

January 17, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. The United States has sent warships, including a massive aircraft carrier, towards the Middle East. Furthermore, tensions in Iran have escalated as it is being said that the US could attack the country at any moment.

(i) The protests against the ruling regime in Iran have been ongoing for a week. Reports from the country indicate that more than 2,600 people have been killed so far in the Government forces' efforts to suppress the protests.

(ii) US President Trump, who has openly expressed support for the protesters, had warned that if the Iranian Government forces attacked the protesters, US forces would intervene in support of the protesters. However, the Iranian rulers did not heed his warning.

(iii) In this context, the US has sent the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, along with several warships and a submarine, to the Middle East. Sources indicate that these vessels will reach the Middle East within a week.

(iv) Some European Union officials have stated that there is a possibility of the US attacking Iran within the next 24 hours.

2. In a case related to the imposition of martial law, a South Korean court sentenced former President Yoon Suk-yeol to five years in prison.

(i) This is the first verdict delivered in the eight criminal cases related to the controversial martial law he imposed in December 2024. This law also led to his impeachment.

(ii) He was sentenced for the crimes of misrepresenting the martial law proclamation and for avoiding the mandatory full cabinet meeting required by law.

3. Social media companies have deleted 4.7 million accounts belonging to Australian children.

(i) Considering that some children were spending excessive time on social media platforms, and with the aim of preventing their future from being negatively affected, the Australian Government banned children under 16 from using social media platforms last December. A law was also passed to enforce this ban.

(ii) The law also includes provisions for imposing fines on social media companies if they fail to delete the accounts of children under 16.

(iii) Following this, 10 social media companies – Facebook, TikTok, X, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, Kik, Reddit, Threads, and Twitch – have informed the Australian Government that they have deleted 4.7 million accounts.

(iv) Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and Threads, has stated that 550,000 accounts were deleted from these three platforms alone.

4. The Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal stated that the Free Trade Agreement between India and the European Union is in its final stages and described it as the largest of its kind ever seen.

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(i) Speaking to reporters on this matter, he said: Since 2014, the BJP-led NDA Government has finalized seven trade agreements with Australia, Britain, Oman, New Zealand, the United Arab Emirates, the European Free Trade Association, and Mauritius.

(ii) He further stated that the European Union-India agreement, which includes 27 developed countries including France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Denmark, and Sweden, will be the largest ever finalized. It will be mutually beneficial to both sides and will be excellent for Indian export sectors.

(iii) European Council President António Luís Santos da Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen are expected to participate as Chief Guests in India's 77th Republic Day celebrations. Following this, the conclusion of the negotiations for this agreement is expected to be announced on January 27th.

(iv) Confirming this, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said that negotiations are currently underway to resolve the remaining issues before the announcement of the agreement at the end of this month.

(v) This agreement is considered significant against the backdrop of global trade disruptions caused by excessive tariffs imposed by the United States.

(vi) In this agreement, India seeks duty-free market access for labor-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, handlooms, and certain processed food products. Meanwhile, the European Union is seeking greater access to Indian markets for cars, wines, and new high-tech products.

(vii) The European Union accounts for approximately 17 percent of India's total exports, while India's share in the EU's exports is 9 percent. In the 2024-25 financial year, the value of trade between the two sides was US\$136.53 billion (₹12.38 lakh crore). Of this, India exported goods worth US\$75.85 billion (₹6.88 lakh crore) and imported goods worth US\$60.68 billion (₹5.5 lakh crore).

5. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized the need for reforms in the UN Security Council in his address on his priorities for 2026.

(i) He further warned that powerful countries in the Global South must lead UN institutions, otherwise, those clinging to power today will have to pay the price tomorrow.

(ii) Addressing the 193-member UN General Assembly, Secretary-General António Guterres stated: "The problem-solving methods of 1945 will not solve the problems of 2026. The global GDP of developed economies is shrinking, but the output of emerging economies is increasing."

(iii) "Every day, trade in the Global South is outpacing trade in the Global North. The UN system must reflect this changing world. Reforming international financial and trade institutions is not only important but essential. This also applies to the Security Council."

(iv) India has long been advocating for reforms in the UN Security Council. India consistently argues that the structure, created in 1945 with 5 permanent and 10 non-permanent members, is irrelevant to today's world.

(v) It insists that the Council should be expanded in both permanent and non-permanent categories, and that India has every right to a permanent seat in the organization.

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(vi) India last served as a non-permanent member during the 2021-22 period. India pointed to the divisions within the council regarding conflicts such as the Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas war as evidence of its shortcomings.

6. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla stated that democratic institutions can remain strong and relevant only when they are transparent, inclusive of all sections of society, and accountable to the people.

(i) The Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 28th Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers Conference (CSPOC) in Delhi. The Conference concluded with a renewed commitment to making democratic institutions people-centric.

(ii) During the concluding session, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla handed over the Chairmanship of the 29th CSPOC to Sir Lindsay Hoyle, the Speaker of the British House of Commons.

7. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin honored Tamil scholars by presenting them with the Tamil Nadu Government's Thiruvalluvar Day awards at a ceremony held at Valluvar Kottam in Chennai.

(i) On the occasion of Thiruvalluvar Day, the award ceremony for Tamil scholars who have served and brought glory to the Tamil language, literature, and the upliftment of the Tamil society was held at Valluvar Kottam in Chennai, organized by the Department of Tamil Development.

