

EDITORIAL

TIM COOK SEEMS DETERMINED TO KEEP BRUISING APPLE

For America's brands, the second Trump administration has been a field of rakes lying in wait to give them black eyes. But unlike most rakes, these have big red flags telling you where they are. Which makes it even more surprising and disappointing that the purveyor of one of America's shiniest and strongest brands keeps stepping on them. Apple Inc. is one of this country's flagship businesses. For the past 19 years, it has been the world's most admired company, according to surveys of executives, directors and analysts by Fortune Magazine and the consulting firm Korn Ferry.

For 13 years running, the iPhone maker has been the world's most valuable brand as measured by the consulting firm Interbrand. It's routinely considered one of the world's best employers.

For most of those 19 years as the Gallant to so many corporate Goofuses, Apple has been led by Chief Executive Officer Tim Cook, who took over from founder Steve Jobs in 2011. Succeeding such a legend would seem to be a poisoned chalice, but Cook's low-key leadership was apparently just what the company needed to carry on in the style to which it had grown accustomed under the hard-charging Jobs, if not better.

Cook, who raised money for Hillary Clinton during the 2016 election, navigated Trump 1.0 with aplomb and even a touch of bravery. At a Bloomberg Global Business forum in 2017, he criticized the administration's immigration policies, saying: "This is unacceptable. This is not who we are as a country." The worst President Donald Trump could ever do in return was call him "Tim Apple."

Trump 2.0 has been a much different story. Where once he managed to stay on Trump's good side without embarrassing himself, this time Cook has bent fully to the political winds. It hasn't been a good look. He donated \$1 million of his own money to Trump's inaugural committee and attended the inauguration with a bevy of other tech CEOs. In August, he presented the award-hungry Trump with a bespoke glass-and-gold plaque and glazed the president as "one of the great and most esteemed business leaders and geniuses and innovators anywhere in the world."

Most infamously, Cook attended a private White House screening of Melania - a \$40 million favor from a less-beloved brand, Amazon.com Inc., to Trump and the first lady - just hours after federal agents shot and killed Alex Pretti in Minneapolis. It took days of furious criticism for Cook to finally release a milquetoast statement calling for "deescalation." More stealthily, Apple last year killed incentives for Cook and other executives to consider the environmental impact of their decisions, Bloomberg News reported. In doing so, Apple joined a recent trend of companies backing away from climate commitments, encouraged by a US government whose official policy is that climate change is a myth.

Such commitments aren't just important for woke virtue signaling. An increasingly chaotic climate makes it harder to do business, especially for a company with global reach and supply chains such as Apple.

Nor have Cook's MAGA flirtations been nearly enough to remove Apple from the American Conservative Values ETF's list of 37 overly woke companies in which it refuses to invest. The ETF's managers say they want to "exclude companies perceived to be most hostile to conservative values without sacrificing performance." The ETF consistently lagged the S&P 500 for most of last year. Apple's stock price has shown no obvious reaction to Cook's political stumbles, rising consistently during the Melania debacle. "

Delhi Scorpio Tragedy: Why These Four States Top The Hit-And-Run List

Two years ago, there was the Pune Porsche case - which still remains in court, by the way. Now, Delhi has been jolted by another fatal road incident: a 23-year-old was killed after being struck by an allegedly speeding Scorpio. Preliminary reports indicate that the vehicle was driven by a minor who did not apply the brakes at the point of impact and attempted to flee the scene which places this harrowing episode within a troubling pattern of attempted hit-and-run cases. While public outrage, particularly in metropolitan centres like Delhi, tends to frame such cases as sudden moral breakdowns from reckless teenage drivers making a panicked escape, national road safety data tells a more structural story. Persistent enforcement gaps, low conviction rates, rapid motorisation, and uneven state capacity have together eroded credible deterrence. The pattern suggests not isolated deviance, but a systemic failure of governance. India's Road Toll in Numbers National data suggest that hit-and-run fatalities are not episodic spikes but part of a sustained upward trajectory. According to the National Crime Records Bureau and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, hit-and-run deaths increased from 18,702 in 2013 to 31,209 in 2023, a rise of nearly 67% over a decade. Their share in total road fatalities has expanded from roughly 13-14% to nearly 18%, indicating that fleeing the scene is accounting for a growing proportion of fatal crashes. The post-pandemic rebound sharpened this pattern. Between 2021 and 2022 alone, hit-and-run deaths rose by about 18%, outpacing the increase in overall road fatalities. Delhi's recent cases have amplified public anger, but the capital is not statistically exceptional. The trend is national. The data points less to isolated moral collapse and more to a widening gap between rapid motorisation and credible enforcement. UP Tops The List The national aggregate masks sharp regional concentration. Data from NCRB and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways show that Uttar Pradesh recorded roughly 16,300 hit-and-run cases in 2022, accounting for a disproportionately large share of the national toll



