

February 18, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. Due to the US sanctions, fuel shortages in Cuba have reached an unprecedented level.

(i) The Cuban Government has introduced a new app to avoid queuing for miles at gas stations. However, drivers who make reservations through this app still have to wait weeks or months to fill up.

(ii) Currently, only 50 to 90 people are allowed to enter gas stations on average per day. As a result, people wait in the expectation that their turn will always come. Even if they are allowed to fill up, they are only given a maximum of 20 liters at a time. People are in a difficult situation of having to stock up on a small amount of fuel for emergency medical needs.

(iii) The main reason for this situation is said to be the cessation of crude oil shipments to Cuba from countries such as Venezuela and Mexico due to US pressure.

(iv) In response, Cuba has announced that it will not be able to supply fuel to foreign aircrafts, causing the country's main source of income, the tourism sector, to suffer a major decline.

2. Amidst the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, a historic bill was passed to abolish pensions for Members of Parliament.

3. In South Africa, Hindu and Muslim organizations have jointly opposed the Government's new legal proposal that requires funerals to be conducted only after receiving a death certificate electronically.

4. Iran's navy has begun a massive war game in the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway that handles 20 percent of the world's total crude oil traffic.

(i) As part of the exercise, Iran caused a stir by conducting missile tests in the Strait of Hormuz, amid talks in Geneva.

5. In the second round of indirect talks between the US and Iran in Geneva, Switzerland, the two countries have reached a common understanding on basic guidelines on how to deal with the nuclear issue.

(i) However, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has said that a complete agreement is not yet possible.

(ii) The talks, mediated by Oman, lasted for about 4 hours at the country's embassy in Geneva. President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner participated on the US side. A delegation led by Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi attended on behalf of Iran.

(iii) The date for the third round of talks is expected to be announced after the two countries exchange documents on the results of the talks.

6. In Karnataka, the State Government has ordered to collect 1 percent welfare fee for each service to ensure social security of 'gig' workers working in private companies providing services like Swiggy, Zomato and Ola.

(i) Although the 'Gig' Workers Welfare Act, which was introduced in the state last year, allows for a fee ranging from 1 to 5 percent, the Government has fixed a minimum of one percent for now.

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(ii) This fee has a different ceiling for each service. Companies like Swiggy and Zomato, which provide food and grocery delivery services, will be charged a maximum of 50 paise per transaction.

(iii) On vehicle service platforms like Ola and Uber, the limit has been fixed at 50 paise for two-wheelers, 75 paise for autos and one rupee for four-wheelers. For professionals like Urban Company, the service will be charged up to a maximum of Rs.1.50.

(iv) The companies concerned should calculate this fee based on their quarterly turnover. This amount should be paid within 5 working days of the end of each quarter through a special website created by the Government.

(v) The entire amount collected in this way will be used for their medical and social welfare schemes through the 'Gig' Employees Welfare Board. The Government has assured that all the details regarding the management of this fund will be uploaded openly for public viewing on the website of the Labour Department.

7. The Chief Minister M.K.Stalin said that climate action will be given priority in Government Departments. Speaking at the inauguration of the 'Climate Summit 4.0' held in Chennai on Tuesday, Chief Minister Stalin said:

- In every project, preventive and adaptive measures to combat climate change should be integrated and implemented. In that regard, Tamil Nadu is a pioneer state among the developing states, ranking second in India in wind power generation and fourth in solar and renewable energy generation.

(i) 30 percent electric buses:

By 2030, 30 percent of the buses operated under the State Transport Corporations should be electric buses. This is the target of the Tamil Nadu Government. Road tax exemption has been given to electric vehicles till 2027. 30.9 crore cubic meters of conventional waste have been removed at 294 places. The 'sponge' parks set up in Chennai to prevent flooding are raising the groundwater level. This will be extended to other parts of Tamil Nadu.

