

September 21, 2026 – Dinamani Newspaper – Tit bits

1. Russia held Parliamentary elections for the first time in the areas recently captured from Ukraine. The European Union has opposed the elections, stating that it will not recognise them.

(i) Russia has captured the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions from Ukraine. To further strengthen its political presence in these areas, Russia conducted elections for the Russian parliament.

(ii) Civilians cast their ballots in polling stations set up in the Donetsk region. Russian soldiers involved in the war with Ukraine also cast their votes.

(iii) Russian government officials warned people in the region that all government employees must participate in the elections and cast their votes, failing which they would be dismissed from service.

(iv) Ukraine's criticism:

- Ukraine has described the elections as illegal. It has stated that elections are being conducted in illegally occupied territories and urged foreign governments not to recognise them. Ukraine also warned that legal action would be taken against Ukrainian citizens who participate in the elections. Nine Ukrainian human rights organisations have also appealed to civilians to stay away from the elections.

2. Violence broke out during a protest organised by members of the Kuki community in Manipur's Kangpokpi district, condemning the arrest of seven people from a Kuki village by security forces.

(i) Clashes broke out between the majority Meitei community and the Kuki tribal community in Manipur in 2023. More than 300 people have so far been killed in the violence that has occurred intermittently, while 49 people remain missing. Thousands of people who lost their homes have been staying in government relief camps for more than three years.

(ii) Following the resignation of the BJP government headed by N. Biren Singh in Manipur last year, President's Rule was imposed. President's Rule was withdrawn in February this year, and a BJP government was formed again. Khemchand Singh is serving as the Chief Minister.

3. Officials have said that dengue cases are likely to increase in the Chennai Corporation areas due to the impact of El Niño. However, statistics indicate that the incidence remains lower compared with 2024.

(i) It has been found that the number of people suffering from fever has increased in the Chennai Corporation over the past few weeks. Dengue cases are also reportedly on the rise. Researchers say that the impact of El Niño has increased due to climate change.

(ii) The Northeast monsoon is expected to begin late in Chennai, while the heat has continued for an unusually long period. Although the rainy season has begun, daytime temperatures remain similar to those during summer. Rain occurs suddenly in the evenings. Heat accumulated by concrete buildings during the daytime causes changes in temperature when it rains in the evening. Researchers say this may contribute to illnesses such as fever.

4.UPASI Centenary Celebrations:

- The centenary celebrations of the United Planters' Association of Southern India (UPASI), commonly known as the Association of South Indian tea plantation owners, will be held at 3 p.m. on Monday in Coonoor, Nilgiris district.
- Vice-President C. P. Radhakrishnan will attend the event as the chief guest and inaugurate the celebrations. He will also release the UPASI centenary souvenir. He will later visit the industry exhibition. Leading Indian scientists engaged in tea research, tea-sector experts from countries including Japan and Indonesia, and representatives of various companies will participate in the exhibition.

5.ISRO's space programmes are remarkable, said Shatrya, Associate Administrator and Chief Engineer of NASA.

(i) Shatrya, an Indian-origin official, former NASA scientist Charles F. Bolden, and Axiom Space Director Peggy Whitson participated in a discussion held at the Intrepid Museum in Delhi. During the event, Peggy Whitson shared her experiences from the Axiom-4 human spaceflight mission with Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla.

(ii) As part of the event, Shatrya spoke to the Press Trust of India (PTI) about the space programmes of India and the United States. She said:

- India is making significant progress in various space programmes, including its human spaceflight programme. ISRO's performance is truly remarkable.
- NISAR, a synthetic aperture radar satellite jointly developed by NASA and ISRO to measure and understand changes in Earth's natural systems, including land, water and ice, was launched into space in July 2025.
- NASA is also providing the necessary assistance to India's human spaceflight programme. Although the United States wants to lead the world in the space sector, it will continue to pursue space exploration in collaboration with other countries.
- India, the United States and 70 other countries have signed the Artemis Accords, proposed by NASA and the U.S. State Department for peaceful and independent exploration of space. This is evidence of the continued international cooperation in space exploration. Respecting the sovereignty and integrity of other countries is also one of the objectives of the agreement.
- NASA maintains a good relationship with ISRO, and this cooperation will be further strengthened in the coming years, she said.

6.The Indian and Japanese Air Force Chiefs flew in Tejas fighter aircraft during the Veer Guardian joint exercise.

(i) The India-Japan air forces' joint exercise, named Veer Guardian, began on September 9 at the Air Force Station in Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

(ii) As part of the two-week-long exercise, Indian Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal A. P. Singh and Japan Air Self-Defense Force Chief of Staff General Takeru Morita flew separately in Tejas fighter aircraft. Each of them flew a Tejas aircraft and participated in a formation-flying exercise for approximately 20–25 minutes.

7. Defence production and exports from India have increased substantially over the past 10 years, said Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth. The Indian Air Force organised the Surya Kiran air show for the first time in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh.

8. Myopia

(i) Global and Regional Prevalence of Myopia

- The historical scenario where only 1 or 2 children out of 100 wore eyeglasses has changed significantly, with many children in today's classrooms now requiring glasses.
- According to World Health Organization estimates, approximately 20% of the global population is currently affected by nearsightedness (myopia).
- If current trends persist, 50% of the global population (nearly half of humanity) is projected to suffer from myopia by the year 2050.
- This global concern is now casting a deep shadow across Tamil Nadu as well.