It was followed by Madhya Pradesh, with around 9,000 cases, Maharashtra with more than 3,600, and Rajasthan with 2,850. Together, these four states contributed close to two-thirds of all hit-and-run fatalities that year. Yet, absolute burden does not equal density. When normalised by population, smaller states and Union Territories reveal different risk patterns. Even a few hundred cases in Delhi, with a population exceeding 20 million and with one of the highest vehicle densities in the country, translate into elevated per-lakh exposure. Crucially, high motorisation does not automatically imply higher hit-and-run density. Tamil Nadu, despite leading in overall crash volumes, performs differently from Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh on fatality intensity. Similarly, Kerala and Chandigarh combine high vehicle ownership with comparatively lower fatality ratios. The divergence underscores a central inference: exposure is driven by traffic volume, but density of death is driven by other things. Two-Wheeler Riders Are The Most Vulnerable Data from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways also show that in 2022, two-wheeler riders accounted for roughly 44.5% of all road deaths, while pedestrians constituted nearly 19.5%, together forming the largest victim categories. This aligns with findings from the World Health Organization (WHO) that in low and middle-income countries

(LMICs), over half of fatalities involve vulnerable road users. Temporal clustering is equally stark. About 20.8% of accidents occurred between 9 pm and midnight, the single highest time band nationally. Darkness reduces detection probability, impaired driving increases impact severity. Geographically, nearly 68% of road fatalities occur in rural areas, where surveillance, lighting and emergency response infrastructure remain limited. The convergence is structural: vulnerable victims, high-speed corridors, low-visibility hours, weak monitoring. Hit-and-run, in statistical terms, is patterned exposure meeting limited enforcement, not episodic deviance. But Why Do Drivers Flee? The data suggests that the problem is not merely reckless driving, but weak consequence management. According to the NCRB, nearly 47,800 hit-and-run cases were registered in 2022. Yet, the legal funnel thins dramatically thereafter. Conviction rates in negligent driving cases hover below 50%, while over 90% of cases remain pending at different stages of trial. In deterrence economics, certainty outweighs severity. India has increased statutory penalties through the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019 and more recently under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. But if enforcement probability is low and adjudication is slow, harsher punishment does not automatically translate into better behaviour.

Edit

Beyond Robodog: The Hollowness of Indian Higher Education



(Academic quality is dying in the race for certification)

—Dr. Priyanka Saurabh

The recent controversy surrounding the display of Robodog at Galgotias University has generated widespread discussion on social media and in the mainstream media. On the surface, this issue appears to be about appropriateness, priorities, or campus culture, but in reality, it is merely a symptom of a deeper, structural crisis that has been brewing in India's higher education system for years. The problem isn't Robodog. The problem is what our universities have gradually become. The past two decades have seen unprecedented expansion in higher education in India. The number of private universities, self-financed colleges, and degree institutions has grown rapidly. This expansion has often been presented as a result of "increased access to education" and a "demographic dividend." However, when this expansion occurred without corresponding regulation, academic rigor, and accountability, quality has come at a cost. The result has been that quantity has increased, but quality has steadily declined. Today, most—though not all—private universities and degree colleges in the country have become less centers of learning

and more centers of degree distribution. Education is becoming a transaction rather than an intellectual process—degrees in exchange for money. Attendance, academic participation, laboratory work, and intellectual discipline are no longer mandatory but are subject to negotiation. What was once non-negotiable in higher education has now become flexible, weak, and distorted. This decline is particularly worrisome in subjects where rigor is essential. Weakening theoretical studies is one thing, but the hollowing out of science education is far more serious. Today, students are receiving bachelor's and master's degrees in science without attending regular classes or receiving practical laboratory training. Experimental work—once the backbone of scientific training—has become a mere formality. Degrees are awarded, but competence is not ensured. The consequences of this hollowness become apparent when students apply for jobs. A master's degree in chemistry can't explain basic scientific concepts. A commerce graduate can't explain the basic concepts of debit and credit. A student with a management degree appears weak in problem-solving and critical thinking. These aren't isolated examples, but rather common trends observed repeatedly by industry. Naturally, this leads to frustra-

tion among students and parents. When employment fails despite years of study and substantial financial investment, questions arise. Parents are right to ask why their children remain unemployed despite their education. This discontent often targets the government, which is accused of failing to create jobs. While job creation is a policy challenge, this discourse ignores an uncomfortable truth—that a significant number of graduates are actually unemployable. This raises the fundamental question. If students lack the necessary knowledge and skills, how did they obtain the degrees that qualify them? Who gave such institutions permission to issue certificates without ensuring academic quality? The answer lies in the regulatory framework for higher education. Higher education in India is overseen by a number of ministries, departments, and regulatory bodies whose stated purpose is to safeguard standards, ensure quality, and maintain academic integrity. Accreditation systems, inspections, evaluations, and academic audits were created for this purpose. However, in practice, these processes often remain formalities rather than genuine evaluations. Inspections are often pre-planned. Documents are embellished to fulfill formalities. Buildings and infrastruc-