(ii) Carbon Balancing Centres:

- Steps have been taken to convert districts like Nilgiris, Coimbatore, Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram into carbon balancing centres. For the first time, 2 'Marine Elite Forces' comprising local fishermen have been formed.
- Under the Tamil Nadu Weaving Recovery Movement, 6 high-speciality centres are being set up to protect rare species including manatees, sea turtles, birds and others. Alayathi, savuktu and palm trees have been planted and bio-shields have been created in coastal areas to withstand natural disasters.

(iii) In collaboration with international organizations...

* To create climate resilient infrastructure, all Government Departments should collaborate with international organizations like the World Bank and Asian Bank to attract green finance and investment. As a first step, for the first time in India, a Green Climate Fund of Rs.1,000 crore has been created and funds have been provided to promote eco-economy and clean and transport-related industries.

(iv) Budget with climate action:

- In the coming times, the budget will be prepared in a way that the projects implemented by all Departments are implemented in a manner that is consistent with climate action.
- 5 lakh sandalwood saplings will be provided for planting across Tamil Nadu.
- Government industries and companies will jointly invest in green technologies and reduce emissions, local bodies will prioritize climate action and youth will emerge as climate leaders and ambassadors, he said.

8. The Chief Minister M.K.Stalin on Tuesday inaugurated "Vizuthugal" 105 Integrated Service Centres for the differently-abled, set up in 20 districts including Chennai at a cost of Rs.14.57 crore, through video conferencing from the Secretariat.

(i) The Tamil Nadu Government is implementing the Integrated Service Centres for the differently-abled under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Scheme with the financial assistance of the World Bank. Under this scheme, 94 Revenue Division Level Integrated Service Centres and 568 District Level Integrated Service Centres are planned to be implemented. In the first phase, 15 Revenue Division Level Integrated Service Centres and 66 District Level Integrated Service Centres are operational in 7 districts.

(ii) In this context, the 105 Integrated Service Centres (ISCs) inaugurated by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin in 20 districts namely Chennai, Ariyalur, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Erode, Kallakurichi, Krishnagiri, Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Ramanathapuram, Salem, Thanjavur, Tirupattur, Tiruvallur, Thoothukudi, Virudhunagar, Villupuram, Nilgiris, Thiruvavur and Pudukkottai include 17 centres at the revenue division level and 88 centres at the block level.

(iii) The revenue division level centres cater to the chronic rehabilitation needs of the differently abled and provide 6 services at one place namely special education, optometry, hearing and speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and psychological therapy. The necessary treatment equipment and qualified professionals have been appointed to provide these services. These professionals provide services at the centers and, if necessary, visit the homes of the differently abled.

(iv) Similarly, services such as special education (communication and cognitive disabilities), physical therapy, and psychological counseling are also provided through district-level centers.

9. Cricket star Smriti Mandhana has won the BBC's 2025 Indian Sportsperson of the Year award.

10. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Tariq Rahman (60) has been sworn in as the new Prime Minister of Bangladesh. He will continue in office for the next 5 years.

(i) Tariq Rahman took office as the Prime Minister after the BNP won 209 seats out of a total of 299 seats in the 13th parliamentary elections held on February 12.

(ii) This ended the 18-month Caretaker Government led by Muhammad Yunus since August 2024.

(iii) Tariq Rahman was sworn in as the new Prime Minister by the country's President Muhammad Shahabuddin at a ceremony held at the Parliament complex.

(iv) Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla represented India at the swearing-in ceremony of Tariq Rahman as Prime Minister.

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11. Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake arrived in Delhi to participate in the Artificial Intelligence Summit.

(i) The visit to Delhi and participation in the Summit by the Sri Lankan President, one of the leaders of South Asia, underlines the closeness of the bilateral relationship and the commitment to work together on issues that shape the future.

(ii) The India-Sri Lanka partnership, rooted in friendship, strengthened by trust and guided by cooperation, continues to grow in good faith, the press release said.

12. In the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, Agriculture Minister M.R.K.Panneerselvam presented the Interim Agricultural Budget for the financial year 2026-27 at Rs.47,248 crore.

