

RGUKT selected candidates list out

4,400 students to be admitted to Nuzvid, Idupulapaya, S'kulam and Ongole campuses

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies (RGUKT) has released the final list (General) of students selected for admission to the Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) campuses at Nuzvid, Idupulapaya, Srikakulam and Ongole for the academic year 2024-25. Chancellor Prof KC Reddy released the list at the SAC Auditorium at Nuzvid campus in Eluru district on Thursday. Registrar Prof Gopala Raju, officials from the Nuzvid campus, and directors of four other campuses took part in the event.

As many as 4,400 students will be admitted to these four campuses, with 1,000 seats allocated to each RGUKT and an additional 100 seats under the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quota. Andhra Pradesh students occupied 85 per cent of the 4,400 seats, and the remaining 15 per cent were filled by candidates from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana based on open merit. The authorities said that classes are likely to start in the first week of August. The exact date will be intimated to all admitted candidates.

Certificate verification of



RGUKT Chancellor Prof KC Reddy, Registrar Gopala Raju, and Admissions Convenor Amarendra Kumar releasing the list of selected students, at the Nuzvid campus in Eluru district on Thursday

the selected candidates will be conducted from July 22 to 27 at all four campuses. The verification of certificates will be held at the Nuzvid and Idupulapaya (RK Valley) campuses on July 22 and 23. At the Ongole campus, the process will be conducted on July 24 and 25. However, those selected for this campus need not go to Idupulapaya. The certificate verification at Srikakulam campus will be held from July 26 to 27.

According to Prof KC Reddy, 53,863 students applied online for admission to the IIIT campuses. Of them, 34,153 were government school stu-

dents, 19,671 were from private schools and the remaining 38 were other State students. This year, 92.99 per cent of students who studied in government schools were selected to the four RGUKT campuses. The remaining 7.01 per cent belong to private schools, he said.

He added that out of the total 4,400 students, 67.16 per cent are girls and 32.85 per cent boys. Srikakulam district has the highest number of students (498). It is 12.33 per cent of the total number of seats. Srikakulam is followed by Vizianagaram – 286 (7.08 per cent), Sri Satysai – 282 (6.98 per cent), YSR Kadapa – 227

(5.62 per cent), SPS Nellore – 218 (5.40 per cent), and Prakasam – 216 (5.35 per cent), he added.

RGUKT Admissions Convenor Prof Amarendra Kumar said that information regarding students' admittance will be sent to the mobile number they provided in their application, as well as through message and SMS. Also, the students can search the details on the website www.rgukt.in. Information about the campuses where the students should seek counselling and the certifications they must carry are all available on the RGUKT website, he said.

CONTEMPT OF COURT CASE

AP HC issues notice to CRDA, MTMC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday issued notice to Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (AP CRDA) Commissioner Katmaneni Bhaskar and Mangalagiri Tadepalli Municipal Corporation (MTMC) Commissioner in contempt of court case.

The YSRCP has filed a writ petition in the High Court following the action of CRDA and MTMC authorities on the under-construction party at Tadepalli in Guntur district. The party had prayed to the court to issue suitable orders to the State government, CRDA and MTMC against the building structure until the completion of the hearing.

The High Court issued the notices to the authorities as they went ahead with the demolition activity despite a court's directive against it. The CRDA and MTMC authorities demolished the building structure claiming it was an "illegal" construction. The authorities carried out the demolition exercise in the early hours of June 22 without serving prior notice to the party's leadership.



Bhogapuram Airport to be operational by 2026: CM

PNS ■ BHOGAPURAM

Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu said that the construction of Bhogapuram International Airport will be completed by 2026 and once the construction of the Airport is completed, North Andhra will transform into an Economic Hub. After inspecting the ongoing construction activities of the Airport area through a bird's eye view on Thursday, the chief minister spoke to the media persons and said the construction of the beach road till Bhogapuram should also be

completed at a brisk pace and said the Bhogapuram area has good potential to grow industrially. "All permissions were given when I was the Chief Minister", said Chandrababu. Road connectivity from the National Highway to the airport should be increased. Due to the bad attitude of the previous YSRCP government, everything has to be done from scratch, said the CM.

The CM said that Bhogapuram airport will have a footfall of 48 lakh passengers in the beginning. Once the airport is operational the youth of

North Andhra will not have to migrate to other areas seeking jobs. The people of Uttarandhra have given a landslide mandate to the NDA that paved the alliance for a historic win. The NDA will do something for the people of Uttarandhra who stood by the alliance. He recalled that he visited Uttarandhra during the tour before the elections. The first phase of Bhogapuram Airport will be completed by June 2026. Union Minister Rammohan Naidu is responsible for speedy completion," said Chandrababu.

Collector urges banks to develop local hostels under CSR

Stresses role of banks in supporting district-wide development

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Parvathipuram-Manyam District Collector A Shyam Prasad has called upon banks to adopt local hostels and provide essential facilities under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes, aiming to transform educational infrastructure and boost rural development. This visionary appeal was made during a pivotal review meeting with district bankers held at the Collectorate.

Prasad underscored the crucial role banks must play in supporting district-wide development. He highlighted the pressing need for basic amenities in many hostels, which can be provided at minimal cost, enhancing the living conditions and educational environment for children.

To boost employment opportunities for rural youth, the Collector directed the Lead District Manager to formulate a proposal for establishing a

comprehensive training centre. This centre will impart skills in various trades, including computers, electrical work, air conditioning mechanics, and plumbing. Prasad assured the provision of land for this purpose and called on bankers to robustly support this initiative.

Emphasising the essential role of banks in fostering agricultural development, Prasad stressed the importance of extending maximum support to farmers through loan facilitation, including tenant farmers. He advocated for strategic measures to ensure farmers achieve a stable income from their agricultural pursuits. The District Collector also set an ambitious target for 100 per cent enrolment in the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) across the district. Additionally, he encouraged large-scale implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) to benefit the broader public.

Lead District Manager JLN Murthy reported the presence of approximately 104 bank branches and 1,593 business correspondents in the district. He announced the approval of the annual credit plan with a substantial budget of Rs. 3,637.81 crore.

The meeting witnessed the participation of several notable officials, including Giridhar Behara, Lead District Officer of the RBI, K Robert Paul, District Agricultural Officer MV Karunakar, District Industries Officer Md Gayajuddin, District SC Welfare and Empowerment Officer R. Gaddemma, and ED of the BC Corporation, along with other concerned bank officers and stakeholders.

This initiative marks a significant step towards fostering a collaborative approach to development, leveraging the CSR capabilities of banks to uplift educational and economic standards in Parvathipuram.



Payyavula Keshav assuming office as the Minister for Finance, Planning, Commercial Taxes and Legislative Affairs at the Secretariat in Velagapudi on Thursday

Rs 250 cr Finance Commission funds released to gram panchayats

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Finance, Planning, Commercial Taxes and Legislative Affairs, Payyavula Keshav, released grants to the tune of Rs.250 crore to the local bodies under the first phase of the 15th Finance Commission. Minister Keshav assumed the office at the Secretariat at Velagapudi on Thursday. He first signed on the file releasing the grant to the local bodies.

Speaking on the occasion, Keshav said that as per the promise given by Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, his government sanctioned the grant of the 15th Finance Commission for all

gram panchayats in the State. During the election campaigning, Chandrababu Naidu had promised to the local bodies' representatives to release the Finance Commission funds and that would be credited into their bank accounts. Using these funds, the gram panchayats will provide various amenities for the public, he added.

Finance Department Principle Secretary Piyush Kumar, Secretaries Dr KVV Satyanarayana, Janaki, and Vinay Chand, Chief Commissioner, State Taxes, Girija Sankar, Finance Department Special Secretary K Adinarayana, Treasuries Director Mohana Rao, APGLI Director Srinivas and others were present.

Inner Wheel new panel lines up service activities



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Inner Wheel Club of Vijayawada Mid Town inaugurated its new working committee on Thursday. At the event, Kantheti Sandhya Rani was appointed as the new president, with K Bhavani taking on the role of secretary.

In her address, Sandhya Rani expressed her pride in assuming the presidency of the Inner Wheel Club of

Vijayawada Mid Town. She noted that there are 37 Inner Wheel clubs spanning from Srikakulam to Vijayawada, and she is honoured to serve as the 18th president.

Sandhya Rani outlined her plans to expand the club's service activities, focusing on enhancing infrastructure in schools and hospitals. Her initiatives will include efforts towards women's empowerment, distributing sewing

machines to support the economic development of underprivileged women, raising cancer awareness, reducing plastic usage, and organizing environmental protection programs.

The event was attended by District Chairperson A Lakshmisrinivas, District Secretary D Savitri, PDC Yashoda P, and several distinguished members of Vijayawada Mid Town.

Minister Dola holds review meeting to fill backlog vacancies



Minister Dola Sree Bala Veeranjanya Swamy conducting a review meeting with the Social Welfare Department officials at the Secretariat at Velagapudi on Thursday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Social Welfare, Disabled & Senior Citizen Welfare, Sachivalayam and Village Volunteer, Dola Sree Bala Veeranjanya Swamy held a review meeting with the Social Welfare Department officials about the filling of backlog vacancies, and the rule of reservations. The meeting took place at his chamber on the premises of the Secretariat at Velagapudi on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Swamy said that officials should work responsibly and they should be account-

able to the people. They should examine the possibilities of implementing the rule of reservations in the recruitment of contract and outsourced employees. He instructed them to resolve every petition received from the people.

Also, he asked the officials to arrange a system to know at what stage is their petition. He also assured the officials of resolving the employees' problems.

Social Welfare Department Principal Secretary K Harshavardhan and others were present.

Fishermen's safety at sea gets tech boost, but AP faces hurdles

Initiative under Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana aims to distribute 3.5 lakh transponders to coastal States

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Indian government is launching a programme to equip fishing boats with transponders, advanced communication devices designed to improve fishermen's safety at sea. This initiative, under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, aims to distribute 3.5 lakh transponders to coastal States.

Developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), these transponders function as two-way communication tools. Utilising radio frequencies, they establish a direct link between fishing boats and Fisheries Department officials stationed at designated harbours. This real-time data stream enables continuous monitoring of a vessel's location, distance travelled for fishing activities, and proximity to harbours. During emergencies, this critical information empowers authorities to swiftly locate and initiate rescue operations by coordinating with the Coast Guard.

The transponders are designed for efficient operation, drawing power from the boat's engine. However, acknowledging the practice



of anchoring with engines switched off, the government has incorporated a solar battery backup system to ensure uninterrupted functionality. Additionally, a cost-sharing model (60 per cent Central government, 40 per cent State government) enhances the programme's financial accessibility.

While the programme presents a promising solution, its deployment in Andhra Pradesh has encountered initial hurdles. In Visakhapatnam district, a pilot project involving five mechanised fishing boats launched three months ago has yielded concerning results. The transponders installed on these vessels have been removed and discarded by the fishermen, rendering the initiative entirely inactive. This lack of usage hinders data collection and prevents

authorities from tracking boat movements or monitoring fishing activities. The possibility exists that this resistance stems from a desire to avoid potential scrutiny regarding the utilisation of subsidised diesel for non-fishing purposes.

The Department of Fisheries has expressed concern regarding the lack of adoption in Andhra Pradesh. Despite the initial setback, they remain committed to the programme's goals. Vijay Krishna, Joint Director of Fisheries, emphasised, "The initial challenges in Visakhapatnam will not deter our efforts. We are determined to ensure fishermen across the State have access to this vital safety measure and will continue our outreach and installation initiatives."

The PMMSY's transponder programme holds immense potential for safeguarding the lives of fishermen venturing into the unpredictable maritime environment. Addressing the concerns and facilitating wider adoption in Andhra Pradesh, alongside a successful nationwide rollout, will be paramount to the programme's ultimate success.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath opened the 52nd Hyderabad Region Archery Sports Meet at the Kendriya Vidyalayam at Satyanarayana puram on Thursday.

The MP lit the lamp along with Vijayawada Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) and Kendriya Vidyalaya Committee Chairman Narendra A Patil. He received the honour from the Bharat Scouts and Guides.

Speaking on the occasion, he said he will strive to conduct international cricket matches at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium in Vijayawada and another stadium at Mangalagiri.

For that, he will have talks with the BCCI authorities with the cooperation of the Andhra Cricket Association (ACA), he said.

Also, he asked the ACA authorities to set up the necessary facilities in these two stadiums. The government will provide all facilities for the players in the coming days, he assured.



MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) inaugurating the 52nd Kendriya Vidyalaya Regional Archery Championship in Vijayawada on Thursday. DRM Narendra A Patil is also seen (Photo: Ch Vijaya Bhaskar)

Later, he announced that the Central government is mulling conducting the Olympics in the country in 2036. The government will file a bid soon by the Indian Olympics Association. In the meantime, the players should stay prepared to participate in the Olympics and take special training, he said.

Once the Olympics is awarded to the country, all

sports infrastructure will be set up in the State. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is mulling conducting the National Games in the State to provide sports infrastructure here and encourage players, he added.

KVS Principal Adishesu Sharma, Vice Principal MV Rao, Regional Tournament Convener Dr Yedukondalu and others were present.

Lecture held on women's health issues

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Loyola College (Autonomous), Vijayawada, organised an informative lecture on crucial women's health issues, particularly urinary incontinence and overactive bladder. The event, aimed at raising awareness among students, featured Senior Consultant Obstetrician and Gynecologist

from Prashanth Hospitals Dr P Haritha as the keynote speaker.

Dr Haritha shed light on various risk factors associated with urinary incontinence, including nerve damage, certain medications, alcohol and caffeine consumption, and infections. The lecture emphasised the growing concern of women's health issues in today's modern, polluted, and



Dr Haritha delivering her lecture at the Andhra Loyola College in Vijayawada on Thursday

fast-paced environment.

She said a significant portion of the talk was dedicated to lifestyle changes that can help manage and prevent these conditions. Dr Haritha highlighted the importance of regular exercise, weight management, and Kegel exercises in maintaining bladder health. She also stressed the significance of a balanced diet, regular bowel habits, and reducing irritants

like caffeine.

The interactive session saw enthusiastic participation from students, who raised various queries to gain deeper insights into women's health. "Young people must understand these health issues early on. Awareness and preventive measures can significantly improve quality of life in the long run," she commented.

284 spl counters for rice & dal set up at Rythu Bazaars across AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs, Nadendla Manohar, formally launched 284 special counters across the State to sell rice and red gram (dal) at affordable prices through all Rythu Bazaars. The inauguration of the special rice and dal counter took place at the Rythu Bazaar in APIIC Colony, Gurunanak Nagar, Vijayawada, on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Manohar announced that sugar and cereals would soon be supplied to consumers. He stated that red gram would be sold for Rs. 160 per kg, steamed BPT rice for Rs 49, and BPT raw rice for Rs 48. He emphasised that, with the cooperation of rice millers, wholesale and retail traders, and officials, the government is



striving to provide all essential goods to people at affordable prices. To combat rising prices, the government will take special steps to stabilize prices, he added.

