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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Current Affairs Today — February 17, 2026

17 February 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED

ENVIRONMENT   ECONOMY   SCIENCE & TECH   IR   POLITY   SECURITY & DEFENCE

HISTORY & CULTURE   REPORTS & SCHEMES

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NGT APPROVES GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND MEGA-PROJECT (₹81,000 CRORE)

The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** approved the **₹81,000 crore Great Nicobar Island development project**, subject to environmental safeguards, in February 2026 — green-lighting one of India's most strategically significant but ecologically contentious infrastructure projects.

Project components:

> **International Container Transhipment Terminal (ICTT):** Deep-water port to compete with Colombo, Port Klang, and Singapore
>
> **Greenfield international airport**
>
> **Township** for operational staff
>
> **Gas and solar power plant** (hybrid energy)

Environmental impact: ~130 sq km of tropical rainforest (approx. 15% of the island's landmass; ~10 million trees) will be cleared.

Sensitive ecosystems: Coral reefs, nesting beaches of **leatherback sea turtles** (world's largest turtle, IUCN Vulnerable), **Nicobar megapode** (endemic bird), saltwater crocodiles.

Tribal communities: Shompen (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, ~400 individuals) and **Nicobarese** — displacement concerns.

Strategic significance: Great Nicobar is equidistant from Colombo (Sri Lanka), Port Klang (Malaysia), and Singapore — positioning the ICTT to capture 20–25% of trans-shipment trade currently dominated by these ports. The island is part of the **Andaman & Nicobar Command** (India's only tri-service command) — critical for monitoring Malacca Strait traffic. Great Nicobar is a **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve** (since **2013**) and geologically earthquake-prone.

UPSC angle: NGT powers (NGT Act 2010), EIA Notification 2006, Expert Appraisal Committee, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, leatherback sea turtle (Schedule I, WPA 1972), Shompen tribe (PVTG), Andaman & Nicobar Command, trans-shipment trade, India's maritime strategy, CRZ (Coastal Regulation Zone) norms.

INDIA'S FIRST CBDC-BASED PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM — GUJARAT

Union Home Minister **Amit Shah** launched India's first **Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)-based Public Distribution System** in **Gandhinagar, Gujarat** on February 15, 2026.

Initial districts: Ahmedabad, Anand, Valsad, Surat (Gujarat)

Expansion planned: Puducherry, Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu

How it works: PDS ration entitlements are credited as **programmable e-Rupee (e₹)** — a form of digital token issued by RBI — which beneficiaries use at Fair Price Shops

Advantage: Eliminates leakage, pilferage, and ghost beneficiaries; programmability ensures tokens can only be used for food grains

About CBDC: The **e-Rupee (e₹)** is India's digital currency issued by **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**. Unlike UPI (which moves existing money), CBDC **is money** — a direct liability of the central bank. RBI launched CBDC pilot in **December 2022** for wholesale (e₹-W) and retail (e₹-R) segments.

UPSC angle: CBDC (Central Bank Digital Currency), e-Rupee, RBI CBDC pilot (2022), Public Distribution System (National Food Security Act 2013), NFSA, Aadhaar-linked ration cards, DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer), India's fintech innovation, programmable money vs. cryptocurrency distinction.

INDIA-AI IMPACT SUMMIT 2026 — SAHI, BODH, INDIAAI MISSION

The **India-AI Impact Summit 2026** was held at **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi** — organised by **MeitY** under the theme: **"Sarvajana Hitaya, Sarvajana Sukhaya"** (Welfare for all, Happiness for all). Built on three pillars: **People, Planet, Progress**; seven working groups: **"Seven Chakras."**

Key launches:

SAHI (Sustainable AI in Healthcare for India): National framework for responsible AI in diagnostics, drug discovery, clinical decision-making

BODH: AI health solution testing and benchmarking platform (IIT Kanpur collaboration)

Sarvam AI: Unveiled Sarvam-30B (30 billion parameters) and Sarvam-105B (105B parameters) multilingual LLMs supporting all 22 scheduled languages

India AI Mission Budget: ₹10,371 crore (approved March 2024); **38,000+ GPUs** available at 40% reduced cost

India entered **US-led Pax Silica** (semiconductor/AI supply chain) initiative

India's AI context: 6 million+ AI/tech workforce; 1,800+ Global Capability Centres; 89% of new startups use AI.

