

February 16, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. International Vallalar Conference was held in Kilpauk, Chennai on behalf of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR and CE) Department. The Chief Minister Stalin, who inaugurated the Conference, named the 'Thiruvottriyur high road' as 'Vallalar high road'.

(i) Subsequently, he inaugurated the Siddha Hospital and devotees' hostels built at a cost of Rs.12.23 crore at the Vallalar International Center in Vadalur through video conferencing.

(ii) The Chief Minister Stalin made eight new announcements at the International Vallalar Conference. Details of which are:-

- A memorial pillar will be erected at the Kanchipuram Ekambaranathar School premises in Kilpauk to mark the holding of the International Vallalar Conference.
- A Sanmarga Training School will be established in Vadalur and Thiruvartuppa music training will be provided.
- An herbal garden will be established in the name of Vallalar in Vadalur.
- A three-day festival will be held annually on the occasion of Vallalar's birth anniversary.
- A book on Vallalar called 'Spiritual Alchemy' will be published by the Department.
- Vallalar food banks will be opened at Marudhur, Mettukuppam and Karunguzhi.
- The park near the Cuddalore District Collectorate will be named 'Vallalar Park'.
- A Vallalar Research Centre will be set up in Chennai, accepting the request of Krishnaraj Vanavarayar, Chairman of Coimbatore Kumaraguru Educational Institutions.

2. Tariq Rahman will take office as the new Prime Minister of Bangladesh on Tuesday (Feb. 17).

(i) Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will participate in the swearing-in ceremony on behalf of India.

(ii) In the recent elections to the Bangladesh Parliament, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won 209 of the 297 seats. The right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami won 68 seats.

(iii) Subsequently, the new Government led by Tariq Rahman will be formed in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Chief Election Commissioner will administer the oath of office to the new MPs at the Parliament in Dhaka. Subsequently, the country's President Mohammad Shahabuddin will administer the oath of office to the new cabinet at a ceremony to be held at the Bangladesh Parliament complex at 4 pm.

(iv) First male Prime Minister after 35 years:

- For the past 35 years, Bangladesh has had female Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. This is the first time a male will take office as the Prime Minister. The administration that was under the Caretaker Government led by Muhammad Yunus is being handed over to the new Government.

(v) During the tenure of Muhammad Yunus, there was a major setback in India-Bangladesh relations. It is expected that this setback will be rectified during the Tariq Rahman regime and the relations between the two countries will return to normal.

(vi) In Bangladesh, it was customary for the new MPs to be sworn in by either the Speaker or the Deputy

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Speaker. However, this time the Chief Election Commissioner will administer the oath of office. The previous Speaker has resigned and is absconding. The Deputy Speaker is in jail. Therefore, the Chief Election Commissioner will administer the oath to the new MPs, according to a statement issued by the Bangladesh Presidential Palace.

(vii) Om Birla to attend the swearing-in ceremony:

The BNP had invited Indian Prime Minister Modi, leaders of China, Turkey and Pakistan to the swearing-in ceremony of Tariq Rahman. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs has said that Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will attend the event on behalf of the Indian Government, accepting this invitation.

(viii) Student-led party plans to form a shadow cabinet:

- In a separate development, the Bangladeshi student-led National Citizens Party has decided to form a shadow cabinet, said Mohammad Asif Shojib, the party's spokesperson and former advisor to the interim government. He also said that the shadow cabinet will monitor the activities of the new Government to be formed in Bangladesh.

3. Norwegian Johannes Høsflot Klæbo won a record 9th gold medal in the cross-country skiing category at the Winter Olympics in Italy.

4. The Artificial Intelligence (AI) Impact Summit will be held at Bharat Mandapam in Delhi from Monday (February 16) to the 20th.

(i) Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the inaugural session of the conference and inaugurate the AI exhibition.

(ii) The conference, which is being held in the South for the first time, will be attended by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, French President Emmanuel Macron, Brazilian President Lula da Silva and other ministerial representatives from 45 countries at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

(iii) In addition, Google CEO Sundar Pichai, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Microsoft Chairman Brad Smith and other top executives from various technology companies will participate. Prime Minister Modi will interact with them.

(iv) 3 Principles, 7 Themes:

Based on the three principles of people, planet and progress, the conference will be held under 7 themes: human capital, science, democratization of AI resources, resilient innovation and energy, inclusive social empowerment, safe and trustworthy AI, economic development and AI for social well-being.

With this in mind, more than 700 seminars have been organized over 5 days from February 16 to February 20.

(v) Previous conferences:-

The AI Security Conference was held in Bletchley Park, Britain, in 2023 to assess the impact of emerging AI technology. After that, AI conferences were held in Seoul, South Korea, in 2024, and in Paris, France, in 2025.

(vi) This year's AI Impact Summit is being held in India, where 65 percent of the population is under the

5. The India-UK Free Trade Agreement is likely to come into effect in April, an official said.

(i) The India-UK Free Trade Agreement was signed on July 24 last year. According to this agreement, 99 percent of goods exported from India to Britain are duty-free. There is also a significant reduction in duty on various goods exported from Britain to India.