(i) For the first time in the history of Tamil Nadu, a separate budget was presented for the agriculture sector in the year 2021-22. At that time, Rs.34,220 crore was allocated. This was increased by more than Rs.11,000 crore to Rs.45,661 crore in 2025-26. In this situation, an additional Rs.1,587 crore has been allocated this year compared to the previous year.

Allocation Details :-

- Agriculture – Rs.11,584.72 crore
- Horticulture and Hill Crops – Rs.1,777.74 crore
- Agricultural Engineering – Rs.677.02 crore
- Agricultural Marketing and Agribusiness – Rs.278.54 crore
- Tamil Nadu Agricultural University – Rs.771.79 crore
- Seed Certification and Organic Certification – Rs.78.41 crore
- Sugar Sector – Rs.254.84 crore
- Animal Husbandry – Rs.1,200.20 crore
- Dairying – Rs.850.31 crore
- Fisheries – Rs.1,472.70 crore
- Tamil Nadu Veterinary University – Rs.397.74 crore
- Tamil Nadu Fisheries University – Rs.50.86 crore
- Cooperative Sector (Crop Loan etc.) – Rs.701.49 crore
- Tamil Nadu Consumer Goods Corporation (Direct Paddy Procurement Centre) – Rs.14,000 crore
- Rural Development and Panchayat Department (Roads, National Rural Livelihoods Mission, All Village Anna Rejuvenation Scheme) – Rs.6,329.30 crore
- Food Processing – Rs.177.79 crore
- Sericulture – Rs.114.97 crore
- Forest – (Agroforestry, Man-Animal Conflict) – Rs.1,527.09 crore
- Revenue (Crop Damage, Farmers Protection Scheme) – Rs.331.17 crore
- Canal Reconstruction (Major Works) – Rs.4,672.04 crore.

Key Features :-

- Allocation of Rs.707 crore under Kalaigal's All Village Integrated Agricultural Development Scheme, benefiting 61 lakh farmers.
- 58,712 acres of fallow lands developed into cropland.
- 21.35 lakh farmers benefited under the Mannuiri Kaathu Mannuiri Kaapom scheme.
- 900 metric tons of traditional seeds produced under the Nel Jayaraman Traditional Paddy Varieties

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Conservation Movement, distributed to 70 thousand farmers.

- 12.84 lakh farmers benefited under the Tamil Nadu Millet Mission.
- 25 lakh farmers benefited under the Nutritional Agriculture Movement.
- 77,499 agricultural machinery, 1,320 agricultural machinery rental centers under the Agricultural Mechanization Scheme.
- Subsidy of up to Rs.6 lakh to agricultural graduates through the Chief Minister's Farmers Welfare Service Centers.
- 70 percent subsidy to Adi Dravidian and tribal farmers, 17,340 people benefited.
- In 2025-26, paddy cultivation was done on 12.48 lakh acres across Tamil Nadu during the Kuruvai season. This is 3 lakh acre more cultivation area than last year.
- In the last 5 years, about 2 lakh new free electricity connections have been provided to farmers so far.
- Irrigation facilities have been provided to an additional 3.48 lakh hectares of agricultural land in Tamil Nadu.
- Tamil Nadu has ranked first in the production of cassava and jasmine at the national level, first in the production of amla, cabbage and radish, and second in the production of cassava, jasmine, jackfruit and guava.
- In five years, steps have been taken to obtain Geographical Indication for the unique products of the State and so far 41 products have been applied for. Of these, Geographical Indications have been obtained for 9 products namely Cholavandhan betel, Panrutti jackfruit, Panrutti cashew, Virudhunagar samba vattal, Ramanathapuram Chithiraikkar rice, Puliyangudi lemon, Chettikulam small onion, Thooyamalli rice, and kavundapadi Country Jaggery and continuous efforts are being made to obtain Geographical Indications for the remaining 32 products.
- In 5 years, 101 new crop varieties, 21 agricultural techniques, and 16 new farm implements have been introduced by Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

13. The budget report states that Rs.69,087 crore crop loans have been provided to farmers in the last five years. It states as follows:

(i) In Tamil Nadu, an unprecedented 14.89 lakh metric tonnes of paddy have been purchased in the current Kuruvai season and 2.15 crore metric tonnes of paddy in five years.

