February 4, 2026 - Dinamani Newspaper - Tit bits

1. NASA's Artemis-2 mission to send humans to the moon has been postponed due to a technical malfunction.

(i) Originally scheduled for this Sunday (February 8), the rocket was to be launched into space. As a preparatory measure, a fuel loading test was conducted last Monday. During this test, a hydrogen leak was detected at the base of the rocket.

(ii) As additional time is required to thoroughly investigate and rectify these malfunctions, NASA has postponed the rocket launch to March.

(iii) Consequently, the three American astronauts and one Canadian astronaut who were in quarantine for the space mission have been temporarily released. A new date will be officially announced after the technical investigations are complete.

(iv) This is considered a historic effort by NASA to send humans to the moon again after the 1970s. During this 10-day mission, the astronauts will orbit the moon and conduct detailed studies on the feasibility of human habitation there.

2. The Supreme Court has sternly told Meta and its subsidiary WhatsApp that they should not play with the privacy rights of the Indian people in the name of user data sharing.

(i) Meta, the owner of Facebook and WhatsApp, updated its WhatsApp privacy policy in 2021. Allegations arose that the company engaged in unfair business practices.

(ii) The Competition Commission of India (CCI), which investigated this allegation, imposed a fine of ₹213.14 crore on Meta.

(iii) Following this, Meta filed a petition against the CCI's penalty order in the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). However, the NCLAT upheld the fine imposed by the CCI. At the same time, the NCLAT overturned the CCI's order that WhatsApp should not share its data with companies operating under Meta for 5 years.

(iv) Subsequently, Meta and WhatsApp filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the penalty order. Meanwhile, the CCI also filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the NCLAT's decision to overturn the order preventing WhatsApp from sharing its data for 5 years.

(v) In this context, the petitions of Meta and WhatsApp were brought before a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant Jayamal Bagchi and Justice Vipul M. Pancholi on Tuesday. Following this, the judges accepted the petitions of both companies for hearing. However, they severely questioned WhatsApp's data sharing policy.

3. The Public health department officials stated that efforts to prevent fever outbreaks in Tamil Nadu have been intensified.

(i) Mosquito control efforts have been affected across the state, leading to an increase in fever cases, including dengue. In January alone, 1,500 people were affected by dengue fever. Additionally, 206 people were affected by leptospirosis, 43 by chikungunya, and 9 by malaria. Although there have been no fatalities due to these types of fevers, the public health department stated that efforts to prevent fever outbreaks have been intensified.

(ii) Regarding this, public health department officials said:

- Last year in Tamil Nadu, 25,521 people were affected by dengue fever, resulting in 12 deaths. Similarly, 321 people were affected by malaria, with 2 deaths. The continuation of these trends from last year is reflected in the dengue cases in January. At the same time, chikungunya cases have increased slightly.
- These types of fever cases will begin to decrease after March. If you experience fever-like symptoms, do not be negligent and seek medical treatment. Houses and surrounding areas should be kept clean to prevent the stagnation of fresh water, they added.

4. The Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's 2026-27 Budget speech is characterised as a pragmatic, macro-economic plan focused on long-term stability and continuous growth rather than flashy, short-term promises.

(i) Fiscal Management and Projections

- Historical Milestone: This marks the 9th consecutive budget presented by Nirmala Sitharaman (consisting of eight full budgets and one interim budget).
- Fiscal Deficit Control: The Government has successfully contained the Fiscal Deficit at 4.3%, staying within the target of keeping it below 4.5% of the GDP. This is a significant recovery from the 9.25% deficit recorded during the 2020-21 COVID-19 period.
- Expenditure and Revenue: Total expenditure is estimated at ₹53.5 lakh crore (a 7.7% increase), while non-borrowing revenue is projected at ₹36.5 lakh crore (a 7.2% increase).
- Debt-to-GDP Ratio: The budget aims to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio from 56.1% to 55.6% in the coming fiscal year.
- GDP Growth: The total GDP for 2026-27 is projected to reach ₹3,93,00,393 crore, reflecting a 10% increase over the current year's estimate.

