Entertainment

Mahesh Babu heads to Georgia for next schedule of SS Rajamouli's 'Varanasi'

Superstar Mahesh Babu's next ambitious project Varanasi is shaping up as one of the biggest pan-world ventures in Indian cinema. Mounted on a monumental scale, the film is being directed by global blockbuster filmmaker S. S. Rajamouli, best known for Baahubali and RRR.

Mahesh Babu was spotted leaving Hyderabad from Rajiv Gandhi International Airport earlier today, heading to Georgia for the next major shooting schedule. This is a work trip, as the actor is set to join the upcoming international schedule of the film. Reports suggest that Priyanka Chopra and Prithviraj Sukumaran are also expected to join the Georgia leg of the shoot, making this schedule one of the most crucial phases of production.

Music maestro M. M. Keeravani recently revealed that background score work will begin in September, after the entire shoot wraps up in June. The film also features Prakash Raj in key role. Produced by K. L. Narayana and S. S. Karthikeya, the massive pan-world action-adventure is being made on a grand budget and scale. Varanasi is officially slated for a worldwide theatrical release on April 7, 2027, and is already being positioned as one of the most ambitious Indian films ever made.

What is your beef?

'Kerala Story' released in 2023 and claimed many things that were wrong with Kerala, including the theory of "Love Jihad." The state largely looked away. The film is back in the news as the makers release a trailer for Part 2; this time they have targeted beef curry. And now Kerala refuses to take the misrepresentation lying low, crying foul at what it sees as an attempt to fracture the secular fabric of society

Rajeshwari Kalyanam

'Kerala Story 2' and the politics and propaganda around it, along with the hilarious reels mocking the beef scene in the trailer, take me back to my recent visit to Kochi. The port city—with its art, architecture, layered history, and melting pot of cultures—leaves an indelible mark. The sea, the fish, and most importantly the warmth of its people stay with you.

Our quest for authentic Kerala parota with some help from an auto driver led us to a simple but bustling hotel in Mattancherry. The owner sat at the counter while we shared a table with two students waiting for their meal. First came pathimukham—the special Kerala root boiled water served hot. We were spoilt for choice: the menu included appam, stew, kadala curry, square parota, even Indian Chinese. The clientele was a mixed bag—foreign tourists, local businessmen, executives, college students, families. People of all classes and creeds sat together, united by love for food. And guess what was the most ordered dish—Beef Roast.

Beef is today in the news thanks to the recently released trailer of the film 'The Kerala Story 2.'

In the trailer, a jihadi is shown force-feeding a girl beef curry. The scene appears conceptualized with little understanding of local culture or culinary habits, seemingly to shock and provoke. Instead, it led to widespread indignation, with Malayalees across religions proclaiming their love for beef curry. The internet is filled with memes and reels mocking what many see as a scene created in poor taste and poorer research.

The story of 'The Kerala Story' goes back to 2023 when Part 1 was released. It was widely accused of being propaganda, given its premise. The film tells the story of a Malayalee Hindu girl lured into conversion by her lover, married, and taken to a terrorist camp. It suggests that "Love Jihad" is widely prevalent in Kerala, quoting unverified numbers to substantiate the claim. In a technically weak film, several scenes present conspiracy theories and questionable information as fact.

Kerala did not agree with 'The Kerala Story.' A state that produces some of the finest films considered it too trivial to take seriously. "No one will watch it here," was the general consensus—and they were not wrong. The film failed to make an impact in Kerala, though it provided WhatsApp fodder elsewhere.

Now the team has released the trailer for Part 2. This time, among other things, they have targeted Kerala's most popular dish—beef curry. And that has clearly backfired.

"In Kerala, everyone has 'Left' blood regardless of religion or politics," shared Father Augustine Vattoly, whom I met during the Kerala visit. He was referring to a shared social conscience that reflects in how people respond to issues. You see it in small but telling incidents—like the recent viral video of an elderly woman stopping a scooter rider from using the sidewalk. A responsible citizen taking a stand.

