring they save the dedicated number, 9552300009, on their smartphones. Secretary of the IT and Real-Time Governance (RTG) Department, Bhaskar Katamneni, emphasised the transformative potential of this initiative while addressing a Collectors' conference at the Secretariat. He highlighted that under Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, the government is committed to eliminating the need for citizens to visit government offices for essential services. With WhatsApp Governance, people can now access a range of services from their smartphones, reducing bureaucratic hurdles and enhancing efficiency. The programme, which currently offers 210 services, is set for rapid expansion. Within a week, the number will increase to 250 services, and within a fortnight, it will reach 350. The ultimate goal is to provide nearly 1,000 services through WhatsApp governance, making government services more accessible than ever before. Key services such as issuing essential certificates will also be digitized, ensuring instant access through Aadhaar integration and DigiLocker. These digital certificates, legally valid, will carry QR codes for authentication, eliminating the need for physical copies.



Secretary of the IT and Real-Time Governance (RTG) Department, Bhaskar Katamneni, highlighted WhatsApp governance as a game-changer under CM Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, enabling citizens to access services via smartphones, eliminating office visits, and streamlining governance.

Sowmya takes charge as Spl Commissioner of State GST

Nuthalapati Sowmya has assumed charge as the Special Commissioner of State Taxes (GST) at the office of the Chief Commissioner of State Taxes (GST). Following orders from the Union Finance Ministry in Delhi, she was transferred from the Central Service to the State Service on a deputation basis. Previously serving as an Additional Commissioner in the Customs and GST Appeals Office in Guntur, she was relieved of her duties on March 12 and reported to the State Government the same day. The State Government issued her posting orders on Monday, granting her the status of Special Commissioner in the GST Department as a senior officer of the Indian Revenue Service.

BUNGALOWS FOR SECRETARIES

Narayana inspects works in Amaravati

Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development, P Narayana, conducted a review of the ongoing development works in the Amaravati capital region. As part of his visit, he inspected the construction of the secretaries' and principal secretaries' bungalows, as well as the CRDA project office. The minister stated that several construction tenders had already been finalised and work was progressing as planned. Addressing the media on Tuesday, Minister Narayana emphasised the importance of a capital city for any



State. He pointed out that Andhra Pradesh remains the only state in India without a fully developed capital. Recalling past initiatives, he stated, "We had called for tenders worth Rs 43,000 crore during the

previous TDP government's tenure. Many key buildings, including those for officials, MLAs, MLCs, and All India Service officers, were near completion.

Continued on Page 2

CASH DISCOVERY ROW

SC panel commences inquiry

Three members of the Supreme Court-appointed in-house committee on Tuesday commenced its inquiry into the alleged cash discovery row involving Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma, sources said. They said the three members -- Chief Justice of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh, and Anu Sivaraman, Judge of the High Court of Karnataka -- reached Justice

Varma's official residence at 30, Tughlak Crescent here. The judges were inside the official residence of Justice Varma for around 30-35 minutes and apparently inspected the site, sources said. The alleged cash discovery took place following a fire at Justice Varma's official residence here at around 11.35 pm on March 14, prompting the fire officials to rush to the spot and douse it.

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NDA moves no-trust motion against GVMC Mayor

P2

Naxalite with Rs 25 lakh bounty among 3 killed in encounter in Chhattisgarh

A Naxalite carrying a reward of Rs 25 lakh on his head was among three ultras killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district on Tuesday, police said. The killed Maoist, Ankanpalli Saraiyah, (58), hailed from Taralappalli village in Madikonda mandal in Hanamkonda district. He had a bounty of Rs 25 lakh on his head. Saraiyah went underground 30 years ago and was a member of the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee, the strongest formation of Maoists, the police said. Security forces have intensified combing in the forests for Maoists. A large number of Maoists were killed in encounters with security forces recently. The gunfight took place at around 8 am in a forest along the border of



Dantewada and Bijapur districts when a team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Superintendent of Police Gaurav Rai said. Personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Bastar Fighters, both units of the state police, were involved in the operation launched on the basis of inputs about the presence of Maoists in forests of Gilsapara, Nelgoda, Bodga and Ikeli villages under Geedam police station limits, he said.

AP govt, Cisco join hands to bridge digital skills gap

Cisco has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Andhra Pradesh to enhance digital skills development across the state. This partnership reflects Cisco's commitment to skilling India's workforce, providing students and professionals with access to advanced learning resources in emerging technologies such as Networking, Cybersecurity, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The initiative comes at a critical time, as industry reports highlight significant skill gaps in India's technology sector. According to Cisco's Cybersecurity Readiness Index, 59% of companies in India report having more than ten unfilled cybersecurity roles. Furthermore, a report by Bain & Company predicts that India could face a shortage of over one million skilled AI professionals by 2027, underscoring the urgent need for workforce readiness. Through this partnership, 50,000 learners across Andhra Pradesh will



gain access to digital skills training through the Cisco Networking Academy (NetAcad), one of the world's longest-running IT skills-to-jobs programmes. The collaboration will extend the NetAcad programme to higher education institutions, including degree colleges, engineering schools, and vocational training centres, equipping young people with the skills needed to excel in the IT sector and beyond. Learners will benefit from a combination of self-paced and instructor-led courses on the NetAcad platform. In addition to student-focused programmes, Cisco will provide specialised digital learning resources on the Andhra Pradesh state government portal, ensuring that government officers can access in-demand technology courses. The initiative will also include virtual internships, workforce development programmes such as Women Rock IT and Find Yourself in the Future (FYIF), and hands-on learning experiences to create a future-ready workforce.

