

April 17, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. A fire accident occurred at one of Australia's largest oil refineries, which has a capacity to process 1,20,000 barrels per day.

(i) The fire broke out on Wednesday night at the refinery owned by Viva Energy, located near Melbourne, and was brought under control by Thursday afternoon.

(ii) As production has been affected at this refinery, which supplies more than half of the fuel needs of Victoria state, there are concerns that fuel prices may rise significantly in the coming days.

(iii) Australia meets 80% of its fuel requirements through imports. With supply already disrupted due to the Middle East conflict, this fire accident has posed a new challenge to the country's fuel security.

2. The total prize money for this year's French Open tennis tournament has been increased to ₹670 crore, which is 10% higher compared to last year.

(i) The French Open, the second Grand Slam tournament in the tennis calendar, is played on clay courts in Paris. This year's tournament is scheduled to begin on May 24.

(ii) According to the announcement by the tournament organizers, the total prize pool for this year is ₹670 crore. Winners of the men's and women's singles titles will each receive ₹30.71 crore, while the runners-up in both categories will get ₹15.35 crore each.

(iii) Players reaching the semifinals will receive ₹8.22 crore, while those eliminated in the first round will get ₹95 lakh. Winners of the men's and women's doubles events will each receive ₹6.58 crore, and the mixed doubles champions will get ₹1.33 crore.

(iv) For the first time this year, players will be allowed to wear devices that collect data related to their physical performance. Additionally, based on players' requests, there will be designated areas without camera surveillance to ensure their privacy.

(v) Spain's Carlos Alcaraz and the USA's Coco Gauff are the defending champions of this tournament.

3. A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court of India seeking to declare forced religious conversion as a terrorist act.

(i) The petition was filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay following allegations by eight women employees at a Tata Consultancy Services office in Nashik, Maharashtra, who claimed they were subjected to forced religious conversion and sexual harassment.

(ii) The petition states:

- The forced conversion incident in Nashik has shocked the nation.
- Forced religious conversion poses a serious threat not only to sovereignty, secularism, democracy, and freedom, but also to fraternity, dignity, unity, and national integrity.

- Organized and systematic forced conversions fall under the definition of a “terrorist act” as per Section 113 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.
- Since foreign funding is allegedly used to carry out such conversions, posing a threat to national security, it can also be treated as a terrorist act under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
- Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees the right to freely practice any religion.
- However, misuse of this right has led to instances of forced conversions. Therefore, forced religious conversion should be declared a terrorist act and appropriate action must be taken.

(iii) It has also been urged that both the central and state governments establish special courts to curb such activities and ensure strict punishment.

4.The Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, C. P. Radhakrishnan, stated that the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) with a capacity of 500 MW at the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research in Kalpakkam has reached its first stage of nuclear fission for power generation, calling it a major milestone.

(i) The 500 MW Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam achieved its first criticality (initial stage of nuclear fission) on April 6 at 8:25 PM. This marks the first stage of nuclear power generation.

(ii) This is considered a historic achievement in ensuring long-term energy security and enhancing indigenous nuclear technology capabilities. It is seen as a significant milestone in India’s nuclear power program.

(iii) Speaking about its importance in the Rajya Sabha, C. P. Radhakrishnan said that this major achievement at Kalpakkam was made possible through the collective efforts of thousands of scientists, engineers, industrial units, and various departments of the central atomic energy sector. It is an important milestone for the nation.

(iv) With this achievement, India has progressed toward the second stage of its three-stage nuclear power program, which involves the use of plutonium in reactors. The third stage will utilize thorium and uranium.

(v) The Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor has been developed jointly by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research and Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited and reviewed the reactor in 2024.

(vi) This achievement is considered highly significant in helping India achieve its goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2070 and its target of producing 100 gigawatts of nuclear power.

5.The Union Law Ministry has announced that the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023, which provides 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, has come into force.

(i) However, confusion has arisen because discussions had been initiated in Parliament to implement this law by 2029 through constitutional amendment bills, yet a notification stated that it has come into effect from April 16, 2026.

(ii) In this regard, a central government official said that the notification was issued as per legal procedures but did not provide a detailed explanation. Jairam Ramesh, General Secretary of the Indian

National Congress, stated that although the Women's Reservation Act was passed in September 2023, the issuance of a notification declaring it in force now is unusual. He added that this comes at a time when voting on related constitutional amendments is scheduled to take place on Friday.

