

February 17, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. The Supreme Court of India has established a specialized judicial timeline and framework to review the landmark Sabarimala Ayyappan Temple entry case.

(i) Judicial Bench and Background

- A 9-judge bench of the Supreme Court will hear the review petitions challenging the September 2018 verdict, which permitted women of all ages to enter the Sabarimala Ayyappan Temple.
- The 2018 ruling sparked widespread protests across Kerala, leading various groups to file review petitions that remained pending for several years.
- The current proceedings were brought before a bench including Justice Surya Kant, Justice Jamala Paksi, and Justice Bipul M. Pancholi, who noted that the Chief Justice would formally constitute the full 9-judge bench for the final hearing.

(ii) Scheduled Timeline for Hearings

- The formal hearing is set to begin on April 7, 2026, at 10:30 AM.
- April 7–9, 2026 – The court will hear arguments from the petitioners and those supporting the review of the 2018 verdict.
- April 14–16, 2026 – The court will hear arguments from those opposing the review (supporting the original 2018 verdict).
- Conclusion: All arguments are expected to conclude by April 22, 2026.
- Filing Deadline: All parties involved must file their formal petitions by March 14, 2026.

(iii) Seven Questions :-

The 9-judge bench will focus on resolving seven legal questions originally raised in the November 2019 preliminary order

- Defining the extent of the Right to Freedom of Religion under Article 25 of the Constitution.
- Addressing the conflict between individual Fundamental Rights and the rights of religious denominations to follow their own practices.
- Determining if a person who does not belong to a specific religion has the legal right to challenge its internal practices via a Public Interest Litigation (PIL).

(iv) Expanded Judicial Scope

The Supreme Court has indicated that this bench will not limit itself to Sabarimalai Temple case but will also examine broader religious gender issues, including:

- The entry of Muslim women into mosques and dargahs.
- The religious rights of Parsi women (specifically those married to non-Parsis) to enter their places of worship.

5. Stances of Key Stakeholders

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- Central Government: Solicitor General Tushar Mehta stated that the Union Government supports the review petitions against the 2018 verdict.
- Kerala State Government: Law Minister P. Rajeev noted that the state is awaiting the court's decision on the seven legal questions. He emphasized that the legal complexities cannot be resolved in a single moment and that the state will decide its next steps based on the court's clarity.
- Political Parties: The CPI(M) (ruling party in Kerala) stated it previously supported the 2018 verdict, but clarified that the state government's legal position may be independent of the party's ideological stance.
- Hindu Organizations: Groups such as the Nair Service Society (NSS) and SNDP remain firm in their opposition, maintaining that the traditional customs regarding women's entry should be preserved.

2. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the AI Impact Summit at Bharat Mandapam in Delhi.

(i) The AI Impact Summit 2026 will be held at Bharat Mandapam in Delhi for 5 days till February 20. An AI Technology Exhibition is also part of the conference.

(ii) Pavilions of 13 countries including Russia, Australia, Japan, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, Serbia, Estonia, Tajikistan and Africa have been set up to showcase international cooperation in AI technology.

(iii) The AI Impact Summit will be attended by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, French President Emmanuel Macron, Brazilian President Lula da Silva and Ministerial representatives from 45 countries, Google, Open AI, CEOs of technology companies including Microsoft are also participating.

(iv) AI is having a major impact on various sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, administration and business. The summit will discuss aspects such as AI innovation, collaboration and responsible use of technology.

(v) India is progressing in the use of AI in all sectors, from public infrastructure to energy-efficient innovation, the Prime Minister said.

3. The Union Home Minister Amit Shah submitted the 13th report of the Parliamentary Official Language Committee to President Draupadi Murmu.

(i) In this regard, Amit Shah posted on the 'X' website, 'The 13th report of the Committee was submitted to the President along with the members of the Parliamentary Official Language Committee.

(ii) With a view to expediting the work of this Committee and modernizing and further strengthening the official language, the Committee has submitted 4 reports to the President in the last 6 years.'

4. The Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu will present the Interim Budget for the year 2026-27 in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly on Tuesday (Feb. 17). Subsequently, the Interim Agriculture Budget will be presented by the Agriculture Minister M.R.K. Panneerselvam.

(i) Since it is an election year, it has been reported that various concessions will be announced in the interim budget.

(ii) Every year, the Legislative Assembly session is usually held at the end of February or the first week of

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March to present the budget. Since the assembly elections are going to be held this year, it is being presented as an Interim Budget.

(iii) Tamil Nadu's economic growth is 11.19 percent. This is almost twice the average growth rate of the country, according to the Economic Survey.

(iv) Chief Minister Stalin released the Tamil Nadu Economic Survey for the year 2025-26 prepared by the State Planning Commission.