ture are prioritized over teaching quality. Compliance is placed above learning outcomes. The actual academic experience of students, the quality of teaching, the rigor of examinations, and the culture of inquiry—these are rarely seriously and consistently monitored. As a result, institutions learn to “manage” regulators rather than improve education. This regulatory laxity has led to a vicious cycle—institutions operate with minimal academic accountability, regulators maintain the appearance of oversight, and degrees continue to be issued. The price of this system is borne not by institutions nor by regulators—but by students, employers, and society. Ironically, while industry complains about a shortage of qualified human resources, the country grapples with a serious crisis of educated unemployment. This is not a contradiction, but a natural consequence of a system that prioritizes certification over competence. Companies are forced to spend heavily on retraining new employees, while young professionals struggle with a lack of confidence and career stagnation. The biggest victims of this system are honest and talented students who, often due to a lack of options or misleading branding, end up in mediocre institutions. They work hard and want to learn, but ultimately, they are burdened more by the institution's name on their marketplace than by their own abilities. Their individual merit is overshadowed by the lack of institutional credibility. This is not only unfair, but a waste of talent on a national scale. It must be acknowledged that India still has some high-quality institutions that compete internationally. But they are the exception, not the rule. It's worth noting that school education up to grade 12 remains relatively structured and controlled. As students enter higher education, oversight loosens and expectations become blurred. If this trend is not arrested in time, the long-term consequences will be dire. The social and economic value of degrees will decline. Public trust in higher education will weaken. The distinction between merit and mediocrity will become ever more blurred. Phrases like “university on every street” will become not satire but a description of reality—where universities will be everywhere, but education will not.

Trump Might Not Actually Have A 'Real' Plan For Iran

The United States under President Donald Trump has taken the decision to go into talks with Iran regarding the country's contested nuclear programme'. This sentence might as well remind one of 2013, when under the American presidency of Barack Obama, pressure was being exerted against Tehran to come to the negotiating table. Back then, as Iran agreed to do so, it led to the signing of the Iran nuclear deal in 2015 (officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the 'JCPOA'). After that, Trump had been one of the deal's most vocal critics, finally terminating US participation in 2018. The US, as of writing this, is building a massive military arsenal in the Middle East. Rumour mills are abuzz as to what kind of action Trump may be mulling, considering that a second round of talks hosted by Oman in Geneva, Switzerland, was, as per reports, not entirely a failure. Even so, two American aircraft carriers are being stationed in the Mediterranean and Arabian waters alike, while open-source information on social media is lit up with a column of US Air Force mid-air refuellers heading to Europe, potentially aimed at supporting a military campaign in the Middle East. The deepening anxieties are not without merit. In 2025, a similar military movement was used as a cover by the US and Israel to launch strikes against Iranian nuclear and air defence sites using stealth B-2 bombers carrying weapons only in the American arsenal.



nal, which could target facilities deep underground. Since then, much has happened with the Iran file, including months of protests called upon by Reza Pahlavi, son of the former Shah of Iran. That unrest saw thousands of protesters take to the streets, leading to an internet ban, a communications blackout, and the state dispersing such gatherings with force. 1. Trump Has Already Shown His Cards Any impending second strike against Iran by the US will have to lay out a different set of political and military aims compared to June last year. One of these is expected to be a final take-down of Iran's expansive missile stocks. The earlier strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities, which are built deep underground, have already utilised primary weapon systems that the US has for such roles. In the months following the attacks, it has been more evident that while they caused much damage across

Iranian facilities, the bombings did not provide the death blow to the programme as the US was expecting. The three main sites, namely, Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan, suffered significant damage, but the underground depth of the sites largely spared them from long-term damage. Iran's nuclear designs seem to have been built around redundancy and contingency of lopsided air power being used against it. True, Israeli air strikes in the past decommissioned nuclear facilities in Iraq (1981) and Syria (2007), but Iran is a much more complex affair, as the past few months have shown. 2. Are There Alternatives Within Iran? There is no doubt that US and Israeli firepower over the past year has shaken the Iranian establishment as well as the 86-year-old Ayatollah Khamenei to the core. Prior to this, Israeli air strikes and intelligence operations deep inside Iranian cities had also removed

some of the country's top political, military, and intelligence leadership. However, some resilience of structure and loyalty of personnel has kept the state from any impending collapse, at least till now. A new round of military strikes, which will almost exclusively rely on air power, will come with unclear aims. Trump's impending wish for regime change, whether holistic or engineered, seems to be wishful thinking. Any push to install a new regime through military power cannot be successful without sustained on-ground operations. And this too will only work if there were robust anti-regime forces and personalities within Iran readily available to take charge or offer alternatives. The recent US actions in Venezuela, a precise and impressive military operation leading to Nicolás Maduro's second-in-command taking over the country - in cahoots with the US - is now commonly cited as a model.

IPL-LINKED TEAMS 'NOT CONSIDERING PAKISTAN PLAYERS'

Pakistan cricketers are not being considered by Indian-owned sides for next month's Hundred auction, sources have told BBC Sport. Players from Pakistan have not featured in the Indian Premier League (IPL) since 2009 because of diplomatic tensions between the two countries. Four of The Hundred's eight franchises - Manchester Super Giants, MI London, Southern Brave and Sunrisers Leeds - are now at least part-owned by companies that control IPL teams. In messages seen by the BBC, a senior official from the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) indicated to an agent that interest in his Pakistan players would be limited to sides not linked to the IPL. Another agent described the situation as "an unwritten rule" across T20 leagues with Indian investment. ECB chief executive Richard Gould said last year he expected "players from all nations to be selected for all teams" in The



Hundred and warned "clear anti-discrimination policies" were in place. None of the four teams or ownership groups in question responded to requests for comment. An ECB spokesperson said: "The Hundred welcomes men's and women's players from all over the world and we would expect the eight teams to reflect that. "Almost 1,000 cricketers from 18