(ii) Historical Context vs. Present Trends

- During the 1990s, students experienced far fewer vision problems; they could clearly read blackboards and regularly played outdoors in natural sunlight after school.
- Gazing at distant birds and the horizon provided natural visual exercise that trained their eyes to focus sharply on distant objects.
- Around 20 years ago in South India, the prevalence rate of myopia among children up to 15 years of age was only 4%.

(iii) Root Causes and Biological Mechanisms

- Digital screens are not the sole cause; the primary scientific drivers are continuous close-up work and a lack of natural sunlight exposure.
- Tasks such as reading books at close range, writing, and looking at mobile devices force the eye muscles to remain in a continuously contracted state.
- Natural sunlight stimulates the retina to secrete dopamine, a chemical compound that acts as a natural protective barrier preventing excessive axial lengthening of the eyeball.
- Remaining indoors reduces dopamine release. An increase in eyeball length of just 1 mm increases the nearsightedness prescription by approximately -3.00 D.
- Intense educational pressure (early morning schools, special classes, evening tuition for competitive exams) combined with the disappearance of playgrounds accounts for 90% of myopia cases.

(iv) Tamil Nadu Government Initiatives

- Kannoli Kappom Thittam: To address the situation, the Tamil Nadu Government conducts mass eye screenings through the 'Kannoli Kappom Thittam' (School Children Vision Screening Scheme).
- Under this initiative, approximately 1.24 crore (12.4 million) students have been tested for vision defects.
- Over 13 lakh (1.3 million) students diagnosed with vision impairment received free spectacles, reflecting the severity of the crisis.

(v) Health Risks of Untreated High Myopia

- If early vision problems are neglected, the optical prescription can rise above -6.00 D, leading to High Myopia.
- Medical experts warn that High Myopia increases the long-term risk of severe eye conditions later in life, including retinal detachment, glaucoma, and early-onset cataracts.

(vi) Preventive Measures and Recommended Lifestyle Changes

- Children's diets should include foods rich in Vitamins A, C, E, and Zinc (such as carrots, papaya, and drumstick leaves/murungai keerai) alongside Omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish, eggs, and almonds).
- The 20-20-20 Rule: During continuous close-up tasks, children should take a break every 20 minutes to view an object located 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds.
- The WHO recommends that children spend at least 90 minutes daily playing outdoors in natural sunlight during daytime hours to significantly reduce the risk of myopia.
- Re-engaging children with outdoor environments rich in greenery and open sky—beyond books and digital screens—is the single most vital step to safeguard their vision and future.

9. People's welfare is a priority

(i) Public Interest Litigation (PIL) by Kerala NGO

- In August 2024, a Kerala-based NGO named '3S and Our Health' filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court of India.
- The petition sought mandatory front-of-package warning labels on packaged food products high in sugar, salt, and fat so that consumers, especially children, can easily identify them.
- The NGO accused the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) of formulating regulations containing loopholes that favor food corporations.
- The NGO challenged the Government's relaxation requiring a red warning label only when at least two nutrients exceed safety thresholds, arguing that excessive sugar alone poses a serious risk of causing diabetes.

(ii) Global and Indian History of Warning Labels

- Early US Regulations (1927 & 1938): The United States enacted laws requiring warning labels on toxic substances and pharmaceuticals to alert users about side effects and hazards to children.
- First Tobacco Warning (1966): The US became the first nation globally to mandate health warning labels on cigarette packaging.
- Evolution of Tobacco Warning Rules in India: India mandated text warning labels on cigarette packages under the 'Cigarette Act' of 1975, strengthened the rules in 2003, introduced pictorial warnings in 2009, and enforced larger pictorial warnings in 2016.
- The 1990 Nutrition Labeling and Education Act in the US popularized printing calorie and nutrient breakdown tables on the back of food packages worldwide.

(iii) FSSAI Guidelines & Proposed Phased Regulations

- FSSAI's 2018–19 report first proposed front-of-pack notifications for energy, saturated fat, trans fat,

added sugar, and sodium.

- In a 2022 draft, FSSAI proposed the Indian Nutrition Rating (INR) system, assigning ratings from 0.5 to 5 stars for packaged foods.
- On August 13, the Supreme Court rejected FSSAI's affidavit regarding daily recommended adult nutritional allowance tables.
- FSSAI subsequently abandoned the star rating concept and proposed a red hexagonal warning label covering four categories: high fat, high sugar, high salt, and high-sweetness beverages.
- Two-Phase Plan:
 - Phase 1: A red warning label is triggered only if at least two out of three target ingredients (fat, sugar, or salt) exceed prescribed limits.
 - Phase 2: The warning label applies if even one of the three ingredients exceeds safe limits.

(iv) Industry Scale & Corporate Resistance

- India's packaged food industry is currently valued at ₹10,000 crore, involving thousands of crores in capital investment and providing employment to lakhs of people.
- Food manufacturing corporations argue that FSSAI's proposed warning label rules are excessively severe.
- Companies express concern that approximately 80% of their existing products would require red warning labels, significantly harming product sales.

(v) Health Concerns & Public Safety

- The Government cannot overlook the concerns of health professionals, civil society activists, and judicial oversight.
- Ensuring public health and safety remains the paramount responsibility, as highlighted in the Supreme Court proceedings.