Nara Lokesh, from the Government of Andhra Pradesh, welcomed the initiative, stating: "As India moves into the next era of economic growth, equipping students and the workforce with the right mix of digital skills is crucial. Cisco's collaboration with the Government of Andhra Pradesh will play a key role in preparing our youth for emerging opportunities in AI and other advanced technologies." Dr Guy Diedrich, Senior Vice President & Global Innovation Officer at Cisco, highlighted the importance of bridging the digital skills gap, saying: "Our partnership with the Government of Andhra Pradesh reflects our commitment to building a strong talent pipeline for the digital economy. Through the Cisco Networking Academy, we aim to empower the next generation with the skills to thrive in a digital-first world."



Nushratt Bharuccha returns in a spine-chilling teaser for Chhorii 2

The wait is over for horror enthusiasts! The much-anticipated teaser for *Chhorii 2* has finally arrived, offering a glimpse into the eerie world that captivated audiences in 2021. Leading the charge once again is Nushratt Bharuccha, reprising her role as Sakshi in this bone-chilling sequel. If the teaser is any indication, this installment promises to be even darker and more intense than its predecessor.

The first *Chhorii* made waves in the horror genre by seamlessly blending supernatural elements with Indian folklore while shedding light on pressing societal issues. Nushratt's portrayal of Sakshi—a woman battling both paranormal forces and deeply ingrained traditions—earned her widespread praise. Her gripping performance solidified the film's place as one of India's standout horror films. Now, with *Chhorii 2*, she dives deeper into the terror, as hinted by the ominous teaser.

The teaser is packed with eerie visuals, suspense-

ful moments and an unsettling atmosphere that immediately grabs viewers' attention. Nushratt's haunting expressions and the sinister sequences tease a relentless horror that goes beyond what was seen in the first film. It's clear that Sakshi's nightmares are far from over—this time, the stakes seem even higher. Directed by Vishal Furia, *Chhorii 2* is set to premiere on Prime Video on April 11, 2025. The film will be available to audiences in over 240 countries and territories, making it a global horror spectacle.

With its intense storytelling, atmospheric horror and Nushratt Bharuccha's commanding performance, *Chhorii 2* is shaping up to be a must-watch. Fans of the genre are eagerly counting down the days until they can witness the next chapter of this terrifying saga.



Riteish Deshmukh steps into the role of fearless politician in *Raid 2*

The anticipation for *Raid 2* just got more intense with the unveiling of Riteish Deshmukh's striking first-look poster. The actor, known for his versatility, steps into the role of a formidable politician in this high-stakes crime thriller.

Taking to social media, Riteish shared his look from the film with the caption, "Kanoon ka mohtaj nahi, kanoon ka malik hai Dada Bhai! #Raid2 knocking in cinemas near you from 1st May." The poster showcases him standing among a crowd, his hand raised in a gesture of authority, exuding confidence in his powerful new avatar. Clad in a kurta and jacket, Deshmukh's intense expression hints at the depth of his character.

Just a day earlier, the makers revealed Ajay Devgn's first look from *Raid 2*, bringing back his much-loved character, IRS officer Amay Patnaik. The actor shared his poster with the intriguing caption, "Naya Shehar. Nayi File. Aur Amay Patnaik Ki Ek Nayi Raid."

The sequel promises another gripping tale of white-collar crime as Amay Patnaik embarks on a new mission in a different city, facing yet another powerful adversary.

Directed by Raj Kumar Gupta, *Raid 2* continues the story of IRS officer Amay Patnaik as he takes on a fresh case inspired by real-life income tax investigations. The first installment, *Raid* (2018), was a major success, praised for its engaging narrative and realistic depiction of income tax operations. The original starred Ajay Devgn alongside Ileana D'Cruz and Saurabh Shukla, making a significant impact at the box office.

In *Raid 2*, Amay Patnaik's battle against corruption intensifies as he works with intelligence agencies to uncover financial fraud and bring influential criminals to justice. Alongside Ajay Devgn and Riteish Deshmukh, the film also stars Vaani Kapoor in a pivotal role.

Produced by Bhusan Kumar, Kumar Mangat Pathak, Abhishek Pathak, and Krishan Kumar, *Raid 2* is backed by T-Series and Panorama Studios. The film is set for a theatrical release on May 1, 2025.



Athiya Shetty and KL Rahul's baby girl arrives—fans celebrate the big news

Joy and celebration filled the air as Athiya Shetty and KL Rahul announced the arrival of their baby girl on March 24, 2025. The couple, who tied the knot on January 23, 2023, took to Instagram to share their happiness with a heartfelt note, marking the beginning of their journey into parenthood.