(ii) The Chief Minister M.K. Stalin participated in the event and presented the 2026 Thiruvalluvar Award to Agamic scholar M.P. Sathyavel Muruganar.

(iii) Following this, the Chief Minister M.K. Stalin presented the 2025 Periyar Award to Advocate A. Arulmozhi, the Ambedkar Award to VCK General Secretary and MLA Chinthanai Selvan, the Anna Award to Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan, the Kamarajar Award to National Integration Council Chairman S.M. Idhayathullah, the Bharathiyar Award to poet Nellai Jayantha, the Bharathidasan Award to poet Yugabharathi, the Thiru. Vi. Ka. Award to former Chief Secretary V. Irai Anbu, the Ki. Aa. Pe. Viswanatham Award to Dr. S. Sellappa, and the Kalaignar Award to former Rajya Sabha member and writer Viduthalai Virumbi.

(iv) Similarly, the award ceremony for the 2025 Ilakkiya Mamani Awards was held. The Chief Minister M.K. Stalin presented the Ilakkiya Mamani awards to orator

T. Ramalingam in the Traditional Tamil category, senior Communist Party of India leader C. Mahendran in the Research Tamil category, and writer R. Narendrakumar in the Creative Tamil category.

(v) Each awardee who received the Thiruvalluvar Day award was given a cash prize of Rs. 5 lakhs and a one-sovereign gold medal. They were then presented with certificates of merit and honoured with shawls.

8. The Tamil Nadu Drug Control Department has banned the use and sale of the children's cough medicine 'Almond Kid' after it was found to contain a toxic chemical. A public warning has been issued regarding this.

(i) Those who have sold or used the medicine have been instructed to report the information immediately.

(ii) Medicines containing the compounds 'Levocetirizine Dihydrochloride' and 'Montelukast Sodium' are used for coughs, allergies, and asthma. Several leading companies manufacture medicines with this combination.

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(iii) In this context, a company from Bihar, Tridus Remedies, was marketing this medicine for children under the name Almond Kid. Generally, the compound propylene glycol is used as a solvent in liquid medicines. However, it was discovered that the Almond Kid medicine contained diethylene glycol.

(iv) This chemical is used to liquefy resins, oils, paints, and inks during their manufacture. Ingesting medicine containing this chemical can lead to kidney failure and death.

9. Air pollution, which causes more deaths in India every year than violence, terrorism, infectious diseases, and natural disasters combined, has not yet generated significant debate or influenced Government policies. Experts say there is a misconception among the public that air pollution is a problem confined to Delhi and that it is regional, seasonal, and situational.

(i) Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}), with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers or less, causes lasting and significant damage to the lungs of Indians, transcending the boundaries of time, state, politics, and media. The cycle of forgetfulness among Indians, who confront air pollution with anger in November, indifference in March, and amnesia in May, perpetuates this pollution crisis.

(ii) The Supreme Court has long held that the right to life includes the right to dignity, health, and a life with clean air. In a 1991 case involving the Bihar State Government, the Supreme Court ruled that the right to life includes the right to enjoy clean water and air. Air pollution is creating a severe crisis for the human dignity and guarantee of life provided by the Indian Constitution. This constitutional crisis cannot be considered merely a seasonal event.

(iii) In environmental activist M.C. Mehta's cases, ranging from vehicular emissions to industrial pollution, various courts have affirmed that clean air is not a policy preference; it is a constitutional right. In the 1996 Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum case, the court issued an order to formulate precautionary principles to uphold Fundamental Rights to Environmental protection.

(iv) The Indian Constitution empowers the courts to intervene under Articles 32 and 226 when Governments fail in their moral obligations. The Supreme Court directly monitored the air quality of Delhi, which was grappling with air pollution, under these categories. The Supreme Court took action to regulate the burning of agricultural waste and to ensure Inter-State coordination to reduce air pollution.

(v) High Courts across the country have taken suo motu cognizance of cases concerning river pollution, declining groundwater levels, and illegal construction, all of which lead to environmental degradation. The National Green Tribunal's power to take suo motu action when urgent environmental protection is needed and when Government authorities fail to provide solutions was affirmed in the 2021 Mumbai Municipal Corporation - Ankita Sinha case.

(vi) Experts, who state that awareness and law enforcement are essential to resolve the crisis caused by air pollution, believe that there is a moral contradiction in human minds that cannot be rectified by legal principles alone. In India, protests erupt when ideological, moral, or religious sentiments are hurt. A perceived insult through a film dialogue, song, social media post, speech, or book triggers nationwide mobilization, outrage on the streets, debates in Parliament, and relentless mainstream news coverage. Yet, when the air becomes toxic, when rivers carry sewage, when forests are destroyed, when lakes disappear, when children's lungs are damaged, when adults struggle to breathe, and when citizens' life expectancy is reduced, even non-violent protests do not occur. Our sentiments, which are hurt by words, remain unmoved by the pollution that steals our breath.

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(vii) Devout religious believers would never engage in activities such as burning garbage that emits toxic fumes, bursting firecrackers, polluting rivers, misusing vehicles, or destroying forests. It is a painful paradox that India, where the vast majority of people have faith in religion, is breathing toxic air.

(viii) While Article 51-A of the Constitution emphasizes the duty of every Indian citizen towards environmental protection, it is undeniable that due to indifference and negligence, many people at various times engage in burning waste and polluting water bodies. Toxic air and polluted water are created not only by the failures of environmental policies but also by the individual actions of citizens, stemming from a lack of duty, discipline, and moral conscience.

