

**P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY****Building Bureaucrats Since 2006****July 16, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits**

1. Leaders including Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge paid tribute to former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K. Kamaraj on the occasion of his 124th birth anniversary.
 - i. Popularly known as “Karmaveerar”, K.Kamaraj was born on July 15, 1903, in Virudhunagar (then known as Virudupatti). He served as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu from 1954 to 1963 and as the President of the Indian National Congress from 1964 to 1967. He passed away on October 2, 1975.
2. The number of people infected with Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has increased to 2,011, with 754 deaths reported.
 - i. The World Health Organization (WHO) has expressed concern that despite intensive efforts to contain the outbreak, which began on May 15, the spread of the disease has not been brought under control.
 - ii. The currently circulating Bundibugyo strain of the Ebola virus has no globally approved vaccine or specific treatment, making disease control much more difficult. The situation has worsened as healthcare workers have gone on strike over unpaid salaries.
 - iii. In addition, the country’s ongoing civil conflict and the continuous displacement of people have made it difficult to trace those who came into contact with infected individuals. As a result, many patients are dying without receiving proper treatment, often before reaching healthcare facilities.
3. Ukraine and the European Union have signed an agreement to expand defence manufacturing through joint projects by combining Ukraine’s advanced drone technology expertise with Europe’s industrial production capacity.
 - i. The announcement was made by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen

during her visit to Kyiv, marking the anniversary of the founding of the ancient Ukrainian state. As the Russia–Ukraine war has completed four years, this is her 11th visit to Kyiv since the conflict began.

- ii. Since Russia launched its invasion in 2022, Ukraine has rapidly developed its drone manufacturing industry to world-class standards. Although Ukraine has already signed nine separate defence agreements with various countries, this is the first comprehensive agreement involving all member states and companies of the European Union.

4. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved the appointment of Rajiv Kumar, former Finance Secretary and former Chief Election Commissioner, as the new Part-Time Chairman of HDFC Bank, India's largest private-sector bank.

- i. His appointment takes effect immediately from Wednesday and will be for a three-year term. Keki Mistry, who has been serving as the interim chairman, will continue as a non-executive director of the bank.
- ii. Rajiv Kumar has been appointed in place of Atanu Chakraborty, who resigned in March, citing that certain banking operations were inconsistent with his personal principles.
- iii. Rajiv Kumar served as India's 25th Chief Election Commissioner and had earlier served as the Secretary of the Department of Financial Services. During his tenure (2017–2020), he introduced several key reforms in India's public sector banking system, which was then struggling with high levels of non-performing assets (NPAs), capital shortages, and fraudulent financial transactions. One of the major reforms was the consolidation of 27 public sector banks into 12 banks.

5. For the first time in India, Swiggy Instamart, in partnership with public-sector oil company Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), has launched a service in Bengaluru that delivers LPG cylinders to homes shortly after they are ordered.

- i. Customers can order HP Navya 10-kg fiber cylinders, which are lightweight, rust-resistant, and designed to allow easy monitoring of the gas level inside.
- ii. This service is expected to be particularly useful for small families, students, and apartment residents. In addition, 5-kg iron LPG cylinders will also be available through

the Instamart app.

- iii. One of the key features of the service is that customers do not need a pre-existing LPG connection to purchase the cylinders. First-time buyers will be treated as new customers, and during subsequent orders they can exchange the empty cylinder for a filled one.
- iv. Swiggy Instamart CEO Amitesh Jha stated that the cylinders will be delivered only after proper identity verification and in compliance with all safety regulations by HPCL personnel.

6. Indian racing driver Atiqa Mir, aged 11, impressed by securing pole position in the third round of the F1 Academy Future Champions Programme in Italy.

7. President Murmu Urges Ayurveda Students to Embrace New Technologies

President Droupadi Murmu urged Ayurveda students and researchers to readily adopt new technologies in order to strengthen the global recognition of Ayurvedic medicine.

- i. She made these remarks during a three-day international conference organized by the All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) in New Delhi to mark Acharya Sushruta Jayanti.

8. Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan stated that democracy flourishes when national interest takes precedence over political differences.

- i. He made the remarks while participating in a conference of former and current members of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly, held as part of the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Rajasthan Assembly in Jaipur.

9. President of the European Council – António Costa

Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India – Ajay Sood

10. Approximately 19,000 files related to the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP), India's largest nuclear power station, have reportedly been leaked online.