(ii) Crop loans of Rs.12,359 crore, jewellery loans of Rs.4,889 crore and loans of self-help groups of Rs.2,118 crore have been waived off through the cooperative sector.

(iii) Crop loans of Rs.69,087 crore have been provided to farmers.

(iv) Medicines worth Rs.26 crore have been sold so far through the Chief Minister's Dispensaries. 45 lakh people have benefited through it.

(v) In the interim budget report, an allocation of Rs.17,068 crore has been made to the Food and Consumer Protection Department.

14. Agriculture Minister M.R.K.Panneerselvam, who presented the Interim Agricultural Budget report in the Assembly, said that 58,712 acre of fallow land in Tamil Nadu have been converted into arable lands. While presenting the agricultural budget report in the Assembly, he said:

(i) In order to achieve comprehensive agricultural development across all the 12,525 village Panchayats of Tamil Nadu, "Kalaigarin All Village Integrated Agricultural Development Programme" is being

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implemented in convergence with the Anaithu Grama Anna Marumalarchi Thittam since the year 2021-22. So far, an expenditure of Rs.707 crore has been incurred, benefitting 61 lakh beneficiaries.

(ii) A total of 58,712 acres of fallow land has been brought under cultivation including 6,048 acres under perennial horticultural crops and 52,664 acres under short duration agricultural crops.

(iii) 53 lakh Coconut seedlings have been distributed to encourage Coconut cultivation besides distributing and 21 lakh fruit seedling kits to ensure nutritional security in rural areas. Bore wells/ tube

wells have been created to support cultivation for 2,115 Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe farmers.

(iv) A total of 10,588 minor irrigation tanks, oorunies, supply channels and water storage structures have been desilted and improved.

(v) 3,816 agricultural machinery and tools of the Agricultural Engineering Department are being provided on rent to the farmers in need through the 'e-Vaadagai' mobile application at a low rate fixed by the government.

(vi) Expansion of flower cultivation area:

- To facilitate daily income to farmers, flower crops like Jasmine, Rose, Chrysanthemum, Marigold and Tuberose have been promoted with a subsidy of Rs.28 crore for area expansion in an area of 11,380 ha benefiting 18,130 farmers.
- Protected cultivation components such as polyhouses and shadenet houses are being promoted to enable farmers to cultivate high-value horticultural crops like Capsicum and Carnation throughout the year under controlled conditions. Under this scheme, 1,756 farmers have been provided with a subsidy of Rs.91 crore to erect 23.55 lakh square meters of polyhouses and shadenet houses.
- Considering the importance of cashew, an essential commercial crop of Tamil Nadu, 8,400 ha has been brought under cashew cultivation over the past five years at an outlay of Rs.12 crore, benefiting 9,687 farmers.
- Under the Coconut Root Wilt Management Scheme, activities such as removal of diseased palms, free distribution of coconut seedlings and provision of inputs for rejuvenation of affected plantation have been carried out in 3,943 ha at a cost of Rs.18.48 crore during 2023-24 and 2024-25 in Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Theni, Tenkasi and Kanyakumari districts benefiting 6,300 farmers.

(vii) Palmyra Development:

- Considering the importance of the state tree, the palm, the 'Palmyra Development Mission' is being implemented from the year 2021-22. Under this scheme, over the past five years, 68 lakh palmyra seeds and 1.28 lakh seedlings have been distributed, 354 value-addition units have been established through the Department of Horticulture. The Tamil Nadu Palm Products Development Board has provided 1,350 individuals with training and equipments for production of palmyrah value-added products and also 650 women were provided with training and equipments for making palmyrah leaf products. This scheme has been implemented with an expenditure of Rs. 9.17 crore, benefiting 1.45 lakh beneficiaries.
- Further, a Common Facilitation Centre has been established for quality palm jaggery production at Veerapandiypattinam in Thoothukudi district. In the past five years, Rs.80 crore worth palm products have been produced and sold.

