

LIGHTS, CAMERA & LAW

MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT LAWS UPDATES JANUARY, 2026



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NATIONAL

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP ACQUIRES MINORITY STAKE IN EXCEL ENTERTAINMENT

Universal Music Group (UMG), through its Indian arm Universal Music India (UMI), has acquired a 30% equity stake in Excel Entertainment, in a deal valuing the production house at approximately ₹2,400 crore. The strategic partnership was announced on 5 January 2026 at a press conference attended by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Under the agreement, UMG will secure global distribution rights for all future original soundtracks created for projects owned or controlled by Excel. The collaboration also provides for the launch of a dedicated Excel music label, globally distributed by UMG, and appoints Universal Music Publishing Group as Excel's exclusive music publishing partner. Devraj Sanyal, Chairman and CEO of Universal Music India & South Asia, will join Excel's Board of Directors, while founders Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani will retain creative control. The transaction reflects a growing convergence of film, music, and global IP monetisation strategies, signalling increased foreign investment interest in vertically integrated Indian content studios.

Access Link: Source [Here](#).

MADRAS HIGH COURT HOLDS ONLINE TAKEDOWNS JUSTIFIED ONLY IN CASES OF COMMERCIAL EXPLOITATION OF IDENTITY – PERSONALITY RIGHTS VS FREE SPEECH

The Madras High Court has clarified that takedown directions for social media content may be issued only where such social media content amounts to commercial exploitation of a person's personality rights, and not merely because the views expressed are adverse or damaging to reputation. Rangaraj alleged that Crizilda started posting photos and videos which falsely portrayed them as husband and wife, triggering widespread circulation and monetisation by third parties. Rangaraj sought interim restraint on the circulation of allegedly defamatory content across social media, television, and digital platforms, claiming irreparable harm to his reputation and commercial interests. The Court held that mere furnishing of links or photographs is insufficient to establish a *prima facie* violation of personality rights, cautioning against using such claims to silence dissenting voices. While recognising that courts may intervene where identity is monetised for commercial gain, the Court emphasised restraint in granting prior restraints on speech, particularly in defamation disputes, and dismissed the interim prayers. The ruling draws a clear doctrinal line between reputational harm and commercial misappropriation, signalling that personality rights-based takedowns in the digital space must be anchored in demonstrable monetisation of identity rather than used as a proxy for suppressing contested narratives or adverse speech.

Access Link: Source [Here](#).

COMPLAINT FILED BEFORE CBFC ALLEGING OBSCENE CONTENT IN TOXIC TEASER

A formal complaint has been filed before the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) against the teaser of the upcoming film Toxic, starring Yash, alleging that it contains explicit and obscene content accessible to the public without age restrictions. The complaint was submitted by advocate Lohith Hanumappa, who has sought immediate regulatory intervention. The petitioner argued that film teasers and trailers, particularly those released on public and digital platforms, should be subject to mandatory censorship and age certification, similar to full-length films. It was contended that the teaser allegedly contains strong adult visuals but lacks any age warning, parental advisory, or certification, thereby posing risks to minors and public morality. The complaint urges the CBFC to direct the producers to remove or suitably modify the teaser and calls for the formulation of clear guidelines mandating certification of teasers and promotional content, especially where adult themes are involved. It further warns of public protests if corrective action is not taken. The complaint raises a broader regulatory question on whether India's film certification framework should formally extend to digital-era promotional content, reflecting growing concerns over unregulated access to adult material on public platforms.

Access Link: Source [Here](#).

X TAKES DOWN AI GENERATED OBSCENE POSTS IN COMPLIANCE WITH INDIAN LAWS

X (formerly Twitter) has come forward and acknowledged lapses in content moderation linked to its AI tool 'Grok' and assured the Government that it will comply with Indian laws following a warning from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology ("MeitY"). Accordingly, around 3500 pieces of content were blocked and over 600 accounts were deleted in response to the issue. Prior to this, MeitY had sought detailed information on the actions taken against obscene and explicit content generated through Grok, after finding X's initial response inadequate. On 02 January 2026, MeitY issued a formal warning, emphasising platform responsibility for AI misuse. X has since stated that it will not permit obscene imagery going forward and reiterated that users generating illegal content through Grok will face the same consequences as those uploading such content directly, including removals, account suspensions, and cooperation with law enforcement. This highlights the government's increasing expectation that intermediaries deploying generative AI tools exercise proactive due diligence, reinforcing that platform liability under Indian law extends to AI enabled content moderation failures and not merely user-generated uploads.

