

September 16, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. The United States has officially confirmed for the first time that it has deployed weapons in space.

(i) Speaking at an event, U.S. Secretary of the Air Force Troy Meink said, “The United States has deployed orbital space-control weapons capable of protecting joint forces from attacks by hostile countries.” However, he did not provide details about the weapons or explain how they operate.

(ii) Earlier, in 2024, the United States had stated that Russia was developing a new anti-satellite weapon that could be launched from space. At the time, the White House had said that the threat did not pose an immediate danger.

(iii) Nevertheless, since major U.S. infrastructure facilities depend heavily on satellite communications, these developments reflected long-standing concerns over potential space threats from Russia and China.

(iv) In this context, it is noteworthy that President Trump established the U.S. Space Force as a separate military branch during his first term in office in 2019.

2. At a time when the trade conflict with the administration led by U.S. President Donald Trump is intensifying, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney is undertaking an official visit to European countries with the aim of further strengthening cooperation with the European Union.

(i) With around 70 per cent of Canada’s total exports dependent on the United States alone, Mark Carney is giving priority to trade and investment ties with Europe in an effort to reduce this excessive dependence. Canada has stated that although it will continue to trade with the United States, creating new alliances in line with the changing geopolitical environment is the need of the hour.

(ii) In this regard, the European Union, which is Canada’s second-largest trading partner, is set to open a new Parliamentary office in Ottawa, while Canada has also joined a European defence procurement programme.

3. The 2029 World Athletics Championships will be held in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. This will be the first time that the event is being held in Africa.

4. The 46th Chess Olympiad of the International Chess Federation (FIDE) begins in Uzbekistan on Wednesday (September 16).

(i) The team-based competition will feature more than 100 countries, with 208 teams participating in the Open section and 191 teams in the Women’s section. Uzbekistan, the host country, has fielded three teams in each section.

(ii) It may be recalled that India won the championship titles in both the Open and Women’s sections at the 45th Chess Olympiad held in Budapest, the capital of Hungary, in 2024. As the defending champions, the Indian teams will enter this year’s competition determined to retain their titles. World Champion D. Gukesh and reigning Women’s World Cup champion Divya Deshmukh are among the Indian players who have travelled to Uzbekistan for the event. India ranks first among the top five teams in both the Open and

Women's sections.

5.The Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has stated that around ₹800 crore has been spent on preparing Indian sportspersons for the Asian Games.

(i) The 20th Asian Games will begin on the 19th in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan. A 501-member Indian contingent, comprising 267 male athletes and 234 female athletes, will participate in the Games. They will compete in 36 sports disciplines. For 310 members of the contingent, this will be their first Asian Games.

(ii) India's best-ever performance at the Asian Games came at the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games, where it won 106 medals—28 gold, 38 silver and 40 bronze.

6.Indian spinner Sree Sarani, who is ranked No. 1 among bowlers in the ICC Women's T20 rankings, has increased her rating points to 804.

(i) She has set a record as the Indian player with the highest rating points in the women's rankings across both the batting and bowling categories. Previously, former Indian captain Mithali Raj held the record with 780 points in the batting rankings in 2011. Sree Sarani has now surpassed that mark.

(ii) India recently won the Women's Asia Cup T20 cricket tournament. Changes in the rankings have taken place based on performances in the tournament.

7.Assam has 3,260 one-horned rhinoceroses, accounting for 80 per cent of the total one-horned rhinoceros population in the world, according to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

(i) This species of rhinoceros is among the animals most frequently targeted by poachers worldwide and is also listed among declining wildlife species.

(ii) In a post on social media, Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "Not a single rhinoceros was poached in Assam during 2025. According to the latest census, Assam has 3,260 rhinoceroses. Their population has increased slightly compared with earlier. There are only 4,075 rhinoceroses in the world in total, of which 80 per cent are found in Assam."

(iii) He stated that Assam is a highly secure habitat for these extremely rare animals and that the state remains committed to protecting the species and creating conservation facilities to increase their population.

8.The country's largest shipbuilding facility is to be established at Dighi Port in Raigad district, Maharashtra.

(i) Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), a defence public sector undertaking, will invest ₹27,000 crore in the project. According to a Government press release:

- An agreement to establish the country's largest shipbuilding facility in Raigad was signed in Mumbai in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis between MDL and the National Shipbuilding and Heavy Industries Park Maharashtra Limited (NSHIPMPL).
- Under the agreement, MDL has set a target of creating an annual shipbuilding capacity of at least 2 million tonnes at Dighi Port. The company plans to invest ₹27,000 crore for this purpose. The construction of very large commercial vessels and warships at the facility is expected to

strengthen the capabilities of India's maritime industries.

- The project, which is being jointly developed by the Central and State Governments, is expected to generate direct employment for 15,000 people and indirect employment for 75,000 people.

9.The India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will come into effect on October 19, it has been announced.

(i) The Free Trade Agreement between the two countries was signed on April 27. The agreement was reached with the objective of increasing bilateral trade in goods, services and investment. Under the agreement, New Zealand has assured that it will impose no tariffs on Indian export products.

