

December 16, 2025 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. The Central Government explained in Parliament that the recent rapid increase in the prices of gold and silver is due to heightened geopolitical tensions. In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary stated:
 - i. Domestic prices of gold and silver depend on international price trends. The value of the Indian rupee against the US dollar also reflects in the price. However, the main reason for the recent rapid increase in gold and silver prices is the heightened geopolitical tensions.
 - ii. There is also uncertainty regarding global economic growth. Therefore, many consider gold and silver as safe investments and are buying them in large quantities. Central banks of various countries are also increasing their gold reserves. Large international companies are also investing heavily in gold.
 - iii. In India, gold holds great cultural significance. People also consider gold as an important investment. Since gold is not only an ornament but also a saving for the future, its price continues to rise.
 - iv. It has been stated that in the current financial year, until September, India has imported gold worth ₹2.4 lakh crore and silver worth ₹29,000 crore.
2. The Central Government is set to introduce the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) or VB-G RAM G Bill' in Parliament as a replacement for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).
 - i. According to this new bill, the 100-day employment scheme is to be transformed into a 125-day employment scheme. This bill is expected to be introduced in the current winter session of Parliament.
 - ii. Under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, wage employment is provided for a minimum of 100 days in rural areas every financial year. This employment is provided to those who voluntarily come forward to undertake manual labour. The objective of this act is to improve the livelihood security of families living in rural areas.
 - iii. The Central Government has now prepared a new bill to change the name of this act and make other amendments to it. According to this bill, the name of the act has been changed to the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) or VB-G RAM G Bill'.
 - iv. Increase to 125 days: Under this act, the number of days for which employment is provided every financial year has been increased to 125. Accordingly, the new bill provides a legal guarantee for 125 days of wage employment.
 - v. The new bill focuses on and prioritizes four key areas: water conservation (including protection, irrigation, rejuvenation of water bodies, and afforestation), essential rural infrastructure (construction and improvement of roads in rural areas, panchayat buildings, anganwadis, etc.) livelihood-related infrastructure development (creating assets to improve rural livelihoods such as training centers, rural markets, and grain storage), and climate change adaptation (activities related to disaster risk reduction).
 - vi. The bill states that no work should be undertaken under the 125-day employment scheme during the peak agricultural seasons to ensure that sufficient agricultural laborers are available for farming activities during those periods. State Governments must declare the periods during which the cultivation and harvesting activities are at their peak.

- vii. According to the new bill, if work is not provided within 15 days of applying for employment under the 125-day employment scheme, the State Government must provide them with an allowance. This allowance should not be less than one-fourth of the declared wage for the first 30 days of the financial year and not less than half of the wage payable for the remaining period of the financial year. Until the Central Government announces the wages to be paid under the 125-day employment scheme, the wages paid under the 100-day employment scheme will continue.
- viii. The 100-day employment scheme is being implemented with 100% funding from the Central Government. However, according to the new bill, the Central Government will share the financial burden with the states under the 125-day employment scheme. Accordingly, in states and union territories with legislative assemblies, the Central Government should contribute 60 percent and the State Governments 40 percent of the funding for the scheme. Meanwhile, in the Northeastern States and the states in the Himalayan region, the Central Government should provide 90 percent and the State Governments 10 percent of the funding for the scheme.
- ix. The bill states that within six months from the date the 'Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) or VB-G RAM G Bill' Act comes into force, the states must formulate an employment scheme in accordance with the provisions of that Act.
3. The Union Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal stated that the trade agreement negotiations between India and the United States are in their final stages.
- i. India and the United States are holding discussions regarding a trade agreement to resolve the issue of high tariffs imposed by the US Government on Indian goods imported into the country, and also concerning a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement. In this regard, a US delegation led by US Trade Representative Rick Schweitzer visited India last week.
- ii. He also stated that the Free Trade Agreement negotiations between India and New Zealand are likely to conclude soon, and that efforts are being made to resolve the differences in the Free Trade Agreement negotiations between India and the European Union.
4. The Hong Kong's pro-democracy former media tycoon Jimmy Lai (78) has been found guilty in a national security law case. Following this, he faces a life sentence.
- i. In the verdict delivered by Judge Esther Toh, it was stated: Jimmy Lai conspired with foreign forces to threaten national security. He repeatedly called on the United States to overthrow the Chinese Government. His objective was to overthrow the Chinese Communist Party. He was the mastermind behind the conspiracies. His statements were contradictory and unreliable. Therefore, the charges against him in the case are confirmed, the verdict stated.
- ii. Jimmy Lai denied all the charges. He has been imprisoned since August 2020. His family has stated that his health has deteriorated significantly, as he is mostly held in solitary confinement.
- iii. Hong Kong, which was under British colonial rule, was handed back to China in 1997. At that time, China agreed to govern Hong Kong under the 'one country, two systems' principle. Accordingly, it was stated that Hong Kong residents would have rights that people living in mainland China do not have.
- iv. However, the Government brutally suppressed the protests that took place in the region demanding democratic reforms.

- v. Furthermore, the Chinese Parliament passed the controversial National Security Law in 2020. Using this law, numerous pro-democracy activists were arrested.
- vi. As part of this, the regional Government leveled various charges against Jimmy Lai, the founder of Hong Kong's pro-democracy newspaper 'Apple Daily', and imprisoned him. Due to government pressure, the newspaper ceased publication.
- 5. The Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya stated in the Lok Sabha that the BCCI is not a recognized National Sports Federation.
- 6. Retired IAS officer Rajkumar Goyal assumed office as India's new Chief Information Commissioner.
 - i. At the swearing-in ceremony held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President Droupadi Murmu administered the oath of office and secrecy to Rajkumar Goyal.
- 7. On the occasion of the 75th death anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who is hailed as the Iron Man of India (December 15), the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and several other leaders paid their tributes.
- 8. The Central Government introduced three bills in the Lok Sabha, including the bill allowing private companies in Nuclear Power generation and the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill.
 - i. A meeting of the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Modi, was recently held in New Delhi. In this meeting, the bill allowing private companies in nuclear power generation was approved.
 - ii. Furthermore, the cabinet meeting also approved the bill to establish the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan, with the aim of creating a single body to replace the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), and the bill to repeal 71 laws that have long been ineffective.
- 9. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on a two-day visit to Jordan, met with King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein of Jordan and held discussions on bilateral relations.
 - i. The meeting took place at the Husseinia Palace in the capital city of Amman.
 - ii. The Prime Minister Modi undertook this two-day visit to commemorate 75 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.
 - iii. Jordan is a major supplier of fertilizers to India, including phosphate and potash. Bilateral trade stands at ₹25,200 crore.
 - iv. There are 17,500 people of Indian origin residing there. The majority of them work in the textile, construction, and manufacturing sectors.
 - v. After concluding his visit to Jordan, Prime Minister Modi is scheduled to visit Ethiopia and Oman.