

## May 18, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. Senior Congress leader V.D. Satheesan is set to be sworn in as the Chief Minister of Kerala on Monday (May 18). Along with him, 20 ministers are also expected to take oath.

2. President Droupadi Murmu has approved the Union Cabinet's decision to increase the strength of Supreme Court judges to 38.

(i) At present, the Supreme Court consists of the Chief Justice of India and 33 judges. On May 5, the Union Cabinet approved increasing the number of judges to 38.

(ii) In this regard, Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal posted on X that, "Following the decision taken in the Union Cabinet meeting, President Droupadi Murmu has approved the ordinance amendment to increase the number of Supreme Court judges."

(iii) Next, a bill to create four additional judge posts will be passed during the upcoming Parliament session, he added.

(iv) When the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act was enacted in 1956, the total number of judges excluding the Chief Justice was fixed at only 10. In 1960, an amendment increased the number to 13, and a subsequent amendment raised it to 17.

(v) Later, in 1986, another amendment increased the number of Supreme Court judges from 17 to 25. In 2009, the number was increased to 30, and in 2019, the total number including the Chief Justice was raised to 34.

3. A horse infected with glanders died in Chennai, raising concerns that the disease could spread to humans.

(i) However, Health Minister K.G. Arun Raj and medical experts have firmly denied widespread public risk. They emphasized that there is no need for panic, though people should remain cautious.

(ii) What is glanders?

- Glanders is an infectious disease that affects horses, donkeys, and mules. It is caused by the bacterium *Burkholderia mallei*. The disease spreads rapidly among horses and donkeys. Since infected animals develop gland-like swellings across the body, it is called glanders.

(iii) How does it spread?

- In infected horses, blisters and glandular swellings appear on the skin and later turn into sores. Fluid discharged from these sores spreads the infection to other animals. Ulcers also form in the respiratory tract, nose, windpipe, and lungs, releasing infectious droplets.
- About 95 percent of infected animals die from the disease. Cases are frequently reported in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

(iv) Can it spread to humans?

- People who come into direct contact with infected animals may contract glanders.
- Veterinarians and animal caretakers are at higher risk.

(v) Modes of transmission:

- The infection spreads when fluid from the wounds of infected animals comes into direct contact with human skin.
- It can also spread through tears, mucus, and saliva from infected horses and donkeys.
- Humans may inhale infectious droplets released when infected animals cough or sneeze.

4.The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the spread of the Ebola virus in the African nations of Congo and Uganda an International health emergency.

(i) Ebola virus infections are spreading rapidly in Congo and Uganda. So far, 88 people have died from the disease, and more than 300 others have been hospitalized.

(ii) WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced the outbreak as an international health emergency. In a statement posted on X, WHO said, "There is no need for emergency measures on the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, countries are advised to consider temporarily closing international borders as a precaution."

(iii) According to WHO officials, "Ebola outbreaks have occurred more than 20 times in Congo and Uganda. However, the current outbreak involves the rare Bundibugyo strain of the Ebola virus. There is currently no approved vaccine or medicine for this strain. The Bundibugyo strain was first identified in Uganda's Bundibugyo district during 2007–08, when 149 people were infected and 37 died."

(iv) During a second outbreak in Congo in 2012, 59 people were infected and 29 died. WHO declared the outbreak an international health emergency to encourage immediate action by countries and donor organizations.

(v) WHO senior official Jean Kaseya stated that the Bundibugyo strain was officially identified only on May 5, though records show that 50 people had already died before then, including four healthcare workers.

5.A drone attack targeting the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has heightened tensions in the region.

(i) The attack caused no damage to the nuclear plant itself. However, a generator near the facility caught fire. No casualties or radiation leaks were reported.

(ii) The Barakah Nuclear Power Plant is located in a desert region near the Saudi Arabian border in the UAE. Built in 2020 with South Korean assistance at a cost of \$20 billion, it was the first nuclear power plant in the Gulf region. The electricity generated there fulfills a major portion of the UAE's energy needs.

6.International company ICEYE has announced plans to establish India's first satellite manufacturing facility.

(i) ICEYE possesses one of the world's most advanced synthetic aperture radar satellite constellations. The company also provides satellite-based surveillance and intelligence services to clients.

(ii) ICEYE satellites are used for defense, intelligence, and environmental monitoring purposes.

(iii) Speaking to PTI, ICEYE co-founder and CEO Rafał Modrzewski said:

- Within the next 6 to 12 months, ICEYE will establish its first satellite manufacturing center in India to build small satellites for defense, surveillance, and environmental applications.
- After the facility is established, around 10 satellites will be manufactured in the first year, increasing to 20–40 satellites annually in later years. Investments worth crores of rupees are planned, though the final amount has not yet been decided.
- Alongside Europe and the United States, India will serve as ICEYE's Asia-Pacific manufacturing hub.
- Satellites manufactured in India will cater not only to domestic needs but also to international markets.

7.Asian Development Bank (ADB) Chief Economist Albert Park stated that Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), reduced import duties, and related measures would help increase net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India.

(i) In an interview with PTI, he said that Asia is more vulnerable than other regions to shocks arising from tensions in the Middle East, particularly the US-Iran conflict.

(ii) Due to prolonged instability in the Middle East, crude oil prices are likely to remain high for an extended period. Oil prices next year are expected to be higher than before.

