April 18, 2026 - Dinamani Newspaper - Tit bits

1. A Constitutional Amendment Bill—which sought to facilitate the speedy implementation of a 33 percent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, as well as to enable an increase in the number of Lok Sabha constituencies to a maximum of 850—was defeated in the Lok Sabha.

(i) For a Constitutional Amendment Bill to be passed, it requires the votes of more than 50 percent of the total membership (543), in addition to a two-thirds majority of the members participating in the voting.

(ii) In the vote held on the aforementioned Bill, the requisite two-thirds majority was not secured. With 528 members participating in the vote, the results showed that "298 votes were cast in favor of the bill, while 230 were cast against it; given that a two-thirds majority required 352 votes, the bill was defeated by a margin of 54 votes."

(iii) For the past few days, this bill has been the dominant topic of discussion across the country. Specifically, concerns were raised regarding a potential reduction in the representation of southern states, and the Central Government faced criticism for allegedly pushing forward with constituency delimitation under the guise of women's reservation. However, Prime Minister Modi and various Union Ministers clarified that no state would face discrimination during the delimitation process, nor would any state suffer a loss. Following the defeat of the bill, the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has seized upon this issue to use against the opposition parties.

(iv) The Central Government's Sudden Decision:

- A law providing for 33 percent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies was enacted in 2023. According to this legislation, women's reservation can only be implemented after the completion of the constituency delimitation exercise based on the 2027 census; consequently, the current situation renders its implementation impossible before 2034.
- Against this backdrop, the Central Government made a sudden decision to expedite the implementation of women's reservation. With the objective of introducing and passing three bills related to this matter, a special three-day session of Parliament commenced last Thursday (April 16).

(v) What are the Bills?:

The three bills—introduced amid strong opposition protests and now under detailed discussion—are as follows:

- The 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2026, which seeks to implement 33% reservation for women starting from 2029 and, to facilitate this, increase the total number of Lok Sabha constituencies from 543 to a maximum of 850.
- The Delimitation Bill, 2026, which proposes the establishment of a Delimitation Commission.
- The Union Territories Amendment Bill, 2026, which aims to enable the implementation of these constitutional changes in Union Territories that have legislative assemblies.

(vi) Defeat of the Bill:

- After an intense debate that continued until Friday evening, the Constitutional Amendment Bill for implementing women's reservation and carrying out constituency delimitation was defeated in the vote. As the main bill was rejected, the Central Government did not proceed with the other two related bills. The Lok Sabha proceedings were adjourned to Saturday.

2.Iran announced that it would fully open the Strait of Hormuz to facilitate the passage of all types of commercial vessels.

(i) Earlier, U.S. President Donald Trump stated that Israel and Lebanon had agreed to a 10-day temporary ceasefire.

3.In the financial year 2025–26, which ended in March, India's gold imports increased by 24% to reach a new high of $71.98 billion (approximately ₹6.65 lakh crore).

(i) It is noteworthy that in the previous financial year (2024–25), gold imports stood at $58 billion. At the same time, the volume of gold imports declined by 4.76% compared to the previous year. Imports, which were 757.09 tonnes in the earlier year, have decreased to 721.03 tonnes as per current estimates.

(ii) The average price of gold per kilogram rose from about $76,617 to $99,825 during the last financial year. This sharp increase is mainly attributed to the unprecedented rise in gold prices in the international market.

(iii) Silver imports:

- Silver imports surged by around 150% during the last financial year, reaching $12 billion. In quantity terms, 7,334.96 tonnes of silver were imported, which is 42% higher than the previous year.

(iv) From Switzerland:

- India imports the largest share of its gold—about 40%—from Switzerland. During the last financial year, total imports from Switzerland increased by 11.36% to $24.27 billion. This is followed by United Arab Emirates (16%) and South Africa (10%).

(v) Economic impact:

- Due to the sharp rise in gold and silver imports, the country's trade deficit (the difference between exports and imports) has widened to $333.20 billion. This is feared to have a significant impact on the country's current account deficit.
- Although the demand from the jewellery industry is the primary driver of these imports, the central government has been imposing various restrictions on gold and silver imports, keeping in mind the overall economic situation of the country.

4. Myanmar's Government has reduced the prison sentence imposed on former State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi (80).