- i. A cybercriminal group known as World Leaks has allegedly been carrying out

ransomware attacks by infiltrating computer systems, stealing data, and demanding money from victims.

- ii. The group has reportedly uploaded files related to the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, located in Tirunelveli district, on the dark web, the hidden part of the internet that is difficult to access through conventional means.
- iii. In response, the Reliance Group, headed by industrialist Anil Ambani and one of the contractors associated with the Kudankulam project, informed an English media outlet that some of its data, including information related to the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, had been partially stolen.
- iv. According to the company, the leaked data had been stored on servers maintained by Yotta, an Indian data centre services provider.
- v. The leaked files are said to include engineering drawings, supplier details, inspection records, and insurance-related documents connected with the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant. However, Reliance Group has not disclosed exactly which data were compromised.
- vi. About 19,000 files, amounting to approximately 14.3 GB and identifiable using the keyword "KKNP", have reportedly been available online since June 11. The files are said to cover the period from 2016 to 2025.
- vii. Among the 858,000 files allegedly available on the World Leaks website that are linked to Reliance, these 19,000 files are considered the most significant.
- viii. Pratik Agarwal, Managing Director of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), clarified that the information that surfaced regarding Kudankulam Units 3 and 4 does not relate to the security or safety of the nuclear reactors. He stated:
- ix. The information reportedly available in the public domain relates only to routine, non-sensitive, and public utility matters. It has no connection with any nuclear safety or nuclear security systems or confidential operational information.

11. A group of U.S. Senators has introduced a bill proposing a 100% tariff on imports from India.

- i. The bill, sponsored by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham and others, proposes imposing a 100% tariff on countries importing crude oil from Russia, which is under U.S.

sanctions. The countries listed include India, China, Slovakia, Hungary, and Azerbaijan. However, 15 European countries that also import Russian fuel have been proposed for exemption.

- ii. If enacted, this would become the first instance in which the U.S. Congress uses tariffs as a punitive measure against countries accused of financially supporting a nation engaged in war.
- iii. Earlier, another bill had proposed an even steeper 500% tariff on countries importing crude oil and petroleum products from Russia.

12. Tamil Nadu Ministers Attend Bharat Tex 2026 International Textile Exhibition

Tamil Nadu Ministers M. Vijay Balaji and S. Keerthana Unnithan participated in the Bharat Tex 2026 International Textile Exhibition and Conference, being held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, under the Ministry of Textiles.

- i. Bharat Tex 2026, being held from July 14 to July 17, is regarded as India's premier global textile event. It was inaugurated by Union Minister for Textiles Giriraj Singh.
- ii. The event has been organized by the Bharat Tex Trade Federation (BTTF) with the support of the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

13. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister S. Joseph Vijay and Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala agreed that Tamil Nadu and Kerala will undertake joint measures to combat drug trafficking.

- i. After meeting Chief Minister Vijay at the Tamil Nadu Secretariat for about 30 minutes, Ramesh Chennithala told reporters: "Kerala has launched an anti-drug initiative called 'Operation Toofan'. It has been implemented successfully over the past 43 days. So far, more than 6,000 people have been arrested, over 5,500 cases have been registered, and more than 100 persons have been imprisoned. Their properties have also been confiscated."

14. The Union Cabinet has approved an allocation of approximately ₹1.9 lakh crore for the second phase of schemes aimed at promoting semiconductor manufacturing, mobile phone production, and exports in India.

- i. Under the approved plan:
 - ₹1.27 lakh crore has been allocated for the Semicon 2.0 Programme.
 - ₹62,500 crore has been allocated for the Mobile Manufacturing Scheme 2.0.
- ii. The Cabinet has also approved a New National Investment Policy to facilitate the production of an additional 10 million tonnes (1 crore tonnes) of urea annually.
 - India currently requires about 40 million tonnes (4 crore tonnes) of urea each year but produces only 30 million tonnes (3 crore tonnes) domestically.
 - The National Investment Policy–2026 aims to make India self-reliant in urea production.
 - Under the policy, 8–9 new gas-based urea manufacturing plants will be established.
 - Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw stated that six new urea plants have already been commissioned over the past 10 years, significantly reducing India's dependence on imports.

15. In an unprecedented achievement, 169 organ donors in Tamil Nadu have enabled 937 people to receive life-saving organ transplants during the past six months.

