

October 15, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. The Union Cabinet approved an allocation of ₹53,428 crore to continue the Central Government's National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), which provides monthly financial assistance to persons with disabilities, senior citizens and widows, for the next five years.

(i) Approval was also granted to rename the scheme as the Pradhan Mantri Samajik Sahayata Yojana. In addition, the monthly assistance for persons with disabilities has been increased, and the minimum age requirement for eligibility has been removed.

(ii) A Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was held in New Delhi. During the meeting, approval was granted to allocate ₹53,428 crore to continue the National Social Assistance Programme until 2030–31. The programme integrates four schemes that provide monthly assistance to persons with disabilities, senior citizens and widows, as well as financial assistance to poor families.

(iii) Major Changes:

- According to the Government's press release, the Cabinet approved renaming the National Social Assistance Programme as the Pradhan Mantri Samajik Sahayata Yojana.
- Under the scheme, the minimum age requirement of 18 years for persons with disabilities has been removed. The minimum disability threshold has also been reduced from 80% to 40%, enabling more people to benefit.
- The monthly assistance for persons with disabilities up to the age of 79 has been increased from ₹300 to ₹375. For those aged 80 and above, it has been increased from ₹500 to ₹625. The new provisions are expected to come into effect within three months of the issuance of the relevant guidelines.
- These changes have been made in accordance with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

(iv) No Changes to Other Schemes:

- The monthly assistance schemes for senior citizens and widows, along with the National Family Benefit Scheme, will continue in their existing form. The National Family Benefit Scheme provides one-time financial assistance to poor families when the primary breadwinner dies unexpectedly, whether due to natural causes or an accident.
- Approval has been granted to rename all four schemes under the National Social Assistance Programme as follows:
- Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme → Pradhan Mantri Vriddhavastha Sahayata Yojana
- Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme → Pradhan Mantri Vidhwa Sahayata Yojana
- Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme → Pradhan Mantri Divyangjan Sahayata Yojana
- National Family Benefit Scheme → Pradhan Mantri Parivar Labh Yojana

(v) 3.20 Crore Beneficiaries to Benefit:

- The National Social Assistance Programme was launched in 1995 under Article 41 of the Constitution, which guides the State to provide social and economic security to vulnerable citizens.

- The Central Government provides 100% financial support under the programme to ensure uniform assistance to beneficiaries across the country. The latest approval is expected to benefit 3.20 crore people nationwide.

2.The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the sale of a 60.72% stake in public sector IDBI Bank to Canada-based Fairfax Financial Holdings for ₹53,000 crore.

(i) The transaction is described as one of the largest foreign direct investments (FDI) in India's financial sector and a major disinvestment. It is also considered a significant development in the long-pending privatisation of a public sector bank.

(ii) The Union Cabinet approved the sale of the 60.72% stake held by the Government of India and the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) to Fairfax Financial Holdings for ₹53,000 crore.

- Government of India: 30.38% stake, valued at ₹26,620 crore.
- LIC: 30.24% stake, valued at ₹26,440 crore.
- Total stake to be sold: 60.72%.
- Sale price: ₹53,000 crore.
- Price per share offered by Fairfax: ₹81.

According to the Central Government's press release, the offer price of ₹81 per share is higher than the fair base value of ₹75.99 determined by two independent valuation firms.

3.The number of people infected with Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has exceeded 9,000, while more than 4,300 people have died so far.

4.Defence Minister Rajnath Singh stated that India's objective is to ensure that every country in the Indo-Pacific region, whether small or large, has the right to make independent decisions to protect its interests and pursue peaceful development. These remarks assume significance amid growing concerns over China's military dominance in the Indo-Pacific region.

(i) A meeting of the defence dialogue mechanism between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was held in New Delhi.

The ASEAN grouping comprises the following Southeast Asian countries:

- Indonesia
- Malaysia
- Singapore
- the Philippines
- Thailand
- Brunei
- Vietnam
- Laos
- Myanmar
- Cambodia

5.Despite a 40.7% increase in India's exports to China, India's trade deficit with the country exceeded ₹9.5 lakh crore (\$100 billion) during the first nine months of the current year, according to data released by China's General Administration of Customs.