Furthermore, he announced that his government has decided to standardize the prices of dal and rice across the state. While the open market price for dal is Rs. 181, the govern-

ment will sell it for Rs 160. He assured that this pricing would not only apply in Rythu Bazaars but also to all wholesale, retail, and supermarket outlets. The government aims to support both farmers and consumers through Rythu Bazaars.

Minister Manohar also addressed the issue of pending paddy procurement payments, criticizing the previous YSRCP government for not paying Rs 1,600 crore in dues to farmers. Under the directives of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan, his government has paid Rs 1,000 crore to farmers, with the remaining Rs 600 crore to be released soon.

Moreover, Manohar stressed that his government is committed to implementing the Public Distribution System (PDS)

more effectively, ensuring no irregularities or corruption. He warned that strict action would be taken against those diverting PDS rice instead of distributing it to the people. Recently, 43,249 metric tons of PDS rice were seized in Kakinada, and the government will conduct a probe to take action against those responsible.

The event was attended by Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rama Mohana Rao, Civil Supplies Commissioner Siddhartha Jain, Director G. Veerapandian, Marketing Commissioner G. Sekhar Babu, NTR district collector Dr. G. Srijana, Joint Collector Dr. P. Sampath Kumar, Vijayawada RDO Bh. Bhavani Sankar, Civil Supplies DM G. Venkateswarlu, Markfed DM K. Naga Mallika, Rice Millers Association President G. Venkateswara Rao, and others.

Minister orders steps to increase power production

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar conducted a review meeting with the officials of Andhra Pradesh Solar Power Corporation at his chamber in the Secretariat on Thursday. He enquired about the current status of the Solar Power Corporation. The minister reminded that in the past, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu had set up solar parks. He added that Chandrababu is credited with transforming the State as a power surplus one. He directed them to take measures to increase power generation according to public needs.

Special Chief Secretary K Vijayanand, AP Solar Power Corporation MD M Kamalakara Babu, Energy Department Joint Secretary Kumar Reddy and others participated in the meeting.



Conducive atmosphere being created for industries: Minister

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and I&PR K Parthasarathy said that a conducive atmosphere is being created in the state for the establishment of industries and the government is ready to provide all infrastructures for the same.

A district-level meeting was held here on Thursday, presided over by MP Putta Mahesh, to review the setting up of industries, safety of labour and environmental protection. Speaking on the occasion, Minister Parthasarathy, underlined the industrial and agriculture development for the overdevelopment of the state.

Claiming that the Naidu-headed government is encouraging entrepreneurs for the development and expansion of the industrial sector, the Minister regretted that due to the wrong decisions taken by the previous government, the industrial development in the state came to a halt. The meeting was held to correct such an environment and find out the

problems of the industrialists and resolve them, Parthasarathy made it clear.

Acknowledging that there is a conducive environment for setting up industries in Andhra Pradesh, the Minister highlighted that many entrepreneurs across the country and the state are coming forward to establish industries in AP which is a good sign.

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh lamented that the Jagan Reddy-headed erstwhile government did not focus on industrial establishment and take steps to provide infrastructure, resulting in AP lagging in industrial development. The MP voiced that the Naidu government is a pro-entrepreneur government, it would provide needed infrastructure and create a healthy environment for industrial development in the State.

He also made it clear proposals were sent to the government to reduce the protected Kolleru forest area from to third contour to the fifth contour. The MP announced that 'Job Melas' would be organized

every week in the district from September onwards.

Collector K Vetri Selvi announced that all needed approvals and permissions for the establishment of industries would be given through a 'single window' to the entrepreneurs. If the entrepreneurs submit their problems in a written format, they would be taken to the notice of the government.

Since Eluru is located near the Capital city, it is a convenient place to establish industries, the Collector opined. MLA Kamineni Srinivas recalled that Rs 64,000 crore worth of aqua products are being exported from AP, stating there is huge scope to establish industries here.

Representatives of various industries explained their problems and urged them to take steps to resolve them. MLAs S Roshan Kumar and Chirri Balaraju also spoke. MLAs Badeti Radha krishnaiah, P Dharmaraju, DRO D Pushmani and a host of officials were present.

Complete TIDCO houses on a war-footing: DC

PNS ■ GUNTUR

District Collector S Nagalakshmi has directed the officials to take steps to complete on war footing the 1392 TIDCO at Vengalayapalem village under phase 2 and 1008 TIDCO houses at Phule colony in Tenali.

The Collector held a meeting with the officials on Thursday and reviewed with TIDCO officials the construction process of houses.

TIDCO Superintending Engineer M Ch Koteswara Rao explained to the Collector that



1088 houses built in Vengalayapalem phase-1 have been handed over to the beneficiaries and 1392 houses in phase-2 are in progress.

He told the Collector that 848

houses constructed in Phase-1 in Tenali were handed over to the beneficiaries and the construction work of 1008 houses in Phase-2 had been stopped due to various reasons. Steps

would be taken to complete the construction works soon and hand over the houses to the beneficiaries, he told the Collector "Till now 4192 houses built in Adavi Takkellapadu, 1728 houses in Mangalagiri, 848 houses in Tenali and 2368 houses in Ponnur have been completed and handed over to the beneficiaries," the officials told the Collector.

TIDCO Supervising Engineer told the District Collector that 5024 TIDCO houses built in Navuluru, Nidamaruru, Penumaka, Ananthavaram, Dondapadu,

Thullur, Ainavolu and Mandamam were handed over to the beneficiaries.

District Collector Nagalakshmi ordered the officials that the 1392 houses in progress in Vengalayapalem Phase-2 as well as 1008 houses in Phule Colony in Tenali should be completed on war footing. All the necessary infrastructures should be provided and immediate steps should be taken to take possession of the beneficiaries. Executive Engineer G Prasada Rao and DE Srinivas were among those who were present.

Minister releases Sahakara Samacharam monthly

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Agriculture, Cooperative, Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Marketing K Atchannaidu released Sahara Samacharam monthly magazine at his camp office in Vijayawada on Thursday. Andhra Pradesh State Cooperative Union is publishing the magazine to provide information about the department to the employees.

The union leaders explained the importance of the magazine to the minister. The book will be supplied to all cooperative societies, banks, and their representatives. They also talked about the ongoing six-



Minister Atchannaidu releasing Sahakara Samacharam magazine at the camp office in Vijayawada on Thursday

month Diploma in Cooperative Management in four training institutes in the State. Minister Atchannaidu appreciated the union leaders for publishing the magazine.

Andhra Pradesh State Cooperative Union president Adimulam Venkateswara Rao, secretary ChV Rama Rao, treasurer Someswara Rao, vice-presidents M Rammohana Rao and Ramadas, Training Institute Principal V Srinivasa Rao and others were present.

Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh Non-Gazetted Employees Officers Association president KV Siva Reddy, general secretary Purushottam Chowdary, NTR district president A Vidyasagar and others met Minister Atchannaidu at the Markfed office in Vijayawada. On the occasion, the APNGO leaders felicitated the minister.

Job mela at Vikas Engineering College tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vikas Educational Institutions located at Nunna will conduct a Job Mela on the Vikas Engineering College premises on Saturday. Interested candidates who have passed a degree, BTech, B Pharmacy, DPharmacy, or MBA can attend the job fair.

Jio, Amazon, Apollo

Pharmacy, Data Vali, Team Yuva, Techno Task, Just Dial and other companies will attend the Job Mela to recruit suitable candidates, Vikas Educational Institutions Training and Placement Officer S Kishore Kumar said in a press release.

For further details, interested candidates can contact the mobile numbers 9490888445 and 9492552636, he added.

CRIME BEAT



353 kg of ganja seized, 4 arrested

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

The police seized a huge quantity of 353 kg of ganja, worth Rs 20 lakh, and arrested four persons in East Godavari district.

SEB DSP P Somasekar told the media that on a tip, a police team conducted a raid at Diwan Cheruvu at Rajanagaram and seized 153.80 kg.

The police got information that some peddlers were selling ganja at Sarpavaram. They conducted a raid and seized 200 kg of ganja. The police seized a total of 353.80 kg of ganja, worth about Rs 20 lakh, in the two raids and arrested four drug peddlers.

The police also seized a lorry, four mobile phones and Rs 4000 cash from peddlers.

Search on to trace body of rape-cum-murder victim

PNS ■ NANDYALA

A massive search is on to trace the body of 8-year-old Vasanthi who was allegedly gang-raped and murdered by three minor boys at Muchhumari village in Pagidyalam mandal.

The expert swimmers launched a massive search in the lift irrigation canal. Nandyala SP Raghuvendra Reddy visited the lift irrigation canal and monitored the search operation.

The SP said that steps would be taken to ensure that such incidents would not recur. The three minor boys, who allegedly gang-raped, murdered and dumped the body in the canal, were unable to tell where exactly they dumped the body in the lift canal, the SP made it clear. The local swimmers searched the entire canal for the body but they could not trace the body till evening.

Meanwhile, Nandyala MP Byreddy Shabari visited the Muchhumari village and consoled the bereaved parents of the deceased girl. The MP said that the children lack



parental guidance and fear parents, committing such horrendous crimes, the MP lamented. She said that the number of swimmers would be increased to search the canal to trace the body. The MP assured to extend all help to the bereaved family.

It may be mentioned here that an eight-year-old girl Vasanthi went missing on Sunday. The family members and the neighbours searched for the girl but did not find her. The parents complained with the Muchhumari police station on Monday. The police got information that the three

minor boys were seen taking the girl to the outskirts.

The police held three minor boys in connection with the disappearance of the minor girl. Police said that when the girl was playing with other girls at the park in the village, the three accused minor boys, who were acquainted with the deceased girl, took her to a secluded place on the outskirts and gang-raped her. Later fearing that she would reveal their names, the minor boys killed the girl by pushing her into an irrigation canal. The three minor boys confessed to the crime, the police said.

MP asks officials to speed up Machilipatnam Port works

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

MP Vallabhaneni Balashoury held a review meeting to discuss the development of Krishna district with Collector DK Balaji and Joint Collector Geethanjali Sharma at the collectorate in Machilipatnam on Thursday. He underlined the importance of speeding up the Machilipatnam Port works.

He said that as per the plan, in the first phase, officials should strive to complete four berths out of the total 16 berths within the stipulated period. As of now, Mega Engineering Infrastructure Limited has completed 20 per cent of the port works. Also, he



Vijayawada MP Kesineni Chnni conducting a meeting with the NTR district officials in Vijayawada on Thursday

will strive to release funds worth Rs.250 crore under the Bharat Mala programme for the port connectivity road, he added.

Later, he instructed the officials to address the drinking water issue and provide safe

PURE backs kids with special needs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

PURE (People for Urban and Rural Education), an NGO working in the field of education, health and empowerment in rural and tribal areas, has provided 36 wheel-chairs with attached commode, three special chairs for autism and cerebral palsy children and 10 hearing aids to the children in Government Bhavitha School, Ferry, Ibrahimpatnam.

PURE has also constructed toilets for the school. On observing the commitment and dedication of the special educators and staff of Bhavitha School, the Board of PURE responded positively to the request of the school for wheel-



chairs and hearing aids.

Shyla Talluri, the CEO, PURE, USA, visited the school on Thursday and presented the wheel-chairs and hearing aids to the children. Toys were gifted to the children suffering from autism and cerebral palsy. She has assured to support the school in future and also to provide employment to the eligible special needs children in their organisation.

G Maheshwara Rao, Deputy

Director and Special Project Director, Samagha Siksha Abhiyan, NTR district, explained the way they teach special needs children and the physiotherapy they provide by qualified physiotherapists.

BVS Kumar, former chairman, Child Welfare Committee, Krishna district, explained the government schemes and welfare schemes applicable to the special needs children and appreciated the PURE for their continuous support for various child care homes across the State.

Pushpalatha, Mandal Education Officer, Annapurna, Assistant Director, SSA, Chandravathi, Special Educator, and parents participated in the programme.

Two killed as lorry knocks down bike

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Two persons were killed when a lorry knocked down their motorcycle at Pedavutapalli in Unguturu mandal on Thursday.

Police said that the deceased V Shyam Kumar (28) and another woman who was a pillion rider on the bike, were killed on the spot as a speeding lorry knocked down their motorcycle on the national

highway. The deceased Shyam Kumar was working in the police department and the police are yet to establish the identity of the woman. The police shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem.



INDIA CORNER

Police arrest opium drug racket's kingpin from Shimla

The Shimla Police on Thursday here arrested the alleged kingpin of opium drug racket, a native of Nepal, they said. On July 3, a police team had arrested two Nepalese nationals with 1.5 kg opium. During investigations, the police got information about the alleged kingpin and arrested him from Narkanda, police officials said. The accused has been identified as Ravi Giri (41). Shimla SP Sanjeev Gandhi said the accused has been arrested and booked under Section 29 (abetment and criminal conspiracy to commit an offense) of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. "The total amount of financial transactions of the accused is around Rs 3.40 crore since 2022. Further investigations are underway and all illegal movable and immovable properties will be identified and seized," he said.



UP: 17 doctors dismissed over absence from work

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak on Thursday dismissed 17 doctors for remaining absent from duty without information. In a post on X, Pathak, who also holds the medical and health portfolio, said treating and curing the sick is a service to God and there cannot be any negligence or indiscipline in it. "It is a great fortune to get the responsibility of serving the people and providing health services. Serving patients is like serving God. There is no place for any kind of negligence or indiscipline in this. I have given instructions to the Principal Secretary, Medical and Health, to dismiss 17 medical officers working in various districts of the state for being negligent in providing medical services to the general public and remaining absent from duty for a long time without informing," Pathak said. He however did not share the names of the doctors who have been dismissed.



13 Indian fishermen arrested by Sri Lanka Navy for alleged illegal fishing

The Sri Lankan Navy on Thursday arrested 13 Indian fishermen and seized their trawlers for allegedly poaching in its territorial waters, taking the number of Indian nationals apprehended this year by the island nation in such incidents to 252, an official statement said. The fishermen were arrested, and their three trawlers were seized north of the Delft Island, Jaffna, the Sri Lanka Navy said in a press release. The Sri Lanka Navy and Coast Guard conducted the special operation leading to the apprehension of the 13 Indian fishermen, it said. Those apprehended were brought to the Kankesanthurai Harbour and will be handed to the Mailadi Fisheries Inspector for further legal proceedings. "The Navy has seized a total of 35 Indian trawlers and 252 Indian fishermen poaching in Sri Lankan waters in 2024 and subsequently handed them over to authorities for legal proceedings," the press release said.



