

April 26, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. The United States has imposed economic sanctions on a Chinese oil refinery company involved in crude oil trade with Iran, along with around 40 shipping companies and cargo vessels. This was stated in a press release issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury:

(i) Independent oil refineries operating freely in China continue to play a significant role in sustaining Iran's crude oil sales.

(ii) Among them, the Hengli Petrochemical Refinery located in Dalian city, Liaoning province, China, is one of the major buyers of crude oil and other petroleum products from Iran. Therefore, the United States has imposed sanctions on this company.

(iii) Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian), the second-largest independent oil refinery in China, has reportedly purchased more than 5 million barrels of Iranian crude oil since 2023 through vessels that were already under sanctions.

(iv) In addition, around 40 shipping companies and vessels that function as part of Iran's covert oil transport network have also been sanctioned. These vessels transport crude oil, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), petroleum, and petrochemical products from Iran to other countries, thereby enabling financial support to Iran's unstable regime.

(v) Restricting Iran's financial resources:

- Iran's actions, carried out without regard for the dangerous consequences across the Middle East region, pose a threat to U.S. interests. These sanctions are intended to limit Iran's ability to raise funds for such activities.
- U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent stated that these economic sanctions would create financial pressure on Iran's regime, prevent aggressive actions in the Middle East, and hinder its ambitions to develop nuclear weapons.
- As part of these measures, any assets owned by the sanctioned entities within the United States or under the control of U.S. persons will be frozen. Violations of these sanctions by U.S. or foreign individuals may result in civil or criminal penalties.
- Among the approximately 40 sanctioned entities and vessels are China-based Tofa Shipping Company and the Marshall Islands-flagged vessel "Idor" owned by it.
- These vessels have transported not only Iranian crude oil but also LPG, high-sulfur fuel oil, ethylene, and other products to international markets.
- Many of the sanctioned oil tankers have delivered large quantities of Iranian crude oil to China.

(vi) This move comes at a time when U.S. President Donald Trump is planning to visit China next month to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping. The sanctions target Chinese petrochemical refineries and shipping companies, even as China remains one of the largest importers of Iranian crude oil. Before the outbreak of conflict involving the U.S., Israel, and Iran, China accounted for approximately 80–90% of Iran's crude oil exports.

2. Restructuring of NITI Aayog

The Central Government has restructured NITI Aayog, which functions as a public policy think tank, promotes economic growth, and strengthens cooperative federalism.

(i) As part of the restructuring, Ashok Kumar Lahiri has been appointed as the new Vice Chairman. Additionally, the following have been appointed as full-time members:

- K. V. Raju (Economist)
- M. Srinivas (Director of AIIMS)
- Abhay Karandikar (Secretary, Department of Science and Technology)
- Govardhan Das
- Rajiv Gauba

(ii) Announcing this on his X (Twitter) account, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the new Vice Chairman and members. He noted that NITI Aayog has emerged as a key pillar in policymaking, promoting cooperative federalism, simplifying governance, and driving reforms. It also serves as a platform for innovation and long-term strategic thinking.

(iii) The Prime Minister serves as the Chairperson of NITI Aayog. Following his appointment, Ashok Kumar Lahiri met Narendra Modi as a courtesy.

(iv) Ashok Kumar Lahiri, a BJP MLA from West Bengal, has previously served as Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of India and as a member of the 15th Finance Commission. He is not contesting in the ongoing West Bengal Assembly elections.

3. AAP MPs Defection Issue

Senior leader of Aam Aadmi Party and its Rajya Sabha group leader Sanjay Singh stated that a letter will be sent to the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha seeking disqualification of seven MPs who left the party and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party.

(i) Due to differences with AAP leadership, seven Rajya Sabha MPs—including Raghav Chadha, Sandeep Pathak, and Ashok Mittal—resigned and joined the BJP. This is considered a major setback for AAP. Among them, six MPs (including Raghav Chadha) were elected from Punjab, while Swati Maliwal was elected from Delhi.

(ii) “Against the Constitution”:

- Speaking on the issue, Sanjay Singh stated that the anti-defection law clearly prohibits any split or division in Parliament. Even if two-thirds of members support it, such a split has no legal recognition.
- He further emphasized that the Anti-Defection Law and the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution do not recognize any form of split, division, or grouping in either the Rajya Sabha or Lok Sabha—even with a two-thirds majority.

4. Nilgiri Tahr Census

The synchronized census of the Nilgiri Tahr began on Friday (April 24) and will continue until April 27, according to a press release from the Tamil Nadu Forest Department.

(i) The Government of Tamil Nadu has been implementing several special schemes to ensure the long-term conservation of the Nilgiri Tahr, the state animal. As part of this, the census is being conducted jointly with the Kerala Forest Department.

(ii) The census is conducted annually after the winter calving season, when both adult herds and young animals are visible.

- In the first synchronized census in 2024, the population was estimated at 1,031.
- In the second census conducted last year, the population increased to 1,303.

(iii) The study confirmed continued use of newly recolonized habitats such as grassland hills and the return of the species to areas where it had not been seen for over a decade. Many surveyed landscapes resemble locations described in ancient Sangam literature.

(iv) The third synchronized census began on April 24 and will continue until April 27. It covers:

- 14 forest divisions
- 43 forest ranges
- 124 forest sectors
- 177 census blocks

across more than 3,100 km² throughout Tamil Nadu.