(i) Bilateral trade between China and India increased by 25.4% between January and September, reaching ₹13.7 lakh crore (\$144.45 billion).

(ii) China's exports to India increased to ₹11.9 lakh crore (\$125.19 billion), representing a 23.3% increase compared with the corresponding period last year.

(iii) India's exports to China also increased by 40.7%, reaching ₹1.8 lakh crore (\$19.26 billion).

(iv) Consequently, India's trade deficit with China exceeded ₹9.5 lakh crore during the first nine months of the year.

(v) Major Commodities Traded

- China primarily exports electronic goods, machinery and chemicals to India.
- India exports minerals, fuels, marine products and agricultural commodities to China.

(vi) China calculates its annual trade statistics based on the calendar year, from January to December. India, by contrast, calculates trade statistics according to its financial year, from April to March.

(vii) According to data released by India's Ministry of Commerce:

- Bilateral trade between India and China reached ₹14.3 lakh crore (\$151.1 billion) in the previous year.
- During the previous financial year, India's exports to China increased by 36.66% to ₹1.85 lakh crore (\$19.47 billion).
- India's imports from China increased by 16% to ₹12.5 lakh crore.
- India's trade deficit with China stood at ₹9.4 lakh crore (\$99.2 billion) in 2024–25 and increased to ₹10.7 lakh crore (\$112.6 billion) in 2025–26.

(viii) India has continued to urge China to open up market opportunities in sectors where India has strong capabilities, including information technology, pharmaceuticals and agriculture. The report states that these efforts have begun to yield limited results.

6.The Central Government plans to introduce Bharat Stage VII (BS-VII) engine and emission standards for new cars and sport utility vehicles (SUVs) in India from April 1, 2029.

(i) To control air pollution, the Central Government has introduced regulations to limit emissions of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons and other pollutants from vehicles. The BS-VI emission standards have been in force in India since April 2020. Cars and two-wheelers are currently manufactured in accordance with these standards.

(ii) The Central Government now plans to implement BS-VII standards nationwide. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways issued a draft notification on the 12th of the month. According to the draft:

- BS-VII standards are scheduled to come into effect from April 1, 2029.

- The new requirements will be introduced in three phases over six years, from April 2029 to April 2035.
- Phase I: April 2029.
- Phase II: April 2031.
- Phase III: April 2035.

(iii) The pollution-control regulations will be tightened by introducing new emission limits for exhaust gases released by vehicle engines. The proposed standards will also cover brakes, tyres and battery service life. The new requirements will apply to passenger cars manufactured from April 2029 onwards, as specified in the draft.

(iv) The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has invited members of the public to submit their comments on the draft notification within 30 days.

(v) A senior Central Government official stated that the guidelines for BS-VII standards had been developed and that the new standards had been framed in line with Euro 7 standards of the European Union.

7. Central Electricity Authority Chairperson Ghanshyam Prasad stated that an investment of ₹15 lakh crore would be required to increase India's nuclear power generation capacity by an additional 91 gigawatts (GW) by 2047.

(i) The Central Government is taking significant steps to expand nuclear power generation in the country. As part of these efforts, the Government enacted the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act last year to enable private companies to participate in nuclear power generation, a sector previously dominated by the Government. Speaking at a seminar organised by the Central Electricity Authority in New Delhi on Wednesday, Ghanshyam Prasad stated the following:

- Nuclear energy is a reliable source of electricity generation.
- India currently has an installed nuclear power generation capacity of 8.8 GW.
- This capacity is expected to increase to 22 GW by 2030–31.
- India has set a target of increasing its nuclear power capacity to 100 GW by 2047.
- An investment of ₹15 lakh crore will be required to add approximately 91 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047.
- Of the targeted 100 GW capacity, 46 GW is expected to come from public sector enterprises, private companies and joint-venture entities.

The official further stated that India's peak electricity demand, which stood at 250 GW in 2024–25, is projected to rise to 459 GW by 2035–36. Nuclear power capacity will play an important role in meeting this growing demand.

8. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed pride in the growing international recognition of India's cultural heritage. He stated that Indian music, dance, cinema and cuisine connect communities across the world.