Augustine is a Catholic priest who supported Sister Ranit, who spoke against a Bishop and faced ostracism and legal battles. He convened "Save Our Sisters" (SOS) to stand by protesting nuns during the 2018 agitation. His experiences reflect Kerala's courage in expressing dissent. Sister Ranit and a few nuns now survive through tailoring and stitching cotton bags, sustained by community support. That solidarity, he says, is heartening.

The 'Me Too' movement from late 2017 and 2018 was an eye-opener across India. But perhaps only in Kerala did it trigger deep introspection in the film industry, leading to the dissolution of AMMA (Association of Malayalam Movie Artists) after the Hema Committee report. The Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), formed after the abduction case involving actor Dileep, continues to grow stronger.

Actor Rima Kallingal, an active WCC member, said at a National Women in Media conference in Thiruvananthapuram that directors and writers sometimes reach out to check if their scripts represent women appropriately. Even occasional instances like these signal a shift in perspective.

The industry and society in the state remain male dominated. But when power is pitted against the powerless, a strong section speaks up for the wronged.

Popularly known as God's Own Country, Kerala is in many ways People's Own Country—fiercely protective of its collective identity. People are proud of their clean roads, greenery, heritage, culture, and cuisine—and yes, the beef roast and curry enjoyed with parota or puttu.

Today, the response is not just about a beef scene. It reflects awareness of attempts to fracture a secular fabric where shared history takes precedence over divisive narratives. Onam, for instance, is celebrated by all communities. King Mahabali is welcomed with fervour, followed by the Onam sadhya—vegetarian in tradition, though some homes add non-vegetarian variations.

A case has now been filed in a Kerala court against the release of the film. As we await judgment, one wonders if 'The Kerala Story 2' will succeed in polarizing Kerala.

The film is being strategically released ahead of elections. It is worth recalling that on more than one occasion BJP candidates in Kerala have promised better quality beef in their manifestos. Hilarious but true.

Looking back at municipal elections in Thiruvananthapuram, BJP did see some success. Whether beef had a role is debatable—but the irony is unmistakable.

After all, if anything could sway a Kerala voter, it might just be the promise of good quality beef.

'Emi Raa Balaraju' from 'Vishnu Vinyasam' strikes a chord as breakup anthem

Actor Sree Vishnu, known for his effortless comic timing and relatable performances, is gearing up to entertain audiences with his upcoming film Vishnu Vinyasam, an out-and-out entertainer directed by debutant Yadunaath Maruthi Rao. Starring Nayana Sarika as the female lead, the film has already built strong buzz with its first two singles, especially the Valentine's Day release, which became a chartbuster.

Adding to the momentum, the makers have now unveiled the third single, Emi Raa Balaraju, a quirky breakup number that blends heartbreak with humour. Designed as a tribute to love failures who choose laughter over pain, the song opens on a playful note with comedian Satya counting numbers, setting the tone for the protagonist's comic rant on love, heartbreak, and emotional chaos. The narrative humorously reflects a man's frustration with romance, wrapped in satire and relatable sarcasm, making it instantly connect with younger audiences.

Producer Sumanth Naidu also makes a fun appearance, adding extra humour to the track. Composer Radhan delivers a groovy, punchy composition, while Sarath Santosh's vocals bring a smooth flow to the song. Lyricist Ramajogayya Sastry cleverly transforms the hero's misery into mischievous fun through witty lines. Sree Vishnu's energetic lungi dance steps, choreographed by Bhanu Master, add mass appeal and crowd-pleasing moments. With music creating strong pre-release buzz, Vishnu Vinyasam is set to hit theatres on the 27th of this month, promising a laughter-filled entertainer with fresh flavour and youthful energy.

'D/O Prasad Rao Kanabadutaledhu' holds grand preview event

The Telugu web series D/O Prasad Rao Kanabadutaledhu is all set to premiere on ZEE5 from February 27, creating strong buzz ahead of its digital release. The series stars Rajeev Kanakala, Udaya Bhanu, Vasanthika, and Sriram Venkat in prominent roles. Produced by K.V. Sriram under the South India Screens banner and directed by Krishna Poluru, the series recently held a special media preview, followed by a grand launch event attended by the cast and crew.