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NATIONAL

MADRAS HIGH COURT GRANTS INTERIM PROTECTION TO KAMAL HAASAN'S PERSONALITY RIGHTS

The Madras High Court found a strong *prima facie* case in favour of actor and Member of Parliament, Kamal Haasan and granted interim relief in a personality rights suit concerning the unauthorised commercial exploitation of his identity. By an order dated 12 January 2026, Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy restrained the respondents from creating or circulating morphed or misleading images of the actor through any medium and from selling merchandise bearing his name or likeness without consent, pending further orders. The Court noted that the material on record demonstrated *prima facie* misuse of the actor's image and unauthorised merchandising, warranting immediate protection. The suit was instituted against Neeyevidai and unidentified "John Doe" defendants, reflecting judicial recognition of the enforcement challenges posed by anonymous and technology-driven digital misuse, including through artificial intelligence. At the same time, the Court clarified that the injunction would not extend to caricature, satire, or other forms of statutorily permissible creative expression, signalling a calibrated approach that seeks to curb commercial misappropriation while preserving constitutionally protected artistic freedoms.

Access Link: [Source Here.](#)

LEGAL NOTICE ISSUED ALLEGING UNAUTHORISED PORTRAYAL IN O' ROMEO

The teaser of the upcoming film O' Romeo, produced by Sajid Nadiadwala and directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, has triggered a legal dispute after Sanober Shaikh, daughter of the late Hussain Ustara, issued legal notices alleging that Shahid Kapoor's character is substantially based on her father without the family's consent. According to her counsel, DV Saroj, notices were issued in October and December 2025, asserting that the character's appearance, mannerisms, and overall depiction closely mirror Hussain Ustara. Sanober Shaikh has stated that the repeated visual similarities in teasers and promotional videos have caused distress to her family and led to widespread public speculation that the film is a biographical portrayal. The filmmakers have denied the allegations, maintaining that the character is fictional and that the film is neither a biopic nor a documentary. In response, Sanober's legal team has approached the court seeking a stay on the film's release and is preparing to initiate further proceedings, including a compensation claim reportedly quantified at ₹2 crore. O' Romeo is scheduled for release on 13 February 2026. The dispute highlights the recurring tension between creative freedom and posthumous personality rights, particularly where fictional characters are alleged to bear a recognisable and identifiable resemblance to real individuals, potentially triggering claims of unauthorised appropriation even in

the absence of an explicit biographical claim.

Access Link: [Source Here.](#)

SUPREME COURT SENDS 'JANA NAYAGAN' CENSORSHIP DISPUTE BACK TO MADRAS HIGH COURT

The Supreme Court of India has declined to intervene in the censorship dispute surrounding Jana Nayagan, starring Thalapathy Vijay, directing the film's producers to pursue their remedies before the Madras High Court. The apex court refused to entertain the plea filed by KVN Productions seeking immediate clearance from the Central Board of Film Certification, holding that the matter ought to be decided by the High Court's Division Bench. The dispute arose after the Madras High Court stayed a single judge's order directing the CBFC to grant certification to the film. The Division Bench had earlier criticised the producers for demonstrating a "false sense of urgency" and directed that the certification process remain on hold until the appeal was fully adjudicated. Upholding this procedural course, the Supreme Court asked the High Court to endeavour to hear and decide the appeal expeditiously.

As a result, the release of Jana Nayagan remains stalled pending further orders from the High Court. The order reinforces judicial discipline in certification disputes, underscoring that challenges to CBFC decisions must follow the prescribed appellate hierarchy and that urgency alone will not justify bypassing High Court scrutiny.

On, 20 January 2026, the Madras High Court has reserved its order on the CBFC's writ appeal against a single judge's direction to grant certification to Jana Nayagan. Following the Supreme Court's refusal to intervene, the film's release remains on hold pending the High Court's decision.

Access Link: [Source Here.](#)

THE DELHI HIGH COURT ORDERED REMOVAL OF UNAUTHORISED IMAGES OF YOUTUBER BHUVAN BAM

The Delhi High Court, by an order dated 13 January 2026, directed the removal of unauthorised images of YouTuber and actor Bhuvan Bam which were circulating across various online platforms without his consent. However, the Hon'ble Court declined to grant interim relief on the broader issue of Bam's personality and publicity rights at this preliminary stage. Justice Jyoti Singh observed that a *prima facie* finding on the infringement of personality rights could not be arrived at on the first day of hearing, and listed the matter for further consideration in February 2026. Bam approached the Court alleging unauthorised commercial exploitation of his name, image, voice, likeness, and other attributes