(i) The international conference titled "Brihattar Bharat: International Conference on India's Cultural Connections Across the World" was inaugurated at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi. Organised by the Indira

Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), under the Ministry of Culture, the three-day conference focuses on the theme "India's Cultural Heritage and Its Civilisational Legacy Beyond Borders." The Prime Minister's address was read out by Vivek Agrawal, Secretary of the Ministry of Culture. In his address, Modi stated that the growing international recognition of India's cultural heritage had given fresh momentum to the Central Government's efforts to bring back ancient Indian artefacts located abroad.

(ii) Gyan Bharatam Initiative

- Along with preserving ancient monuments, the Gyan Bharatam initiative seeks to preserve India's manuscript heritage.
- Indian music, dance, cinema and cuisine connect communities across the world.

(iii) The conference brings together cultural representatives, diplomats and scholars from various countries. Its sessions will discuss India's historical and contemporary cultural connections with the rest of the world.

(iv) According to the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, the conference also marks the centenary of the Brihattar Bharat Parishad, an organisation established by Indian scholars in Kolkata on October 14, 1926, with Rabindranath Tagore serving as its spiritual guide.

9. Neutrino research receives new recognition

(i) Overview & Historical Naming of the Neutrino

- Research on neutrinos has been recognized with five Physics Nobel Prizes (1988, 1995, 2002, 2015, and 2026), providing a fundamental rethinking of how nature works and establishing a new way to observe the universe.
- Neutrinos are often called "magic particles" or "mysterious particles" due to their intriguing and elusive nature.
- In 1930, Wolfgang Pauli hypothesized an electrically neutral particle and initially named it the "neutron". After the discovery of the modern neutron in 1932, Enrico Fermi renamed Pauli's proposed particle the "neutrino".

(ii) Nobel Prizes in Neutrino Physics (1988–2015)

- 1988 Nobel Prize: Awarded to Leon M. Lederman, Melvin Schwartz, and Jack Steinberger for discovering the muon neutrino using an accelerator-made neutrino beam, proving it is a distinct particle from the electron neutrino.
- 1995 Nobel Prize: Awarded to Frederick Reines for the first experimental detection of neutrinos, which he achieved in 1956 alongside Clyde Cowan at the Savannah River nuclear reactor.
- 2002 Nobel Prize: Awarded to Raymond Davis Jr. (who first measured solar neutrinos) and Masatoshi Koshihara (who confirmed solar neutrinos in real-time and captured neutrinos from a supernova) for pioneering cosmic neutrino detection.
- 2015 Nobel Prize: Awarded to Takaaki Kajita and Arthur B. McDonald for discovering neutrino oscillations, which proved that neutrinos possess mass. Kajita demonstrated atmospheric neutrino transformations in 1998, while McDonald proved that solar electron neutrinos transform into other types rather than vanishing.

(iii) 2026 Nobel Prize Winner: Francis Halzen

- The 2026 Nobel Prize in Physics was awarded to Belgian scientist Francis Halzen for discovering high-energy cosmic neutrinos and his contributions to the IceCube Observatory.
- Halzen earned his master's and Ph.D. in physics at KU Leuven in Belgium. In 1971, while working at CERN in Geneva, he joined the faculty at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.
- In 1980, Halzen and his doctoral researcher Enrique Zas began studying the feasibility of a neutrino telescope. In 1988, Halzen proposed using the massive, transparent ice sheet beneath the South Pole as a particle detector.
- Halzen noted that he looks only to the future rather than reflecting on his legacy, as the growing field of neutrino physics continues to offer immense excitement.

(iv) IceCube Neutrino Observatory & Neutrino Astronomy

- Located 1.5 km beneath the ice near the South Pole, the IceCube Observatory is the world's first gigaton detector, covering 1 cubic kilometer of ice. Construction was completed in 2011.
- Detection Mechanism (Cherenkov Radiation): When a neutrino interacts with ultra-clear ice, it creates a charged particle traveling faster than the phase velocity of light in that medium, emitting Cherenkov radiation picked up by highly sensitive optical sensors.
- Evidence confirmed that several detected high-energy neutrinos originated far beyond our solar system, founding the new field of neutrino astronomy.