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August 25, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. Free LPG Cylinders for Women Under the 'Annapoorani Super Six' Scheme

One of the key election promises of TVK, the 'Annapoorani Super Six' scheme, will provide three free LPG cylinders per year to women homemakers in the first phase, Chief Minister S. Joseph Vijay announced.

i. Implementation from Pongal:

The scheme will come into effect from January next year, coinciding with the Pongal festival, and around 1.30 crore families will benefit from it, he said in the Assembly. The Chief Minister made the following announcement under Rule 110:

- The TVK Government has formulated several schemes for the advancement and safety of women. These include the 'Singap Pen Special Rapid Force' scheme, Thaaymaaman Ring Scheme, Vetri Magalir Goat-Rearing Scheme, and Anna Seer Scheme, with funds also allocated for their implementation.
- As the first phase of the 'Annapoorani Super Six' scheme, three free LPG cylinders per year will be provided. The corresponding amount will be credited directly to the beneficiaries' bank accounts.
- After beneficiaries make a booking and receive the LPG cylinder, details will be obtained from the oil companies, and the corresponding amount will be credited to the beneficiaries' bank accounts.
- Around 1,30,16,104 families will benefit from the scheme. It will be implemented from January, around the Pongal festival, and approximately ₹4,000 crore will be allocated annually for the scheme.

ii. Who will be eligible?

Chief Minister Joseph Vijay said that free LPG cylinders under the scheme would be provided to economically weaker families, including:

- Families with an annual income not exceeding ₹2.5 lakh;
- Small and marginal farmer families; and
- Families of persons with disabilities, among other vulnerable families in society.

iii. Similar schemes in other States:

- In Andhra Pradesh, under the 'Deepam' scheme, families below the poverty line receive three free LPG cylinders a year, one every four months.
- In Uttar Pradesh, beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana receive two free LPG cylinders a year.
- In Maharashtra, women receive three free LPG cylinders a year under the Chief Minister's Annapurna Yojana.
- In Uttarakhand, three free LPG cylinders a year are provided under the Antyodaya scheme.

Tamil Nadu has now joined the list of these States.

2. Free Bus Travel for Women Expanded Under 'Vetri Payanam'

Chief Minister Joseph Vijay announced in the Assembly that women would henceforth be able to travel free of cost on suburban buses, express buses, LSS buses and deluxe buses under the 'Vetri Payanam' scheme.

i. Implementation from October 2:

The scheme will be implemented from October 2, Gandhi Jayanti, he said. The Chief Minister's announcement under Rule 110 stated:

- Under the existing free bus travel scheme for women, women are currently allowed to travel only up to 40 km on ordinary and hill-area buses operating within cities and suburbs. Free travel is not currently permitted on express buses, LSS buses, deluxe buses and suburban buses.
- The Government has now decided to expand the existing free bus travel scheme for women. It will be implemented under the name 'Vetri Payanam' from October 2, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

- In the first phase, women will be able to travel free not only on ordinary buses in cities and urban areas but also on express, LSS and deluxe Government buses. To facilitate inter-district travel, women will also be allowed free travel on ordinary-fare buses in suburban and hill areas.
- There will be no income ceiling or restriction on the number of journeys under the scheme. The Vetri Payanam scheme will gradually be extended to other services as well. The scheme is expected to cost approximately ₹6,000 crore annually.

ii. Benefit extended to transgender persons:

- Transgender persons, including trans women and trans men, will also be eligible under the Vetri Payanam scheme.
- Accordingly, they will also be able to travel free of cost on the buses covered by the Chief Minister's announcement.

3. Tamil Nadu Government Drops Parandur Airport Project

Chief Minister S. Joseph Vijay announced in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly that the State Government would abandon the Parandur airport project in order to protect the interests of farmers and the general public.

4. Iranian Rial Falls to Historic Low Amid Expected US Sanctions

As the United States prepares to impose further economic sanctions on Iran, the value of the Iranian rial has fallen to an unprecedented low.

- Earlier, the United States announced that it was preparing to impose the toughest economic sanctions in history on Iran. Following this, President Donald Trump warned that countries providing assistance to Iran in any manner would also face severe economic consequences.
- As a result, in the foreign exchange market, the rial's value fell to 2.02 million rials per US dollar. Although the Central Bank of Iran fixed the official exchange rate at

1.5 million rials per US dollar, the market rate is being taken into consideration.

- iii. Even before the joint US-Israeli attack on Iran in February, the country's currency had already experienced a sharp decline. Against the backdrop of double-digit inflation and declining economic growth, continued conflicts over the past six months have caused the price of rice to rise by 60% and beef by 150%.
- iv. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected that Iran's GDP could contract by more than 5%.

5. US Proposes Additional \$103,265 Fee for New H-1B Visas

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has proposed imposing an additional fee of \$103,265 (approximately ₹98 lakh) on new H-1B visas issued to highly skilled foreign workers.