6. "War is not a solution to any problem; the conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia must be resolved through peaceful means," said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday. He made this statement after meeting Austrian Chancellor Christian Stocker in Delhi.

(i) Christian Stocker arrived in India on a four-day official visit last Tuesday with the aim of strengthening India-Austria relations and expanding cooperation across various sectors. This is his first official visit to India.

(ii) During his meeting with Prime Minister Modi in Delhi, the two leaders held bilateral talks. In addition to mutual relations, they also held detailed discussions on the impacts of the Russia-Ukraine War and conflicts in West Asia.

(iii) Six agreements signed:

- Following the talks, six agreements were signed to enhance cooperation in areas such as investment promotion, defense matters, and counter-terrorism.
- Addressing the media jointly afterward, Prime Minister Modi said that the entire world is currently passing through a highly tense and sensitive period, and everyone is experiencing the impact of these tensions.

7. A special majority in Parliament is required to pass the constitutional amendment bill that seeks to implement 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, as well as to enable an increase in the number of Lok Sabha constituencies.

(i) This means that the bill must secure more than 50% of the total membership's votes, and additionally, it must receive the support of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. The ruling National Democratic Alliance does not currently have sufficient strength to meet this second requirement on its own.

(ii) To pass the bill, the Government must either secure the support of opposition parties or ensure that some key opposition parties abstain from voting. Due to these factors, there is significant uncertainty over whether the bill to implement women's reservation will be passed.

(iii) In the Lok Sabha, the National Democratic Alliance has a strength of 293 members (with Bharatiya Janata Party alone holding 240 seats). The opposition has 233 members. Additionally, there are 7 independent MPs, 4 members from YSR Congress Party not aligned with either bloc, and one member each from All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen and Shiromani Akali Dal.

(iv) What are the ruling side's options?

- If all 540 members participate, 360 votes are needed to achieve a two-thirds majority. If 30 members are absent, 340 votes would suffice; if 60 members are absent, 320 votes; and if 90 members are absent, 300 votes would be enough.
- The Indian National Congress has 98 members, the Samajwadi Party has 37, the All India Trinamool

Congress has 28, and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has 22 members. Therefore, persuading parties like the Samajwadi Party and Trinamool Congress to abstain could be a potential strategy for the Central Government. If other opposition parties also abstain, it would work in favor of the BJP

- In the Rajya Sabha, the NDA has 141 members (with BJP alone having 107), while the opposition has 83 members. Parties not aligned with either bloc—such as Bharat Rashtra Samithi, YSR Congress Party, Biju Janata Dal, Bahujan Samaj Party, and independents—together account for 20 members. A total of 163 votes is required to pass the bill in the Rajya Sabha. It is important to note that if the bill is not passed in the Lok Sabha, it will not be taken up in the Rajya Sabha.

8. Analysis of China's ongoing provocations against India and its strategic encircling tactics through neighboring nations.

(i) China's Renaming Provocations (Arunachal Pradesh)

- Territorial Claims: China persistently claims Arunachal Pradesh as a part of "South Tibet" and has recently renamed six locations in the state to assert its claim.
- Protests against Indian Leaders: China routinely issues diplomatic protests whenever Indian leaders visit the state, including visits by former PM Manmohan Singh (2009), the Dalai Lama (2017), President Droupadi Murmu (2023), and Home Minister Amit Shah (2023).
- In 2023, China renamed 11 locations in Arunachal Pradesh following high-profile visits and G20 meetings held in the region.
- The Indian Ministry of External Affairs has clarified that renaming places does not change the reality that these areas have always been and will always be part of India.

(ii) Historical and Recent Military Conflicts

- 1962 War: Following the 1962 war, the border remained relatively stable for decades.
- Galwan Valley Clash (2020): In June 2020, Chinese troops attempted to enter Indian territory in the Galwan Valley, leading to a violent clash in which 20 Indian soldiers were martyred. While China initially maintained silence, they officially admitted in February 2021 that four of their soldiers died in the encounter.
- Tensions have persisted despite the 2019 informal summit in Mamallapuram between PM Modi and Xi Jinping and numerous subsequent rounds of border talks.