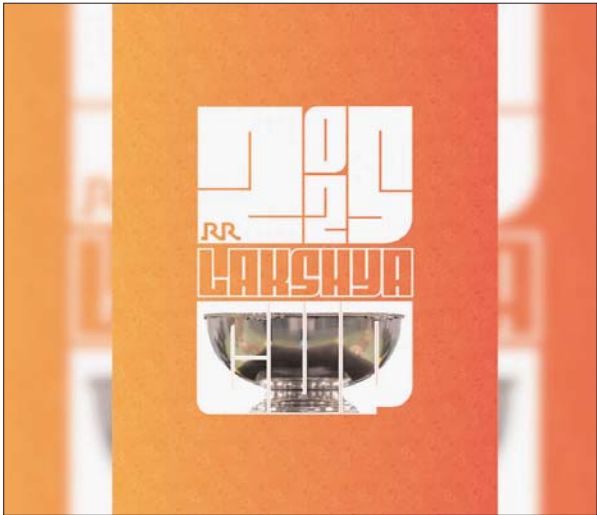
nations have registered for The Hundred auction, with representation on the longlist of over 50 players respectively from Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Pakistan and West Indies." Two Pakistan internationals - Mohammad Amir and Imad Wasim - appeared in last year's tournament, which was the final edition before new investors took control.

Others - including Shaheen Afridi, Shadab Khan and Harris Rauf - featured in earlier seasons of the men's competition. No Pakistan players have appeared in the women's Hundred. Pakistan's men are ranked sixth in the ICC T20 world rankings,, external with the women's team eighth. The men's side are scheduled to play a Test series in the West

Indies during this year's Hundred, though white-ball specialists would still be available. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has previously withdrawn no-objection certificates (NOCs) - required for players to take part in overseas tournaments - at short notice. However, sources point to the participation of seven leading players in Australia's recent Big Bash League as evidence the PCB has shown flexibility over player availability. A growing trend in franchise cricket No Pakistan players have featured in South Africa's SA20, which launched in 2023. All six of its teams are owned by IPL franchise groups - including the four now involved in The Hundred. In the UAE's ILT20, franchises controlled by the owners of MI London and Southern Brave have not signed a Pakistan player across four seasons, but have recruited cricketers from 15 other nationalities.

16TH LAKSHYA CUP 2025 TO FEATURE INDIA'S TOP-RANKED AIR RIFLE SHOOTERS IN NAVI MUMBAI

India's top 20-ranked 10m Air Rifle shooters will compete at the 16th RR Lakshya Cup 2025, powered by RR Global, at the Lakshya Shooting Club, Karnala Sports Academy, Panvel, Navi Mumbai. The Invitation only tournament scheduled for 21st and 22nd February will bring together leading junior and senior athletes in a professionally run competition aligned with international standards, with equal podium opportunities for men and women, and prize money and equipment awards for top finishers. The top-contenders like Kiran Jadhav (reigning National Champion and World Championship medalist), Sonam Maskar (ISSF World Cup medalist), Parth Mane (reigning National Games Champion and Junior World Champion), Rajshree Sancheti (international shooter and former National Champion), and Ojasvi Thakur (Asian Championships Youth gold



medalist) will compete, where the Senior Champion will receive ₹1.5 lakhs and the rotating Silver Trophy, currently held by Kiran Jadhav of the Navy. The Junior Champion will receive ₹75,000, with additional cash prizes for other podium finishers. Athletes will also be eligible to win shooting equipment and accessories from equipment partner Capapie Sports and accessories partner Tiro

Sports. Founded in 2006, Lakshya Shooting Club introduced the Lakshya Cup in 2009 as an intra-club event. The tournament was conceptualised by Olympian, Arjuna Awardee and Dronacharya Awardee Suma Shirur, Founder and High-Performance Director of Lakshya Shooting Club. Since 2016, it has developed into one of India's most respected invitation-only rifle competitions.

Italy defeat puts GB's men into curling semi-finals

Team GB's men's curlers are now just two victories away from a remarkable Winter Olympic gold after sneaking into Thursday's semi-finals in Cortina. Bruce Mouat's world champions were on the brink of a shock early exit in Italy after losing their penultimate round-robin match to Canada. However, a comprehensive victory over the United States on Wednesday - coupled with favourable results elsewhere - revived their hopes. And Italy's defeat by Switzerland on Thursday morning ensured the British rink would advance to a last-four meeting with the unbeaten Swiss at 18:35 GMT. Should the Scottish



quartet win that repeat of last April's world final, they will play in Saturday's gold-medal contest (18:05) and would be guaranteed to at least match the silver they won in Beijing four years

ago. Lose, and they will go for bronze on Friday (18:05) against whoever loses the other semi between Canada and Norway, who edged GB into fourth in the standings on the head-to-head

record. The women's rink must win a third game in a row - against the Italians on Thursday (13:35) - and hope Switzerland beat the US if they are to make Friday's semi-finals.