The news quickly spread across social media, with fans, friends, and well-wishers pouring in their love and blessings for the new parents. Emotional messages, heartwarming comments, and virtual happy tears flooded their post, making it one of the most cherished moments for the couple's admirers.

While Athiya and KL Rahul's little one has captured everyone's hearts, her name remains a closely guarded secret, sparking endless curiosity. Social media is abuzz with fans eagerly speculating what the couple might name their daughter, and some have even come up with creative suggestions.

Reddit users, always quick with ideas, have already started guessing. Some of the popular suggestions include: "Rahiya", "Raya", "Aira", "Athira", or "Rahath".

Athiya and KL Rahul's love story has been nothing short of a fairytale. From their dreamy wedding to their unwavering support for each other, the couple has always been adored by fans. Now, as they step into this new phase of their lives, their well-wishers can't wait to see glimpses of their little princess.

Randeep Hooda was initially hesitant to play Ranatunga in *Jaat*, here's why!



The latest trailer of *Jaat* has taken audiences by storm, showcasing thrilling action, gripping visuals and intense performances. Among the highlights, Randeep Hooda's powerful portrayal of the menacing antagonist, Ranatunga, has particularly stood out. His sheer screen presence and ability to embody the role with chilling precision have once again reaffirmed why he is regarded as one of the finest actors in Indian cinema.

While Hooda is a proud *Jaat* in real life, he was initially hesitant about taking on the role of Ranatunga, a character that stands in stark contrast to his person-

al identity. A source close to the production revealed that the filmmakers had their eyes set on Hooda for this crucial antagonist role, but the actor wasn't immediately convinced.

"When the producers approached Randeep for the role of Ranatunga, he was intrigued by the challenge but had his reservations about stepping into a character so different from his real-life background," the source shared.

Despite his initial hesitation, Hooda ultimately decided to take on the role after witnessing director Gopichand Malineni's passion for the project. Additionally, the opportunity to share the screen as the lead antagonist opposite Sunny Deol—whom Hooda deeply admires—was a major deciding factor.

"Seeing the enthusiasm of the director during the narration and the chance to play the main villain against Sunny Deol was what ultimately made him say yes," the source added. With *Jaat* set to deliver high-octane action and a gripping narrative, fans are eager to witness Randeep Hooda in this formidable avatar. His ability to bring depth and intensity to his roles makes Ranatunga one of the most anticipated villains in recent cinema.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



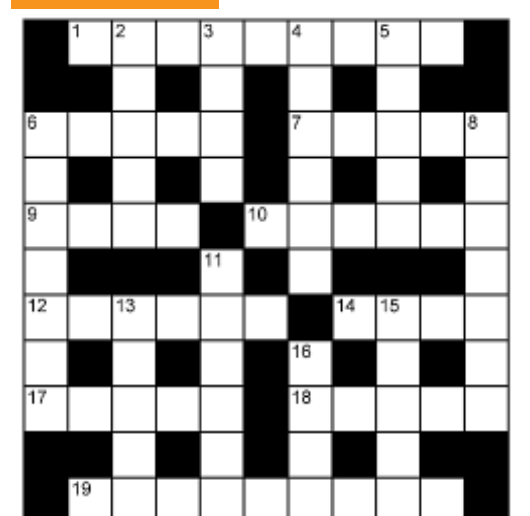
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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	6			8	1			
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	3							
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Yesterday's solution

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

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.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

ACROSS

- A ship's right side
- Perspire
- Young person
- Take a break
- Very rarely
- A passenger needs this
- Sky colour
- Divide into two equal parts
- Acted dramas
- Lucky
- Make longer by pulling
- Carpenters and engineers use these
- Say again
- A stringed musical instrument
- Fewest
- Twirl

DOWN

- These are cut down for paper manufacture
- Decays
- The gas we need to live
- Circular in shape



'Expect a 360-degree transformation in Jewel Thief – My character will shock you!'

In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Nikita Dutta opens up about her transformative journey in the entertainment world, where she's quickly becoming one of the most exciting and fearless actresses. Known for her bold and unfiltered approach to acting, Nikita Dutta, opens up about her transformative journey in the entertainment world and insights into her powerful role as Poonam in *Waking of a Nation*. She also teases her upcoming project *Jewel Thief*

TEJAL SINHA
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Nikita Dutta is quickly becoming a force to be reckoned with in the entertainment world, delivering unforgettable performances that leave audiences captivated and craving more. With each role, she has proven that she's not afraid to take risks—whether it's stepping into the raw, gritty world of *Waking of a Nation* or gearing up for her upcoming high-stakes thriller *Jewel Thief: The Heist Begins*. Known for her bold choices and fearless approach to acting, she has not only earned rave reviews but has also captured hearts with her dedication to portraying characters who are unapologetically strong, complex and unapologetically real.