'India pitches for infusing new energies into BIMSTEC grouping'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday called on seven-nation BIMSTEC grouping to infuse new energies, resources and a fresh commitment to bolster cooperation among the Bay of Bengal countries.

The appeal was made by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar while hosting his counterparts from BIMSTEC member states at a two-day retreat in the national capital.

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) brings together seven countries of South and Southeast Asia for multifaceted cooperation.

Besides India, BIMSTEC comprises Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan. Jaishankar said BIMSTEC should harbour higher aspirations.

"For India, BIMSTEC represents the intersection of its 'Neighbourhood First' outlook, the 'Act East Policy' and the



'SAGAR' vision," Jaishankar said in his opening remarks on the first day of the retreat. "Each of these endeavours is being proposed with a specific focus on the Bay of Bengal, where collaborative potential has long remained under-realised," he said. "Our challenge is to change that for the better, and to do so rapidly," he added. India has been making concerted efforts to make BIMSTEC a vibrant forum for regional cooperation as initiatives under SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) were not moving

forward for a variety of reasons. India has been cooperating with the countries of the Indian Ocean region under the broader policy framework of SAGAR or Security and Growth for all in the Region. BIMSTEC foreign ministers' retreat is aimed at exchanging ideas openly, candidly and fruitfully. "We all benefited from the last such exercise in Bangkok. This one now has a particular importance as it serves to prepare strong outcomes for the summit to be held later in the year," Jaishankar said. "Our message should be

clear - that we are all determined to infuse new energies, new resources and a new commitment into cooperation among the Bay of Bengal nations," he said.

Thailand is the current chair of BIMSTEC and it is set to host the annual summit of the grouping later this year. Jaishankar said the first part of the discussions in the retreat will revolve around connectivity, cooperation in trade and business, collaboration in health and space, digital public infrastructure, capacity building and societal exchanges.

"I hope in the second part of our deliberations, we could focus more sharply on the possible outcomes of the forthcoming summit," he said. BIMSTEC foreign ministers had last met in a similar format in Bangkok in July last year. The charter of the grouping came into effect on May 20. "Global and regional developments also make it imperative that we find more solutions amongst ourselves.

Nepal can't progress without close relations with India

PNS ■ KATHMANDU

The Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) on Thursday said the landlocked Himalayan nation can attain economic prosperity only by maintaining close friendly relations with India, asserting that it will not allow any activity directed against the southern neighbour from the Nepalese soil.

The remarks by a senior leader of the party led by former prime minister K P Sharma Oli came on the eve of a confidence vote in Parliament which may see him return as the politically fragile Himalayan nation's premier once again. "CPN-UML doesn't believe that Nepal can progress or the interest of Nepalese people could be promoted by pursuing anti-India policy," Dr Rajan Bhattarai, the Foreign Affairs Department chief and Standing Committee member of the CPN-UML, told PTI in an interview.

INDIA bloc will raise Manipur issue with full force in Parl: Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress and the INDIA bloc will raise the need for peace in Manipur with full force in Parliament to put pressure on the government to end this tragedy, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said on Thursday, days after his visit to the violence-hit state.

He also reiterated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should visit Manipur and appeal for peace.

Gandhi made the remarks in a post in Hindi on X as he shared a video of his interactions with the people of Manipur during his day-long visit to the restive state on Monday.

"I have visited Manipur three times since violence broke out there, but unfortunately there is no improvement in the situation -- even today the state is divided into two parts. Houses are burning, innocent lives are in danger and thousands of families are forced to live in relief camps," the former Congress chief said.



The prime minister should personally visit Manipur, listen to the problems of the people of the state and appeal for peace, Gandhi said. "The Congress party and INDIA bloc will raise the need for peace in Manipur with full force in Parliament to put pressure on the government to end this tragedy," the Congress leader said. During his stay in Manipur, Gandhi had visited three relief camps in different districts of the BJP-ruled state and interacted with people belonging to both the warring ethnic groups -- Meiteis and Kukis -- who were displaced by the violence. Gandhi had also visited

Manipur weeks after ethnic violence broke out in the northeastern state on May 3 last year. He also began his 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' from the state in January 2024. In the video, Gandhi is seen interacting with people at various relief camps. The people narrate to him their plight and fears and urge him to fight for them and raise their voice. The Congress leader is seen in the video telling the people that his party and its MPs had raised the problems the people of Manipur were facing in the Parliament session that has just gone by and promised to raise the issues again in the upcoming session.



Ex-Agniveers to get quota, age relaxations: CISF, BSF chiefs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The chiefs of CISF and the BSF on Thursday said 10 per cent posts of constables will be reserved in their respective forces for former Agniveers in line with a decision by the Union Home Ministry. The remarks by CISF Director General Nina Singh and her BSF counterpart Nitin Agrawal came amid fresh spotlight on the Agnipath recruitment scheme for short-term induction of personnel in the Army, Navy and the Air Force. "The Union Home Ministry has taken an important decision regarding the recruitment of ex-Agniveers. Accordingly, the CISF is also preparing the process of the recruitment of ex-Agniveer," Singh said. The chief of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) said 10 per cent jobs will be reserved for ex-Agniveers in all

future appointments of constables. "In physical tests also, they will be given exemption along with the relaxation on the age. In the first year the age relaxation is for five five years and in the subsequent year, the age relaxation will be three years," she told DD News. "Ex-Agniveer will be able to take advantage of this and the CISF will ensure that. This will be beneficial for the CISF too as the force will get trained and disciplined personnel," Singh said. In June 2022, the government rolled out the Agnipath recruitment scheme with an aim to bring down the age profile of the three services. The Agnipath scheme provides for recruiting youths between the age bracket of 17-and-half years and 21 for four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for 15 more years.

Cong will rectify mistakes committed in LS polls: DK

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Thursday said the Congress party would evaluate and rectify the mistakes it committed in the Lok Sabha elections in the state. He said the exercise is aimed at taking on the BJP-JDS combine. Speaking to reporters at the KPCC office, Shivakumar, who is also the Congress state president, said the party increased its tally from one seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections to nine in 2024, but that fell short of the expectation of at least 14 to 15 seats. "The performance will be evaluated by the party in the presence of the AICC fact-finding committee. This process is taking place across the country. We are sharing our reports for the four geographical regions of the state. We will discuss and find out the shortcomings," Shivakumar said. The deputy chief minister said though the party fielded good candidates in the recent Lok Sabha elections, it did not translate into favourable results. "We need to understand the subtle factors which have influenced the results.

SC seeks Centre's response on rising suicide cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Terming the rising number of suicides a "social issue", the Supreme Court on Thursday granted four weeks to the Centre for filing a comprehensive reply to a PIL seeking effective implementation of a public health programme for prevention and reduction of suicides. A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of lawyer and petitioner Gaurav Kumar Bansal that effective steps are needed

to deal with the rising number of suicide cases and asked the Centre to file a comprehensive affidavit. "It is a social issue, let them (Centre and authorities) file a counter affidavit," the CJI said. The top court, on August 2, 2019, had issued notices to Centre and all states and Union territories on the PIL. The plea has also sought a direction to all the states and Union territories to start a project for providing support and advice through call centres and helplines to persons with suicidal thoughts. Referring to data provided by



Delhi Police, the petition said 140 cases of suicides of children below 18 years were recorded between 2014 and 2018. The plea said the failure of the authorities in "drafting, designing and implementing

public health programme for the prevention and reduction of suicides in India is not only violative of section 29 and 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 but is also in violation of Article 21 (protection of life and personal liberty) of the Constitution". Bansal has alleged in his plea that the Delhi government has "failed to provide a healthy social atmosphere" here. The plea said all the states and Union territories have failed to implement various provisions of the Mental Healthcare Act 2017 and they should be directed to take

appropriate steps for the prevention and reduction of suicides in their jurisdiction. It said that the authorities should be asked to provide status report on the steps taken by them to implement public health programme for reduction and prevention of suicides. Referring to the World Health Organization's (WHO) report 'Preventive Suicide - a Global Imperative', the petitioner has said that young people are among the most affected and suicide is now the second leading cause of death for those between the age of 15 and 29 globally.

UP court acquits Jaya Prada in 2019 poll code violation case

PNS ■ RAMPUR (UP)

An MP-MLA court here on Thursday acquitted former MP and actor Jaya Prada in an election code violation case registered in 2019. The actor was the BJP candidate from Rampur in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and was defeated by Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan. The MP-MLA court Judge, Shobhit Bansal, acquitted Jaya Prada in the case lodged against her at Kemri police station in Rampur under IPC section 171 G (false statement in connection with an election),



senior prosecution officer Amarnath Tiwari said. The 62-year-old former MP, who won the Lok Sabha election from Rampur in 2004 and 2009 on a Samajwadi Party ticket, was present in the court while the judgement was pro-

nounced. Talking to reporters after her acquittal in the case, Jaya said, "I want to thank the honourable court for acquitting me in the case. I have been a two-time MP from Rampur... I never said anything wrong or made any such comment." "I want to tell the public that I have represented Rampur and will always stay in Rampur. 'Satyamev Jayate' (Truth alone triumphs)," she said. Senior prosecution officer Tiwari told reporters that the case against Jaya Prada was registered after she allegedly made remarks on Azam Khan.

British Indian MPs swear oath on 'Gita', 'Gutka', 'Bible'

PNS ■ LONDON

Newly elected Indian-origin MPs to the House of Commons have been pledging their allegiance to the British Crown as a symbol of loyalty to the country, choosing to swear on holy texts or to affirm their oath during the first week of a new Parliament. A new copy of the 'Bhagavad Gita' presented to Speaker Lindsay Hoyle by Shailesh Vara, former Conservative Party member of Parliament who lost his Cambridgeshire seat in last week's general election, featured early on as Rishi Sunak was among the first British Indian MPs to take his

oath as Leader of the Opposition on Tuesday. Holding the text in his right hand, the former prime minister read out the customary text: "I swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King Charles, his heirs and successors, according to law. So help me God." First-time MP Kanishka Narayan, who is the first Indian-origin member of Parliament to represent Wales in the Westminster Parliament after winning the Vale of Glamorgan seat for Labour, also chose the 'Gita' for his oath, as did new Tory MP from Leicester Shivani Raja.



Bob Blackman, a Tory veteran who represents Harrow East in London and has chaired the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Hindus, chose to hold both the 'Gita' and the 'King James Bible' for his oath-taking ceremony.

"This 'Bhagavad Gita' has been specially blessed in a temple in India and will be used by Hindu MPs entering Parliament following this General Election and those who will enter in the generations to come," said Shailesh

Vara, when he recently presented the holy text blessed at the Mayapur temple headquarters of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Some of the British Sikh MPs such as Tan Dhesi and first-timers Gurinder Singh Josan, Harpreet Uppal, Satvir Kaur and Warinder Singh Juss chose to swear their oath to the Sikh scriptures but without holding any text in their hands. Preet Kaur Gill, with her head covered with a red scarf, chose to hold the cloth-wrapped 'Sundar Gutka' prayer book during her swearing-in. Sojan Joseph, the mental

health nurse from Kerala who has been elected Labour MP from Ashford in Kent, chose the 'New Testament' biblical text to swear his oath. Meanwhile, the 'King James Bible' was chosen by re-elected Conservatives Priti Patel and Claire Coutinho, as well as Liberal Democrat Munira Wilson. MPs can opt for a non-religious affirmation, as did the two new Independent MPs with their roots in India, Shokat Adam and Iqbal Mahmood, along with many others including Tory MP Gagan Mohindra and Labour's Lisa Nandy and Seema Malhotra.



He was speaking at the first plenary session on the theme of "The BRICS Parliamentary dimension: prospects for strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation". Birla also welcomed the four new members -- Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates -- into the BRICS Parliamentary Forum. "BRICS, largely representing the interests of the developing world, stands for

greater democratisation of the global governance system, and for reforming the international organisations such as the UN Security Council, WTO, at the global level," the Lok Sabha speaker said. Birla stressed on the importance of enhancing cooperation among BRICS members and other multilateral forums, and cited the Indian philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' -- "the world is one family". He said parliamentarians play a crucial role in advancing the agenda of growth and sustainable development, and asserted that the BRICS Parliamentary Forum was pivotal in this context. Birla called for the need to strengthen the BRICS Parliamentary Forum and welcomed India's stance of collaboration among BRICS parliaments to enhance cooperation and solidarity, reform global governance, improve multilateral organisations, promote economic recovery and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. He also met Tulia Ackson, President of the International Parliamentary Union

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Going strong @75

The 2024 NATO summit concluded with pledges to support Ukraine and strengthen defence preparedness

Seventy-five years ago, 12 nations gathered in Washington, DC to sign the North Atlantic Treaty, better known as NATO aiming to safeguard their collective defence amid the rise of communism under Soviet Union. This year, 32 NATO Allies convened once more in Washington, DC to make critical decisions on ensuring the protection of the member countries. In these 75 years a lot has changed. The Soviet Union does not exist and the Warsaw Pact has been disbanded. But NATO is alive and taking on new challenges in the emerging world order. The 2024 NATO Summit concluded after three days of high-level discussions and strategic deliberations among the member states. Basically, a product of cold war era, NATO has been pivotal in addressing pressing global security challenges, reaffirming commitments to collective defence, and exploring new avenues of cooperation among the member states. One of the primary focuses of the summit was of course reinforcing NATO's collective defence posture. In response to



escalating tensions and conflicts in various parts of the world, NATO leaders agreed to bolster their military capabilities and readiness. This includes increased defence spending by member states, the deployment of additional troops to Eastern Europe, and the enhancement of cyber defence mechanisms. NATO members reaffirmed their commitment to expanding partnerships beyond its traditional geographical boundaries. The summit saw increased engagement with non-member countries, emphasising the importance of global security cooperation. Key partners, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, participated in discussions on shared security concerns

and collaborative initiatives. In the new world order China and Russia have emerged a formidable player in the world arena. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine remained a critical issue at the summit. NATO reiterated its unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. NATO has remained steadfast in its support to Ukraine and has supported Ukraine's war efforts but just about avoiding direct confrontation with Russia and widening the scope of war. India so far has maintained a safe distance with NATO. It has charted its own nonaligned path steering clear of either of the two blocs NATO and now defunct, The Warsaw Pact. India, though not a NATO member, has been closely monitoring the developments of the summit. As a major player on the global stage, the outcomes of the NATO summit have several implications for India's strategic interests and foreign policy. India has been increasingly engaging with NATO members on various fronts, including defence and security cooperation. The emphasis on collective defence and partnerships at the summit opens avenues for India to deepen its strategic ties with NATO countries. Joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and defence technology collaborations could see a significant boost, enhancing India's defence capabilities.