(iii) China's Involvement in Pakistan :-

China has invested billions of rupees in Pakistan as part of a strategy to create a permanent economic and military foothold:

- Infrastructure Projects: Development of the Karakoram Highway and the Peshawar-Karachi Highway.
- Maritime Access: Modernization of the Gwadar Port, which provides China with strategic access to the Arabian Sea.
- Economic Corridor: Funding massive energy projects and establishing a dedicated economic corridor to link Chinese trade directly to the Indian Ocean.

(iv) China's Involvement in Sri Lanka :-

China's heavy investments in Sri Lanka are viewed as a method to gain strategic leverage in the Indian Ocean:

- Strategic Ports: Massive funding and development of the Hambantota Port and the Colombo Port City project.
- Energy Sector: Significant investments in various energy infrastructure projects across the island.

(v) Impact on India and Counter-Measures

- Rapid Infrastructure: India is developing extensive road networks in border areas, allowing villages that were previously isolated to be reached in a few hours.
- Logistics: Construction of strategic bridges across the Brahmaputra River to facilitate the rapid movement of heavy military equipment.
- Military Autonomy: The Indian military has been granted increased decision-making authority to respond immediately to border developments based on the ground situation.
- "Vibrant Villages" Program: Launched by the Home Minister in Arunachal Pradesh, this scheme aims to populate and develop border villages to maintain a permanent Indian presence.

(vi) India cannot afford to remain silent about China's renaming provocations, as they are designed to weaken India's territorial integrity. While India remains committed to diplomatic peace, rigorous border surveillance and robust defense modernization are the only ways to ensure India does not lose territory.

9. Analysis of the historical struggle and the 2026 legislative push to implement the 33% women's quota by the 2029 elections.

(i) Historical Facts :-

- Early Voting Rights: India granted women the right to vote in 1920, significantly earlier than many Western nations. By contrast, women in the United States waited 144 years after men for full suffrage, and Britain only granted universal voting rights in 1928.
- Reservation for women in local governance began in 1987-88. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) officially mandated a 33% quota in Village Panchayats and Municipalities. Currently, 21 Indian states have increased this to 50% reservation in local bodies.

(ii) Introducing the Bills: Past Failures and the 2023 Milestone

- The 33% Women's Reservation Bill was first introduced in the Lok Sabha by the Deve Gowda Government, but it failed to pass.
- Under the Manmohan Singh Government, the bill successfully passed in the Rajya Sabha in 2010 but lapsed because it was not passed in the Lok Sabha.
- In September 2023, the Modi Government passed the 106th Constitutional Amendment, known as the "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam". The bill received 454 votes in the Lok Sabha and was passed unanimously in the Rajya Sabha.

(iii) Statistical Analysis of Representation

- Initial Representation (1951): Women held only 5% of Lok Sabha seats.
- Representation in the Rajya Sabha has never crossed 13% between 1951 and 2026.
- Women's representation in the Lok Sabha only reached double digits after the year 2009.
- The 2019 Lok Sabha saw the highest female representation in history at 15%, while the 2014 Rajya Sabha peaked at 12.7%.
- Currently, women hold an average of only 10% of seats in State Legislative Assemblies.

(iv) The Current Situation (2026 Special Session)

To ensure implementation for the 2029 General Election, the Central Government held a special Parliamentary session from April 16 to 18, 2026.

- 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill: This new bill was introduced to facilitate the expansion of seats and the immediate application of the quota.
- Lok Sabha Expansion: The bill proposes increasing the total number of Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 850.
- Reserved Seats: Out of the new total, 272 to 280 seats will be reserved exclusively for women.
- Internal Reservation: The quota includes sub-reservations for women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).
- Census and Delimitation: To avoid delaying the reservation until 2034, the Government decided to base the delimitation on 2011 Census data.

(v) Addressing Regional Concerns

- South India will not lose legislative power.
- Total seats for the five southern states are projected to rise from 129 to 195.
- Specifically, Tamil Nadu's seats are expected to increase from 39 to 59.

Women have become the decisive force in elections, influenced by schemes like free bus travel and cooking gas connections, making their proportional representation a democratic necessity.