(v) The Economic Survey further states as follows:

- Per capita income in Tamil Nadu has increased to Rs.3.62 lakh. This is 1.77 times higher than the national average.
- The manufacturing sector has registered a growth rate of 14.74 percent. This is three times higher than the national average of 4.5 percent.
- Tamil Nadu ranks first among all states, contributing 15 percent to the total manufacturing sector employment in the country.
- Rs.1.57 lakh crore has been spent on education, health and social welfare schemes.
- With the labour force participation rate increasing to 72.1 per cent, the unemployment rate has come down to 3.5 per cent.
- Tamil Nadu has set a target of becoming a trillion dollar economy with strong manufacturing capacity and human capital.
- Exports of merchandise from Tamil Nadu have almost doubled to \$52.07 billion. Foreign direct investment has increased, it has been reported.
- Jayaranjan, Executive Vice Chairman of the Planning Commission, said that this year's report includes a separate chapter on women's employment and economic participation.
- New plans for the development of the maritime economy of Tamil Nadu, which has a coastline of 1,076 km, and the target of becoming a trillion dollar economy by 2030 are the main features of the report.

5. Anthropic, the world's leading artificial intelligence (AI) technology company, has opened its second office in Asia in Bengaluru.

(i) The company, known for developing cutting-edge AI software called 'Claude', has signed agreements with prominent companies like Air India, Razorpay, and Creed to start its journey in India. The company plans to provide AI services in Indian languages, not just for business, but also for social development.

(ii) Anthropic's India Director Irina Ghosh said, "India is a great place to bring AI technology to the world in a responsible manner. India's technological prowess and human capital are impressive."

(iii) It is noteworthy that the 'Nifty IT' index recently fell by about 6 percent in a single day, causing losses of up to Rs.2 lakh crore to investors, due to fears that the introduction of new AI tools by Anthropic will reduce the need for human labor in the IT sector.

6. The Israeli cabinet has approved a new procedure to formally register land with the Government of Israel, with the aim of expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank of Palestine.

(i) This is the first time that Israel has carried out such a land registration operation in the West Bank since the 1967 Middle East war.

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(ii) The decision by the Israeli cabinet, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is a 'revolutionary step to strengthen Jewish settlements,' said Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.

(iii) The Palestinian Authority has strongly condemned this Israeli move. They have accused it of being an indirect attempt to fully annex the West Bank and of destroying the Palestinian dream of a separate state.

(iv) Human rights organizations have warned that the Palestinians could lose more than half of their land in the West Bank as a result of this land registration operation.

(v) The International Court of Justice has already ruled that Israel's settlements in the occupied West Bank are illegal. However, the US President Donald Trump administration has not put any pressure on the Gaza peace plan to curb this settlement expansion.

(vi) With elections due to be held in Israel later this year, there has been international criticism that the Government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is taking such decisions to increase its influence.

(vii) US President Donald Trump said that the member states of the Board of Peace have pledged to provide more than \$5 billion financial assistance for the reconstruction of Gaza.

- The first official consultative meeting of the Board of Peace will be held at the Donald Trump Peace Center in Washington on Thursday, he said. The leaders of more than 20 countries will participate in the meeting. It is expected that important announcements on funding allocation and the deployment of peacekeepers will be made at that time.

7. The Chinese Government has officially announced that British and Canadian citizens can now travel to China without a Visa (entry permit).

(i) Those traveling for reasons such as tourism, business, educational projects or visiting relatives can stay in China without a Visa for up to 30 days. The new policy will come into effect immediately from Tuesday (Feb. 17).

(ii) China has extended this Visa exemption as part of an effort to improve relations with those countries following the recent visits to China by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney.

(iii) With this announcement, the number of countries that are allowed to travel to China without a Visa has now increased to 79.

(iv) In the past, the procedure for obtaining a Visa to China was considered very difficult. However, in the last 2 years, China has been rapidly expanding its visa exemption program to strengthen its ties with countries around the world.

8. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed a fine of Rs.5 lakh on online retailer Snapdeal for selling toys that were not compliant with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) procedures and were not covered by the Toys (Quality Control) Order, 2020. The final order for this penalty has been issued based on a suo motu inquiry into the matter,' said CCPA Chief Commissioner Nidhi Kare.

(i) In addition to this fine, Snapdeal should ensure that it does not list or advertise such toys that do not comply with BIS standards on its online platform in the future. Furthermore, the CCPA has also stated in its order that Snapdeal should prominently display the contact number, email address and grievance



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redressal officer details so that the grievances of the consumers can be addressed appropriately.