"Everyone Turned Against Me, Had To Resign": Pakistan Great's Big Revelation On Suggestion To Drop Babar Azam

Mohammad Yousuf has publicly criticised Babar Azam amid the latter's ongoing struggles in the T20 World Cup, asserting that the former Pakistan captain lacks the requisite skill set to excel in the shortest format of the game. Babar has managed to score only 66 runs across three matches, prompting renewed scrutiny of his place in the playing XI. Yousuf further disclosed that he resigned from his role as a selector because he had proposed dropping Babar from the squad-a recommendation that was rejected, as the entire team management opposed his stance. "I've been saying this for 2-3 years that Babar's technique has gone for a toss. I've been hearing



that he is out-of-form, but he is not. A player can only be out-of-form for two to three series and he has not scored runs for the past two-three years. The moment I suggested resting Babar, everyone suddenly turned against me. I had to

resign because of this. He was eventually dropped a couple of series later," Yousuf said on 'How Does It Work?' podcast. Yousuf also offered a blunt assessment, arguing that mindset alone cannot be considered the issue, as mental

strength holds little value without the requisite skill set. "The churan of mindset is being sold very wrongly. Until you don't have the skill, the mind can't do anything. If you don't have the skill, what will the mind do?" he added. When asked to compare Babar with players from his own era, Yousuf asserted that Pakistan greats such as Inzamam-ul-Haq, Saeed Anwar, Younis Khan, and Zaheer Abbas operated on an entirely different level. "Inzy Bhai and Saeed Bhai's level can't be matched. They can't be matched. They were very big players. Zaheer Abbas.... These four players were of different categories and levels. Babar is nothing in front of them."

NORRIS ADMITS NEW F1 CARS 'NOT PUREST FORM OF RACING'



Lando Norris has admitted he described the new Formula 1 cars as "a lot of fun" last week to "see what the reaction was of everyone". The world champion also suggested Max Verstappen, who had said the cars were "just not F1", could "go and find something else to do" if he did not like them. On Thursday, at the second pre-season test, Norris said: "I just didn't want to come out into the media and complain to everyone on the first weekend back. "I just wanted to say that and see what the reaction was of everyone. "It's been quite an amusing week, and it certainly made a lot of people comment and say a lot of things." The McLaren driver also admitted that the cars were "certainly not the purest form of racing", and that he shared Verstappen's views in many ways. "I agree with Max on a lot of comments," the McLaren driver said. "Probably most of the comments I agree with, but it's not that I don't have fun out there. So there's two sides. "I do agree with basically every

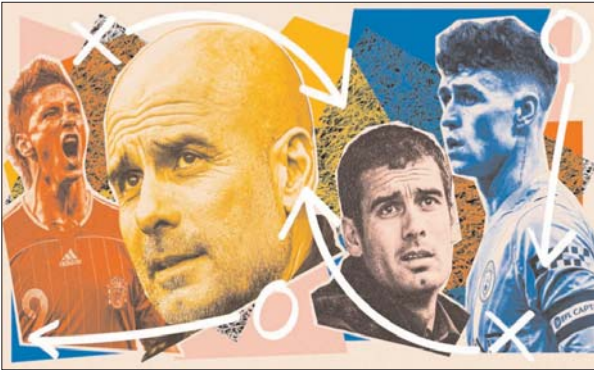
other driver, because I think every other driver has made their comments pretty clear. I just didn't want to come out into the media and complain to everyone on the first weekend back. I want to still enjoy my time and just say what I feel. "I had fun last week. I've still been having fun out there now. And I think we know as a championship with FIA and with Formula 1, we're trying to improve the car that we have now, because it's certainly not the purest form of racing, and that's what Formula 1 should be. "A lot of the driving is focused on just trying to get the battery to work properly and less focused on how can you as a driver get everything out of the car." Verstappen's criticisms centred on the amount of energy management that is required with the new cars. The combination of the power provided by the electrical part of the engine being increased three-fold, to about half of the total output, and the batteries being more or less the same size, has led to drivers doing tasks they have described as counter-intuitive.



'For Dad, who didn't get to see this' - Shiffrin wins gold

The 20-year-old newspaper column that gave a hint to Man City's new tactics

Last week, Pep Guardiola replied to a journalist's question by saying: "Do you want to be my assistant coach? You are brilliant, you are top." The journalist asking that question was me. The reason for my question was to try to gain insight into Manchester City's increasing use of narrow and fluid attackers. In City's stellar side of 2017-18, Leroy Sane and Raheem Sterling would finish games with white paint on their boots after being stationed high and wide. Almost a decade on, Guardiola's system looks very different. To understand why requires a deep dive. "In my question I referenced an article Guardiola wrote for Spanish newspaper El Pais in 2006, in which he analysed Spain's 3-1 win against Tunisia. An important aspect of that column



was his analysis of how to break down low blocks, which has been a key theme this season. "When you decide to play on the counter-attack, you have plenty of space. When you decide to attack [with the ball], you have less. [But] when you play on the counter-attack, the ball belongs to the opponent," he wrote. At the start of this season, City leant into the counter-attacking strengths of individuals

such as Erling Haaland and Tijjani Reijnders. By November, they had scored more goals from fast breaks than in the previous two league campaigns combined. In response to increasingly physical and centrally compact defences in the Premier League, City were scoring by bypassing teams' low-blocks altogether. And although City still look to use their fast attackers, the Spaniard has

applied the brakes in recent weeks, with his words from 20 years ago hinting as to why. Playing more directly can lead to more turnovers, especially centrally. In those circumstances, the attacking side can become stretched with the forwards far from the midfielders and defenders. If a side's shape off the ball is not compact and a team loses the ball often, the logic behind Guardiola wanting to minimise the risk around playing directly is obvious. "After [their opening goal], Tunisia wanted the game to be 14-a-side. They wanted a game with little space," he continued in his column. Given how many Premier League teams now look to defend City in a way that mirrors how Tunisia played on that day, the rest of his words become even more insightful.