In this exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, she takes us behind the scenes of her transformative journey as Poonam in *The Waking of a Nation*, revealing the challenges, the freedom and the intense emotional moments that came with playing a character like no other. She also offers a sneak peek into her upcoming role in *Jewel Thief*, promising a completely new side of herself that will leave audiences in awe. Nikita Dutta is a



Usually, actors get touch-ups between takes, but with *The Waking of a Nation*, the sweat and dirt were left as they were. It gave me a sense of freedom—there was no vanity, no worrying about how I looked. I could just focus entirely on Poonam

required not just emotional depth but also a complete de-glamorisation. "I had zero makeup throughout the shoot—no foundation, no concealer, not even basic grooming like threading. Even my request for sunscreen was denied because the team wanted absolute authenticity," she recalls with a laugh.

Shooting on live locations, where dust and sweat were a part of the environment, added to the realism. "Usually, actors get touch-ups between takes, but here, the sweat and dirt were left as they were. It gave me a sense of freedom—there was no vanity, no worrying about how I looked. I could just focus entirely on Poonam." Poonam navigates a world filled with chaos and personal tragedy, yet she remains steadfast.

"Credit goes to the writers for crafting a well-balanced character. She endures intense emotional trauma, yet she never loses her strength. Unlike many 'strong female characters' who express power by being loud, Poonam's strength lies in her thoughts, choices, and quiet determination," Nikita explains.

She further admits that the role lingered with her long after the cameras stopped rolling. The courtroom scene in the fourth episode, where Poonam testifies about the massacre, was particularly intense.

"The director didn't use 'action' or 'cut' to keep us immersed in the moment. After shooting that sequence, it took me a while to return to normalcy. The show's premise itself is emotionally heavy and that weight stays with you." Beyond the no-makeup look, the *Khakhee: The Bihar Chapter* fame also embraced a more relaxed approach to fitness for the role.

"Since Poonam gets pregnant midway through the show, I didn't have to follow a strict diet. But the biggest shift was accepting that I wouldn't be in my usual groomed, polished self—on set or in real life—until the shoot wrapped up."

She describes the experience as liberating: "I was completely unfiltered, with no worries about hair, makeup, or even how I moved on camera. It gave me a new perspective on acting." After *The Waking of a Nation*, Nikita is set to appear in *Jewel Thief*, an action-packed thriller filled with deception and intrigue.

"It's a high-stakes world, full of twists and adrenaline. And of course, being a film by Ram Madhvani, you can expect the perfect mix of action, drama and entertainment," she teases.

Without revealing too much, she promises a dramatic transformation. "My character in *Jewel Thief* is a complete 360-degree shift from Poonam. Audiences might not even recognize me!" As for her future projects, Dutta remains selective. "The first thing I consider is the character—does it excite me, challenge me, or offer something new? Then come other factors like the director, production team and genre. But my priority is always the role itself," she explains.

While she remains tight-lipped about her next projects, one thing is clear: Nikita Dutta is an actress to watch.

star who's just getting started—and trust us, you don't want to miss a moment of what's to come.

While Nikita's rise in the entertainment industry has been impressive, she insists that it was never a conscious strategy.

"I wouldn't say it's been a planned effort, but I have always prioritised doing work that I'm proud of, regardless of how it performs with the audience. I also try to improve with every project," she shares.

Her dedication to meaningful storytelling has paid off, with audiences and critics alike praising her for her nuanced performances.

The *Kabir Singh* star's latest project, *The Waking of a Nation*, is set in 1919 and revolves around a pivotal historical event. Her character, Poonam, is central to the story and her journey is one of resilience and strength.

"Poonam is bold and fierce, but not in a loud or over-the-top way. She has a quiet strength, a strong mind and an unshakable will. I don't think I've ever been this proud of a character I've played," she says. She points out that portrayals of women from that era often depict them as passive figures—either dancing or engaged in domestic tasks.

"Poonam breaks that stereotype. She is independent, outspoken and a rare representation of a powerful Punjabi woman of that time," she adds.

Stepping into Poonam's shoes



Healthcare and sports with AI

PNS|HYDERABAD

Digital Darwin is transforming the sports and healthcare industries with its cutting-edge technologies, pushing the limits of human potential with sophisticated AI solutions. This business was founded on February 11, 2021, by visionary entrepreneur Rahul Bajaj, a Deep Tech specialist and former FMS and BITS Pilani student. Since then, it has grown to become a major force in the AI space! Renowned for his 'Transformation Supply Chain' methodology, he approaches problems with the accuracy of fixing a chain's weak points, guaranteeing a comprehensive transformation strategy. His creative ideas have not only sparked significant technological advancements but also the development of forward-thinking businesses that are constantly on the cutting edge. Offering a 360-degree perspective and integrating multiple athletic departments, Speed.AI is a comprehensive athlete management and performance solution. This tool is changing how pro teams, leagues, federations and national and state sports bodies oversee and improve athlete performance. Since its inception in January 2024, it has accounted for more than 10% of the Indian elite athlete market thanks to its integrated analytics and data integration. With over ten prominent clients, such as the Sports Authority of India in Bangalore, which is home to the Indian National Hockey Team and Karni Singh Shooting Range, which is home to Indian Olympian shooters, it is expanding at an astounding 22% each month. Additionally, it has been evaluated for NIC hosting, is PDP-compliant and is connected with the National Sports Science Database. Conversely, we also have Shitiz Ruhail, a seasoned leader with 15 years of expertise who serves as Digital Darwin's co-founder and chief growth officer. He has demonstrated exceptional proficiency in spearheading corporate transformation, strategic planning and mergers and acquisitions in a variety of industries, such as healthcare and finance. Let's go over an exclusive interview with Rahul and Shitiz, Darwin Digitech Pvt Ltd, the founder and CEO of Digital Darwin & co-founder and chief growth officer respectively.

