February 1, 2026 - Dinamani Newspaper - Tit bits

1. The United States has approved the sale of advanced weapons worth $15.67 billion (approximately ₹1.43 lakh crore) to Israel and Saudi Arabia.

(i) The US State Department issued this important announcement amidst rising war tensions in the Middle East region due to fears of a potential US military attack on Iran. A report on this matter has also been submitted to the US Congress.

(ii) To Saudi Arabia:

The US has decided to provide Saudi Arabia with weapons worth approximately $9 billion.

This primarily includes 730 'Patriot' missiles and their necessary equipment.

Regarding this, the US State Department stated, "Although Saudi Arabia is not a member of NATO, it is a very important ally of the United States. Ensuring Saudi Arabia's security is essential for the political stability and economic progress of the Gulf region.

These missiles will further strengthen the country's air defense system."

(iii) To Israel:

The arms sale to Israel is divided into four categories. The total value is $6.67 billion.

Thirty 'Apache' attack helicopters equipped with advanced targeting systems will be provided at a cost of $3.8 billion.

In addition, Israel is purchasing 3,250 light military vehicles worth approximately $1.98 billion. Similarly, $740 million has been allocated for modernizing the engines of existing armored vehicles, and $150 million for other helicopters.

(iv) Amidst peace efforts...:

US President Trump is making serious efforts to bring an end to the Israel-Hamas conflict, which has been ongoing for over two years. While he is planning, through a peace committee, to reconstruct the war-torn Palestinian territories and establish peace there, this arms sale announcement has been made. The US State Department has clarified that 'this arms sale will not alter the military balance in the region. Instead, it will only increase Israel's defensive capabilities necessary to protect its borders and its people.'

2. In the eastern part of the African nation of the Democratic Republic of Congo, continuous rainfall triggered a landslide, causing the collapse of mines where coltan ore is extracted.

(i) The M23 rebel group, which controls the area, reported that more than 200 workers died in this horrific accident in the Rubaya region of North Kivu province.

(ii) It has been reported that "more than 200 people have died so far; many are still buried under the earth, and rescue operations are continuing."

(iii) 40 percent of the world's coltan ore comes from Congo. A large portion of this ore, which plays a crucial role in the manufacture of smartphones and computers, is extracted from the Rubaya mines. These mines, which have been under the control of rebels since May 2024, experienced the landslide while workers were manually excavating without proper safety precautions.

3. Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina defeated world number 1 Aryna Sabalenka to win the Australian Open title for the first time. Sabalenka has lost in the final for the second consecutive year.

(i) The Australian Open, the first Grand Slam tournament of the year, is being held in Melbourne. In the women's singles final, Belarus's world number 1 Sabalenka and former Wimbledon champion Rybakina competed against each other.

(ii) Sabalenka had won the Australian Open title in 2023 and 2024. In the 2025 final, she lost to Madison Keys, thus missing out on the title.

4. In the Track Asia Cup Chennai 2026 competition, Indonesia won the gold medal in the men's elite category. Uzbekistan won the silver, and the SDAT Racing team won the bronze.

(i) The Track Asia Cup competition, organized by the Asian Cycling Confederation, the Cycling Federation of India, the Tamil Nadu Cycling Association, and SDAT, was held at the velodrome in Vandalur, near Chennai.

(ii) The Indonesian team won the gold medal in the men's elite category, which covered a distance of 4 km.

5. Fire Open tournament is associated with Squash.

6. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be travelling to Punjab to participate in the Guru Ravidas Jayanti celebrations.

(i) The 649th birth anniversary of Guru Ravidas, a 15th-century Bhakti movement saint, is being celebrated. On this occasion, the Prime Minister Modi will visit Dera Sachkhand Ballan in Jalandhar, Punjab, the main centre of the Guru Ravidas faith.

(ii) He will also participate in the renaming ceremony of Adampur Airport as Sri Guru Ravidas Airport and inaugurate a new terminal at Ludhiana Airport.

7. The Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who is set to present her ninth consecutive Union Budget for the financial year 2026-27 has utilized her MPLADS (Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme) funds to drive a unique agricultural empowerment initiative in Karnataka, the state she represents in the Rajya Sabha.

(i) The "Kalyana Sampada" Initiative involves selecting a backward village in different districts to implement schemes that empower farmers.