(ii) Capital Investment and Infrastructure

- Capital Expenditure (CapEx): CapEx has been increased to ₹12.2 lakh crore, up from ₹11.2 lakh crore, maintaining a level of 3.1% of the GDP.
- Connectivity Vision: The budget outlines plans for 7 high-speed rail corridors and the development of 20 new national waterways.
- Resource Research: The Government plans to establish research centers for rare mineral resources in states including Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Odisha.

(iii) Taxation and Investment Incentives

- Strategic Focus: Rather than radical tax cuts, the focus is on widening the tax base, encouraging compliance, and simplifying the payment process.
- Global Data Centers: To attract foreign investment, a 20-year tax exemption was announced for foreign companies establishing global data center services in India.
- Electric Vehicles (EVs): Exemption from basic customs duty has been provided for raw materials

required for Lithium-ion cell production to support the EV industry.

(iv) Healthcare and Social Welfare

- Life-Saving Medicines: Customs duty has been waived for 17 cancer drugs and 7 medicines/specialty foods used for the treatment of rare diseases.
- Bio-Pharma Support: An allocation of ₹10,000 crore has been made for the "Bio-Pharma Shakti" scheme over the next five years to position India as a global manufacturing hub for medicine.

The budget is designed to shape the future by addressing current economic needs while building a foundation for the "Viksit Bharat" goal through continuous, stable growth.

5. Unprecedented surge in gold and silver prices.

(i) Global Drivers of the Price Surge

- Geopolitical Instability: Ongoing international wars and geopolitical tensions have led investors to seek gold as a "safe haven" asset.
- Central Bank Activity: Central banks worldwide, particularly in China and Russia, are buying massive quantities of gold to reduce their dependency on the US Dollar.
- US Economic Policies: The expected interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve, combined with a weak dollar index and rising unemployment in the US, are driving prices upward.
- Trade Settlements: Due to sanctions and trade wars involving the US, Russia, and China, many nations are increasingly opting to settle international trade using gold instead of dollars.

(ii) Key Statistical Facts and Records

- Historic Global Highs: Spot gold reached a record-breaking $5,026 per ounce.(1 ounce = 28.35 grams)
- Gram Value: One gram of gold reached $175, which is approximately equivalent to ₹16,000 in Indian currency.
- Weekly Growth Rates: In a single week, spot gold prices rose by 7.5%, while silver saw an even steeper increase of 11%.
- Silver Records: Globally, silver reached a historic peak of $98.70 per ounce. In Chennai, silver prices hit ₹300 per gram and reached ₹3.75 lakh per kg.

(iii) The Indian and Chennai Market Context

- Daily Price Hikes: On February 3, 2026, the price of ornamental gold (22k) in Chennai rose by ₹2,560 per sovereign in a single day to reach ₹1,14,160.
- Current Gram Rates: In Chennai, 22k gold reached ₹14,270 per gram, while pure 24k gold hit ₹15,567 per gram.
- Rapid Inflation: Between January 17 and January 26, 2026, the price of 22k gold in Chennai jumped from ₹13,280 to ₹15,025 per gram.
- Rupee Depreciation: The weakening of the Indian Rupee against the US Dollar has made gold imports significantly more expensive for the domestic market.
- Local Demand: The peak wedding season in South India has maintained high demand despite the record-breaking prices.

(iv) Market Shifts and Social Impact

- Shift to 18k Gold: Due to the extreme cost of 22k gold, a new market trend has emerged for 18k gold (priced at approximately ₹12,500 per gram) for designer jewelry to provide a more affordable alternative.
- Investment Migration: A decline in the Indian stock market has prompted domestic investors to move their capital into bullion (gold and silver).
- Impact on the Poor: Gold, once a standard savings tool, has now become "unattainable" for the poor and middle class.

6. Yumnam Khemchand has been elected as the leader of the Manipur BJP legislative party. This reportedly increases the likelihood of him becoming the new Chief Minister of the state and the end of President's Rule, paving the way for the formation of a new government.

(i) Violence prevailed in Manipur for more than two years due to clashes between the Meitei and Kuki communities. Approximately 260 people lost their lives, and thousands lost their homes. Due to this violence, the state Chief Minister Biren Singh resigned on February 9th of last year. Subsequently, President's Rule was imposed for six months until August of that year. The President's Rule, which was later extended for another six months, is set to end on February 12th.