HOW SZOBOSZLAI BECAME LIVERPOOL'S KEY MAN



On his forearm, Dominik Szoboszlai has a tattoo in Hungarian which reads 'Talent is a divine blessing, but without incredible will and humility, it is worth nothing'. Dig a little deeper and you find the quote is attributed to Steven Gerrard. When midfielder Szoboszlai arrived at Liverpool from RB Leipzig in 2023 for £60m, there was a reason why he took the number eight shirt that had become synonymous with Gerrard at Anfield. Earlier that summer, Alexis Mac Allister turned down the chance to take the number, but Szoboszlai craved that main-character energy. The 25-year-old has been Liverpool's main character this season, scoring his 10th goal of the season last weekend, to go with seven assists. When it was put to him that he was having a "Steven Gerrard season", he politely disagreed and insisted he was writing his own story. Only forward Hugo Ekitike has more goal involvements

and captain Virgil van Dijk has played more minutes than Szoboszlai for Liverpool this season - and close friend Mohamed Salah described him as "one of the best players in the world right now". The Hungarian international may insist on being his own man, but when it comes to taking responsibility as others struggle, and having his own goal of the season competition at the club, there are certainly similarities to the iconic and inspirational Gerrard. Szoboszlai hasn't always played in his preferred number 10 position this season, but is scoring more frequently - his stunning free-kicks against Arsenal and Manchester City came in games he started at right-back. The step-up in both consistency and output has been clear. In a tumultuous Liverpool campaign that has involved speculation about the future of Salah and defenders Ibrahima Konate and Andy Robertson.

Father, Fear, and Rising Suspense – Emotional Crime Thriller ‘D/O Prasad Rao Kanabadutaledhu’ Unveils a Powerful, Tense Trailer Ahead of 27th February Premiere on ZEE5

The makers of D/O Prasad Rao Kanabaddaledu have unveiled a powerful and tension-filled trailer, offering a compelling glimpse into the emotional crime thriller set to stream exclusively on ZEE5 from 27th February. Directed by Krishna Poluru and produced by K.V. Sri Ram under the banner of South India Screens, the Telugu Original series blends heartfelt emotion with layered investigative intrigue. The trailer opens on an intimate and deeply personal note, capturing the warmth of a father-daughter relationship before shifting abruptly into anxiety and uncertainty. Portrayed by Raji Kanakala, Prasad Rao is introduced as a devoted father whose world is shaken when his daughter Swathi suddenly goes missing. The emotional contrast between affection and absence establishes the tone immediately — this is not merely a mystery, but a story rooted in love and loss. Vasanthika plays Swathi, whose presence resonates throughout the narrative even in disappearance. The trailer carefully establishes her aspirations and the tenderness she shares with her father, making her absence feel profoundly unsettling. As the search intensifies, the narrative transitions into a gripping investigative track. Uday Bhanu, portraying



Investigation Rebecca Joseph, brings authority and emotional sharpness to the case. A striking moment in the trailer suggests that while clues may seem visible, something essential is being overlooked — hinting at unexpected twists and layered revelations. The preview raises compelling questions: Was Swathi's disappearance linked to her hostel life? Did something occur at her workplace? Is someone

close to her involved? Each frame builds intrigue while carefully withholding answers. The ensemble cast further deepens the narrative fabric. Gayatri Bhargavi and Hima Bindu contribute to the evolving emotional and investigative layers surrounding the central conflict, while Sri Ram Venkat appears in a significant role that adds dimension to the unfolding web of relationships. The screenplay by Krishna

Poluru is structured to escalate suspense gradually while remaining grounded in emotional authenticity. Dialogues by Maidaala Shruti lend credibility and texture to character interactions, ensuring the drama feels lived-in rather than exaggerated. The background score composed by Sri Ram Maddury heightens tension with measured precision, amplifying both suspense and sentiment without overwhelming the narrative.

Technically, the series is shaped with clarity and rhythm. Editing by Chandrashekar G.V maintains narrative momentum, allowing key emotional beats to resonate while sustaining intrigue. Cinematography by Ram K Mahesh captures a visual landscape defined by unease and emotional fragility, reinforcing the psychological undercurrents that drive the story. With its emotionally resonant core and suspense-driven structure, D/O Prasad Rao Kanabadutaledhu positions itself as more than a conventional crime thriller. It explores the unbreakable bond between a parent and child, the anguish of uncertainty, and the resilience that emerges when hope refuses to fade. By combining psychological depth with investigative tension, the series promises an experience that is both emotionally stirring and narratively compelling. As a platform committed to elevating regional storytelling, ZEE5 continues to expand the scale and ambition of Telugu Originals. With D/O Prasad Rao Kanabadutaledhu, it reinforces its vision of presenting stories that are emotionally powerful, technically refined, and resonant with contemporary audiences. D/O Prasad Rao Kanabadutaledhu premieres exclusively on ZEE5 on 27th February.