- i. The H-1B visa allows foreign workers to live and work in the United States. A large number of Indians work in the US information technology sector through this visa programme, followed by Chinese nationals and workers from other countries.
- ii. The US Government sets an annual cap on the number of regular H-1B visas issued to new applicants. The DHS has proposed imposing a fee of \$103,265 on these new visas.
- iii. Separate from the existing fee:
 - The proposed fee would apply only to H-1B visa applications falling within the annual quota. The DHS has proposed collecting the \$103,265 as a separate additional charge, rather than adding it to the existing H-1B application fee.
 - The fee has been proposed to cover the expenses incurred by various US Government agencies involved in H-1B visa-related activities.
 - According to the DHS notification, collecting the fee separately would make it easier to track and allocate the revenue and prepare related reports.
 - The public will be given 30 days to submit comments on the proposal.
 - More than 70% of H-1B visa holders in the United States are Indians. If the

proposed fee is finalized, it could significantly affect Indians as well as the IT companies that employ them.

iv. To discourage legal immigration:

Immigration lawyer Emily Newman, who works in the United States, said that the measure was being taken to discourage the legal immigration of foreign nationals into the country.

v. Earlier, a US court had reportedly struck down the \$100,000 fee imposed by President Trump on new H-1B visas, ruling that it was illegal.

6. UPI Transactions Increase 13,000-Fold in 10 Years

As the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) completes 10 years since its introduction, digital payment transactions have increased by approximately 13,000 times.

i. UPI was launched in India on August 25, 2016. While 1.78 crore transactions were recorded in 2016–17, the figure rose to 24,162 crore transactions in 2025–26, representing a 13,000-fold increase, according to the Ministry of Finance.

The Ministry said in its press release:

- UPI, launched by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and operating under the supervision of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), completes 10 years on August 25, 2026.
- UPI transactions worth ₹7,000 crore were carried out in 2016–17, while the figure increased to ₹314 lakh crore in 2025–26, a 4,000-fold increase.

ii. Rise in monthly average transactions:

- 2026 is being viewed as a landmark year for UPI transactions. For the first time, 2,320 crore UPI transactions were recorded in May 2026.
- This was followed by a new 10-year record of 2,366 crore transactions in July.
- As a result, the average monthly UPI transaction volume has risen to around 2,300 crore in recent months.

iii. IMF recognition:

- While only 44 banks were connected to UPI in 2016–17, the number increased to 703 in 2025–26.
- A total of 24,162 crore transactions were recorded through UPI during the 2025–26 financial year.
- UPI, which has become the backbone of India's digital public infrastructure, has evolved into a massive platform enabling merchants and businesses to participate in the digital economy.
- It has helped reduce the digital divide and strengthen financial inclusion in the country. The increase in UPI transactions also reflects India's economic growth.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recognized UPI as the world's largest transaction system.

iv. UPI in 11 countries:

- An average of 66 crore UPI transactions are carried out every day in India.
- UPI is currently operational in 11 countries: the United Arab Emirates, France, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Singapore, Mauritius, Qatar, Cambodia, Greece and the Maldives.

7. India Lifts Ban on Wheat and Wheat-Product Exports

The Central Government has lifted the ban on exports of wheat and wheat-based products, with the decision taking immediate effect.

- i. India has taken this step with the objective of maintaining a stable global wheat supply. The nearly four-year-long Russia–Ukraine war has severely affected wheat production and supply worldwide. Therefore, several countries, including European nations, had repeatedly urged India to allow wheat exports.
- ii. India is the second-largest wheat-producing country in the world after China. In May 2022, the Central Government imposed a ban on wheat exports to maintain adequate domestic supplies and control rising prices.
- iii. The ban has now been lifted after approximately four years. The Government has

also removed restrictions on exports of wheat-based products such as maida, semolina (rava) and whole-wheat flour.

- iv. The information was announced by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT). The move is expected to benefit wheat farmers.

8. Death penalty in India and global trends

i. The Core Debate and Historical Criticism

- In a civilized society that prioritizes human rights, the question of whether the death penalty should continue has been intensely debated for more than half a century.
- Along with capital punishment itself, the method of execution—hanging by the neck—has faced widespread criticism and has been questioned by many.
- Petitioners argue that hanging by a rope does not lead to an immediate loss of consciousness and represents an inhumane, barbaric act that violates personal dignity.

ii. Recent Supreme Court Ruling and Legal Validity

- A Supreme Court bench consisting of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta recently addressed these issues in a case.
- The bench refused to cancel the death penalty of a convict by hanging, rejecting the argument that hanging violates the right to life and liberty protected under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.
- The Court found no reason to revise the landmark 1983 Deena case (Deena vs. Union of India) judgment, which held that hanging by rope is a constitutionally valid and proper method of execution.
- The bench pointed out that Section 393(5) of the newly enacted Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (which replaced the old CrPC) has preserved the provision of the death penalty.
- The court clarified that even when a death sentence is awarded, the

constitutional and legal protections of the convict do not entirely disappear, and the judiciary handles these cases with the highest level of care.