(viii) 1.86 crore metric tonnes of paddy procurement:

- A special incentive of Rs.156 per quintal for Grade A paddy and Rs.131 per quintal for Common paddy has been fixed for Kharif 2025–2026 Marketing season. Accordingly, the procurement prices for Grade A and Common paddy have been increased to Rs.2,545 and Rs.2,500 respectively.
- In the last 5 years, 1.86 crore metric tonnes of paddy have been procured and an incentive of Rs.2,118 crore has been provided.

(ix) Rs. 1,094 crore incentive:

- Compared to 2020–21, the paddy procurement incentive has been increased by 123 percent for Grade A and 162 percent for common variety.
- From the 2020–21 crop season, a special incentive is being provided for sugarcane in addition to the Fair and Remunerative Price fixed by the Union Government.
- A special incentive of Rs.349 per MT of sugarcane has been announced for the 2024–25 crushing season, thereby fixing the increased cane price at Rs.3,500 per MT.
- In the last five years, Rs.1,094 crore has been provided as incentive to 5.70 lakh sugarcane farmers.
- Apart from these, in order to protect farmers from income loss during periods of price fall, a total of 12,236 MT of Greengram, Black gram, and Red gram worth Rs.96.66 crore have been procured from 10,690 farmers at the Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- In addition, 1.47 lakh MT of Copra worth Rs.1,600 crore have been procured from one lakh farmers at Minimum Support Price.
- A value chain for chillies in Ramanathapuram district and a value chain for drumsticks in Tirunelveli district have been created to connect farmers with the export market.
- Tamil Nadu's GDP growth rate, which averaged 1.36 per cent from 2012–13 to 2020–21, increased to 3.03 per cent from 2021–22 to 2024–25.
- Compared to the base year 2011–12, the GDP growth rate in agriculture increased by 9.97 per cent in 2024–26. The GDP growth rate increased to Rs.59,117.08 crore in 2024–25 from Rs.53,756.39 crore in 2011–12, he said.

15. The Agriculture Minister M.R.K. Panneerselvam proudly announced that Tamil Nadu has moved up to the top position in the production capacity of ragi.

(i) At the national level, Tamil Nadu has ranked first in Ragi productivity, second in Ragi production and fifth in Minor millets production.

16. The Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu presented the interim budget of the Tamil Nadu Government for the financial year 2026–27 at Rs.2.55 lakh crore.

(i) In it, he said that the Revenue Deficit of Tamil Nadu is estimated to increase to Rs.48,696 crore and the outstanding debt burden to Rs.10.71 lakh crore. Minister Thangam Thennarasu also listed the reasons for the increase in Tamil Nadu's debt burden.

(ii) In view of the upcoming assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, the interim budget for the year 2026–27 was presented in the Legislative Assembly. Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu, while presenting the budget, said:

- The fundamental reason for all the problems related to finance is that the right to levy taxes lies with the Central Government and the responsibility to bear huge expenses for the welfare of the

(iii) Revenue deficit:

- The revenue deficit is estimated to come down to Rs.48,696.32 crore in the Interim Budget Estimates for the year 2026-27.
- Revenue-enhancing measures including improving tax collection and improving tax collection management efficiency are expected to bring the revenue deficit down to Rs.42,964.61 crore in 2027-28 and Rs.35,115.33 crore in 2028-29. This will pave the way for additional capital expenditure.

(iv) Debt burden:

- The total borrowing is planned to be Rs.1,78,308.05 crore. Out of this, the Government will repay public debt worth Rs.60,418.42 crore, so the outstanding debt as on March 31 next year will be Rs.10,71,770.34 crore. This is 26.35 percent of the GDP.
- It is expected to further decline to 25.30 percent in 2027-28 and 25.43 percent in 2028-29.