(ii) Ceramic products, carpets, various types of machinery and automobile components are among the major products exported from India to New Zealand. These products currently attract tariffs of up to 10 per cent. With the removal of these tariffs, Indian exporters will have significant opportunities in the New Zealand market. They will be able to ship their products there at lower costs compared with suppliers from other countries. New Zealand has already announced plans to invest \$20 billion in India over the next 15 years.

10.US court issues interim stay order on restrictions on foreign students' stay and study

(i) Court Intervention & Immediate Relief

- A US Federal District Court in Massachusetts issued an interim stay order blocking the implementation of new restrictions on foreign students' stay and study in the United States.
- The court order was delivered just one day before the new visa rules were set to take effect on September 15.
- The stay provides major temporary relief to thousands of foreign students, including a large population of Indian students pursuing higher education in the US.

(i) Key Restrictions Under the Proposed Rule

- Under the Trump administration's proposed policy, foreign students entering on non-immigrant 'F' visas and exchange visitors on 'J' visas were restricted to a maximum stay of 4 years or the precise duration of their program.
- The proposal aimed to end a long-standing policy that allowed foreign students to remain in the US indefinitely as long as they maintained full-time student status.

(iii) Reductions in Grace Period & Media Visa Caps

- The post-study grace period for 'F' visa holders—to depart the US, transfer to another educational institution, or change visa status—was cut from 60 days down to 30 days.
- 'I' visa durations for foreign journalists were capped at a maximum of 240 days, with a stricter 90-day limit imposed on Chinese journalists.

(iv) Legal Challenge & Administration's Arguments

- Multiple higher education institutions, organizations, and labor unions filed lawsuits challenging the restrictions in the Massachusetts District Court before Judge F. Dennis Saylor.

- The US Department of Homeland Security argued that strict time limits were necessary to curb visa fraud and prevent foreign nationals from overstaying after visa expiration.

11. Fees for UPI business transactions

(i) MDR Fee Structure & Caps

- A Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) fee of 0.4% per transaction will be charged on business transactions exceeding ₹2,000 conducted via UPI or RuPay cards.
- For transactions of ₹75,000 and above, a maximum fee cap of ₹300 per transaction has been fixed.
- Essential public service sectors—including Indian Railways, telecommunications, and fuel distribution—will attract a flat, fixed fee of ₹5 per transaction.
- For transactions in capital markets, including investments in mutual funds and stocks, a reduced MDR rate of 0.02% per transaction has been determined.

(ii) Exemptions & Excluded Categories

- No MDR fee will be levied on UPI merchant transactions of ₹2,000 or below, which represent 95% to 96% of in total UPI merchant transactions.
- Small merchants earning an income of up to ₹1 lakh per month through UPI transactions are completely exempt from MDR fees.
- Transfers conducted between individuals (person-to-person money transfers) remain entirely free of MDR fees.

(iii) Implementation Date & Regulatory Body

- The fee framework was approved by the 22-member UPI and Other Services Guidance Committee (comprising representatives from banks and digital payment service providers) and formally announced by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- The new MDR fee collection system will come into force starting October 15, 2026.

(iv) Rules for Merchants & Infrastructure Fund Allocation

- Merchants are strictly prohibited from passing the MDR fee burden onto customers, and payment service providers are barred from levying platform fees on users.
- Banks have been instructed to enforce compliance and ensure merchants do not surcharge consumers.
- One-fifth (20%) of the collected fee pool will be allocated toward financing digital infrastructure and expanding UPI access for small merchants.

(v) Legislative Background & Government Clarification

- The Central Government introduced and passed the Tax and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 in both Houses of Parliament, amending Section 10 of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 (which previously banned banks from levying fees on digital payments).
- The decision brings an end to the zero-MDR policy that had been in place since January 2020, addressing long-standing complaints from banks and fintech firms regarding financial sustainability.



- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman clarified that the law does not impose any tax or fee on consumers; fees apply strictly to a small percentage of merchants conducting higher-value transactions.

12. Investment proposals worth over Rs.15,300 crore in London: Tamil Nadu Government

(i) Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay undertook a 6-day official visit to London, UK, to attract foreign direct investments to the state.

(ii) Investment proposals, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), and letters of intent exceeding ₹15,300 crore were signed and finalized during the visit.

(iii) The incoming projects are expected to create over 10,000 direct and indirect jobs across Tamil Nadu.

(iv) The agreements cover critical industrial verticals including automobile component manufacturing, research and development (R&D), renewable energy, electrical power equipment, and Global Capability Centers (GCCs).

(v) Procurement agreements were established between UK commercial entities and Tamil Nadu textile manufacturers for raw material sourcing.

(vi) A UK delegation of aerospace and defense representatives is slated to visit Hosur to explore infrastructure and manufacturing partnerships.

(vii) Representatives from the London Mayor's Union are scheduled to visit Chennai in October 2026 to deepen civic and trade ties.