(i) As part of a mass amnesty granted to 4,335 prisoners on the occasion of Myanmar's New Year, former

President Win Myint, a close ally of Aung San Suu Kyi, has been released.

(ii) In 2021, the military led by Min Aung Hlaing seized power by overthrowing the democratically elected Government headed by Aung San Suu Kyi. At that time, she, along with President Win Myint and other key leaders, was detained.

(iii) Of the 27-year prison sentence imposed on Aung San Suu Kyi under various charges including corruption and election irregularities, 4.5 years have now been reduced.

5.Reed Hastings, co-founder and current Chairman of Netflix, the world's leading OTT platform, will step down from his position at the annual meeting scheduled for June.

(i) This marks the end of his 29-year journey with the company. Having taken charge as CEO in 1999, he transformed Netflix from a DVD distribution company into a global streaming giant, competing with firms like Blockbuster.

(ii) In January 2023, he had already stepped down as CEO, handing over responsibilities to Ted Sarandos and Greg Peters. He is now also exiting the board of directors.

6. Former President of the Indian Olympic Association, N. Ramachandran (77), passed away in Chennai on Thursday (April 16) due to ill health.

7. To reduce the transportation of gas by road and to further enhance energy security, the Central Government has planned to set up a gas pipeline network at a cost of ₹12,500 crore.

(i) At present, gas imported from foreign countries is transported via tanker lorries by road to refineries. After refining, it is filled into cylinders and distributed to households and commercial establishments.

(ii) Due to this, oil companies are heavily dependent on road transport for gas movement. To reduce this dependence, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board has planned to establish a pipeline network.

(iii) Under this plan, pipelines will be laid connecting gas import terminals, processing plants, and cylinder filling stations. Gas will be transported between these three points through the pipeline network.

(iv) This will significantly reduce the transportation of gas via tanker lorries on roads and also improve safety.

(v) As part of the first phase of the project, nine locations have been identified for pipeline development. Work is underway to finalize tenders for laying pipelines over a distance of 2,500 km across four major hubs.

(vi) The project is expected to cost ₹12,500 crore. It is believed that by implementing this plan, road-based gas transportation can be significantly reduced by 2030, and accidents caused by tanker lorries can also be minimized.

8. In the financial year 2025–26, the Central Government granted recognition to more than 55,200 startups.

(i) According to a report by the Ministry of Commerce, this is the highest number of startups recognized in a single year since the launch of the Startup India programme in January 2016.

- As of March 31, more than 2.23 lakh startups have been officially recognized. These startups have created over 2.336 million direct jobs. The report also noted that the Government has continued to strongly support this flagship initiative, particularly by enabling startups to access funding through various channels.
- Startups are typically founded by young entrepreneurs with innovative business ideas and operate using modern technology. The objective of the initiative is to promote innovation and increase private investment.
- Sector-wise distribution shows that 22% of startups operate in the IT sector, 18% in agriculture, and 15% in healthcare.

9. Harivansh Narayan Singh, a nominated Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha, has been elected unopposed as the Deputy Chairman of the House.

(i) With this, he has been elected as Deputy Chairman for the third consecutive time. This is the first time a nominated MP has held this position.

(ii) Harivansh Narayan Singh, who has been a Rajya Sabha MP since 2014 from Bihar representing the Janata Dal (United), was earlier elected as Deputy Chairman in 2018 and 2020.

(iii) As his term as MP ended on April 9, Droupadi Murmu re-nominated him to the Rajya Sabha.

10. In the rankings of major economies released by the International Monetary Fund, India has slipped from 5th place to 6th place, while the United Kingdom has moved up from 6th to 5th.

(i) This decline is attributed to the depreciation of the Indian rupee against the US dollar and the revision of the GDP base year from 2011–12 to 2022–23.

(ii) The Central Government had expected India to overtake Japan and move into 4th place.

(iii) According to IMF data, India's GDP stood at $3.76 trillion in 2024, while the UK's GDP was $3.7 trillion. In the latest estimates, India's GDP is $3.92 trillion, whereas the UK's GDP has risen to $4 trillion.

(iv) Although India remains one of the fastest-growing major economies, the rupee has weakened against the US dollar in recent months.