(v) The survey spans from Ashambu Hills in Kanyakumari to Thavalamalai in Gudalur. Around 800 trained field personnel are participating. Additionally, radio-collar tracking devices are being fitted on the animals—this is the first time such monitoring is being implemented for Nilgiri Tahr in India.

(vi) The release noted that such synchronized censuses help in effective habitat restoration and conservation planning.

5. Local Elections in Gaza After 20 Years

Local body elections were held in the Gaza region of Palestine after nearly 20 years.

(i) Amid war with Israel and ongoing political instability, this election is seen as a significant milestone in shaping Palestine's future. Notably, people in Gaza voted for the first time since 2006.

(ii) The Palestinian Authority, based in the West Bank, was expelled from Gaza by Hamas in 2007.

(iii) Following a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in October last year, mediated by the United States, the Palestinian Authority is attempting to reassert its control over the region by conducting elections in Deir al-Balah in Gaza.

(iv) Despite elections being held after two decades, voter turnout remained low:

- 13.8% in Deir al-Balah (Gaza)
- 25.3% in the West Bank

Voting in the West Bank continued until 7 PM, while in Gaza it ended an hour earlier due to electricity shortages. Although Hamas did not officially contest, candidates backed by the group are in the fray, and their performance is seen as a measure of Hamas's influence.

(v) The elections are being conducted despite financial constraints and restrictions imposed by Israel. The Palestinian Authority is struggling even to pay salaries, as Israel has withheld tax revenues meant for

Palestine.

(vi) If these local elections are successfully completed, there is strong expectation among the international community and Palestinians that Parliamentary and Presidential elections may follow soon.

6. Proposed Suspension of H-1B Visa Program in the U.S.

A new bill has been introduced in the U.S. Congress proposing a temporary three-year suspension of the H-1B visa, which could impact foreign workers, including Indian IT professionals.

(i) The bill was introduced by Eli Crane of the Republican Party, associated with President Donald Trump. The proposed restrictions have raised concerns among foreign workers.

(ii) Key proposals include:

- Reducing the annual visa cap from 65,000 to 25,000
- Setting a minimum annual salary of \$200,000 (approx. ₹1.88 crore) for H-1B visa holders

(iii) The bill also proposes replacing the current lottery system with a preference system that prioritizes higher-paid applicants. Supporters argue that U.S. companies often overlook domestic workers and hire foreign employees at lower wages.

(iv) Additional provisions include:

- Companies must ensure that no American workers are laid off when hiring foreign workers
- Employers must prove that no qualified domestic candidates are available
- Strict rules to prevent H-1B visa holders from obtaining permanent residency
- Restrictions on visa holders bringing their families to the U.S.

7. Indian Hockey Player Gurbakhsh Singh Grewal- Passed away.

Gurbakhsh Singh Grewal (84), a member of the Indian hockey team that won the bronze medal at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, has passed away.

8. Vikram-I Private Rocket – Hardware Dispatch

Hardware for India's first private rocket Vikram-I, developed by Skyroot Aerospace, was flagged off by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy.

(i) The rocket is scheduled to be launched into Earth orbit in the coming months from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh. The hardware was dispatched from Telangana.

- The Chief Minister stated that the rocket being fully designed in Hyderabad is a matter of pride.
- The company had developed its first rocket in 2022 and has rapidly progressed to orbital launch capability—marking a major milestone.
- He highlighted the presence of global aerospace companies like Boeing, Airbus, and Safran in the state.
- Telangana aims to become a global hub for space technology by 2047.
- Engineering exports from the state grew by 117.9% between 2023–24 and 2024–25, driven largely by aerospace components and defense equipment.

- The Government is focusing on skill development programs in collaboration with global universities and industry experts.
- Strong policies, infrastructure, and a skilled workforce will continue to support companies like Skyroot.

9. Ganga Expressway Inauguration

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Ganga Expressway in Uttar Pradesh on April 29.

(i) Built at a cost of ₹37,000 crore, this 594 km six-lane expressway connects Meerut and Prayagraj. It is the longest expressway in the state and one of India's largest infrastructure projects.

(ii) It passes through 12 districts, including Meerut, Hapur, Bulandshahr, Amroha, Shahjahanpur, Unnao, Raebareli, Pratapgarh, and Prayagraj.

(iii) The foundation stone was laid in 2021 by Narendra Modi. The project was divided into four packages and completed accordingly. It is expected to:

- Reduce travel time
- Improve industrial logistics
- Attract new investments

(iv) A 3.5 km emergency airstrip has also been constructed in Shahjahanpur for aircraft landings during emergencies—adding strategic importance to the expressway.

10. UN General Assembly President - Annalena Baerbock

11. DRDO Weapon Systems Showcase

Advanced weapon systems developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) were showcased.

(i) The systems were unveiled in Mumbai by Samir V. Kamat, who is also the Chairman of DRDO.

(ii) The showcased systems include:

- 30 mm unmanned turret systems
- 7.62 mm PKT machine guns

These were designed indigenously to enhance the strength of the Indian Armed Forces.

(iii) Currently, around 65% of the components are domestically sourced, with plans to increase this to 90%.

(iv) These high-performance weapons, equipped with advanced engines, are capable of rapid and versatile operations.

(v) The systems were developed with contributions from companies like Tata Group and Bharat Forge, along with several MSMEs.