PICTALK



Anganwadi workers conduct inspection of stored water to curb the spread of dengue during monsoon

PTI

The synergy between culture and economy

Culture and economy are deeply intertwined, each influencing and enhancing the other. This can lead to sustainable economic progress

Culture and economy are deeply intertwined, each influencing and enhancing the other in multiple ways. This synergy can be observed through various lenses, from local community impacts to global economic trends. Cultural assets such as traditions, arts, and heritage sites can drive economic growth. Cities with rich cultural histories often attract tourism, which stimulates local businesses and generates revenue. For example, the cultural heritage of cities like Paris and Rome makes them top tourist destinations, contributing significantly to their economies.

The creative sector, including music, film, fashion, and design, is a major economic driver. These industries not only create jobs and generate income but also foster innovation and attract investments. The global success of Hollywood and the fashion industry in Milan and New York are prime examples of how culture fuels economic activity. Governments often implement cultural policies to boost economic development. By investing in cultural infrastruc-



ture such as museums, theatres, and festivals, they create vibrant communities that attract residents, businesses, and tourists. These investments can lead to urban regeneration and increased property values. A culturally diverse workforce brings various perspectives and skills, fostering creativity and problem-solving. This diversity can enhance a company's ability to innovate and adapt to changing markets, making economies more resilient to shocks. Globalisation has increased cultural exchange, leading to the spread of ideas, goods, and services across borders. This cultural exchange can open new markets for businesses and create opportunities for economic partnerships. For instance, the glob-

al popularity of K-pop and Japanese anime has created vast economic opportunities for South Korea and Japan. Cultural education enhances human capital by fostering critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills. These qualities are essential in the modern economy, where knowledge and innovation are key drivers of success. Investing in cultural education can thus contribute to a more skilled and adaptable workforce. Maitreya Dadashri, the force behind the summit also shared this vision, "The synergy between culture and economy forms the foundation of sustainable development. We envision a future where spiritual and economic prosperity evolve hand in hand," he said.

Countries and cities often use culture to brand themselves and build soft power. Cultural diplomacy, through international cultural events, exchanges, and collaborations, can enhance a nation's global image and influence, attracting foreign investment and tourism. Law and Justice Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal echoed this senti-

ment at the Maitri Cultural Economy Summit 2024. "The Modi government has been dedicated to nurturing culture to harness its economic potential," he said. He emphasised that India's cultural economy is deeply rooted in the ancient wisdom of the Vedas and Puranas, making it an intrinsic part of the nation's identity. Cultural tourism in cities like Ayodhya, Varanasi, and Puri, along with major events such as the Kumbh Mela, play a significant role in contributing to the GDP.

In conclusion, the synergy between culture and economy is a powerful combo that drives both societal and economic progress. By recognizing and fostering this relationship, policymakers, businesses, and communities can harness cultural assets to achieve sustainable economic growth and development. This was aptly summed up by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari when he said that importance of cultural economic governance must be the cornerstone of our policies.

(The writer is a social activist and business consultant; views are personal)



PRABHA GUPTA

Will Democrats nominate Joe Biden

As the Democratic Party prepares to nominate him, questions linger about Biden's ability to lead, the party's strategy and potential challengers

U.S. President Joe Biden's underwhelming performance in the 2024 presidential debate last week raised concerns due to his apparent fatigue, forgetfulness, and confusion. This has caused uncertainty among supporters despite Biden's attempts to reassure them in the post-debate period. Even last week, during a speech in Madison, Wisconsin, he initially said he would "beat Donald Trump again in 2020" before correcting himself to "2024," which added to the uncertainty. According to the Spanish newspaper El Pais, Biden has defended himself about three things. First, his support stayed pretty much the same after the debate. Secondly, most party voters want him to continue. The last point is that other options are not better. President Biden has demonstrated resilience in the face of pressure to step down. He confidently declared at a rally in Madison that he would run and win again, which cheered his supporters and reassured sceptics. President Biden's improved performance in his public appearances post-debate has the potential to significantly reshape his chances in the upcoming election and the prospects of the Democratic Party.

This shift in dynamics could bring a sense of hope and anticipation to the party. Next month, the Democratic Party will nominate President Biden as its 2024 Presidential candidate in a virtual convention. This event will officially confirm Biden's candidacy and establish the party's campaign strategy. If Biden stays in the race, it will be tough for any other candidate to win the Democratic nomination. This is because the party rules give Biden a big advantage. These rules include specific guidelines for delegate allocation and superdelegate influence.

If Biden were to resign, who would take his place? With only four months before the 2024 election, finding the right person takes a lot of work. This shows how serious the situation is. Kamala Harris, the current Vice President and Joe Biden's running mate is the top contender for the

upcoming presidential election. Many believe that she has the advantage. However, her lack of popularity could be a significant challenge, as 49% of Americans disapprove of her according to polling averages. Republicans hope Harris will become the Democratic presidential nominee, believing it will benefit Trump's campaign.

The Trump campaign has launched an ad with the slogan: "This November, vote Republican. Stop Kamala." A recent poll by Reuters/Ipsos showed that Michelle Obama could win against Trump in November. However, Michelle has repeatedly said she does not aspire to be President, so it's doubtful she will run. Several names are being floated to replace President Biden.

This includes at least six governors: Gavin Newsom from California, Gretchen Whitmer from Michigan, Josh Shapiro from Pennsylvania, J. B. Pritzker from Illinois, and Ro Khanna, a representative from California. Each of these potential candidates has their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, Gavin Newsom is the favourite. Their potential to run for office would have dif-



IF BIDEN WERE TO RESIGN, WHO WOULD TAKE HIS PLACE? WITH ONLY FOUR MONTHS BEFORE THE 2024 ELECTION, FINDING THE RIGHT PERSON TAKES A LOT OF WORK. THIS SHOWS HOW SERIOUS THE SITUATION IS

ferent effects on the Democratic Party and the upcoming election. After the debate, polls from CNN, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal showed that Biden is six points behind Trump in the country. Biden is also trailing in the most crucial states he won in 2020. Furthermore, other states he won—Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Virginia—now seem uncertain.

In 2020, four months before the election, Biden was 9 points ahead in the polls. However, he eventually won the election with 51.25% of the popular vote, compared to Trump's 46.8%. This data suggests Biden may face a more challenging race in 2024 than 2020. When asked whether he could run the country for another term, he told ABC in a recent interview, "I believe so; I wouldn't be running if I didn't think I did. Look, I'm running again because I believe I understand best what has to be done to take this nation to a completely new level. We're on our way." Polls reveal that voters are more concerned about whether the 81-year-old President could manage another four years in the

White House than his 77-year-old predecessor.

Biden needs to be more competent to win in November. Biden was confident when he said, "If the Lord Almighty came down and said, 'Joe, get out of the race,' I'd get out of the race," but added, "The Lord Almighty's not coming down." So, it is up to God Almighty to go down and ask him to keep out of the race. Trump quietly observes Biden's challenging position. India has had a good rapport with both Trump and Biden. There is also bipartisan support. Therefore, it is unlikely that their South Asia and India policies will change, given the growing economic influence of India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also has a good rapport with both of them. Biden is facing challenges as he moves toward November. Trump has raised a lot of money and still has support from his party despite some court decisions going against him. Both candidates are trying to harm each other's reputation. Elections are unpredictable, especially with four months to go. Anything could happen.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

USE OF DIGITAL TECH IN HEALTHCARE

Madam — Apropos the article "Transforming healthcare with digital technologies," published on July 9, this is my response. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for digital transformation in the healthcare sector. According to the 2018 Digital Trends report by Econsultancy, only 7% of healthcare and pharmaceutical companies have gone digital, compared to 15% in other industries. The pandemic has underscored the importance of digitizing medical services, which can reduce costs and improve quality. For instance, Austria's e-Medication system has been running successfully for years, allowing patients to access their electronic medical records anytime and anywhere. Similarly, doctors in Sweden and Denmark send e-prescriptions to pharmacies. The UK's National Health Service is working with Google to deploy AI in healthcare. Digital transformation empowers patients to manage their treatment independently and ensures that medical histories are readily accessible in emergencies, eliminating the need for physical files.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

RAGA AS LEADER OF OPPOSITION

Madam — During the last week, Rahul Gandhi visited Hathi, Manipur, and Rae Bareilly, expressing his opinions on various incidents as the Leader of Opposition. This reflects a mature Indian democracy and raises expectations for his role in the next budget session. A 2012 government note described the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha as the "Shadow Prime Minister of India." Since becoming LoP, Gandhi has targeted Modi inside and outside Parliament. However, with great power comes great responsibility. Gandhi must maintain the sanctity of his position, opposing questionable government policies without obstructing proceedings. He should ensure government accountability, pro-

Upgrade teaching standards in new technology



During the IT industry boom, many engineering colleges in India emerged without updated curricula, industry linkages,

or adequate student-faculty ratios. Except for IITs, some NITs, and a few private colleges, these institutions have failed to produce job-ready graduates.

A survey by Aspiring Minds revealed that 86% of engineers are unemployed in the knowledge economy. Most private engineering colleges now focus on AI, ML, DS, and IoT, but 90% of their teachers lack fundamental knowledge in these fields. Teachers need continuous professional development through refresher courses and orientation programs to stay current. Teaching AI and Data Science requires a different approach than programming them. Addressing the gaps in teaching standards, particularly in emerging technologies, is crucial for preparing future engineers and maintaining the quality of education in India.

M Suresh Babu | Hyderabad

pose alternatives, and facilitate smooth functioning of the House. Gandhi's recent actions have portrayed him as a proactive leader, but he must be mindful of his conduct. The effectiveness of his maiden speech as LoP is debated, but it undeniably stirred significant responses from the Prime Minister and Union ministers. The upcoming budget session will be keenly watched to see if the Opposition can maintain its momentum.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

ADDRESS MOB LYNCHING IN UP

Madam — In 2023, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced a provision for the death penalty for mob lynching under new criminal laws. However, this commitment seems hollow in practice. In Shamli district, Uttar Pradesh, scrap dealer Firoz Qureshi was lynched by a mob, yet local authorities downplayed the incident as a mutual dispute.

When journalists Zakir Ali Tyagi and Wasim Akram Tyagi reported on the

lynching, they faced FIRs for allegedly disturbing communal harmony.

The Press Club of India has rightly called for the cancellation of these FIRs, emphasizing that reporting publicly available information is a cornerstone of authentic journalism. The arbitrary use of laws to intimidate journalists violates Article 19(1)(A) of the Constitution. Upholding journalistic freedom is essential to maintaining a democratic society.

Mob lynching must not be tolerated because it represents a severe breakdown of the rule of law and undermines the foundations of a civilized society. It fosters a climate of fear and impunity, where individuals take the law into their own hands, leading to tragic and often fatal outcomes. Such acts of violence erode trust in legal institutions, perpetuate communal hatred, and jeopardize the safety and rights of individuals.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

PM MODI'S STRATEGIC VISIT

PM Modi's visit to Russia underscores the importance of Russia in India's foreign policy




KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

This week marked several high-profile meetings amongst senior leaders around the globe, discussing primarily various conflicts and possible outcomes. PM Narendra Modi, in his first state visit during his third stint, visited Russia and Austria. The State visit by the India PM was the first since the Ukraine war and underscores the primacy of Russia in India's state of affairs. Meanwhile, all North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) leaders assembled in Washington DC to discuss global geopolitics. Ukraine and the Middel East featured prominently in all the discussions, even though the flavours were significantly different.

The India-Russia joint statement following President Putin and PM Modis' bilateral meetings read "The Sides highlighted the imperative of peaceful resolution of the conflict around Ukraine through dialogue and diplomacy including engagement between both parties. They noted with appreciation relevant proposals of mediation and good offices aimed at peaceful resolution of the conflict by international law and based on the UN Charter in its entirety and totality. "Earlier, PM Modi during one of the televised speeches of the two leaders told his Russian counterpart "peace is of utmost importance" and solution to Ukraine could not be found on the battlefield. He expressed serious concern regarding the bombing of a children's hospital in Kyiv and said "When innocent children are murdered, one sees them die, the heart pains and that pain is unbearable." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, with whom PM Modi has had several telephone calls in the past, called the Russia state visit by India "a blow to peace efforts."

NATO Secretary General, Mr Stoltenberg in the run-up to the NATO summit said "Allies will agree a financial pledge for Ukraine", and that he also expects more immediate military support to Ukraine." Ukraine is moving closer to NATO ". The close relationship with NATO was one of the reasons Russia came marching into Ukraine. It was a tightrope walk for PM Modi, in Russia, given the relatively new strategic relationships, he has developed in his last decade of being at the helm, crucial among them being the India-US partnership. It would be worth mentioning that



In the wake of the war in Ukraine, India has not yet verbally criticised Russia, for its aggression and has also stayed away from multilateral resolutions against Moscow. In the first few months, of Russia's attack on Ukraine, several US top leaders had criticised India's stance regarding the war, and even a threat of sanctions was discussed. However, with deft diplomatic efforts made by both long-term partners, the high-decibel criticism was restricted to closed-door meetings. PM Modi's state visit to Russia opened some of the past heartburn regarding Ukraine in Washington. US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said "US has raised concerns with India regarding its relationship with Russia". He added "We would urge India, as we do any country when it engages with Russia, to make clear that any resolution to the conflict in Ukraine needs to be one that respects the UN charter, that respects Ukraine's territorial integrity," This comes at a time when the US has been seen to be one of the most important allies of India in the recent past.

Interestingly President Putin upon re-election chose to visit Beijing in one of his first official trips and followed it with a bilateral last week, on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Kazakhstan. China and Russia have mutually agreed to be friends without any limitations, and are widely seen as challengers to what they allege as the US-led democratic order. India and China are on an extremely rough patch due to the military aggression on India's borders. India managed to walk the tight rope for now, but at some point of time it will have to balance it out with more actionable statements on world conflicts.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

A call for civility and integrity in democracy



J S RAJPUT

The elected representatives must adhere to constitutional principles and the high standards set by the framers of the Constitution



The Constitution and its makers Deserve Respect].S. RajputIn a functional democracy, election times could indeed become a celebration time, not only the competing candidates and their partiers, but also for the for entire country, which may involve votes, and future voters. Imagine a situation in which every candidate remains respectful to all others, and is ever conscious of his words and their usage in every interaction, interview and interpretation of the views of his competitors. Everyone who enters the election fray is duty-bound to remember that there is a generation of younger people watching closely how they conduct themselves in competitive conditions, and the extent to which they are conscious of their conduct and behaviour, both in public and private. Though it is a major responsibility of the family and school to shape the growing up of the children, the significance of the role of society and particularly those keen to lead the society could never be ignored.