(iii) Continued tensions in the Middle East could reduce India's economic growth by 0.6 percentage points to 6.9 percent and also significantly increase inflation during the current financial year.

(iv) He added that FTAs, lower import duties, and improvements in the ease of doing business would help attract more net FDI into India.

8.India is reportedly closely monitoring Sri Lanka's move to lease out the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, located near the Chinese-controlled Hambantota Port, for 30 years.

(i) China has been increasing efforts to expand its political and economic influence in Sri Lanka. In 2017, the strategically important Hambantota Port was leased to China for 99 years.

(ii) The Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport is located near the port. Built at a cost of \$209 million (around ₹2,000 crore), the airport received major funding from China's Export-Import Bank.

(iii) "World's emptiest airport":

- Opened in 2013 with ambitious goals, the airport has a modern terminal building and a 3,500-meter runway. However, it failed to attract enough passengers and airlines for sustainable operations and remains largely unused.
- The Sri Lankan Government has invited both domestic and international investors interested in operating, managing, and transforming the airport under a 30-year lease arrangement. Interested parties must express their interest by June 3.

(iv) Why is India closely watching?

- Sources said India is carefully monitoring Sri Lanka's decision.
- According to them, with China seeking to expand its influence in Sri Lanka, the project has major strategic significance.
- Indian involvement in Hambantota would reflect India's "Neighbourhood First" policy and its "MAHASAGAR" initiative in the Indian Ocean.

- India's aviation sector is rapidly expanding, and its maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) industry is facing growing pressure.
- Mattala Airport's long runway, uncongested airspace, and large land area make it suitable for use as an MRO hub for Indian airlines, saving both time and costs.
- India could also establish an Indian Ocean logistics hub there. The uncongested airspace makes it suitable for pilot training academies.
- The project also includes 238 acres of Government lease land suitable for industrial parks, cargo transport, and solar energy projects, making the lease commercially attractive.
- Since Sri Lanka is actively trying to attract Indian investment, such an opportunity in a strategically important region like Hambantota is considered rare.

9. According to data released by the Union Commerce Ministry, 35 percent of India's exports are directed toward North America, East Asia, and Latin America.

(i) Exports to North America continue to dominate at ₹9.2 lakh crore (\$97.7 billion), accounting for 22.1 percent of total exports. This represents a 1.3 percent increase over the previous year.

(ii) Exports to Northeast Asia stood at ₹3.9 lakh crore (\$41.6 billion), accounting for 9.4 percent, marking a 21.6 percent increase year-on-year. Rising demand in the region for Indian electronics, engineering goods, chemicals, and industrial equipment contributed to the growth. The region includes manufacturing powerhouses such as China, South Korea, North Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and Taiwan.

(iii) Exports to Latin America accounted for 3.7 percent at ₹1.5 lakh crore (\$16.4 billion), showing a 7.8 percent increase compared to last year. In 2025–26, India's total exports were valued at ₹41.8 lakh crore (\$441.78 billion), of which 35 percent went to North America, East Asia, and Latin America.

10. India and the Netherlands signed 17 agreements to strengthen cooperation in defense, critical minerals, and several other sectors.

(i) The agreements were signed in The Hague in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten following bilateral talks.

(ii) After visiting the UAE as part of his five-nation tour, Prime Minister Modi arrived in the Netherlands.

(iii) Modi held bilateral discussions with Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten in The Hague.

(iv) The two leaders discussed strengthening cooperation in trade, investment, defense, critical minerals, maritime development, science and innovation, semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, space, and other sectors, along with regional and global issues of mutual interest.

(v) Upgrade to strategic partnership:

- In his opening remarks, Modi said, "India-Netherlands relations have made remarkable progress over the past decade. Due to our deep historical and people-to-people ties, India considers the Netherlands an important partner.
- Democratic values, market economy principles, and responsible conduct form the basis of our shared approach. Dutch expertise and India's speed and talent should come together. Under this shared vision, we have elevated our bilateral relationship to the level of a strategic partnership."

(vi) 17 agreements signed:

- At a time when China dominates global critical mineral supply chains, both leaders agreed to strengthen cooperation in exploration and supply chain integration in this sector.
- Agreements were also signed in semiconductors, healthcare, water resources, renewable energy, agriculture and animal husbandry, customs, education, culture, migration, and transport.
- India's External Affairs Ministry said that the migration and transport cooperation framework would make it easier for Indians to travel to the Netherlands for education and employment.

(vii) Visit to a massive dam:

- Prime Minister Modi also visited the Afsluitdijk Dam, considered one of the engineering marvels of the world. It is a massive 32-kilometer-long flood-control dam.
- The Netherlands is among India's largest trading partners in Europe. Bilateral trade reached \$27.8 billion in 2024–25.
- The Netherlands is India's fourth-largest source of Foreign Direct Investment, with total FDI inflows amounting to \$55.6 billion.

11. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was awarded Sweden's highest honor, "The Royal Order of the Polar Star – Degree Commander Grand Cross." This is the 31st international award received by Modi.

(i) After concluding his Netherlands visit, Modi arrived in Sweden, where he was personally welcomed at Gothenburg Airport by Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. Modi is also scheduled to visit Norway and Italy next.