- i. Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan, Member Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Transplant Authority, stated that Tamil Nadu continues to be India's leading state in organ donation, with one of the country's most advanced organ transplant systems.
- ii. On September 23, 2023, the Tamil Nadu Government announced that state honours would be accorded to organ donors. Following this initiative, several other Indian states adopted similar measures.
- iii. In 2024, a total of 268 individuals donated organs. Through these donations, approximately 1,500 patients received transplants in Government and Private hospitals.
- iv. Furthermore, organs retrieved from 266 brain-dead donors during the year were successfully transplanted into 1,476 recipients, giving them a new lease on life.

16. Commencement of the India - Britain landmark trade deal and its immediate economic implications.

- i. Timeline and Official Implementation
 - The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between India and

Britain officially came into effect on Wednesday, July 15, 2026.

- The agreement was originally signed in July, 2025.
- On the very first day of implementation, India exported goods worth \$140 million (₹1,348 crore) to Britain.

ii. Economic Impact and Market Access

- Under this agreement, 99% of Indian export products now have duty-free access to the British market.
- In return, 90% of British imports into India will benefit from duty exemptions or significant tariff reductions.
- Total bilateral trade, currently valued at £48 billion (₹6.19 lakh crore), is projected to double by 2030.
- A significant fact mentioned is that the tax on high-end British cars, which was previously over 110%, has been slashed to just 10%.

iii. Specific Benefits for Industry Sectors

- Indian Beneficiaries: Major gains are expected in sectors such as textiles, leather goods, gems and jewelry, engineering goods, marine products, pharmaceuticals, processed foods, and digital commerce.
- British Beneficiaries: The agreement provides a boost to British automobile manufacturing, consumer goods, and medical technology.
- MSME Support: Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted that the agreement would provide new impetus to India's farmers and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

iv. Social Security and Labor Mobility

- A critical non-trade aspect of the deal is the Double Social Security Contribution Avoidance Agreement.
- Indian professionals on temporary assignments in Britain will no longer be required to pay social security contributions in both countries simultaneously.
- This measure ensures that Indian workers do not lose their pension benefits while working abroad.

v. Chennai's First-Day Export Statistics

- Chennai recorded its first export under the new agreement on Wednesday, valued at

₹4.29 crore (\$446,046).

- The first batch included gold jewelry, vehicle spare parts, leather footwear, rice, millets, and frozen food products.
- Leading companies involved in the first day's exports included Emerald Jewel Industry (Coimbatore), Breaks India, Wheels India, and Good Leather Shoes.
- The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) facilitated the shipment of 50 metric tons of processed foods, including premium traditional rice and country sugar.

vi. Diplomatic and Strategic Significance

- British High Commissioner Lindy Cameron described the deal as a "model agreement" for future global trade and a testament to the economic strength of both democracies.
- Prime Minister Modi stated that the agreement reflects the mutual trust between the two nations and their shared vision for innovation, technology, and sustainable growth.

17. India to Prioritize Russian Crude Oil Despite American Tariff Threat

- Members of the US Senate have reintroduced a bill that imposes a 100% tariff on countries importing Russian crude oil and natural gas. This is a significant reduction from a previously proposed 500% tariff introduced in April 2025.
- In June 2026, India imported approximately 2.6 million barrels of Russian crude oil per day, representing the largest portion of its total crude oil imports. These import levels have been steadily rising since March and are expected to remain high through July.
- The proposed bill specifically targets five nations—India, China, Slovakia, Hungary, and Azerbaijan—with the 100% tariff, while providing a total exemption for 15 European nations that also import Russian energy.
- Analysis by research firm Kpler indicates that India has few alternatives, as global crude production is low and critical supply routes like the Strait of Hormuz face continuous threats. Consequently, Russian crude remains the most reliable and price-effective source for India's national energy security.

18. Intensifying heatwave across Tamil Nadu and the broader geographical and historical implications of the El Nino phenomenon.

i. Geographical Mechanism of El Niño

- El Nino is defined by the unusual warming of the sea surface in the Pacific Ocean compared to its normal state.
- These climatic shifts typically persist for 7 to 24 months.
- During El Nino cycles, average temperatures can rise by 5°C to 7°C, while seasonal monsoon rainfall significantly decreases.
- In May 2026, meteorological stations noted higher-than-normal temperatures not only in the Pacific but also across the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

ii. Global Vulnerability and City Rankings

- The Climate Change Research Division of Oxford University recently identified 205 global cities most vulnerable to extreme El Nino-induced heat.
- The list was compiled based on population density, humidity levels, urbanization rate, and forest cover.
- 14 Indian cities feature in the top 50 global danger zones.
- Madurai ranks 7th in the world for heat vulnerability, while Bangalore is 33rd and Chennai is 49th.