We Are Confident ‘Hey Balwanth’ Will Be a Sure Shot Hit” – Distributor & Producer Vamsi Nandipati at Release Press Meet



“Hey Balwanth’ Will Be a Memorable Film in Telugu Cinema” – Senior Actor Naresh

After delivering blockbuster films like Little Hearts, Raju Weds Rambai, and Isha, the successful duo Bunny Vasu and Vamsi Nandipati are now coming together once again with a full-length out-and-out entertainer titled Hey Balwanth. The film is being presented under the banners of Nandipati Entertainments and Bunny Vas Works.

The movie stars Suhas, Shivani Nagaram, senior actor Naresh, and anchor Sravanti in prominent roles. The film is directed by Gopi Achhar and produced by B. Narendra Reddy under the Trishul Visionary Studios banner. Hey Balwanth is slated for release on February 20. Ahead of its release, the film unit organized a grand release press meet.

Vamsi Nandipati Speaks

Speaking at the event, Vamsi Nandipati said:

"We have spoken about Hey Balwanth on many platforms so far. The film is releasing in over 650 screens, which reflects our confidence. As the release approaches, we have already started paid premieres in several locations from Thursday evening, and we've planned them across all areas. You don't need to follow a one-month diet or hit the gym for a month. Just give us three hours, and we'll give you a month's worth of happiness and energy. We have a strong story, powerful emotions, and wholesome entertainment. This is a film that must be experienced in theatres. Come, laugh wholeheartedly, and enjoy the ride. We are confident that we will score a definite hit."

Senior Actor Naresh Shares His Excitement

Senior actor Naresh added: "From 'Hey Bhagwan' to 'Hey Balwanth,' it has grown even stronger. The film is releasing in over 300 the-

atres overseas, and many shows are already household. There's tremendous positive buzz both in India and abroad. Anil Sunkara, after witnessing the overseas response, has already called it a blockbuster. Another director called to say he laughed non-stop for two and a half hours. Even the media has started congratulating us in advance. This year looks very promising for Tollywood. Hey Balwanth comes with freshness and family entertainment. Suhas is entering the next phase of his career. The climax will particularly impress everyone. This film will become a memorable one in Telugu cinema. Everyone has delivered outstanding performances. In Gopi, the industry has found a talented director. If Vamsi Nandipati is involved, the film is bound to be a hit. Premieres have already begun from the evening of February 19, and we are all celebrating with great enthusiasm."

THE LOVE SONG “OOSULAADE..” FROM THE MOVIE “SON OF”, STARRING SAI SIMHADRI, HAS RECEIVED A SUPERB RESPONSE

Produced under the Sai Simhadri Cinema banner, “Son Of” features Sai Simhadri as both the hero and producer. The film is directed by Battula Satish. The movie is scheduled to release on February 27. As part of the promotions, the love song titled “Oosulaade...” was released on Wednesday. The song beautifully portrays the love between the hero and heroine and is captivating listeners. Meera Raj plays the female lead in this film, while senior actor Vinod Kumar appears in a key role. The music for the film is composed by Rishi M. The song “Oosulaade...” is written by Bhaskarabhatla and sung by Aditya and Sameera Bharadwaj. This cute love song is melodious



and pleasant to listen to. Earlier, the teaser and the movie's title song received a superb response from the audience. Following that trend, the newly released "Oosulaade.." song is also getting an amazing

The makers stated that the film has been crafted to highlight the emotional bonding between a father and son and expressed confidence that it will definitely impress the audience.

REVIEW: A BEAUTIFUL BREAKUP - STRONG YET GROUNDED

A Beautiful Breakup proves that strong performances can sustain a film without the need for large ensemble casts. Making a two-character film for 90 minutes is an ambitious decision. It requires courage and immense trust in the actors. Thaksh and Matylda justify that trust. Their natural acting makes the emotional journey feel believable. Thaksh brings a composed yet intense performance that stands out. There is star quality in his calm confidence — a new face with significant potential. Matylda complements him well, ensuring the emotional balance never feels one-sided. The film's technical aspects are handled with care. The colour grading enhances mood, and the production



THE SOUTH INDIA TIMES REVIEW & Rating: 3.25/5.

values, including poster designs and presentation, reflect professional quality. Ilaiyaraaja's symphony-based score elevates the film considerably. His music adds scale, richness, and emotional resonance, turning intimate scenes into cinematic moments.

film considerably. His music adds scale, richness, and emotional resonance, turning intimate scenes into cinematic moments.