Why is "near-zero hallucination" important for healthcare applications?

Rahul Bajaj: HealthMates.AI's "near-zero hallucination" is the result of careful implementation and architectural design. Initially, it uses a multi-agent system, implying inherent cross-validation and redundancy. Second, the AI's knowledge base is customised to the healthcare industry by utilising optimised LLMs (Large Language Models). Importantly, the system uses RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation), which means that the AI retrieves data from reliable sources, such as the integrated HIMS/EMR system, rather than only producing responses from its learned model. The possibility of producing inaccurate or fake information is greatly decreased by this foundation on validated facts. "Near-zero hallucination" is crucial in the medical field since false information can have serious repercussions. If the AI gives inaccurate information, there could be a danger of misdiagnosis, improper treatment regimens and negative drug interactions. AI systems must be reliable and accurate in order to be employed properly in clinical settings, where patient safety is of utmost importance.

Describe how Follow-up Agent helps hospitals make more money!

Shitiz Ruhail: The issue of patients "slipping through the cracks" following initial consultations or procedures—a frequent source of wasted revenue and less-than-ideal results—is directly addressed by HealthMate, Meera. It uses the EHR to automatically identify patients who need follow-ups, such as specialty consultations, OPD reminders, or post-discharge check-ins. After receiving approval from the Human Manager, it begins individualised outreach to these patients, customising the message to meet their unique requirements

(e.g., a post-surgery conversation or a cardiology follow-up). By taking a proactive stance, patients are more likely to schedule and receive the care they require, which increases the number of procedures, improves resource use and increases the number of OPD visits that turn into IPD admissions. It increases patient retention and encourages more patients to schedule procedures, which increases hospital revenue by guaranteeing timely engagement.

Which are the main sources of information that the AI Analyst Agent consults in order to offer insights?

Rahul Bajaj: To produce insights, Ana, uses a wide range of well screened data sources. She consults peer-reviewed medical literature, established clinical recommendations from top healthcare institutions and meticulously curated computerised health records. Ana also incorporates real-time updates from clinical trial repositories and regulatory agencies to make sure her analyses are up to date and supported by evidence. In addition to improving the precision and applicability of the insights offered, this multi-source strategy facilitates sound, well-informed decision-making in crucial healthcare environments.

In what ways does the OPD Booking Agent enhance conventional appointment scheduling techniques?

Shitiz Ruhail: By simplifying and automating the procedure to get rid of frequent inefficiencies, Sarthi, reinvents conventional appointment scheduling. In contrast to traditional approaches that frequently depend on manual scheduling, lengthy phone calls by hospital staff and possible misunderstandings, Sarthi uses cutting-edge AI to offer real-time availability, immediate booking confirmations and customised appointment recommendations based on patient preferences and history over a straightforward phone call or text message. Sarthi guarantees correct and current scheduling information by integrating with hospital systems and electronic health records in a smooth manner, thereby lowering administrative loads and decreasing errors. By making the booking process quicker and more dependable, this creative method not only increases patient convenience but also boosts overall operational effectiveness in healthcare facilities.

Give an example of how HealthMates.AI might assist a hospital in cutting expenses!

Rahul Bajaj: It improves revenue management and directly and visibly reduces man-hours by automating important administrative processes. For example, Sarthi, replaces multiple contact center agents by automating the appointment scheduling process—eliminating manual call handling and the back-and-forth inherent in traditional reservations. This speeds up patient care while significantly lowering staffing costs. At the same time, Medusa automates medical coding to revolutionise billing processes. This ensures that clinical facts are accurately captured and minimises errors that may result in revenue leakage or delayed reimbursements. When combined, these agents greatly improve operational efficiency and financial performance while freeing up vital staff time so that medical personnel can focus on patient care.

In what ways does it work with current EMR/HIMS systems?

Shitiz Ruhail: Through a strong interoperability architecture that makes use of secure API connections and industry-standard protocols like HL7 and FHIR, it interfaces with current HIMS/EMR systems with ease. Real-time synchronisation of clinical records, appointment scheduling and patient data is made possible by this integration, which guarantees that data moves between systems without interfering with current activities. The platform's adaptable design enables it to adhere strictly to data security and regulatory standards while accommodating the unique configurations and requirements of various healthcare organisations. Hospitals get improved operational effectiveness, precise data management and a single view of patient data across all systems as a result.

Addressing gender disparities in cardiac care in India

Indian women face disparities in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of cardiovascular illnesses. Despite the fact that both genders have a significant health problem, women receive less intensive therapy and are more likely to be underdiagnosed. This imbalance leads to delayed diagnosis and insufficient treatment, both of which have a negative influence on patient health. As cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death among Indian women, surpassing breast and other cancers combined (Lancet, 2022). The incidence of coronary heart disease among Indian women ranges from 3% to 13%, increasing nearly 300% over the past two decades (Indian Heart Journal, 2020). From 1.1% in 2000 to 2.6% in 2015, the prevalence of heart failure in women has similarly increased dramatically (Global Burden of Disease Study, 2017).