(ii) The main objective of this agreement is to double the current \$56 billion (Rs.5.71 lakh crore) trade between the two countries by 2030.

(iii) Apart from this, a Double Contribution Convention (DCC) pact was also signed between the two countries. This agreement helps prevent double taxation of temporary workers.

(iv) Before these two agreements come into effect, it is necessary to get the approval of the British Parliament.

6. Landmark judgement on menstrual hygiene and the systemic failures in providing basic facilities for girl students.

- **Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Many Government school toilets lack essential amenities such as running water, soap, disinfectants, and functional door locks.
- **Economic Barriers:** A significant portion of young women in rural areas cannot afford hygienic products. Only 64.5% of girls aged 15–19 using proper menstrual products according to the NFHS.
- **Social Taboos:** Menstruation remains a topic that people are hesitant to discuss openly, leading to a lack of awareness and emotional distress for adolescent girls.
- **Waste Management Issues:** There is a critical lack of private disposal facilities or incinerators in schools, making it difficult for girls to manage their periods with dignity.
- **Lack of private and clean facilities** is identified as a primary reason for high dropout rates among adolescent girls in rural areas.
- Medical experts warn that poor menstrual hygiene leads to severe reproductive health issues and complications during future childbirth.
- Improper disposal of non-biodegradable menstrual products poses a threat to local ecosystems and hygiene standards.

Landmark judgement :-

- On January 30, 2026, a Supreme Court bench comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan issued a significant judgment on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Jaya Thakur.
- The Court ruled that the Right to Health/ Menstrual Hygiene is an inseparable part of the "Right to Life" under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.
- The Supreme Court ordered all States and Union Territories to ensure the provision of free sanitary napkins and separate, functional toilets in all Government and Government-aided schools.

Proposed remedies :-

- Schools must move beyond just building toilets to ensure they have water, privacy, and safety locks.
- Every school should be equipped with incinerators for the safe and hygienic disposal of products.

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- Encourage the use and distribution of biodegradable sanitary napkins to minimize environmental damage.
- Education programs regarding menstrual health should be mandatory for girls, boys, and male teachers to foster a supportive environment.

Government Steps

- In states like Tamil Nadu, free sanitary napkins are being provided to school girls.
- Education Department data shows that more than 96 percent of schools in the country have toilets for female students.
- There is an ongoing effort to involve Local Panchayats and Urban Bodies in maintaining school health and hygiene standards.
- The Government is directed to treat menstrual hygiene not just as a health scheme but as a Fundamental Duty toward ensuring the dignity of future generations.

7. Women Farmers Seeking Recognition

- Agriculture originally began with women, who transitioned nomadic societies into settled ones by developing sowing and harvesting techniques.
- Before the Green Revolution, women were central decision-makers regarding seeds and soil; however, with the rise of external commercial inputs, decision-making shifted to men while the physical labor burden on women increased.
- As agricultural income decreased, men migrated to cities for non-farm work, leading to the "feminization of agriculture" where women are left to manage both the fields and the households.
- Women are culturally viewed as "helpers" or "supporters" to their husbands rather than independent farmers, which denies them professional status.

Recent Trends and Milestones

- Workforce Surge: The number of women working in the Indian agricultural sector rose significantly from 23.6 million in 2017–18 to 59.1 million in 2024–25.
- Global Recognition: The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has designated 2026 as the "International Year of the Woman Farmer" to bring global attention to their invisible labor.
- Current Production Share: Globally, women contribute to 50% of food production, and in developing nations, they are responsible for 60% to 80% of the food supply.

Consequences

- Unpaid Labor: Despite their heavy workload, a significant portion of women in agriculture are classified as unpaid family workers.
- Land Ownership Gap: According to the National Family Health Survey, only 8.3% of women in India actually own the land they cultivate.
- Climate Change Vulnerability: Women-led farms lose more income due to climate change and rising temperatures compared to those led by men, as they have fewer resources to adapt.
- The "365-Day" Burden: Women farmers work from dawn to dusk without holidays, managing livestock, cooking, childcare, and field labor with zero economic recognition or "leisure time".

Proposed Solutions :-

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- Honorable Wages: The editorial suggests that the government should provide a periodic "honorable wage" (Madippudhiyam) to recognize the unpaid labor of women in farming families.
- Women need direct access to loans, machinery, and technology specifically designed for their needs rather than through their husbands.
- Policies should focus on giving women the skills to handle market management and commercial trading.
- Achieving sustainability in farming requires a fundamental shift toward gender equality and the legal recognition of women as heads of farming households.

Government Steps

- Governments are urged to use the 2026 International Year platform to draft policies that safeguard the rights and dignity of women farmers.
- Data from the Tamil Nadu Planning Commission indicates there are 97.69 lakh agricultural households in the state, yet only a small fraction of the women within these households have land titles.
- There is a growing mandate for policy-makers to move beyond viewing women as "petitioners" and instead see them as the essential architects of food security and the rural economy.