9. A 9-judge bench of the Supreme Court will hear the controversial issue of defining the term "industry" from March 17.

10. The first part of the report of the High-level Committee on Centre-State Relations was submitted to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin. In this regard, the Tamil Nadu Government has stated in a press release:

(i) The High-level Committee was constituted on April 15, 2015, under the Chairmanship of former Supreme Court Justice Kurian Joseph, to prepare a report on Centre-State Relations. It included former Vice-Chancellor of the Indian Maritime University K. Ashok Vardhan Shetty and former Vice-Chairman of the Tamil Nadu Planning Commission M. Naganathan.

(ii) This is the fourth major study on Centre-State Relations conducted at the national level. Moreover, it is the second attempt by Tamil Nadu to initiate a dialogue on Centre-State Relations through the Rajamannar Committee (1969-71).

(iii) At the national level, the Sarkaria Commission (1983-88) and the Poonchi Commission (2007-10) have studied the Centre-State relations and made various recommendations.

(iv) Considering the changes in the constitution, finance and institutional development that have taken place since these studies, a high-level committee headed by former Supreme Court Justice Kurian Joseph was constituted to conduct a fresh and comprehensive study.

(v) The first part of the report of this committee has been submitted in English and Tamil with 10 articles on the issues of decentralization and state autonomy, constitutional amendment, territorial integrity of states, language, governor, delimitation of constituencies, elections, education, health, goods and services tax.

(vi) The report, which has made a detailed study of the challenges to the federal system, makes concrete and specific recommendations to restore the balance of the federal system and strengthen the true cooperative federal system within the limits of the Constitution.

(vii) Two more parts, each containing 10 articles, are being prepared. As a highlight of this initiative, the Tamil version of the report has been made 'open access'. This is the first of its kind in the country. After the report is tabled in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, the Tamil version will be uploaded on the official website of the Government of Tamil Nadu.

(viii) This report will be an important milestone in the continued contribution of Tamil Nadu to the evolution of the federal system of India. Its aim is not to weaken the Central Government; rather, it is to formalize the power of the Central Government. This will enable the Central Government to focus on national-level responsibilities. At the same time, it will ensure better governance by restoring the necessary autonomy to the States. It stated that the Tamil Nadu Government hopes that this report will stimulate constructive dialogue and lead to a balanced and cooperative federal system.

11. The resolution notice proceedings brought by the opposition parties against Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla have highlighted the need for the post of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha, which has been lying vacant for the past seven years.

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(i) The resolution moved by the opposition parties seeking the removal of Om Birla will be debated and voted upon on March 9, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said.

(ii) Om Birla will not be able to lead the House till the process is completed. Meanwhile, a group of senior members is leading the Lok Sabha in his place.

(iii) The post of Deputy Speaker existed till the 16th Lok Sabha (2014–2019). At that time, Sumitra Mahajan was the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and M. Thambidurai of the AIADMK was the Deputy Speaker. The post of Deputy Speaker was not filled for its entire term in the 17th Lok Sabha from 2019–2024. This continues in the 18th Lok Sabha (2024–29).

Thus, the Panel of Chairmen who preside over the House presided over the proceedings of the first part of the Budget Session by allocating time among themselves.

(iv) According to Article 93 of the Constitution of India, when the offices of Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha fall vacant, they shall be filled up expeditiously. However, no time limit has been fixed for the same. In this context, recent events have highlighted the need for the post of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

(v) According to the rules of procedure of the Lok Sabha, the post of Deputy Speaker is the next highest post after the Speaker. The only difference is that the Speaker of the Lok Sabha will not sit with his fellow members as a member under any circumstances. He cannot participate in the debates. However, when the Speaker of the Lok Sabha presides over the House, its Deputy Speaker is allowed to act as a regular member. He can also participate and speak in important debates.

(vi) Furthermore, even after the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, the Deputy Speaker, like the Speaker, continues to hold office until a new Lok Sabha is elected and a new Deputy Speaker is elected. His powers include presiding over the House in the absence of the Speaker, removing objectionable speeches and records of members, administering the oath of office to new members, and receiving their notices and resignation letters.

(vii) However, Article 96 of the Constitution states that they cannot preside over the House until the result of a motion of impeachment against either or both of them is announced.

(viii) As per the tradition of the Lok Sabha, especially since the 11th Lok Sabha, the Deputy Speaker has been elected from the ranks of the opposition parties. Although this tradition was followed to promote non-partisan functioning, the Constitution did not make it mandatory.

(ix) In this situation, the continuous non-filling of the post of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha may lead to the accumulation of all powers in the hands of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

(x) There is a continuing confusion as to who will take the decision on the issue of opposition notices against the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. The House is led by a committee of senior members in the absence of the Speaker. However, this committee does not have the power to arbitrarily allow notices or action against the Speaker. If so, there is confusion as to who will take the decision.

If there was a Deputy Speaker, he would have coordinated these procedures. This is an important matter to be discussed, say the MPs.