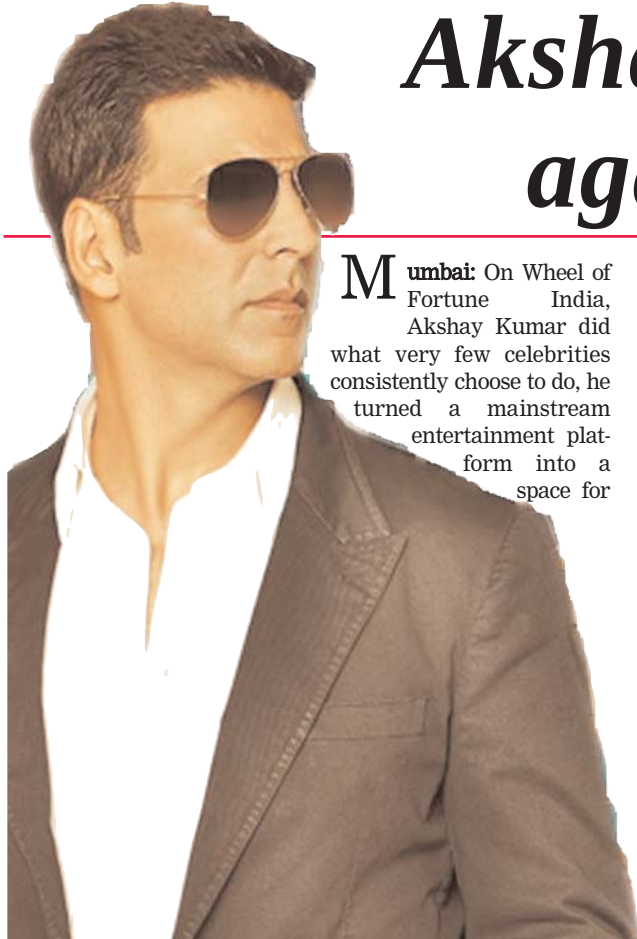
Lets create MIRA- CLE! Says Heartthrob Hebba Patel



Hebba to join the sets
Of
Prabhas Nimmala's
MIRACLE
The upcoming out-and-out
action entertainer
"Miracle", directed by
Prabhas Nimmala, is pro-
gressing at a brisk pace.
The film is being produced
under the Saida Family
Entertainment banner by
Ramesh Eggidi, Srikanth
Mogadasu, and Chander
Goud. After successfully
completing two schedules,
the team is gearing up for
the third schedule, which
will commence on
February 24 in and around
Hyderabad.
Actress Hebhab Patel is
joining the project and
will participate in this
schedule. The film fea-
tures Randheer Bheesu as
the lead hero, while senior
actors Sriram and Suresh
are playing crucial roles.
Naidu Pendra is being
introduced as the antago-

nist. Senior film journalist Dheeraj Appaji will be seen in the role of a forensic officer. The supporting cast includes Janardhan, Yogi Katre, Vijay Surya, Intiaz, Saibaba, Dil Ramesh, Jhansi, Suryanarayana, Sridhar, Srikanth, Shiva, Amani, Haimavathi, Navya (Ammu), Sameer Datta, Anushree, Bezawada Mastan, R. Kumar and others in important roles. Speaking about the film, the producers said that director Prabhas Nimmala, who earlier showcased his talent with "Satya Gang" and "Fighter Shiva," is confident that "Miracle" will live up to its title. They stated that Hebah Patel's glamour, the strong performances of senior actors, and the high-voltage action sequences will be the major highlights of the movie.

Akshay Kumar calls out racism against North-east Indians



Mumbai: On Wheel of Fortune India, Akshay Kumar did what very few celebrities consistently choose to do, he turned a mainstream entertainment platform into a space for

social reckoning, further acknowledging the racism that takes place against North East Indians. It all began when a contestant shared her lived experience of racial abuse faced by people from the Northeast, to which Akshay leaned into and completely acknowledged it, further making his stand known. Rather than positioning himself as a distant ally, he made the issue personal. The actor further called his makeup artist Kim, who is from Manipur, onto the stage. He stated, “There is a boy with me, who does my makeup and takes care of me. He is here, Kim.” Further when Kim narrated his experience of being mocked, stereotyped, reduced to slurs like

“Chinese,” “Chinky,” “Momo”, Akshay seemed disturbed and shocked. Akshay didn’t dilute the moment with politeness or denial, and said that “Today, after listening to Kim, I am convinced that these things happen.” He further said, “I want to tell all the people of India, there is discrimination with the people of North-East. They are all Indians. They are as much Indians as I am, you are and the people sitting here.” He went further, reminding viewers that the same people who are mocked for their features are often the first to stand at the borders. “There is so much contribution for this country. The Naga Regiment... Kargil war, Bangladesh war. They have given their blood.

They are Indians.” For the uninitiated, Akshay Kumar is currently seen hosting the quiz reality show Wheel of Fortune. It all began when a contestant shared her lived experience of racial abuse faced by people from the Northeast. Akshay explained that he brought up the topic on the national Television to highlight the discrimination faced by North-East people. “They are all Indians. Ye utne hi Indian hain jitney ki mai hum, aap hain aur yaha pe jitney bhi baithne wale log gain,” Akshay voiced his support. He also reminded viewers of the significant contributions of North-East Indians, including their role in the Kargil War, the Naga Regiment, and the Head

Hunters. Akshay further claimed, "They have given their blood. They are Indians." Fans are cheering as the actor openly voices his support for North-East Indians. Akshay Kumar hosted Wheel Of Fortune is a quiz show that was originally meant to be a limited series, including 40 episodes. Seeing how great of a response Wheel of Fortune is getting, makers have extended the show with an addition of 25 more episodes in it. Wheel of Fortune premiered on January 27, 2026. The new episodes of the show releases every Monday to Friday at 9 pm IST on Sony Entertainment Television. The show can also be streamed on Sony LIV OTT platform.