UPSC angle: IndiaAI Mission (MeitY, ₹10,371 crore, 7 pillars: Compute, Datasets, Lab, Startups, Safe & Trusted AI, Application, Future Skills), Bharat Mandapam (G20 summit venue), GCC (Global Capability Centres), Pax Silica, AI governance.

TARIQUE RAHMAN SWORN IN AS BANGLADESH PM

Tarique Rahman, Chairperson of the **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)**, was sworn in as **Prime Minister of Bangladesh** on February 17, 2026 — Bangladesh's first elected PM since the July 2024 revolution that ousted Sheikh Hasina.

- BNP and allies won **209 of 297 seats** in the 13th Parliamentary Elections; Jamaat-e-Islami: 77 seats; NCP: 6; Independents: 7

- Oath administered by President **Mohammed Shahabuddin**; interim PM Muhammad Yunus (August 2024–February 16, 2026) stepped down

- India-Bangladesh trade (FY25): **USD 13.51 billion** (India exports: USD 11.46 bn; imports: USD 2.05 bn)

- Bangladesh imports **1,160 MW** electricity from India; **Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant** (1,320 MW): India-Bangladesh joint project

- India's Lines of Credit (LoC): **~USD 8 billion** (3 LoCs); USD 500 million Defence LoC

- **Key concerns for India:** Northeast insurgent safe havens, minority community safety, China's growing influence, anti-India sentiment during transition

UPSC angle: India-Bangladesh relations, LoC (Lines of Credit), Maitree STPP, India's Act East Policy connectivity (road/rail through Bangladesh), Teesta river water sharing dispute, Farakka Barrage, BIMSTEC, SAARC, India's neighbourhood first policy.

INDIA NON-FOSSIL POWER CAPACITY SURPASSES FOSSIL — FIRST TIME

India added **52,537 MW** of power capacity in the first 10 months of FY 2025-26 (April 2025 to January 2026):

- Renewable: **39,657 MW** (Solar: 34,955 MW; Wind: 4,613 MW)

- Thermal: 8,810 MW | Large Hydro: 3,370 MW | Nuclear: 700 MW

- **Total installed capacity: ~521 GW**

- **Non-fossil capacity: 271.9 GW — first time surpassing fossil fuel capacity** in India's history

India's 2030 target (NDC): **500 GW non-fossil capacity** — already on track to exceed. **Leading states in solar:** Gujarat and Rajasthan (**44 GW each**).

UPSC angle: India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under Paris Agreement, PANCHAMRIT commitments (500 GW non-fossil by 2030, 50% energy from renewables by 2030, net-zero 2070), MNRE schemes, PM Surya Ghar Yojana, Green Energy Corridors, ISA (International Solar Alliance, HQ Gurugram).

URBAN CHALLENGE FUND + STARTUP INDIA FUND OF FUNDS 2.0

Cabinet approved two major funds:

Urban Challenge Fund: ₹1 lakh crore central assistance (FY26–FY31, extendable to FY34) — covers **25% of project costs**; minimum **50% from market sources**; targets urban transformation in cities

Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0: ₹10,000 crore corpus to mobilise **venture capital** for Indian startups; SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) will deploy capital

UPSC angle: Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT 2.0, urban infrastructure financing, SEBI-regulated AIFs, National Startup Policy, Startup India (launched January 16, 2016), DPIIT, angel tax removal (2024), GIFT City IFSCA.

RAILWAY MULTITRACKING PROJECTS — ₹18,509 CRORE

Cabinet approved three multitracking projects covering **~389 km** across four states for **₹18,509 crore** (target completion: FY 2030-31):

Delhi–Ambala (Delhi + Haryana)

Kasara–Manmad (Maharashtra)

Ballari–Hosapete (Karnataka)

UPSC angle: Railway infrastructure, multitracking (reduces congestion, improves freight/passenger capacity), Indian Railways (world's 4th largest network), Dedicated Freight Corridors (Eastern DFC: Ludhiana-Kolkata; Western DFC: JNPT-Dadri), National Rail Plan 2030.