iii. Record-Breaking Heat in Tamil Nadu (July 2026)

- Madurai recorded an unprecedented maximum temperature of 108.5°F on Tuesday, July 14, which is 5.5°C above the normal average.
- Temperatures in Karur, Dindigul, Nilgiris, and Vellore districts were recorded at 5.1°C above their usual seasonal norms.
- Ooty experienced a temperature spike of 7.4% above normal, while Tiruttani and Kodaikanal saw increases of 5.3%.
- The heat is being exacerbated by dry westerly winds that lack humidity, preventing the usual cooling effect of the Badi winds.

iv. Hydrological and Agricultural Crisis

- The Southwest monsoon has failed to intensify due to El Nino, leading to a rainfall deficit of over 50% in many regions.
- Low rainfall in the Western Ghats catchment areas has caused water levels in the

Mullaperiyar Dam to plunge.

- For the first time in recent years, the Kuruvai (short-term) paddy cultivation in Madurai and Theni districts has failed due to a lack of irrigation water as of July 15.
- Experts warn of an impending acute drinking water crisis and widespread agricultural distress across 28 districts of Tamil Nadu.

v. Historical Context and Comparisons

- The Great Famine (1877–78): Historically, El Nino was the primary cause of the devastating famine in South India known as "Thathu Varuda Panjam," which lasted for two years.
- Other significant years where El Nino caused severe drought and heat in India include 1982–83, 1997–98, and 2015–16.
- Scientists are categorizing the 2026 cycle as a "Super El Nino" due to its rapid intensification.

vi. Resilience and Mitigation Strategies

- Agricultural experts advise farmers to avoid water-intensive crops like paddy, banana, sugarcane, and coconut.
- Switching to drought-resistant millets such as pearl millet (Kambu), kodo millet (Varagu), sorghum (Cholam), and maize.
- Increasing the use of organic fertilizers is encouraged to help soil retain moisture for longer periods.
- The Government must conduct urgent awareness programs for farmers and students to prepare for the long-term impacts of this climatic shift.

19. Tragic boat accident in Vietnam involving Indian tourists and the systemic failures in travel safety and insurance.

- The accident occurred near Phu Quoc Island, Vietnam.
- A total of 15 people died, of whom 10 were Tamils.
- The trip was an incentive tour organized by the Lava mobile phone company for a group of 105 people.
- There were 32 people on the specific motorboat that met with the accident.
- Every year, approximately 3 crore (30 million) Indians travel abroad, with Vietnam,

Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia being top destinations.

- International travel insurance typically costs a minimum of \$100 (approx. ₹8,400) per person.

i. Causes of the Accident

- A sudden surge in sea turbulence caused the speeding motorboat to lose control.
- The boat jerked sharply to the left, causing all passengers seated on the right to be thrown toward the left side.
- The sudden shift in weight caused the boat to lose its balance and capsize.
- Survival reports indicate two major violations: passengers were not wearing seatbelts and, more critically, they were not wearing life jackets.

ii. Problems Faced and Systemic Failures

- Unlike India, many rapidly growing tourism hubs in Asia do not prioritize passenger safety or mandate the wearing of life jackets on recreational boats.
- While insurance is mandatory for visas to the USA and Europe, it is not a requirement for tourist visas to many Asian countries like Thailand and Vietnam.
- It remains unclear if the organizing company (Lava International) provided proper insurance for the participants.
- Tour operators often skip insurance to save money, gambling on the safety of the travelers.
- When uninsured travelers die abroad, the cost of bringing the body back is astronomical. Families and friends are often forced to crowdfund for the return of remains.
- Immigration and passport officials currently do not have a mandate to advise or check for travel insurance before a citizen departs for a foreign country.

When safety protocols and insurance are ignored for the sake of convenience or cost, "tours of joy" inevitably turn into "tours of tragedy".

20. Groundbreaking advancements at the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) in Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu.

i. Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) Milestone

- The 500 MW Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor achieved its first stage of nuclear fission

for power generation on April 6, 2026.