Why does heart disease in women go undetected?

Many women are unaware of their heart disease risk, leading to late detection. Symptoms are often different from chest pain and may include fatigue, nausea, dizziness, or jaw pain. Nearly 45% of women aged 20 and older have cardiovascular disease, but many do not know (American Heart Association, 2024). Pregnancy-related conditions, like high blood pressure and diabetes, raise the risk but are rarely discussed. High blood pressure is especially dangerous, causing 51.9% of hypertension-related deaths in women (Go Red for Women, 2024).

Barriers to cardiac care

Gender disparity in cardiac care arises due to unawareness, late symptom recognition and biases within the healthcare system. Women often experience nonspecific symptoms such as fatigue, nausea, or jaw pain, leading to misdiagnosis or delayed treatment.

Biological and clinical differences: Women's heart disease symptoms are different from men's, which leads to underdiagnosis. Women may have jaw pain, nausea, exhaustion, or shortness of

breath following a heart attack, but men typically describe chest pain. These mild indicators sometimes lead to poorer outcomes and delayed diagnosis.

Limited access to healthcare: In India, 80% of cardiologists work in urban areas, creating barriers for rural populations. Women in villages frequently travel 50–100 km for check-ups, a costly and time-consuming journey. As a result, treatment is usually sought at later, more serious stages of the disease.

Socio-cultural barriers: Traditional norms in India contribute to delayed cardiac care for women. Prioritising family responsibilities over personal health, many women postpone seeking medical attention. Additionally, the cardiovascular risk in female patients is underestimated due to the false belief that heart disease mostly affects men.

Healthcare system biases: Gender disparities in treatment further exacerbate inequities. Studies indicate that women are less likely to receive evidence-based therapies such as lipid-lowering medications, aspirin, or beta-blockers. Data from the American College of Cardiology's PINNACLE India Quality Improvement Program (PIQIP) reveal that women receive suboptimal



cardiovascular care despite having similar clinical presentations.

Strategies to address disparities

Action is required from both women and the healthcare system to bridge this gap. The actions listed below can be beneficial:

- 1. Awareness raising** - Heart disease is often perceived as a male issue, but it affects women as well. Public health campaigns should educate both women and healthcare providers about female-specific symptoms.
- 2. Regular screenings** - Routine heart check-ups, particularly for women over 40, can aid in early detection. Serious consequences can be avoided by regular blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar monitoring.
- 3. Healthcare provider training** - Improved training is necessary for doctors and nurses to recognize heart disease symptoms in women and ensure equitable care.
- 4. Better access to care** - Women in rural areas often face challenges in reaching specialists. Accessibility can be improved with telemedicine, mobile clinics, and community programs.
- 5. Affordable treatment** - Government policies and insurance coverage should prioritise affordability, ensuring that low-income women have access to essential heart treatments.

Technology's role in minimising the gender gap in cardiac care: Telecardiology technology is improving heart care in rural areas. Heart scans in village clinics are made possible by portable ECG devices, with results promptly sent to urban cardiologists for diagnosis. AI-driven algorithms quickly analyse heart data, identifying potential risks. Diagnoses are delivered 90% faster than traditional methods, reducing the number of emergencies. By offering free and accessible screenings, technology helps ensure that women in remote areas receive essential heart care.

(The author, Arindam Sen, is a CEO & Director of HeartNet India.)



Director Krishna Vamsi and Yandamuri Veerendranath pay homage to Alluri Sitarama Raju

Renowned director Krishna Vamsi visited Lakshimpuram village in Anakapalle district, Andhra Pradesh, accompanied by acclaimed novelist Yandamuri Veerendranath. Both paid homage at the tombs of legendary freedom fighters Alluri Sitarama Raju and Gantam Dora.

Reports suggest that Krishna Vamsi is keen on making a film with an Alluri Sitarama Raju backdrop, which prompted his visit. He also interacted with the family members of Gantam Dora to understand their history and legacy.

Yandamuri Veerendranath praised Krishna Vamsi's patriotism, citing his heartfelt gesture at Alluri's tomb. He also

recalled the director's patriotic film *Khadgam*, highlighting his commitment to portraying nationalism on screen.

Krishna Vamsi expressed his long-held desire to visit Alluri's historical sites, a dream that was finally fulfilled. He mentioned the book *Akupacha Suryodayam*, which deeply inspired him to explore Alluri's legacy further. The director also stated his intention to create a compelling film based on Alluri's history.

As part of the visit, the Nenu Saitham Charitable Trust distributed clothing to the family of Gantam Dora, who was one of Alluri's closest followers and now resides in Koyyuru Mandal. The trust's founder, Kusireddy Shiva, led the initiative.



RAJENDRA PRASAD ON DAVID WARNER CONTROVERSY

'It was not intentional'

Veteran actor Rajendra Prasad faced severe backlash for his inappropriate remarks about Australian cricketer David Warner at a pre-release event. Many social media users criticised his comments, resurfacing past videos of his controversial behavior. Amid mounting pressure, Rajendra Prasad issued an apology through a video on Tuesday.