(ii) Identifying specific agricultural products in each district and transform them into value-added goods for better marketability.

(iii) The initiative works through Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), with NABARD assisting in selecting organizations to run food processing and training units.

(iv) She has selected seven districts in Karnataka for these projects: Bellary, Bidar, Kalaburagi, Koppal, Raichur, Vijayanagara, and Yadgir.

(v) She has allocated ₹50 lakh from her MPLADS funds to each of these seven rural areas to establish processing and training infrastructure.

(vi) District-Specific Projects and Impacts

- Bidar (Soybean): In Petkunda village, funds were used for a soybean training and common facility center, producing soy paneer, flavored milk, and flour, benefiting over 21,000 people indirectly.
- Bellary (Chili): A project involving 1,115 people, including 372 women, focuses on chili cultivation and processing.
- Kalaburagi (Sorghum): A 1,000-member farmer group produces cleaned sorghum, sorghum flour, and sorghum popcorn.
- Raichur (Pulses): Assistance was provided to 14 pulse mills and agricultural marketing committees to produce branded, long-shelf-life pulses.
- Vijayanagara (Groundnut): In the arid Kudligi taluk, a center was established to produce peanut butter, salted peanuts, and peanut candy, benefiting 575 farmers directly.
- Yadgir (Groundnut): The Patpalli Women's FPO runs a groundnut processing and training center encouraging women entrepreneurs and increased farmer income.

(vii) The MPLADS funds not just as a source for infrastructure, but as a catalyst for socio-economic transformation and sustainable development in rural Karnataka.

8. The additional excise duty imposed by the Central Government on tobacco products, including cigarettes, is set to come into effect from Sunday (February 1).

Similarly, the new health cess levy on pan masala products will also come into effect from February 1st.

As a result, the prices of tobacco products, including cigarettes and pan masala products are expected to increase significantly.

The Central Government introduced the Goods and Services Tax (GST), a single tax system, on July 1, 2017. Since then, a 28 percent GST and an additional cess have been levied on cigarettes, tobacco, hookah, zarda, and other tobacco products.

Meanwhile, with the GST rate changes and the repayment of the loan taken to compensate for the states' GST revenue loss during the COVID-19 pandemic completed on January 31st, the compensation cess is also set to be discontinued. To ensure that the tax rate levied on tobacco products, including cigarettes, and pan masala products does not decrease but remains at a high level, the Central Government introduced and passed the 'Central Excise Amendment Bill 2025' and the 'National Security Cess Bill 2025', which imposes a new cess on pan masala production, in Parliament last December.

Additional tax from today: Both of these new amendment acts come into effect from Sunday (February 1).

Accordingly, an additional tax of Rs.2.05 will be levied on each filterless cigarette of 65 mm length. An additional tax of Rs.2.10 will be levied on filter cigarettes of the same length.

65 mm to 70 mm... An additional tax of Rs.3.40 to Rs. 4 will be levied on cigarettes of standard length.

An additional tax of Rs.5.40 will be levied on cigarettes measuring 70 mm to 75 mm in length.

Cigarettes with unusual or non-standard designs will be subject to a maximum additional tax of Rs.8.50 per stick. The most popular cigarette brands will not fall under this tax bracket.

Chewing tobacco and zarda will be subject to an 82 percent excise duty, and gutkha to a 91 percent excise duty.

Furthermore, under the new National Security Cess Act, pan masala manufacturers across the country must apply for fresh registration of their companies from February 1st. These companies are mandated to install surveillance cameras that clearly show all packing machines and to preserve the recordings for a minimum of 24 months.

These companies must also inform the excise authorities about the number of machines in their premises and their capacities. The cess tax will be levied based on the production capacity of these machines.

That is, after taking into account the 40 percent GST, the total tax burden on pan masala will be maintained at the current level of 88 percent.

Moreover, companies have the right to claim a reduction in excise duty if a machine remains non-operational for a minimum of 15 consecutive days.

Sharing with States: The amount collected through this excise duty on tobacco products, including cigarettes, will be shared with the states based on the recommendations of the Finance Commission. Furthermore, under the National Security Cess Act, this cess tax will be levied on pan masala companies based on the production capacity of their machines.

Therefore, this cess tax levy will vary for each company depending on its production capacity. It is noteworthy that when introducing these bills in Parliament, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that a portion of this cess revenue would be shared with the states for health awareness or other health schemes.