(v) Welfare schemes will continue:

- In the current economic environment, Tamil Nadu's growth is higher than the country's GDP growth. If the same situation continues, revenue will increase due to measures to increase resource resources and improve tax collection capacity. Expenditure on welfare schemes will continue,' he said.

17. The Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu presented the interim budget and spoke as follows:

- The Central Government is creating an artificial crisis in the financial situation of Tamil Nadu by rejecting major infrastructure projects of Tamil Nadu, withholding funds for projects implemented by the State Government, adjusting tax rates without consulting the States, and forcing them to make project expenditures with conditions.

(i) Deductions from the Government's Account:

- Tamil Nadu has suffered a revenue loss of Rs.9,600 crore in the current year due to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) revision. The Central Government had deducted Rs.1,709 crore from the GST revenue from the State Government's account with the Reserve Bank without prior notice in April last year. The loss of Rs.1,202 crore was caused by the reduction in the Central Government's tax share allocated to Tamil Nadu.

(ii) Power Distribution Company Compensation Fund:

- The Central Government imposed a condition that if the State Government does not provide compensation fund of Rs.16,290 crore to the Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Company, the amount will be reduced in the permissible borrowing limit of the State Government.
- Although the Power Distribution Company had incurred a loss of only Rs.413 crore, this condition has caused an additional expenditure of Rs.15,877 crore to the State Government.

(iii) No release of subsidy:-

- The Central Government has withheld the subsidy amount of Rs.3,548 crore for the Integrated

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Education Scheme, Rs. 3,112 crore for the Jal Jeevan Scheme, and Rs. 2,246 crore for the Rural Local Bodies.

- The Tamil Nadu Government has allocated Rs.9,500 crore as a loan due to the non-disbursement of funds as per the commitment made by the Central Government for the Chennai Metro Rail Project.

(iv) Impact on cash flow:

- It is due to such reasons that the state's debt to GDP ratio of Tamil Nadu has been continuously increasing. This has affected the state's ability to raise debt and cash flow.

18. The Central Government submitted a report on the action taken on the report of the 16th Finance Commission in Parliament on February 1. The report was very disappointing.

(i) All the states had demanded an increase in the share of the states in the shared fund of central taxes. The Finance Commission report did not make any recommendation in this regard.

(ii) The share given to Tamil Nadu, which was 7.931 percent during the Ninth Finance Commission, has been reduced to 4.079 percent till now. Due to this, Tamil Nadu has suffered a loss of Rs.3.17 lakh crore. This is about 33 percent of the outstanding debt of the state government.

(iii) The 16th Finance Commission has given a financial increase of 23.74 percent to Kerala and 13.27 percent to Karnataka. However, Tamil Nadu has been given a mere 0.44 percent increase.

19. India and France signed 21 agreements and Memorandums of Understanding to strengthen bilateral cooperation in various sectors including defence, high-tech, key minerals. The agreements were signed after a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron in Mumbai.

(i) French President Macron arrived in India on a three-day state visit to participate in various events, including the ongoing International Artificial Intelligence (AI) Impact Summit in Delhi.

(ii) Bilateral talks between Prime Minister Modi and President Macron were held in Mumbai. During the talks, it was agreed to elevate the bilateral relationship to the status of a Special Global Strategic Partnership.

(iii) Various agreements signed: 21 agreements and memorandums of understanding to enhance bilateral cooperation in various sectors including key minerals, defence, high-tech, renewable energy, health, investment were signed.

(iv) The agreement between Bharat Electronics and France's Safran to manufacture the Hammer missile in India includes a double taxation avoidance agreement to encourage mutual investment.

(v) The Airbus-Tata joint venture will manufacture the H125 helicopters, which can fly as high as Mount Everest. The helicopter plant, built in Vemagal, Karnataka, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi and President Macron via video conferencing.

- The production of the Airbus H125 helicopters, which can operate at high altitudes and in the most difficult environments, will strengthen India's aerospace manufacturing capacity, officials said.