As part of the promotional event for the film *Robinhood*, the team hosted a grand pre-release event in Hyderabad, where David Warner attended as a special guest. During the event, Rajendra Prasad, who

plays a role in the film, made controversial remarks about Warner, using inappropriate language. His comments quickly went viral, sparking criticism from netizens.

Responding to the backlash, Rajendra Prasad clarified that his comments were not intended to be offensive. "It was not intentional. Before the event, Nithiin, David Warner, and I had a lot of fun. I love Warner and I admire his cricket. If my words have hurt anyone's feelings, I sincerely apologise," he said in his video statement. He also assured that such incidents would not happen again.

Lyrics that set the screen on fire: Kasarla Shyam's musical mastery

Tollywood's most sought-after lyricist, Kasarla Shyam, opens up about his journey from folk street plays to blockbuster chartbusters. Best known for his Telangana-infused lyrics in hits like *Ramuloo Ramula*, *DJ Tillu* and *Balagam*, Shyam shares how his deep-rooted connection to folklore and passion for storytelling shaped his career

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Kasarla Shyam, the name behind some of Tollywood's biggest musical hits, has solidified his place as one of the industry's top five lyricists. Known for his mastery of Telangana folk dialect and deep-rooted storytelling, Shyam has become the go-to lyricist for filmmakers seeking authenticity in their songs. From *Ramuloo Ramula* (*Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo*) to the unforgettable tracks in *Balagam*, *DJ Tillu* and *Tillu Square*, his journey is one of perseverance, passion and an unwavering dedication to the art of lyric writing.

While Kasarla Shyam had penned many songs before, it was *Ramuloo Ramula* from *Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo* (2020) that catapulted him to stardom. The song, infused with Telangana slang and a vibrant folk rhythm, became the second-fastest song to top the charts and remained a fan favorite for months.

Shyam recalls how he got the opportunity to work on this iconic track. "I had written a song for Nithiin's film *Lie* and Trivikram Srinivas garu happened to be the chief guest at the event where it was released. He liked my work and later suggested to music director Thaman that I should write a song in Telangana slang for *Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo*. That's how *Ramuloo Ramula* happened," he shares.

Born and raised in Hanamkonda, Warangal, Shyam pursued his post-graduation in Political Science and later completed an M.Phil. in Folk Arts in Hyderabad. His love for folk music was deeply influenced by legends like Warangal Shankar and Sarangapani, whom he considers his gurus.

His father, a stage artist and film actor, also played a crucial role in shaping his artistic inclination. "My school encouraged students to participate in cultural activities. Our correspondent, Upendra garu, was a writer himself, and he motivated us to write plays and poetry. I started writing poetry from my tenth grade," Shyam reminisces.

Shyam's journey into films wasn't an easy one. Though he initially wrote and performed folk songs, his first breakthrough in cinema came when a senior co-director, Srinivas, introduced him to filmmaker B. Jaya. This led to his first song in the 2003 film *Chantigadu*.

Between 2003 and 2009, he juggled his career as a casual commentator at All India Radio's Yuvavani program while occasionally writing songs for films. His major breakthrough came in 2009 with Krishna Vamsi's

Mad Square, releasing this week, as well as upcoming projects like *Yellamma* (directed by Balagam fame Venu), Nani's *Paradise*, Ravi Teja's *Mass Jathara*, Sai Dharam Tej's *Sambarala Yetigattu* and Nithiin's *Thammudu*. Despite being one of the most sought-after lyricists, Shyam remains grounded. His biggest inspiration in the industry is Chandrabose, another renowned lyricist from Warangal. "When I was a student, Chandrabose garu was an icon for me. His work inspired me to pursue a career in lyric writing," he shares.

The camaraderie between lyricists in Tollywood is something he deeply values. "Whenever a song is released, we exchange congratulatory messages. Chandrabose garu has appreciated my work many times, which means a lot to me," he says.

Kasarla Shyam's journey has been deeply personal. His father, who once aspired to be an actor, had to return home after six unsuccessful years in Chennai. "I always wanted to enter the industry and succeed where my father couldn't. Today, I am among the top five lyric writers, and my father is proud of my achievements," he says with pride.

While his career continues to soar, Shyam remains connected to his roots, regularly visiting Hanamkonda to support folk artists and keep the culture alive.



Mahatma, thanks to actor Uttej, who introduced him to the director.

"During our discussions, Krishna Vamsi garu heard my folk song *Neelapuri Gajula O Neelaveni*—a song I had originally written for a street play. He liked it so much that he decided to include it in his film. That was the moment my name started getting recognized in the industry," Shyam shares.

One of the reasons filmmakers seek out Shyam is his expertise in Telangana folk dialect and cultural nuances. His songs in *Balagam*, which is deeply rooted in Telangana culture, were massive hits. Similarly, he contributed songs to *Dasara* and has a deep passion for incorporating age-old Telangana words into his lyrics.