It is not only the 'Acharya' whose conduct is under watch and is emulated, children in their sensitive years learn from numerous sources, and no one is out of their ambit of keen observation. Having seen, observed and participated in the elections that were just over, one may find all these 'expectations' just 'utopian, to be aspired for, but with full understanding that these would never be fulfilled! After the election results, the parliament meets, and there is only a superficial bonhomie of a few minutes, followed by the same old routine of distrust, and a sense of shyness, the creation of hurdles and ensuring that the nation must once again get ready to suffer continuous shouting in both the Houses of parliament and regular walk-outs! Is it amazing – and sadly enough, amusing – that the elected representatives of the great Indian democracy just cannot sit together and find out ways and means to sit together, express themselves, and arrive at inferences that are for the good of their voters? How could they ignore that they are the legatees of Gandhi, Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, Rajagolachari, and that illustrious lot that prepared the Constitution, and had cre-

“ IF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE ELECTED ARE CAPABLE, MEN OF CHARACTER AND INTEGRITY, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE THE BEST EVEN OF A DEFECTIVE CONSTITUTION. IF THEY ARE LACKING IN THESE, THE CONSTITUTION CANNOT HELP THE COUNTRY”

ated conditions to enable them to get elected, enjoy all the perks and privileges that have been acquiring bulging proportions? A veteran of the freedom struggle once told me he finds it repulsive when people go to Raj Ghat before beginning their so-called fasts, political dramas and whatever you may call it. I share his anguish. Many others would also be doing so. Those who indulge in such frivolities could remember what Dr Ambedkar had mentioned in his concluding speech in the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949: "If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also a fact, what must we do? The first thing in my judgment we must do is hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the bloody methods of revolution. It means that we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha." He goes on to point out that even with the Constitution in place, the nation, its people in general and those occupying constitutional positions in particular must never forget: "...however good a constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot.... The Constitution can provide only the organs of the State such as the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs of the State depends are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics." Not only Dr. Ambedkar, but other stalwarts were also equally concerned oabouthow things may take shape in future.

Speaking on November 26 of 1949, the final remarks of the President of the Constituent Assembly could be the guiding light for every member of parliament, irrespective of his party affiliations: "Whatever the Constitution may or may not provide, the welfare of the country will depend on how the country is administered. That will depend upon the men who administer it. It is a trite saying that a country can have only the Government it deserves. If the people who are elected are capable, and men of character and integrity, they will be able to make the best even of a defective Constitution. If they are lacking in these, the Constitution cannot help the country. After all, a constitution like a machine is a lifeless thing. It acquires life because of the men who control it and operate it, and India needs today nothing more than a set of honest men who will have the interest of the country before them". There can be no better articulation of the anxiety and anguish that every concerned Indian citizen experiences at this juncture of history. India needs awakeners not only in every section of Indian society." The newly elected MPs could rally move towards an illustrious political career if they just internalize the thoughts, ideas and ideals of three of the illustrious Indians: Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad and Ambedkar; the ARG" This could become their tribute and salutations to the three of them, and that would equip them to plunge into the service of the people and India. Scholars and institutions must launch serious analysis of certain aspects of how the democratic process has fared in its actual practice, in sustaining its credibility amongst the voters. They could also find out with academic fidelity – and inform the

people what has eroded Gandhian values that were supposed to become the cornerstone of the Indian Democracy after the Constitution of India was prepared with un-heard of dexterity and socio-economic and cultural comprehension by its framers, all of whom were distinguished freedom fighters, known for their sacrifice, non-accumulation, and commitment to a cause.

Not only in India, the greatness of the contributions of Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar is acknowledged globally. It is indeed intriguing for numerous people how those who swore by his name all the time to give a zing to their political ambitions, blatantly ignore some of his basic premises which were an outcome not only of his intellectual prowess but also a precise and incisive comprehension of life he had led!

Take the example of reservations for the SC/SC communities. It is the responsibility of the members of the Parliament and State assemblies to fact-check the extent to which reservations have helped the target groups. How long shall the unscrupulous among the politicians shall be allowed to play the games of caste, creed, religion, region and even language? If all this is permitted to continue, it would be impossible to create an India that projects social cohesion and religious amity.


Revert back to the sixties of the last century, Gandhi had gone but had not vanished from the psyche of the people, young persons were convinced that the caste system would be eliminated during the next two to three decades. Yes, that was the spirit of the Constitution of India, that was the India of Baba Saheb's Dreams! *(Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion and religious amity; views are personal)*

India and US support for the Dalai Lama and Tibetans upsets China

India and America's identical and unequivocal stance on Tibet has rattled China, highlighting the evolving geopolitical dynamics in Asia

In a significant diplomatic move, both India and the United States have extended their support to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan cause, provoking a strong reaction from China. The adoption of the Resolve Tibet Act by the US Congress and a recent high-profile meeting between a bipartisan American Congressional delegation and the Dalai Lama in Dharamshala have amplified the tensions between the US, India, and China. This article explores the strategic and ideological implications of these developments.

A Diplomatic Convergence: The backdrop of this development is the increasingly strained relationship between the United States and China.



K S TOMAR

The US Congress's passage of the Resolve Tibet Act, which promises comprehensive support for the Tibetan cause, marks a clear stance against China's policies in Tibet. The meeting between the American delegation and the Dalai Lama further underscores this commitment. In a related move, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with the US delegation, who congratulated him on his historic third-term

election victory and praised the fairness and transparency of the recent Indian general elections. Modi's subsequent Twitter post highlighted the strong bipartisan support for advancing the India-US strategic partnership. Notably, the post did not mention the Dalai Lama, though it was clear the topic was a significant aspect of the discussions. India's hosting of the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamshala places it in a unique position concerning the Tibetan cause. The Indian government has historically balanced its support for Tibet with its broader strategic and economic relations with China. The timing of the meetings suggests a coordinated diplomatic effort to highlight shared values and mutual

interests in countering China's assertive policies. **Strategic Ramifications:** The convergence of American and Indian interests reflects the evolving geopolitical landscape in Asia. Both nations share concerns about China's growing influence and assertive behavior, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. By reinforcing their strategic partnership, the United States and India signal their commitment to a rules-based international order, countering China's ambitions. In response, China is likely to intensify its efforts to strengthen alliances and expand its influence in the region. This could involve deepening ties with Pakistan, increasing engagement with other South Asian nations, and accelerat-

ing Belt and Road Initiative projects to secure strategic footholds. Additionally, China might enhance its military posture along disputed borders with India, particularly in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, to assert territorial claims. Beyond immediate strategic calculations, these meetings highlight the broader ideological contest between democratic values and authoritarian governance. The Dalai Lama, a symbol of non-violent resistance and spiritual leadership, embodies values resonating with global advocates of democracy and human rights. Engaging with him reinforces the US and India's commitment to these principles. China, facing scrutiny over its

human rights record in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong, is placed in a defensive position. In the global influence battle, soft power and moral authority are becoming increasingly important. The Dharamshala and Delhi meetings enhance the soft power of the United States and India, positioning them as champions of human rights and democratic values. **The Path Forward:** As the geopolitical chessboard in Asia becomes more complex, the interplay between diplomacy and deterrence will be crucial. The United States and India, through coordinated diplomatic actions, are setting the stage for a more assertive and collaborative approach to countering China's influence. This involves not only

strengthening bilateral ties but also fostering broader coalitions with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The high-level US delegation, led by Republican Rep. Michael McCaul and including prominent figures like Democratic former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, discussed the relevance and significance of the Resolve Tibet Act. President Joe Biden, a strong advocate for Tibetan rights, is expected to approve the Act. China's reaction has been predictably strong, warning the United States against sending the "wrong signal." The Chinese embassy in India emphasized China's stance on Tibet as an internal matter, condemning any perceived interference in its domestic affairs.

Conclusion India and America's identical and unequivocal stance on Tibet has rattled China, highlighting the evolving geopolitical dynamics in Asia. The historical breach of trust by China in 1962, replicated in 2020 during the Ladakh confrontation, underscores the challenges in Sino-Indian relations. Prime Minister Modi's efforts to normalize ties with Beijing have not yielded desired results, reflecting the ongoing tension. Adopting a more nuanced approach to diplomacy may help mitigate tensions while advancing China's strategic goals. *(Writer is a political analyst; views are personal)*

MONEY MATTERS

Gold price rises on jewellers' buying, positive overseas trend

Gold price rose Rs 50 to Rs 75,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday driven by jewellers' buying and a firm trend in the international markets, according to All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had settled at Rs 75,050 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Silver prices also climbed by Rs 100 to Rs 94,500 per kg. It had closed at Rs 94,400 per kg in the previous session. In sarafa markets, the yellow metal was trading at Rs 75,100 per 10 grams, up by Rs 50 against the previous close, the association said. Traders said gold rallied due to fresh demand from local jewellers and a firm trend in overseas markets. In the global markets, spot gold was trading higher at US\$ 2,389.20 per ounce, up by US\$ 9.50 per ounce. Gold prices firmed for a third consecutive session with investors awaiting US inflation data due later in the day for more insights on the Federal Reserve's interest rate path, Manav Modi, Senior Analyst, Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd (MOFSL), said.



ED arrests company promoter in Rs 25,000 cr bank loan fraud

The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday said it has arrested the director of an insolvent automotive equipment manufacturing company as part of a money laundering probe linked to an alleged Rs 25,000-crore bank loan fraud case. Arvind Dham, the promoter and one of the directors of the Amtek Group, was taken into custody on Tuesday (July 9), it said in a statement. A special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Delhi sent him to seven days Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody after he was produced before it on Wednesday. The money laundering case against the company and its directors stems from a CBI FIR that was registered on written complaints from the IDBI Bank and the Bank of Maharashtra, the ED said. It was alleged that loans were diverted through cheating, fraud and criminal breach of trust, causing a wrongful loss of worth Rs 673.35 crore to the banks, the agency said. The Supreme Court in February, while deciding a public interest petition against the Amtek Auto group of companies, directed the ED to investigate the case.



Rupee falls 5 paise to close at 83.56 against US dollar

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ISF members add 2.20 lakh flexi jobs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body Indian Staffing Federation (ISF) on Thursday said it added 2.20 lakh new flexi jobs to reach 16.6 lakh in 2023-24.

The data was shared as part of its 'Annual Employment Trends 2024' report launched by V Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Advisor to Government of India, and Ramesh Krishnamurthi, Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of Labor and Employment, ISF said in a statement.

"Flexi staffing industry witnesses 15.3 per cent year on year growth in new jobs during FY24. ISF members added 2.20 lakh new flexi jobs in FY24. ISF collectively added 2.20 lakh new flexi jobs during this period reaching 16.6 lakhs," the statement said.

ISF President Lohit Bhatia said the staffing industry added 30,000 new flexi employment opportunities in the last quarter of FY24.

'Question of change in stance on interest rate quite premature now'

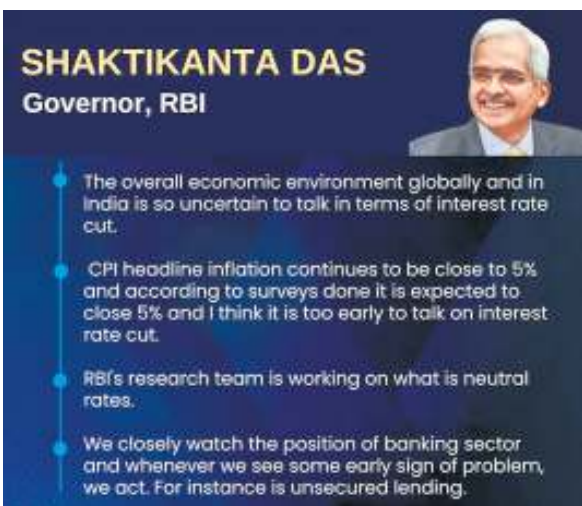
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the question of change of stance on interest rate is quite premature given the gap between current inflation and 4 per cent target.

"Given the gap between current inflation and 4 per cent target, question of change of stance is quite premature...when we move towards 4 per cent CPI (retail inflation) on a sustained basis is when we will get the confidence to think about a change in stance," Das said in an interview to CNBC-TV 18.

He said the inflation journey is progressing as per expectations, but added that it is the last mile of the journey towards 4 per cent, which will be the most difficult or sticky.

Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based retail inflation has been projected at 4.5 per cent with quarter-wise projec-



tions at 4.9 per cent in Q1 (April-June), 3.8 per cent in Q2, 4.6 per cent in Q3, and 4.5 per cent in Q4, RBI had said in its June bi-monthly report.

The Reserve Bank, which has been mandated to ensure inflation remains at 4 per cent

(with margin of 2 per cent on either side), mainly factors in CPI while arriving at its monetary policy.

He had said headline inflation softened further during March-April, though persisting food inflation pressures offset the

gains of disinflation in core and deflation in the fuel groups. Despite some moderation, pulses and vegetables inflation remained firmly in double digits.

Vegetable prices are experiencing a summer uptick following a shallow winter season correction. The deflationary trend in fuel was driven primarily by the LPG price cuts in early March. Core inflation softened for the 11th consecutive month since June 2023. Services inflation moderated to a historic low and goods inflation remained contained.

Concerning GDP, Das said many growth drivers are playing out their role and the growth momentum was very strong in the fourth quarter of last financial year which continues to be strong in the first quarter.

The June policy also revised the GDP growth projection for the current fiscal upwards to 7.2 per cent from 7 per cent on rising private consumption and revival of demand in rural areas.

India's oil, gas exploration offers US\$ 100 bn opportunity: Puri

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday called for stepping up the oil and gas hunt to cut India's reliance on imports and making available fuel at an affordable and sustainable way.

Speaking at the Urja Varta conference, he said the exploration and production (E&P) sector is integral in the journey towards energy self-sufficiency, which is critical for sustained economic growth.

"E&P offers investment opportunities worth US\$ 100 billion by 2030," he said.

Stating that India's exploration and production potential still lies untapped, he said, "I find it strange that India is so heavily reliant on oil imports despite the abundant geological resources available to us."

The Indian sedimentary basins hold about 651.8 million tonnes of crude oil and 1138.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas, he said. Puri said only 10 per cent of our sedimentary basin



area is under exploration, which will rise to 16 per cent by 2024-end after the current bid ends.

"The focus of our exploratory endeavours must pivot towards discovering 'Yet to Find' resources," he said. India imports over 85 per cent of its crude oil needs. Crude oil is converted into fuels like petrol and diesel in refineries.

"The government is doing its part to catalyse investments in E&P. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) has instituted sweeping reforms, empowering stakeholders to contribute to

our nation's progress," he said, adding "We intend to increase India's exploration acreage to 1 million sq. km. by 2030."

The minister said since its inception in 2015, the Discovered Small Field (DSF) Policy has garnered investments of approximately US\$ 2 billion and brought in 29 new players in the field.