PM MODI IN ASSAM — KUMAR BHASKAR VARMA SETU INAUGURATED

PM Modi inaugurated development projects worth ₹5,450 crore in Assam, including:

Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu: Six-lane bridge across the Brahmaputra connecting Guwahati and North Guwahati — reduced crossing time from 30 minutes to **7 minutes** (named after scholar-king Kumar Bhaskar Varma of ancient Kamarupa Kingdom, 7th century CE)

Landed at **Emergency Landing Facility on Moran Bypass NH-37, Dibrugarh** using IAF C-130J aircraft (first PM to use such a facility)

Inaugurated **National Data Centre for North Eastern Region** at Amingaon, Kamrup

Virtually flagged off **225 electric buses** under **PM-eBus Sewa Scheme**

UPSC angle: Emergency Landing Facilities (strategic dual-use highways), Brahmaputra bridges (strategic for Northeast India), Kumar Bhaskar Varma (ancient Kamarupa — covers modern Assam, parts of Bangladesh), Assam's development, PM-eBus Sewa, NeSDA (North East Special Development Assistance), Act East Policy.

KERALA'S GRAPHENE POLICY — FIRST IN INDIA

CM Pinarayi Vijayan approved **Kerala's Graphene Policy — India's first comprehensive policy** for graphene development.

Incentives: 50% land lease subsidy, flexible payments, up to **45% CAPEX support**

Graphene Innovation Centre, Kochi: ₹87 crore

Graphene Aurora Project: Palakkad

International partnerships: **University of Oxford** and **University of Manchester** (where graphene was first isolated in 2004 by Andre Geim and Konstantin Novoselov — Nobel Prize in Physics, 2010)

Graphene Parks planned on KINFRA (Kerala Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation) land

About graphene: Single layer of carbon atoms arranged in hexagonal lattice; world's strongest material (200x stronger than steel), excellent conductor, thinnest known material. Applications: Batteries (EV, energy storage), semiconductors, composites, water filtration, medical devices.

UPSC angle: Graphene (Nobel Physics 2010, Geim + Novoselov, University of Manchester), BioE3 policy (biotechnology), critical minerals and advanced materials policy, Make in India in deep-tech, KINFRA, IndiaAI Mission.

UDAY KOTAK APPOINTED GIFT CITY CHAIRMAN

Uday Kotak, founder of **Kotak Mahindra Bank** and recipient of **Padma Bhushan 2026** (Trade and Industry category), was appointed as the new Chairman of **GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City)** — replacing **Hasmukh Adhia** (retired IAS, former Finance Secretary).

GIFT City: India's **first International Financial Services Centre (IFSC)** at Gandhinagar, Gujarat. Regulated by **IFSCA (International Financial Services Centres Authority)** — established April 2020. Allows foreign currency transactions, offshore banking, insurance, capital markets — tax incentives to attract global financial firms.

UPSC angle: GIFT City, IFSCA (IFSCA Act 2019), IFSC, foreign currency transactions, special economic zones in financial services, Gujarat's development model.

HENLEY PASSPORT INDEX 2026 — INDIA AT RANK 75

India ranked **75th** in the **Henley Passport Index 2026**, with visa-free/on-arrival access to **56 destinations** — up from 85th (52 destinations) in 2025. A significant improvement of 10 positions in one year.

Top ranked (2026): Singapore, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Spain, Finland (90+ destinations each). Pakistan ranks 102nd; China 61st; USA ~7th.

UPSC angle: Passport power, visa diplomacy, bilateral visa agreements, India's soft power, consular relations under Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963), MEA's passport services, e-Passport technology.

OL CHIKI SCRIPT CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated centenary celebrations for the **Ol Chiki script** in New Delhi — marking 100 years since Pandit **Raghunath Murmu** invented the script in **1925** in Rairangpur, Mayurbhanj, Odisha.