"I have traveled across almost all villages in Telangana as part of my folklore research. I try to infuse those words and traditions into my songs whenever possible," he explains. Apart from writing lyrics, Shyam has also dabbled in music composition. He provided music for a few films made by his friends due to budget constraints, but he has since decided to focus solely on lyric writing.

His experimental approach to lyrics can be seen in songs like *Dabidi Dabidi* from *Daaku Maharaj*, where the lyrics cleverly integrate punch dialogues from Balakrishna's films. "If you listen closely, you'll notice how the lyrics reflect Balayya garu's iconic dialogues," he reveals.

Post-*Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo*, Kasarla Shyam's songs have continued to dominate the charts, with hits from *Mad* (*College Papa*), *DJ Tillu* (*Title Track*), *Tillu Square* (*Radhika Radhika*) and *Hanuman* (*Poolamma Pilla*). He is currently working on *Robinhood* and *Mad Square*, releasing this week, as well as upcoming projects like *Yellamma* (directed by Balagam fame Venu), Nani's *Paradise*, Ravi Teja's *Mass Jathara*, Sai Dharam Tej's *Sambarala Yetigattu* and Nithiin's *Thammudu*. Despite being one of the most sought-after lyricists, Shyam remains grounded. His biggest inspiration in the industry is Chandrabose, another renowned lyricist from Warangal. "When I was a student, Chandrabose garu was an icon for me. His work inspired me to pursue a career in lyric writing," he shares.

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28°C is a special film to me: Director Anil Viswanath

Director Dr. Anil Viswanath, known for *Polimera* and its sequel *Polimera 2*, is set to release his debut directorial film *28°C* on April 4. Starring Naveen Chandra and Shalini Vadnikatti, the film is a captivating love story with emotional and thrilling elements. Produced by Sai Abhishek, *28°C* holds a special place in the director's heart.

"This is my first film as a director, and I'm thrilled to talk about it. Every filmmaker dreams of a debut project like this, and I worked extremely hard to bring it to life," said Anil Viswanath. He expressed his deep emotional connection to the film, revealing that he plans to write a book about his experience making it.

Speaking about the story, the director said that an unexpected problem arises between the lead characters,

making their journey to overcome it truly gripping. "You won't see the last 20 minutes coming—it's something never before seen in cinema," he hinted.

Interestingly, *28°C* was completed in 2019 but faced release delays due to the pandemic. Lead actor Naveen Chandra shared, "It's a fresh love story about two doctors, packed with thrilling elements. The title *28°C* comes from a crucial plot point—if the female lead's body temperature isn't maintained at *28°C*, complications arise."

Additionally, Anil Viswanath teased his highly anticipated sequel *Polimera 3*, promising it will be "15 times bigger and better" than *Polimera 2*. "We are currently working on CGI and pre-production. Filming is set to begin around August or September," he revealed.



Vijay bids farewell to cinema with *Jana Nayagan* before full-time politics



Tamil superstar Thalapathy Vijay is gearing up for his last film before transitioning into full-time politics. With his political party already announced and multiple public meetings held, his political entry has become a major talking point. However, fans are equally eager for his final cinematic outing, *Jana Nayagan*. Produced by KVN Production and directed by H. Vinoth, the makers have officially announced that the film will release on January 9, 2026. Positioned just ahead of Makar Sankranti and Pongal (January 14, 2026), *Jana Nayagan* is set to dominate the box office during the festive season—an ideal time for blockbuster releases in both Tamil and Telugu cinema. Pongal has historically been a lucrative period for Tamil and Telugu films, and with a superstar like Vijay leading the charge, anticipation is at an all-time high. The film's first-look poster, which went viral, features Vijay taking a selfie with a massive, electrified crowd—symbolising his deep-rooted connection with his fans. The title *Jana Nayagan*, meaning "The People's Leader," aptly reflects both his on-screen charisma and his growing political influence.



Nithiin's *Robinhood* to face stiff competition at the Ugadi box office

Actor Nithiin is set to return to the big screen after nearly two years, hoping to bounce back after the box-office failure of his last film, *Extraordinary Man*. His upcoming film, *Robinhood*, directed by Venky Kudumula, marks their second collaboration after the successful *Bheeshma*. Starring Sreeleela as the female lead, the film is scheduled for release on March 27, just ahead of Ugadi (March 30), a major South Indian festival.

While Ugadi is an excellent time for film releases, *Robinhood* is set to face stiff competition. The small-budget film *Mad Square* is releasing on the same date, and its viral trailer has already captured youth interest. Trade analysts predict it could pose significant competition for Nithiin's film.

Additionally, Mohanlal's much-anticipated sequel *Empuraan* is also hitting the screens. The first installment, *Lucifer*, was a massive hit, even among Telugu audiences on OTT platforms. With Prithviraj Sukumaran directing and playing a key role, *Empuraan* has strong expectations, especially in its dubbed Telugu version.

Despite *Robinhood* featuring a cameo by Australian cricketer David Warner, trade experts believe it may not provide a significant boost to the film's performance. Moreover, the makers have announced that there will be no hike in ticket prices in both Telugu states, which could impact revenue. With these factors at play, *Robinhood* will have to fight hard for box-office success this Ugadi.