

April 24, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections

In the election held on Thursday for the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, a record 84.51% voter turnout was recorded. This is the highest ever in the 74-year electoral history of Tamil Nadu.

(i) Notably, this was the first election held after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in the state.

(ii) The election witnessed a four-cornered contest involving:

- DMK alliance
- AIADMK alliance
- Seeman's Naam Tamilar Katchi
- Vijay's TVK

A total of 4,023 candidates contested.

(iii) Polling was conducted in a single phase across all 234 constituencies, with 75,064 polling stations set up across the state.

(iv) For security arrangements:

- 83,095 personnel were deployed
- 300 companies of Central Armed Police Forces were engaged

(v) During the SIR process:

- 97.37 lakh voters were removed, including:
 - 66.44 lakh migrated individuals
 - 26.9 lakh deceased persons
 - 3.98 lakh duplicate entries
- Later, 27 lakh voters were added, including 14 lakh first-time voters
- As a result, the total number of voters reduced from 6,41,14,587 → 5,73,43,291
- Political observers noted that:
 - Inclusion of only eligible voters
 - High enthusiasm among first-time voters

led to this historic turnout.

- Compared to the previous election (72.81% turnout), the 2026 election saw an increase of 12%.

(vi) District-wise highest turnout:

- Karur – 92.66%
- Dharmapuri – 90.14%
- Erode – 90.10%

2. West Bengal Assembly Elections

In the first phase of elections held on Thursday for the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, a record 91.78% voter turnout was recorded – the highest ever in the state, according to the Election Commission.

(i) The election in 152 constituencies across 16 districts witnessed clashes and violence in several places, including attacks on candidates.

(ii) The state's total 294 constituencies are being covered in two phases:

- First phase: 152 constituencies
- Conducted for 3.60 crore voters

44,378 polling stations were set up.

3. NASSCOM Leadership Appointment

NASSCOM, the premier body of India's IT sector, has appointed Srikant Velamakanni, Co-founder and CEO of Fractal, as its new Chairman.

(i) This appointment follows the completion of the tenure of Sindhu Gangadharan, Managing Director of SAP Labs India.

Additionally, Kishor Patil, CEO of KPIT Technologies, has been elected as Vice-Chairman of NASSCOM.

(ii) Srikant Velamakanni has served for over six years as a member of the NASSCOM Executive Council and as Vice-Chairman, with deep expertise in AI and data analytics.

(iii) As the founder of one of India's leading AI companies, he is expected to guide the IT sector through major technological transformations.

(iv) Commenting on his role, he stated that in the coming years, focus will be on:

- Driving AI-led growth in both services and product sectors
- Developing a skilled workforce

4. France-UK Migration Control Agreement

France and United Kingdom have signed a new 3-year security agreement to curb illegal migration into the UK via small boats across the English Channel.

(i) A key provision of the agreement is that the UK will provide £500 million in funding to France over three years.

(ii) This funding will be used to:

- Strengthen security along the northern French coastline
- Increase patrol operations

(iii) The agreement includes performance-based conditions:

- An additional £160 million will be provided if illegal crossings are successfully reduced
- Funding may be reduced or stopped if targets are not met

(iv) Security enhancements include:

- Increasing personnel from 907 to 1,392 officers
- 24/7 surveillance using drones, helicopters, and electronic monitoring systems
- Targeting and disabling smuggling boats known as “taxi boats”

(v) However, human rights organizations have raised concerns:

- Strict enforcement alone may not solve the issue
- Increased restrictions may force migrants into more dangerous routes
- Over 162 deaths have occurred in the past three years during such crossings

(vi) Despite enforcement efforts, over 6,000 migrants have already crossed the Channel into the UK this year, evading surveillance.

5. The International Criminal Court has confirmed charges of crimes against humanity against former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

(i) A three-judge bench unanimously stated that there is sufficient evidence to conduct an investigation against Duterte regarding the killing of thousands of people during the harsh anti-drug campaign carried out while he was in office.

6. Thomas and Uber Cup is associated with Badminton.

7. António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

8. India and Qatar held discussions on resolving issues in trade and fuel supply caused by the West Asia conflict.

(i) Union Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal held a virtual meeting with Qatar’s Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Sayed.

(ii) It is noteworthy that India imports a significant quantity of natural gas from Qatar. India is also engaged in negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

9. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated that Africa has been given greater importance in India’s foreign policy.

(i) The 4th summit of the India-Africa Forum Summit is set to be held soon. A launch event for its logo, website, and theme music was held in New Delhi.

Speaking at the event, Jaishankar said:

- The relationship between India and Africa is rooted in strong people-to-people connections. Cultural ties and direct interactions over centuries have shaped this partnership.
- India supported African nations during their struggles against colonialism, strengthening mutual relations. There are close links between the independence movements of India and African countries.
- In India’s current foreign policy, Africa holds a central place. India approaches its relations with African nations based on equality, mutual respect, and shared growth.

Engagement across various sectors is increasing through high-level visits. India has consistently supported giving Africa a greater role in global institutions. As part of this, during its Presidency of the G20 in 2023, India facilitated the inclusion of the African Union as a member.