"The opening up of the erstwhile no-go areas has paved the way for exploration activities in previously restricted zones, fostering investments, notably in regions such as the Andamans," he said.

India's veg oil imports up 18% in June to 15.5 lakh tonnes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Import of vegetable oils, comprising edible and non-edible oils, rose 18 per cent in June to 15.5 lakh tonnes on higher imports of crude palm oil and crude sunflower oil, according to trade data.

Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) data showed that import of vegetable oils during June 2024 stood at 15,50,659 tonnes compared to 13,14,476 tonnes in the year-ago period. Edible

oils import increased in June to 15,27,481 tonnes from 13,11,576 tonnes in the same month last year. However, the imports of non-edible oils jumped to 23,178 tonnes from 2,300 tonnes during the period under review.

During the first eight months of 2023-24 oil year ending October, the imports of vegetable oils fell 2 per cent to 1,02,29,106 tonnes compared to 1,04,83,120 tonnes in the corresponding period of the previous year.

RBI permit banks to use ratings of Brickwork Ratings India

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday permitted banks to use ratings by Brickwork Ratings India Private Limited for loans of up to Rs 250 crore. The RBI, in October 2022, asked banks and other regulated entities not to obtain any fresh ratings from Brickwork Ratings India.

The Certificate of Registration granted to Brickwork Ratings India as a Credit Rating Agency (CRA) was cancelled by market regulator Sebi in October 2022.

After a review of the October 2022 circular, the RBI on Wednesday permitted banks to use the ratings of the

"In respect of fresh rating mandates, the rating may be obtained from the CRA for bank loans not exceeding Rs 250 crore. In respect of existing ratings, the CRA may undertake rating surveillance irrespective of the rated amount till the residual tenure of such loans," it said

CRA for risk weighting their claims for capital adequacy purposes, subject to certain conditions.

"In respect of fresh rating mandates, the rating may be obtained from the CRA for bank loans not exceeding Rs 250 crore. In respect of existing ratings, the CRA may

undertake rating surveillance irrespective of the rated amount till the residual tenure of such loans," it said.

The Reserve Bank has also issued another circular, tweaking norms related to remittances to International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) under the Liberalised Remittance



Scheme (LRS). On a review, RBI said it has been decided that "authorised persons" may facilitate remittances for all permissible purposes under LRS to IFSCs for availing financial services or financial products as per the International Financial Services Centres Authority Act, 2019, within IFSCs.

At present, remittances under LRS to IFSCs can be made only for making investments in IFSCs in securities except those issued by entities/ companies resident in India (outside IFSC), and payment of fees for education to foreign universities or foreign institutions in IFSCs for pursuing courses

Economic vision of new govt, political theme key aspects to watch in budget

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The new government's economic vision and management of the "political theme" will be among the key aspects to watch in the upcoming Union budget, a Japanese brokerage said on Thursday.

The brokerage said the second half of the year will see "muted returns" on the equities front, and reiterated its year-end target of 24,860 points on Nifty, which is only about 3 per cent higher than the current levels.

The fiscal glide path beyond FY26, when the government has committed to reduce the fiscal deficit to 4.6 per cent, will also be a key theme to look at, Nomura's India Economist Aurodeep Nandi told reporters.

Reminding of the 100-day programmes of the new government prepared by various ministries ahead of the elections, Nandi said getting some idea of the economic vision of the new government will be a key area to watch.

After the election setback, the "political theme" of the budget by the new government dependent on coalition partners will also be keenly watched, he said.

Specifically, how the new government manages the demands from Bihar and Andhra Pradesh - the home base of allies Janata Dal and TDP, respectively - will be watched, Nandi said.

Vodafone Idea seeks waiver of Rs 24,700 cr bank guarantee from DoT

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Debt-ridden Vodafone Idea has reached out to the Department of Telecom to seek waiver on a financial bank guarantee worth Rs 24,747 crore for spectrum payment due in September 2025, according to sources.

Vodafone Idea (VIL) needs to securitize the annual instalment one year before the due date of the payment.

"Vodafone Idea has reached out to DoT seeking waiver for financial bank guarantee (FBG) worth Rs 24,747 crore which it has to pay in September 2025. The FBG

needs to be deposited one year before the due date as per spectrum auction rules," a source, who did not wish to be identified, said.



An email query sent to Vodafone Idea elicited no response. The payments are for frequen-

cies that VIL purchased in auctions that were conducted before 2022. VIL in 2022 opted for a four-year moratorium to pay for the spectrum allowed under a government relief package. The moratorium period for the spectrum payment obligations related to spectrum auctions conducted until 2016 ends between October 2025 and September 2026.

The company also opted for a moratorium on AGR payments. The moratorium ends in March 2026.

VIL is required to provide bank guarantees at least 13 months prior to the expiry of the relevant moratorium period.

Sensex, Nifty close marginally down amid profit-taking ahead of key financial results

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex and Nifty closed marginally down in a rangebound session on Thursday as investors booked profits in heavyweights ahead of the announcement of key financial results for the June quarter. Retreating from early highs, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed lower by 27.43 points or 0.03 per cent at 79,897.34. As many as 15 Sensex shares closed with gains while the rest declined.

The index climbed 245.32 points to hit a high of 80,170.09 in early trade but later lost



momentum due to selling in index heavyweights. The barometer hit a day's low of 79,464.38, down by 460.39 points from the last close.

The NSE Nifty edged down

8.50 points or 0.03 per cent to settle at 24,315.95. The broader index gyrated between a high of 24,402.65 and a low of 24,193.75 in day trade.

"The main indices are trad-

ing in a narrow range, struggling to justify its premium valuation ahead of the Q1 earnings season, which is forecast to be subdued," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Among Sensex shares, Bajaj Finance fell the most by 1.48 per cent. Mahindra & Mahindra (1.24 per cent), NTPC (1.14 per cent) and Nestle (1.05 per cent) were also among the major losers. HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement, Bharti Airtel, RIL and Larsen & Toubro also declined.

Insurers expect more tax benefits for health insurance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More tax benefits for health insurance under the new tax regime, relaxation in payment norms for MSMEs and incentives for the agri-tech sector are among the expectations of stakeholders from the first budget of the Modi 3.0 government.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the full Budget for fiscal 2024-25 on July 23, which will be the first major policy document of the new government.

Anup Rau, Managing Director and Chief Executive



Officer of Future Generali India Insurance Company, said the deduction limit on health insurance premiums under Section 80D of the Income Tax Act has remained unchanged for the past nine years despite the fact that there has been a significant rise in healthcare

costs across the country.

"It would be best if the limit for medical insurance is linked to inflation and gets revised automatically every year or once in a couple of years. Also, the benefits need to be extended to the New Tax regime since increasing health insurance

penetration is critical. So, we hope the upcoming Budget to announce some hike in the deduction limit on health insurance premiums," Rau said.

Tapan Singhel, MD & CEO of Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, said reforms like offering health insurance to employees at negotiated rates, reducing GST on health insurance premiums, and offering tax benefits like increased Section 80D exemption limits would make health insurance more affordable and accessible, especially for the 'missing middle' segment of our population. "Additionally, for senior citizens, removing the limit on

deductions for health insurance premiums would significantly ease their financial burden," Singhel said. The finance minister is likely to lay out the government's economic agenda in the budget.

On expectations from the Sitharaman's budget, D S Negi, CEO of Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute & Research Centre (RGCIRC), said the focus on reforming cancer care in India is crucial and it is important to prioritise funding for advanced treatments like immunotherapy and personalised medicine, ensuring more patients can access these cutting-edge therapies.

ixigo, AU Small Finance Bank launch co-branded RuPay travel credit card

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Travel distribution platform ixigo and AU Small Finance Bank on Thursday announced the launch of RuPay variant of their premium co-branded travel credit card, offering the customers UPI-based payments and rewards.

The RuPay variant offers a range of features such as the facility to link RuPay credit card on UPI using any UPI payment app, a comprehensive insurance cover of up to Rs 2 lakh, including personal acci-



dent insurance and permanent disability cover, and reward points on UPI transactions, ixigo said.

"With seamless UPI integra-

tion and comprehensive insurance coverage, this card is designed to meet the evolving needs of modern travellers, especially those from tier 2,3 & 4 cities," ixigo quoted Alok Bajpai, Group CEO & Rajnish Kumar, Group Co-CEO as saying.

In addition, the cardholders will get 1,000 reward points, Rs 1,000 ixigo money reward on completing their first transaction within 30 days, and a fuel surcharge waiver of 1 per cent and 10 per cent reward points on train transactions.

Sir Anthony Hopkins opens up about his character ‘Vespasian’ in *Those About to Die*

Imagine a time of emperors and gladiators, where the roar of the crowd fills a colossal amphitheater. This is the world of ancient Rome, a society both awe-inspiring and brutal. At its heart stands the Colosseum, a grand symbol of both entertainment and power. But was it truly for the people? or a mere tool to distract them from a harsher reality? Sir Anthony Hopkins delves into this very question in his gripping new series, *Those About to Die*, all set to premiere on Prime Video in India, UK and other European countries.

Those About to Die is based on the eponymous 1958 book by Daniel P Mannix, which previously served as the original inspiration for *Gladiator* screenwriter David Franzoni. The series explores the ways in which Vespasian, a former army general, sought to restore order in Rome after the city was nearly reduced to ashes during the deranged and decadent rule of Nero, the final emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

“Bread and circuses, hey? Look this way!” says Hopkins. He adds, “It was the same as in today’s political climate, where you have nothing but distractions. The movie industry, the red carpet ... entertainment, entertainment. You can get too many films now. Fluff! And you are hooked. It takes you away from the pain of living in political chaos.”

Hopkins also expresses admiration for his character, Vespasian, in the series. He jokes that, during his own school days, he wasn’t much of a classicist: “I tried to read Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* [of the Roman Empire]. Impossible! So I had to get ‘Gibbon for simpletons’—but he he evidently now has a solid grip on his character.

“Vespasian was, I think, a strong soldier, a man of justice determined to make Rome a decent place after Nero had left it in a mess of backstabbing and all of that. Awful. The place was in its death throes. So he came along and said, Right, let’s put it back on track. He was a pragmatist. He knuckled down to fiscal reforms and acts of consolidation. He had two sons and told them to behave and to get on with it. But their dynamic was always going to unleash the scorpions of jealousy,” shares Hopkins.

Sir Anthony Hopkins’ portrayal of the complex emperor Vespasian promises a nuanced exploration of this fascinating period. From the political machinations to the bloody spectacles in the arena, *Those About to Die* promises to be a must-watch for history buffs and fans of epic dramas alike. Directed by Roland Emmerich, the Roman drama stars Anthony Hopkins, Iwan Rheon, Rupert Penry-Jones, and Sara Martins, who will bring this bygone era to life on Prime Video in India, starting July 19.

what’s brewing?

Kanye West retiring from professional music!

Rapper-producer Rich the Kid has said that Kanye West is retiring from music, though it’s unclear what exactly that entails or if the decision is final. According to a since-deleted screenshot of a text exchange posted by Rich the Kid from West: “I am retiring from professional music.” The reason behind the decision, the musician hinted, is that he’s “not sure what else to do”

as far as music goes, as per reports. However, Rich the Kid replied: “Retire? Why? How? The people need you the music you and Ty and we have made was the biggest champ in culture to this date in 2024.” Shortly after he posted the screenshotted-texts, Rich the Kid announced on X that he’s dropping new music with West featured on his forthcoming album, *Life’s a Gamble*. “WE DROPPING FRIDAY 7/19,” he wrote, confirming the project’s release date.

According to the album’s tracklist, there’s an upcoming collaboration with West titled *Plain Jane*, as well as the already-released single *Gimme a Second 2* featuring Ty Dolla Sign and Peso Pluma. There’s also the track *Carnival with Playboi Carti* and *Ty Dolla \$ign*, 42, that was featured on the latter’s collaborative *Vultures 1* album with West, which dropped in February. It peaked at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 the following month. West’s retirement announcement comes weeks after he and Ty Dolla Sign were slated to release their sequel project, *Vultures 2*. According to an Instagram post shared by Ty Dolla Sign, the duo are next set to bring their *Vultures* listening experience to Korea on Friday, August 23.

MC Stan to collaborate with Karan Aujla for album *Mehfeel*

Bigg Boss 16 winner and rapper MC Stan has teamed up with Punjabi singer Karan Aujla, who is currently riding high on the success of his latest song *Tauba Tauba* from the film *Bad Newz*. The new album is titled *Mehfeel* and has a blend of hip-hop with Punjabi beats. MC Stan has delivered hits like *Basti Ka Hasti* and *Tadipaar*.

Mehfeel is expected to be a musical journey, reflecting both artists’ experiences and backgrounds. Talking about Aujla, who has given hits such as *Gangsta* and *Mexico* to name a few, hails from Ludhiana. He started as a songwriter for Jassi Gill’s *Range*, from his album *Replay*. He then went to Canada, where he wrote lyrics for various other artists including Deep Jandu and Ely Mangat.

It was in 2016, when he dropped his maiden song *Property of Punjab*. He gained major stardom with songs such as *Yaarian Ch Fikk*, *Unity*, *Alcohol 2*, and *Lafaaf*. It was in 2018 when he amassed mainstream popularity with *Don’t Worry*, his first song to enter UK Asian chart. *Jhanjar*, *Red Eyes* and *Kya Baat Aa* entered top 10 in the chart, while *So Far* entered top five in 2020.

Alexandra Daddario expecting first child with producer Andrew Form

The *White Lotus* star Alexandra Daddario is expecting her first child with husband and film producer Andrew Form. Alexandra Daddario, who featured as the cover girl for *Vogue* magazine, shared her baby bump picture from the shoot and she wrote in the caption in an Instagram post,



“Excited for my child to go to preschool with Margot Robbie and Hailey Bieber’s kids.” In the comments section, Emily In Paris star Lily Collins wrote, “Eeeeeek so happy for you both.” Margot Robbie and her husband, Tom Ackerley, are expecting their first child. Hailey and Justin Bieber also announced their pregnancy this year. In an interview with *Vogue*, the actress said, “I feel like now that I’m pregnant and it’s all successful and everything’s healthy, I shouldn’t complain.” Alexandra revealed that she managed to keep her pregnancy under wraps for almost six months. She added that she shot for the *Mayfair Witches* while she was pregnant. “I was on set and I was throwing up and having make-out scenes with my coworkers right after. By week five, I was like, There’s no way I’m going to be able to hide this,” said Alexandra. She added, “I was like, If I tell my job that I’m pregnant, I’m going to get a lot of time off to go throw up in peace. Alexandra Daddario is best known for starring in the Percy Jackson film series, *Halloween Pass Texas Chainsaw 3D*, *San Andreas*, *Baywatch* and *We Summon the Darkness*. She has also starred in the web-series *Mayfair Witches* and *The White Lotus*, for which she got an Emmy nomination in the Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Limited or Anthology Series or Movie category.