- With this achievement, India became only the second country in the world (after Russia) to successfully operate a commercial-scale Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor.
- This milestone is a critical step in India's three-stage nuclear power program, aimed at utilizing thorium for long-term energy security.

ii. World-First in Clean Hydrogen Production

- For the first time in history, scientists at Kalpakkam successfully extracted clean hydrogen from water using only atomic reactor heat, completely bypassing the need for electricity.
- The world's first hydrogen production plant based on this technology officially began operations on June 26.
- The system was designed indigenously by the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in Mumbai.

iii. The Copper-Chlorine (Cu-Cl) Thermochemical Process

- Unlike traditional electrolysis, which requires massive amounts of electricity, this facility uses a "Copper-Chlorine thermochemical cycle" to split water into hydrogen and oxygen.
- The process directly utilizes the surplus heat generated by the atomic reactor, which would otherwise be wasted.
- While direct water splitting normally requires temperatures exceeding 800°C or intense electricity, this cycle operates efficiently at a much lower temperature range of 450°C to 550°C.

iv. Technical and Economic Advantages

- Efficiency Gains: By utilizing surplus reactor heat, the total production efficiency of the facility is increased by 37% to 54%.
- Because it eliminates the high cost of electricity and high-temperature infrastructure, it provides a path for large-scale commercial production of hydrogen at a very low cost.
- Atomic reactors can provide heat for hydrogen production 24 hours a day, unlike solar or wind power which are intermittent.

v. Environmental Impact and Sustainability

- Hydrogen is a clean fuel that releases only water vapor when burned, producing no carbon smoke or pollutants.
- The technology eliminates the release of greenhouse gases associated with fossil fuel-based hydrogen production, aiding global efforts to curb global warming.
- This breakthrough allows for the production of clean fuel for heavy industries like steel and fertilizer manufacturing, which currently rely heavily on fossil fuels.

vi. Strategic Significance

- Reducing dependence on imported crude oil strengthens India's national economy and strategic independence.
- These achievements demonstrate India's rapid progress toward becoming a global leader in advanced nuclear science and sustainable technology, marking a major step toward a "Developed India".

21. Analysis of the current state of Tamil Nadu's Government school system, highlighting both its achievements and the urgent challenges it faces.

i. School Statistics and Enrollment Trends

- A total of 44,884 schools are operational in Tamil Nadu, consisting of 37,595 Government schools and 7,289 Government-aided schools.
- Over 55 lakh students currently study in these institutions.
- In the most recent month, 3.37 lakh students were newly admitted to Government schools.
- This number is lower than last year partly due to the Right to Education (RTE) Act, which allows children from families with an annual income under ₹2 lakh to enroll in private schools for free.
- Despite the overall decline, there is a trend of students from economically backward families increasingly choosing Government schools over private ones as of the 2024–25 academic year.

ii. Academic Performance Comparison (2025–26)

A significant achievement for Government schools in higher secondary education:

- Government schools achieved a 91.86% pass rate, while private schools reached 98.14%.

- In a major success, Government schools recorded a 95.20% pass rate, which is notably higher than the 86.58% achieved by private schools.
- While parents value the free benefits—such as morning and afternoon meals, free notebooks, books, and uniforms—their primary expectation is consistent, high-quality education.

iii. Critical Teacher Vacancies and Workload

A primary concern raised is the massive shortage of teaching staff:

- There are approximately 18,107 vacant teaching positions in the School Education Department, which accounts for roughly 20% of the total sanctioned Government teaching posts.
- These vacancies include 2,833 postgraduate assistants and 1,214 headmasters.
- An additional 16,000 positions are vacant in the elementary education sector.
- This shortage increases the workload of existing teachers, making it difficult to provide individual attention to students.

iv. Administrative and Systemic Challenges

- Contrary to the RTE Act and recent Madras High Court rulings, teachers are frequently diverted to administrative tasks and various Government welfare schemes, which diminishes their teaching time.
- Rapid changes to the curriculum force teachers to constantly adapt, which can negatively affect instructional quality. Only education experts should serve on syllabus committees.
- Enrollment Anomalies:
 - ❖ In the Nilgiris district, 48 Government schools saw zero admissions for Class 1 this year.
 - ❖ In a Government-aided primary school near Vilathikulam (Thoothukudi), there are two teachers employed for only one student.

v. National Ranking and Recommendations

- According to the NITI Aayog's school education quality index, Tamil Nadu ranks second in India. Due to the dedication of Government school teachers as the primary reason for this high national standing.
- To maintain and improve this excellence, the Government must immediately fill all

teacher vacancies and address the reasonable professional demands of the teaching staff.