10. Analysis of the recurring firecracker factory explosions in India, particularly focusing on the recent tragedy in Virudhunagar and the systemic failure to prevent such disasters.

(i) Causes of Firecracker Blasts

- Many blasts, including the recent one in Virudhunagar, are suspected to have been caused by friction during the mixing or preparation of explosive powders.
- Factories frequently violate safety limits on the number of workers per room; for instance, in one instance, over 50 people were working in space meant for only 16.
- The high demand for crackers to celebrate election victories in four states led factories to work secretly on Sundays and holidays, bypassing mandatory rest periods.
- High temperatures during the summer months increase the volatility of chemicals, which is why production is legally required to stop early in the day.
- A significant lack of regular inspections by Government officials, which allows factories to operate while ignoring safety protocols.

(ii) Materials Used and Substitutions

- Due to the West Asian war, there has been a shortage of Sulphur. As a result, factories have reportedly started using "Chlorate" as a substitute, which is more unstable and prone to accidental ignition.
- Factories were found to be manufacturing "Fancy" variety crackers without the proper authorization or safety infrastructure required for such types.

(iii) Prevailing Rules and Safety Standards

Specific legal mandates under the Explosives Act of 2008 that are routinely ignored:

- Occupancy Limits: The rule states that only 4 people should work in a 100 sq. ft. area, and a mixing room should never have more than two employees.
- Summer Timings: During the summer, all firecracker production must be completed before 11:00 AM to avoid the peak heat of the day.
- Structural Separation: Rules mandate specific, safe distances between the mixing room, production room, and storage warehouse to prevent a single spark from causing a chain reaction.

(iv) State-Wise Recent Incidents (2026)

Four major blasts occurred across India in just the last three months:

- Tamil Nadu (Virudhunagar): On April 19, 2026, a blast at the Vanaja factory killed 25 people, including 21 women.
- Kerala (Thrissur): A blast during the preparation for the Pooram festival resulted in approximately 15 deaths.
- Rajasthan (Bhiwadi) & Andhra Pradesh (Kakinada): Both states recorded major firecracker-related fatalities recently.

(v) Action Taken and Failures by Government

- Lack of Accountability: Government should be held accountable for not taking action against negligent officials. Officials who fail to conduct proper inspections are rarely punished or removed from their posts.
- Following a major blast in 2012 (Om Sakthi factory, 40 deaths), stricter rules were implemented, which kept accidents low for a decade. However, the current Government has allowed these standards to slip.
- Political Indifference: Despite the high death toll, the safety of firecracker workers has not become a significant election issue, indicating a lack of political will to solve the problem.

11. "Special Intensive Revision" (SIR) of domestic gas cylinder connections, modeled after the successful cleanup of the Indian voters' list.

(i) The Success of the Voter SIR

The recent success of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voters' lists to justify a similar move for other essential services.

- The SIR for the voters' list removed nearly 97 lakh ineligible entries (duplicate, deceased, or moved) in Tamil Nadu alone.
- This led to a more accurate representation of the electorate and contributed to the record-breaking 84.51% voter turnout in the 2026 assembly elections.
- Despite initial political protests, the process restored public faith in the democratic process.

(ii) The Need for another SIR (Gas Connections)

There is massive disparity in data regarding domestic gas cylinder distribution:

- There are approximately 20 crore family (ration) cards in India, but there are 33 crore gas cylinder connections.
- Because ration cards were not mandatory for securing gas connections, one individual may hold multiple connections across different addresses.
- Many households maintain "inactive" connections for various generations within the same family without legitimate need.
- While the number of connections increased from 14 crore to 33 crore over the last decade, much of this growth is suspected to be in "ghost" or duplicate accounts.

(iii) Consequences of the Current System

The lack of a cleaned-up database for gas connections has several negative impacts:

- Excess and inactive connections are frequently diverted to the black market, where they are sold illegally for profit.
- During global supply chain disruptions—such as the current West Asian war—selfish individuals hoard multiple cylinders while the poor are left in long queues.
- During crisis, the Government struggles to ensure equitable distribution because it cannot verify which households truly need the supply and which are hoarding.
- Large hotels and marriage halls often continue to use resources without restriction, while small tea

shops and street vendors are forced to close due to shortages.

(iv) Advantages of the Proposed SIR

- Integrating ration card data with gas connection IDs would reveal and remove redundant or fraudulent accounts.
- An SIR would ensure that every needy household receives its fair share of clean fuel without being sidelined by hoarders.
- By removing "ghost" connections, the Government can effectively shut down the illegal black market for cylinders.
- A lean and accurate database would allow the Government to manage distribution efficiently during future fuel shortages or international conflicts.
- Cleaning the system would facilitate the transition to piped gas connections, which are currently more prevalent in Northern states like Gujarat and Maharashtra than in Tamil Nadu.

While political parties promise free water and welfare, they have failed to address the systemic corruption in gas distribution. Treating the gas connection database with the same rigor as the voters' list (SIR) is characterized as a democratic necessity to protect the rights of the poor and ensure national resource security.