(v) The rupee depreciated from 84.57 per US dollar in 2024 to 88.48 in 2025, and is expected to weaken further to 92.59 this year. In contrast, the British pound has strengthened against the US dollar.

(vi) Based on IMF projections, India is expected to remain in 6th place among major economies this year in terms of exchange rate-based GDP.

(vii) However, India is expected to overtake not only the UK but also Japan next year to reach 4th place. If the trend continues, India may surpass Germany to become the 3rd largest economy by 2031.

11. The Tamil Nadu Green Energy Corporation has intensified efforts to prepare project reports for establishing 37 model solar villages in Tamil Nadu.

(i) To promote solar power usage in households, the central government launched the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana in 2024. Under this scheme, a subsidy of ₹30,000 per kilowatt is provided for installing rooftop solar systems.

(ii) Additionally, the scheme includes the development of model solar villages in all districts.

(iii) Under this initiative, solar power plants will be set up in villages, and the electricity generated will be supplied to homes, panchayat offices, and other public buildings.

(iv) The Central Government provides ₹1 crore funding for each solar village. In Tamil Nadu, solar villages are being developed in 37 districts (excluding Chennai) by the state electricity board's subsidiary.

(v) Villages with a population of over 5,000 have been selected for this project.

(vi) According to an official from the corporation:

- Detailed project reports are being prepared through private contractors, including determining the megawatt capacity of solar plants and establishing transmission infrastructure.
- Once the planning is completed, solar plants will be set up and electricity will be supplied to all households in these villages.

12. Analysis of the Central Government's failed attempt to pass the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill in April 2026, which sought to increase Lok Sabha seats and implement women's reservation.

(i) Strategic "Deception" and Political Motives

- The Government introduced the bill despite knowing it lacked the two-thirds majority required to pass a Constitutional amendment.
- Out of 528 members present, the bill received 298 votes in favor and 230 against. It required 352 votes (two-thirds) to pass, meaning it failed by 54 votes.

(ii) Historical Facts: Women's Representation

- Constituent Assembly (1946): When the assembly first met on December 9, 1946, there were only 15 women members.
- Initial Demands: Pioneers like Ammu Swaminathan, Dakshayani Velayudhan, Sarojini Naidu, and Vijayalakshmi Pandit argued for equal representation in the chambers.
- Arguments Against Reservation: Interestingly, some women members like Hansa Mehta and Renuka Rayoriginally opposed the concept of "reserved seats," arguing that women wanted social and political justice rather than concessions, and that reservation would be a "slur on their intelligence".
- The 1951 Reality: Despite promises of adequate representation, in the first Lok Sabha elections (1951), only 22 women were elected out of 489 seats, a mere 4.5%.

(iii) Evolution of the Women's Reservation Bills:-

- A bill for 33% reservation in local bodies passed the Lok Sabha under Rajiv Gandhi but was defeated in the Rajya Sabha.

- First Successful Implementation (1992): The P.V. Narasimha Rao Government successfully passed the 33% reservation for women in Village Panchayats and Municipalities in both houses.
- Parliamentary Debut (1996): The first formal attempt to provide a 33% quota in Parliament was introduced as the 8th Constitutional Amendment Bill by the Deve Gowda government, but it failed to pass.
- The 2010 Lapsing: Under the Manmohan Singh Government, the 108th Amendment Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha but lapsed because it was never taken up in the Lok Sabha.
- The 2023 Milestone: The Narendra Modi Government passed the 106th Amendment (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) in 2023, but its implementation was tied to a future delimitation process, effectively delaying it until 2034.
- The 2026 Conflict: The current bill sought to bypass that delay by increasing seats to 850 based on 2011 Census data, leading to the current legislative standoff.

(iv) Analysis of Consequences

- The Government has not clarified how the transition from 543 to 850 seats would actually be managed or how debating time would be allocated for such a massive number of MPs.
- Regional Imbalance: South Indian states fear that basing the new seat count on population data "punishes" them for successful family planning, potentially reducing their overall influence in the Lok Sabha.
- Uncertainty for 2029: Because the 2026 bill failed, the implementation of the 33% reservation remains a "mirage" leaving women's representation as a central, unresolved issue for the 2029 General Election.