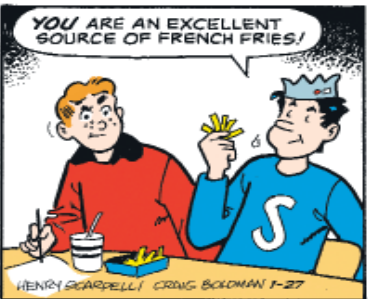
Radhikka trained for three months learning Marathi for *Sarfira*

Renowned actress Radhikka Madan has captivated the audiences once again with her stunning transformation into a traditional Marathi girl for her role as ‘Rani’ in the highly anticipated film *Sarfira*. With her ethereal beauty and authentic portrayal, Radhikka promises to bring depth and authenticity to this culturally rich character. “Being a Delhi girl, it was quite a challenge for me to embody a Marathi woman authentically—getting the dialect, tone and body language just right,” Radhikka explained. “I dedicated three months to learning Marathi and refining my body language, which was further enhanced by the costumes and accessories I wore. And working alongside such veteran actors as Paresh and Akshay sir, and with director Sudha Kongara, kept me on my toes and pushed me to give my best every day on set.” Radhikka Madan, known for her versatility and dedication to her craft, has immersed herself completely in the role of Rani. Her look in the film, styled meticulously to reflect the quintessential *Maharashtrian* essence, has already created a buzz among fans and critics alike. From the traditional *nanari* sarees to the exquisite nath (nose ring), every element of Radhikka’s appearance has been carefully chosen to portray the elegance and strength of a Marathi woman. Her *bindi*, hair and dance all reflect the rich heritage of Maharashtra, adding further authenticity to her character. Also spoke about how playing “Rani” revitalised her life, saying, “After portraying the urban character ‘Sanaa’, which was quite dark, ‘Rani’ brought a new spark and energy into my life, pulling me out of that zone.” *Sarfira*, directed by Sudha Kongara Prasad, is a poignant narrative that delves into the life of Rani, a woman of resilience and grace, navigating the complexities of her world with unwavering determination. The film promises to offer a compelling story, beautifully intertwined with cultural authenticity and strong performances. Rani’s character is strong and carries her own unique swag, which will be evident throughout the film.



FUN

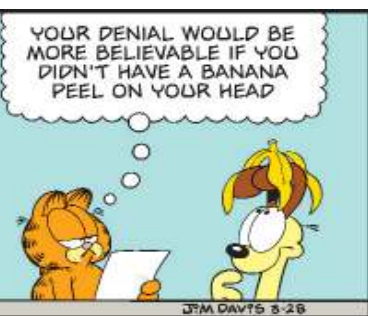
ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



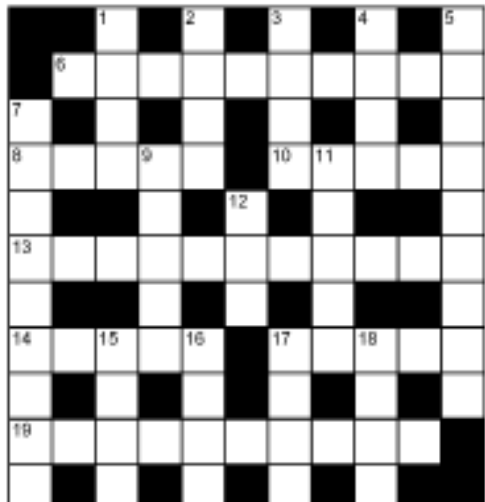
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Good-looking
- A part of something
- A house made of snow
- One third of twenty-four
- This many-legged creature is the young form of a butterfly
- Tidy and well arranged
- Observes
- Fifty percent
- Very uncommon

DOWN

- Come to a halt
- Mix black and white to make this
- A throbbing pain
- Make music with the voice
- Periods of a hundred years



SUDOKU

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4	2		5					
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3		9		2		5		
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Yesterday's solution								
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9	1	6	8	2	4	5	7	3
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7	5	1	6	8	3	4	9	2
6	3	2	4	5	9	7	8	1
4	2	3	5	9	7	8	1	6
1	6	9	3	4	8	2	5	7
5	7	8	1	6	2	9	3	4

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: ★★★★★

STARC EXPRESSES DISPLEASURE AT BEING DROPPED FOR T20 WC GAME AGAINST AFGHANISTAN

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian pacer Mitchell Starc has expressed his displeasure at being dropped for the crucial T20 World Cup Super Eights match against Afghanistan in the Caribbean, saying he was not one bit amused by the team management's decision. The 2021 T20 World Cup champions suffered a shocking 21-run loss to Afghanistan, which dealt a massive blow to Australia's chances of entering the semifinals. Australia had replaced Starc with Ashton Agar for the match but the left-arm spinner, despite tying down the Afghanistan batters, could not take any wickets. "No -- two World Cups in a row," Starc was quoted as saying by Sydney Morning Herald on Willow Talk podcast when quizzed about his omission and whether he was amused by the decision. "Just the match-up, they (team management) saw previous games on that ground in St Vincent with spin playing a part and obviously Ash (Ashton) and the left-armer enticing them to make a change," he added. This was the second occasion in a row where the Australian pacer was dropped for a T20 World Cup match against Afghanistan, with the previous one being in Adelaide in 2022 where also the hosts failed to reach the last four stage. Agar and the two Australian



pace spearheads, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins, were unable to break the partnership between openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz and

Ibrahim Zadran, who ended up making 118 runs. "I think Ash bowled pretty well in the powerplay. They probably played the spin quite

well and batting first probably assessed the conditions a little bit better than we did, and had a couple of stumbles that in the end cost us the game," said

Starc. "It was probably the fielding that cost us again that game. That meant we had to win against India and we fell short

there as well." Australia then went on to lose to India in Super Eights and were later eliminated from the competition. Starc also expressed his displeasure with the scheduling of the tournament and pre seeding that saw them advance to the pre determined group despite topping the group stage. "We finished ahead of England (in the group stage) and end up where we were pre-seeded as the second side. All of a sudden, you're in a different group." "The argument was it was because it was so hard to get around the West Indies, so fans knew where your team was playing. "So then why don't you have the chock-a-block tournament at the front... And then spread it out at the back end? We had the two night games and the third was a day game, so it wasn't the best preparation. We had a delayed flight out of St Vincent, it was a 90-minute drive from the airport to the hotel in St Lucia, and then we had a 10 o'clock toss. He added that the travelling between venues in the West Indies is always difficult. "I think that was probably maybe a misread [by organisers], the fact that the front half of the tournament was more spread out, and then you hit the super eights and ... travel around the West Indies is probably not the easiest thing to do, certainly not to travel home from."



Shocked by that amazing catch: Avesh on Bishnoi's wonder grab in India's win against Zimbabwe

PTI ■ HARARE

Ravi Bishnoi's fielding has always had a touch of athleticism but he took it to a different plane in the third T20I against Zimbabwe when he leapt to pluck a screamer off Avesh Khan to dismiss Brian Bennett, leaving his India teammate in awe. India defeated Zimbabwe by 23 runs on Wednesday to take a 2-1 lead in the five-match series but the talk in the dressing room was Bishnoi's astonishing catch to dismiss the Zimbabwe top-order batter, reducing the hosts to 19 for 3 in the fourth over. The pacer said he was left "shocked" for a moment. "When he took the catch, I don't think he got the reaction time. I also did not get the reaction time (to see what happened). I was, in fact, shocked how he took that catch," said Avesh, who took two wickets as India restricted Zimbabwe to 159/6 in the chase of 182. Avesh added that the wicket

should be credited to Bishnoi's account for the sheer effort. "He is a good fielder, works a lot on his fielding. The catch that he took, the scoreboard will show that it was taken by me, but it should be credited in his (Bishnoi's) account," added Avesh in a video posted by BCCI. India skipper Shubman Gill said it was a truly amazing effort from Bishnoi and showed that the leg-spinner was enjoying his fielding. "Very happy with the team's win to go 2-1 up in the series and the catch that Bishi (Bishnoi) took was absolutely remarkable. It was truly delightful to watch. "Cricket is definitely a team sport and it's more so a team sport when you're fielding. So, it's very important to have fun when you are fielding. If you are having fun then you are always in the game," added the captain. Washington Sundar said he had the best view of the catch as he was positioned at mid-on.



I could have done better in tennis than badminton, says Saina

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Traillblazing Indian shuttler Saina Nehwal feels she would have perhaps excelled more as a sports person if she had picked a tennis racquet instead of playing badminton. Nehwal has an impressive resume as a badminton player. Not only she became the first Indian woman shuttler to be ranked No. 1 in the world, she was the first woman athlete from the country to win an Olympic medal. "Sometimes I feel that it would have been good if my parents had put me in tennis," Saina said during her "Her Story-My Story" talk at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. "There is more money and I had more strength I think. I could have done better in tennis than badminton," she

added. While Saina has inspired many to take up badminton, the 34-year-old herself didn't have anyone to look up to when she picked the racquet at the age of 8. "When I started, I didn't have any role models to look up to. No one to look up to and say 'I want to be world number one or be an Olympic medallist,' I hadn't seen anyone do that in badminton before me," Saina said. Beside the London Olympics bronze and a silver at the World Championships and multiple Commonwealth Games gold, including two in the women's singles. She urged the youngsters present to explore a career in sports. "I always tell children to

concentrate on games. China wins 60-70 medals. We only get 3-4. There are so many doctors and engineers, their names don't come in newspapers," she said. "I want girls to especially to come forward and start getting fit and get into sports. Now we are there for the children, there are world number ones, Olympic champions and so many medallist to look up to," she added. Reflecting on her career, she said her hard work compensated for the lack of talent. "I loved hard work, I was not the most talented person, I need to practice a lot. If a talented player is doing something 100 times I had to do it 1000 times. But I like hard work. My coaches like my never give up attitude."

Indian Racing Festival: Ganguly buys Kolkata Royal Tigers team

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India captain Sourav Ganguly was on Thursday unveiled as the owner of the Kolkata Royal Tigers ahead of the Indian Racing Festival 2024, scheduled between August and September this year. Apart from the debutant Kolkata racing team, the event will see participation from seven other outfits based at Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, Kochi, and Ahmedabad. The racing festival encompasses two main championships — Indian

Racing League (IRL) and the Formula 4 Indian Championship (F4IC). Expressing his enthusiasm for the association, Ganguly, the former BCCI president said: "I am truly excited to embark on this journey with the Kolkata team in the Indian Racing Festival. "Motorsports has always been a passion of mine and together with the Kolkata Royal Tigers, we aim to build a strong legacy in the Indian Racing Festival and inspire a new generation of motorsport enthusiasts." Akhilesh Reddy, Chairman and Managing Director of



Racing Promotions Pvt Ltd (RPPL), welcomed Ganguly to the racing fold. "We are thrilled to announce Sourav Ganguly as the owner of the Kolkata franchise. His visionary leadership and commitment to excellence, shaped by years of legendary cricketing success, brings unparalleled dynamism to the Indian Racing Festival," he said. It may be recalled that veteran India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has recently acquired stakes in American Gambits, a team that will take part in the second edition of the Global Chess League.

Mumbai City FC ropes in Greek striker Nikolaos Karelis

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai City FC on Thursday announced roping in Greek striker Nikolaos Karelis ahead of the upcoming Indian Super League season. The 32-year-old, also known as Nikos Karelis, is set for his maiden stint in India. He began his youth career with Ergotelis and made his senior professional debut with them in 2007. Karelis has played for seven more clubs including stints in Russia (Amkar Perm), Belgium (Genk), England (Brentford) and the

Netherlands (ADO Den Haag). Mumbai City FC will be his eighth club. Karelis has netted 103 goals in 361 professional matches along with 29 assists, while his best performance at a club came for Panathinaikos, for whom he scored 36 goals in 114 competitive games. The 2014-15 season was his standout when Karelis scored 19 goals in 50 contests. He won the Greek Cup with Panathinaikos in 2013-14. Later, he also won two titles with the Greek club PAOK in 2018-19 (Super League Greece and Greek Cup). Karelis was last associated with



another Greek club Panetolikos, where he was adjudged its player of the season in 2022-23. "The team has achieved significant success over the past few years, and I am eager to contribute to its continued success in the upcoming season," Karelis said in a release. MCFC head coach Petr Kratky said, "Nikos is a highly talented player who perfectly matches the requirements we expect from our forwards. He has experience playing in various European countries and has consistently proven his calibre in different leagues."

Carlos faces Daniil and Novak plays Lorenzo in Wimbledon's semis

AP ■ LONDON

Carlos Alcaraz's ability to hit any type of shot, from any position on the court, on any surface, keeps fans on the edge of their seats. Keeps other players guessing, too. Alcaraz delights in all of that - he loves putting on a show just as much as he enjoys knowing he makes the guys on the other side of the net uncomfortable - and figures it can only help him in the Wimbledon semifinals against Daniil Medvedev on Friday. It's beneficial, Alcaraz said, that opponents need to focus on whether he'll be 'able to be back (in) the point or ... Able to hit an unbelievable shot.' "For me," he said, "it's great that they're thinking about it." Alcaraz, the No. 3 seed, is seeking a second consecutive trophy at the All England Club and fourth Grand Slam title overall. His triumph last month at the French Open made him, at 21, the youngest man to collect a major trophy on hard, grass and clay courts.

Medvedev, who is seeded No. 5 and defeated No. 1 Jannik Sinner in the quarterfinals, won the 2021 U.S. Open but is just 1-5 in major finals. The other match Friday will be No. 2 Novak Djokovic, who has won seven of his men's-record 24 Slam championships at Wimbledon, against No. 25 Lorenzo Musetti, making his debut in a major semifinal. "Against him, you are probably more stressed, because he's probably the best player ever - or one of the best players ever," said the 22-year-old Musetti, who beat Taylor Fritz in five sets on Wednesday, while Djokovic got the day off because his foe, Alex de Minaur, withdrew with an injured hip. "You walk on court with a different mentality," said Musetti, whose 1-5 record against Djokovic includes a five-set loss at this year's French Open that ended at after 3 a.m. "If I play in a certain way, I could have my shot in the next round."



Alcaraz vs. Medvedev is a rematch from last year's semifinals, when Alcaraz won in straight sets before getting past Djokovic in the final.