Rajeev Kanakala described his role as one of the most defining performances of his career, stating that the character demanded emotional depth, modulation, and transformation unlike anything he has done before. He credited director Krishna Poluru for presenting him in a refreshing and intense new space, adding that the narrative maintains gripping tension and emotional engagement till the very end. Director Krishna Poluru revealed that the story evolved over nearly two years, shaped carefully to balance emotional depth with thriller elements. He thanked ZEE5 for supporting the vision and trusting the project's long-form storytelling approach.

Udaya Bhanu shared that she connected deeply with her role, especially the emotional layers, calling the character both strong and vulnerable. Producer K.V. Sriram expressed confidence that the series would resonate strongly with families and fathers, praising Rajeev's immersive performance and the consistent intensity across episodes.

ZEE5 Telugu Senior Vice President Jayanth Raghavan said the series adds emotional depth to the platform's Telugu originals, while the team also highlighted the strong contribution of cinematography by Mahesh and dialogues by Shruti.

Positioned as an emotionally intense thriller, D/O Prasad Rao Kanabadutaledhu promises a layered, suspense-driven narrative that blends family emotions with gripping storytelling.

Mrunal Thakur grabs fashion lovers attention

Bollywood actress Mrunal Thakur's latest release Do Deewane Seher Me, produced by celebrated filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali and co-starring Siddhant Chaturvedi, has opened to a modest response at the box office. The film reportedly collected around Rs 1 crore on its opening day, followed by a slight growth on day two with earnings of approximately Rs 1.60 crore. Despite the marginal improvement, overall collections remain below industry expectations.

Even as the film faces a slow theatrical run, Mrunal has remained upbeat and focused, choosing to stay positive about her journey rather than dwell on numbers. The actress continues to engage her fans through social media, where she recently shared a set of stunning new pictures that quickly caught attention online. In the latest photos, Mrunal is seen in a chic white one-shoulder top paired with grey wide-leg trousers, creating a modern yet elegant silhouette. The outfit's soft drapes added a graceful touch, while her styling — straight open hair, bold eye makeup, and nude lips — gave her a confident and contemporary look. Keeping her accessories minimal with a statement ring and a sleek bangle, the actress let her outfit take centre stage, earning praise from fans and fashion lovers alike. On the professional front, Mrunal has a promising lineup ahead. She will next be seen in the upcoming film Dacoit, which is scheduled for release on April 10. The film stars Adivi Sesh in the lead role and is already generating buzz among audiences. While Do Deewane Seher Me struggles at the box office, Mrunal Thakur's confidence, consistent screen presence, and upcoming projects continue to keep her firmly in the spotlight.

'Haiku' wraps first schedule, targets September release

Vision Cinema House has officially announced the successful completion of the first shooting schedule of its upcoming film Haiku, marking a confident start to the project's production journey. The opening schedule was wrapped up smoothly and on time, giving the team strong momentum as the film moves forward.

The first phase of filming featured key sequences involving lead actors Aegan and Sridevi, along with impactful performances by Adrichi Arun and Kalaivani Baskar. According to the makers, the cast delivered emotionally layered performances that added depth and authenticity to the narrative right from the opening schedule.

Haiku is written and directed by Yuvaraj Chinnasamy, with additional screenplay contributions from Hariharan Ram. The creative collaboration has resulted in a script that blends sensitivity, realism, and strong cinematic storytelling, raising expectations within industry circles.

The production team has also expressed satisfaction with the visuals captured so far, particularly praising cinematographer Priyesh Guruswamy for establishing the film's emotional tone and visual mood. The footage from the first schedule is said to have exceeded expectations.

Produced by Dr. D. Arulanandhu and Mathewo Arulanandhu under the Vision Cinema House banner, the film is progressing as planned. The next shooting schedule will begin shortly in Chennai, where major portions of the story will be filmed.

With strong creative energy and steady production progress, Haiku is slated for a grand worldwide theatrical release in September 2026.