iii. Alternative Execution Methods and Law Commission Recommendations

- The Supreme Court noted that alternative methods of execution do not guarantee a completely painless death. The Central Government also argued that alternative methods do not reliably ensure the finality of execution.
- In 2003, the 187th Law Commission Report recommended that lethal injection could be considered as an alternative method of execution instead of hanging.
- In 2015, the 262nd Law Commission Report recommended abolishing the death penalty for all ordinary crimes, suggesting it be retained only for terrorism-related offences and waging war against the state.

iv. Judicial Caution and Execution Statistics in India

- In the *Bachan Singh vs. State of Punjab* case, the Supreme Court established that the death penalty must only be awarded in the "rarest of rare cases".
- Despite the strict guidelines, trial courts continue to award death sentences frequently; in the ten-year period from 2016 to 2025, a total of 1,279 individuals were sentenced to death by trial courts.
- Conversely, the Supreme Court has not confirmed a single death sentence in the last two years. This high level of restraint reflects the judiciary's caution, knowing that once a death sentence is executed, it is irreversible.
- India acts with extreme caution and avoids executions as much as possible; consequently, only eight people have been executed by hanging in India since 2003.

v. Global Status and Comparisons

- Over 110 countries have completely abolished the death penalty, including nations like Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Zimbabwe.
- Countries such as Brazil, Chile, Israel, and Peru have abolished capital punishment for ordinary crimes, keeping it active only for extreme

circumstances like war crimes.

- In countries like Russia, South Korea, and Laos, the death penalty remains legally valid, but no executions have been carried out in the last ten years.
- The death penalty continues to be practiced in fewer than 60 countries, including India, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.
- While the Supreme Court's Vikram Nath bench did not abolish the death penalty, the global and national debate over whether the death penalty should continue must go on.

9. NASA has developed the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope as its next-generation space observatory to explore some of the deepest mysteries of the cosmos.

- The telescope is named after Nancy Grace Roman (born in Nashville, USA, in 1925), who was NASA's first Chief of Astronomy and its first female executive. She is widely revered as the "Mother of Hubble" for her pioneering role in making space-based telescopes a reality.

i. Technical Specifications (Roman vs. Hubble)

- While Roman features a 2.4-meter primary mirror (matching the size of the Hubble Space Telescope), its infrared field of view is 100 to 200 times larger than Hubble's.
- If Hubble's view is compared to looking through a narrow window, Roman's view is equivalent to seeing an entire city in a single frame.
- Due to its massive field of view, Roman can survey and map the sky 1,000 times faster than Hubble.

ii. Launch and Orbit Details

- The spacecraft is scheduled to launch on August 30 (of its launch year) from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida aboard a SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket.
- Its core structure was integrated and tested at NASA's Goddard Space Flight

Center.

- The observatory will operate in a halo orbit around the Sun-Earth Lagrange Point 2 (L2), situated 15 lakh kilometers (1.5 million km) from Earth.
- At L2, the gravitational forces of the Earth and the Sun balance out, keeping the spacecraft exceptionally stable. It also keeps the telescope isolated from Earth's heat and light, which is ideal for sensitive infrared observations. This is the same orbital point utilized by the James Webb Space Telescope.

iii. Primary Scientific Objectives

- Roman will investigate Dark Energy—the mysterious force discovered in 1998 that is causing the expansion of the universe to accelerate. It will map this using baryon acoustic oscillations, distant supernovae, and weak gravitational lensing.
- It will map the distribution of Dark Matter—invisible matter that cannot be seen directly because it does not emit or absorb light, but is detectable through its gravitational pull on galaxies.
- Using a technique called gravitational microlensing (ஈர்ப்பு நுண்விலக்கை முறை), Roman is expected to discover thousands of new planets orbiting distant stars, including cold planets far from their stars and free-floating "rogue" planets. This will help scientists determine how common Earth-like worlds are.
- By capturing images of billions of galaxies, it will trace how the structure of the universe has evolved since the Big Bang, creating a massive 3D cosmic map.

iv. Scientific Instruments

- Wide Field Instrument: This primary scientific camera features a massive 300-megapixel infrared sensor to capture giant swaths of the sky.
- Coronagraph Instrument: This advanced instrument is designed to block out the blinding glare of host stars. By doing so, it allows astronomers to directly image and analyze the fainter planets orbiting those stars, providing key technologies for future missions aiming to find habitable worlds.

v. Legacy and Significance

- Roman represents the next major step in the legacy of space-based astronomy, building on the accomplishments of COBE, Hubble, Chandra, Spitzer, and James Webb.
- Entering its peak operational phase in the 2030s, it will serve as our newest window to the universe, promising to reshape our understanding of the cosmos and seek answers to fundamental questions: How did the universe begin, how did it evolve, and are we alone?