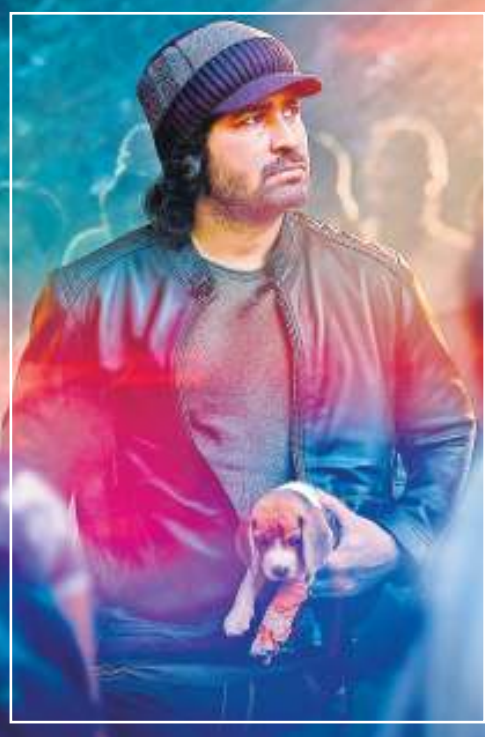
It also offers a contrast between a talented attacker (Alcaraz) and a consummate defender (Medvedev). "The most difficult thing

about facing Daniil, or the most special thing about him, is he can reach every ball," Alcaraz said. "Well, he is like a wall. Every ball bounces back."

Asked what Alcaraz's best quality is, Medvedev began this way: "To be honest, everything." That sounds like an

exaggeration. Might not be. "That's where it's tough to play against him, because you know whatever shot you hit,

he can hit a winner from there. So you try to make his life difficult. You try to hit the shot as good as you can. Maybe he goes for it and he cannot make it," said Medvedev, who has won just two of their previous six encounters. "Carlos can do whatever, from any position," Medvedev said, "and that's not easy to play against." Tommy Paul, the 12th-seeded American who lost to Alcaraz in the quarterfinals, put something else on the lengthy list of the Spaniard's attributes. "He moves unbelievably well. He's probably the quickest player. It's very hard to get the ball by him," Paul said. "Grass suits him. He moves incredible on the grass. It's not easy to change direction the way that he does. He stays pretty low. Yeah, I mean, it's not easy." And then, in a nod to the sort of highlight-reel material Alcaraz regularly produces, Paul added: "Half of the job when you're out there is not to let him win one of those crazy points - because when he does, he kind of gets on a roll."



TOOFAN SEALS RELEASE DATE

Vijay Antony's latest film, *Toofan*, is set to hit theaters worldwide on August 2, announced the makers on Thursday. Produced by Kamal Bora, D. Lalitha, B. Pradeep, and Pankaj Bora under the Infinity Film Ventures banner, this film follows their previous collaborations, *Raghavan* and *Hathya*, which also starred Vijay Antony. Directed by Vijay Milton, *Toofan* is a poetic

action entertainer that promises a compelling narrative. The film tells the story of a man who transforms the future of a society that initially dismissed him. Set on an island, the movie was shot in Andaman and Diu Daman. The songs and trailer have already garnered significant attention, and the team is hopeful for a similarly enthusiastic reception upon its release.

Kavin, Nayanthara join forces

Actor Kavin is set to embark on his next cinematic journey with a new film directed by Vishnu Edavan, an assistant director to the acclaimed Lokesh Kanagaraj.

The film's official pooja ceremony is scheduled to take place in Chennai tomorrow, marking the auspicious beginning of the pro-

ject.

The shooting for the film is slated to commence on July 22, promising a fresh and engaging storyline. Nayanthara will star as the female lead, adding star power and anticipation to the project.

Produced by 7 Screen Studio, the film is expected to be a major highlight in Kavin's career.



Kanguva 2 announced!

Studio Green's highly anticipated film, *Kanguva*, starring Suriya, is generating immense excitement among fans. The newly released teaser offered a tantalising glimpse into its thrilling world, heightening anticipation for the movie. In a thrilling development, the makers have officially announced a sequel, *Kanguva 2*.

Producer KE Gnanvel Raja revealed in a recent interview that *Kanguva* will be a two-part film, with the first installment concluding on an exhilarating note that sets the stage for the sequel. Production for *Kanguva 2* is scheduled to begin by the end of 2025, with a planned release in the first half of 2027, either in January or during the summer.

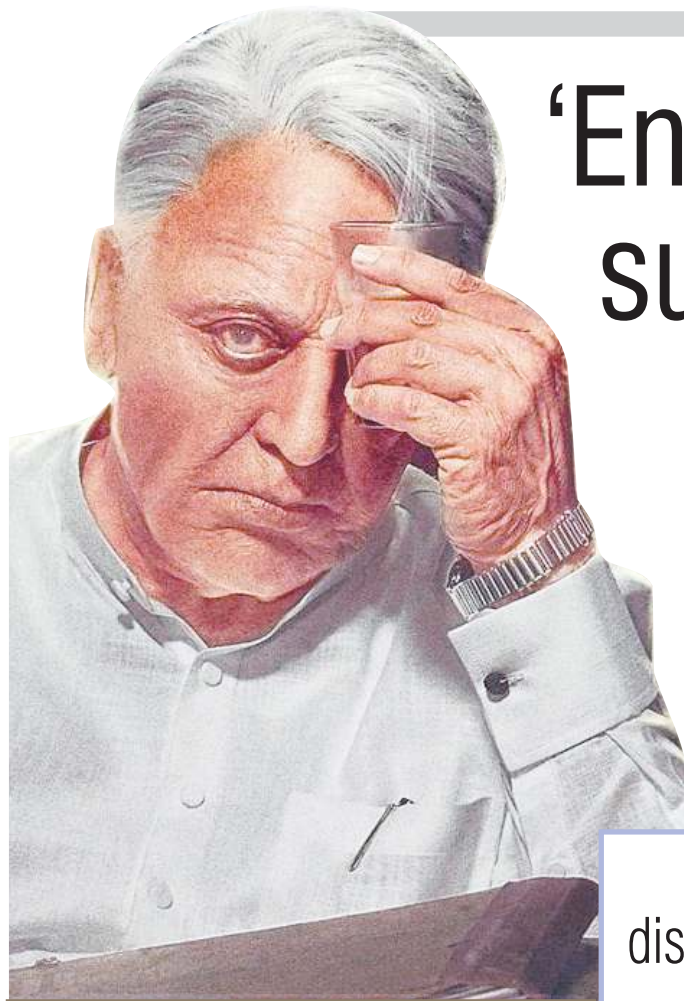
The sequel's script is currently underway, with shooting set to start towards the end of next year or early 2026. The sequel is expected to hit

theaters in early 2027, likely in January or April. The teaser has already intensified excitement for the film, and fans are eagerly awaiting the trailer.

In *Kanguva*, Suriya takes on a never-before-seen avatar for his 39th film as a lead actor, showcasing multiple distinct personas. The newly released poster of Suriya has only added to the growing buzz around the film.

Joining Suriya in the cast are Bobby Deol and Disha Patani, making their Tamil debuts, along with Natarajan Subramaniam, Jagapathi Babu, Yogi Babu, Redin Kingsley, Kovai Sarala, Anandaraj, Ravi Raghavendra, K. S. Ravikumar, and B. S. Avinash.

Studio Green has partnered with top distribution houses to ensure a massive global release for *Kanguva* on October 10, 2024.



Kiran Abbavaram's KA audio rights bagged by Saregama

The renowned audio label Saregama has secured the music rights for Kiran Abbavaram's highly anticipated period thriller *KA*. Produced by Chinta Gopalakrishna Reddy under the banner of Srichakraas Entertainments, the film is noted for its impressive production values. Directed by the duo Sujith and Sandeep, *KA* is set in a rural backdrop and promises a gripping action-filled narrative.

The film's music, composed by Sam CS, is expected to enhance the cinematic experience with its rich soundscapes. With filming completed, the focus has now shifted to post-production.

KA is scheduled for a grand theatrical release in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada. Since its announcement, *KA* has received substantial positive attention and is marked as Kiran Abbavaram's exciting comeback.



'End credits in Indian 2 will surprise all,' says Shankar

After nearly 28 years, Kamal Haasan is preparing for the release of the highly anticipated sequel to *Indian*, titled *Indian 2*. The film is set to hit theaters on July 2.

At a press conference for *Indian 2* in Kochi, director S. Shankar teased an exciting surprise for fans—those who see the sequel in theaters might get a special preview of *Indian 3*.

Shankar revealed that there is a possibility the trailer for *Indian 3* will be

shown during the end credits of *Indian 2*. He indicated that if the post-production for *Indian 3* stays on track, audiences could get a sneak peek of the next installment in cinemas.

The director also shared plans to release *Indian 3* within six months of *Indian 2*'s debut, provided everything proceeds smoothly. Shankar noted, "If the VFX work is completed on schedule, it's feasible to release within six months. And, as a special treat, you

might see the trailer for *Indian 3* at the end of *Indian 2*.

Indian 2 features Kamal Haasan, Siddharth, Rakul Preet Singh, SJ Suryah, Bobby Simha, and Priya Bhavani Shankar, and continues the story of Senapathy—a freedom fighter turned vigilante dedicated to combating corruption and societal ills.

Kamal Haasan initially announced *Indian 2* in 2017. The project faced setbacks when Sri

Venkateswara Creations withdrew due to escalating production costs, and Lyca Productions subsequently took over. Filming, which began in January 2019, was disrupted by a tragic accident and the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a two-year delay.

Red Giant Movies later joined as co-producers, and filming was completed in March 2024. Directed by Shankar, *Indian 2* was produced with a budget of Rs 250 crores.

Mythri Movie distributors to release Darling in TG

Mythri Movie Distributors LLP is set to release the upcoming film *Darling* in the Nizam region.

This film, a family entertainer, is produced by K. Niranjan Reddy and Smt. Chaitanya, with debutant Aswin Raam at the helm. It stars Priyadarshi and Nabha Natesh in the lead roles.

This marks Mythri Movie Distributors LLP's latest venture following their successful collaborations on the Pan-India sensation *Hanu-Man*—which they distributed in Nizam—and major hits such as Prabhas' *Salaar* and Vijay Sethupathi's *Maharaja* in the same region. Their track record in Nizam distribution has been notably successful, and they now bring *Darling* to this territory.

Meanwhile, the film *Darling* was censored and the movie was awarded with a U/A certificate. The final duration of the movie is 2:20 hours, which is ideal for the movie of the genre. The core point and unique narration are the major highlights of the movie which is now capitalizing on positive censor reports.

As we already saw, Priyadarshi and Nabha Natesh played their parts brilliantly. While Darshi played an innocent husband, Nabha stole the show as Lady Aparichitudu who torments her hubby with a split personality disorder. Aswin Raam's writing was remarkable, he dealt with the subject convincingly. *Darling* is a full-meal family entertainer with adequate hilarity and emotional climax. 3 songs and BGM scored by Vivek Sagar are an added attraction. The movie has some surprising guest roles as well. The film's theatrical trailer has already created a buzz, showcasing its promise as a hilarious and engaging family entertainer.

Darling is scheduled for release on July 19th.



Venkatesh, Anil Ravipudi's film to release for Sankranti

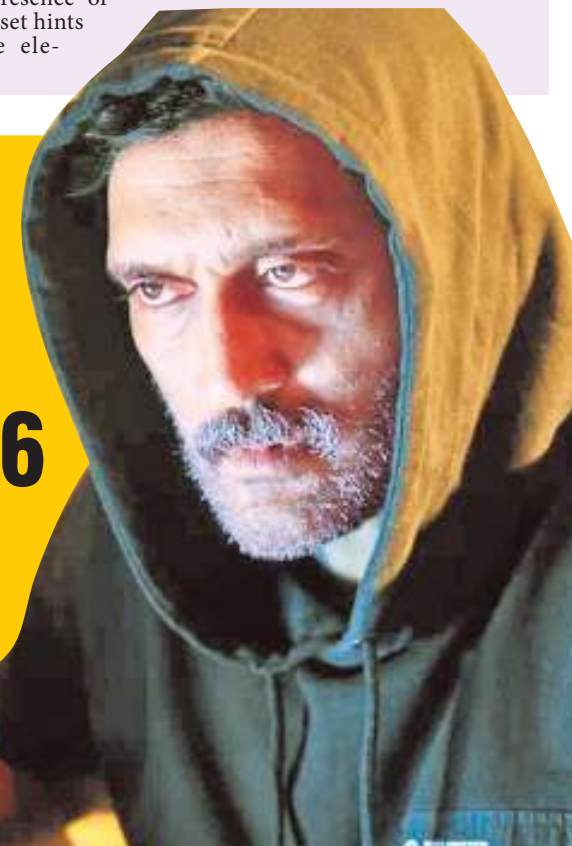
Victory Venkatesh, the hit-making director Anil Ravipudi, and the successful production house Sri Venkateswara Creations are reuniting with a shared Sankranti spirit. This trio is collaborating for the third time, aiming to deliver another blockbuster. The upcoming film, Production No. 58 from SVC, is set to hit theaters during the Sankranti festival, as announced by the makers.

The film was launched with much fanfare recently, and the regular shoot has now begun in Hyderabad. The main cast is currently filming in a palace setting, with a making video revealing a dynamic work atmosphere. The presence of large guns on set hints at the crime ele-

ments featured in the movie.

This new project is an exceptional triangular crime entertainer, focusing on three key characters: the protagonist, his ex-girlfriend, and his remarkable wife. Meenakshi Chaudhary and Aishwarya Rajesh will star alongside Venkatesh.

The film boasts a talented team of technicians. Bheems Ceciroleo is composing the music, Sameer Reddy is handling the cinematography, A. S. Prakash is the production designer, and Tammiraju is the editor. S. Krishna and G. Adhinarayana are contributing as co-writers, with V. Venkat serving as the action director.



Case No. 15 hits theatres on July 26

Mark your calendars for July 26, as the highly anticipated suspense crime thriller *Case No. 15* is set to premiere in theaters worldwide. Directed by Tadakala Vankar Rajesh, this film promises to keep audiences on the edge of their seats with its gripping storyline and powerful scenes.

Ajay delivers a standout performance, while Ravi Krash brings a unique portrayal of a police officer to the screen. The film features exceptional music by John and stunning cinematography by Anam Venkat, enhancing the cinematic experience.

Produced with meticulous attention to detail, *Case No. 15* is sure to be a memorable watch. BG Ventures and Kalyangari the forces together have brought this film to life.

Suriya's 44th film next scheduled in Kerala

The next schedule for actor Suriya's highly anticipated 44th film is set to take place in Kerala. The week-long shoot is scheduled from July 19 to July 25, during which pivotal fight scenes will be filmed.

This segment of the shoot is expected to feature intense action sequences, adding to the film's excitement and anticipation. The production team is gearing up to capture these dynamic scenes in picturesque locations across Kerala, enhancing the film's visual appeal.

Fans can look forward to an official update on the film later this month, which is expected to reveal more details about the project. Stay tuned for further announcements on this high-profile film as it progresses towards its next major milestone.