Commemorative coins and postage stamps released. Ol Chiki was included in the **Eighth Schedule** in 2003 for the **Santhali language**. Constitution translated into Santali in December 2025. UPSC examinations now conducted in Ol Chiki.

UPSC angle: Eighth Schedule (22 languages), Santhali language, tribal scripts, Santali added to 8th Schedule by 92nd Amendment (2003), linguistic rights of tribes, Raghunath Murmu (Guru Gomke — spiritual teacher).

BIRAC-RDI FUND — ₹2,000 CRORE FIRST CALL

Union MoS **Jitendra Singh** launched the **BIRAC-RDI Fund** — the first ₹2,000 crore national call under **BIRAC (Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council)** as part of the broader **₹1 lakh crore R&D Initiative (RDI)** approved in July 2025. Phase 1 deadline: March 31, 2026. Focus: Deep-tech, AI, Biotechnology.

UPSC angle: BIRAC (under Department of Biotechnology), R&D Investment (India's GERD — Gross Expenditure on R&D — is ~0.7% of GDP vs. 2–4% in developed nations), BioE3 policy, deep-tech incubation, Startup India.

PERSONS IN NEWS

Tarique Rahman — Sworn in as Bangladesh PM (BNP); ends Muhammad Yunus interim period.

Uday Kotak — Appointed GIFT City Chairman; Padma Bhushan 2026 (Trade & Industry); Kotak Mahindra Bank founder.

Mia Mottley — Re-elected PM of Barbados for 3rd consecutive term; BLP won all 30 parliamentary seats (February 11, 2026).

📌 FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

Great Nicobar Project:

Cost: **₹81,000 crore** | Approved by: **NGT** (Feb 2026) + EAC

Components: ICTT + greenfield airport + township + gas/solar power plant

Forest impact: **130 sq km** (~15% landmass; ~10 million trees)

Sensitive species: **Leatherback sea turtle** (IUCN Vulnerable), Nicobar megapode, saltwater crocodile

Tribal communities: **Shompen** (PVTG, ~400 individuals), Nicobarese

Strategic: equidistant from **Colombo, Port Klang (Malaysia), Singapore**

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status: **2013**

Andaman & Nicobar Command: India's **only tri-service command** (HQ Port Blair)

CBDC-PDS:

Launched by: **Amit Shah** | Date: February 15, 2026 | Location: **Gandhinagar, Gujarat**

Currency: **e-Rupee (e₹)** — RBI CBDC; launched pilot **December 2022**

Initial districts: Ahmedabad, Anand, Valsad, Surat

Expansion: Puducherry, Chandigarh, DNH, Daman & Diu

CBDC vs. UPI: CBDC is **digital money** (RBI liability); UPI is a payment interface for existing bank deposits

India Power Capacity (February 2026):

Total: **~521 GW** | Non-fossil: **271.9 GW** (>50% — first time)

FY26 (10 months) addition: **52,537 MW** | Solar added: **34,955 MW**

Leading states: **Gujarat + Rajasthan** (44 GW each in solar)

2030 NDC target: **500 GW non-fossil** (already on track)

Net-zero target: **2070**

Tarique Rahman — Bangladesh:

BNP seats: **209/297** | Jamaat-e-Islami: 77 | NCP: 6

India-Bangladesh trade (FY25): **USD 13.51 billion**

Electricity supply India → Bangladesh: **1,160 MW**

Maitree STPP: **1,320 MW** (Khulna, Bangladesh; India-Bangladesh joint)

India's LoCs to Bangladesh: **~USD 8 billion** (3 LoCs) + USD 500M Defence LoC

Kerala Graphene Policy:

First graphene policy in **India**

Graphene Innovation Centre, Kochi: **₹87 crore**

Graphene isolated (Nobel Physics 2010): **Andre Geim + Konstantin Novoselov**, University of Manchester

KINFRA: Kerala Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation

GIFT City / Uday Kotak:

GIFT City: India's first **IFSC** | Location: **Gandhinagar, Gujarat**

Regulator: **IFSCA** (International Financial Services Centres Authority, est. April 2020; IFSCA Act 2019)

New Chairman: **Uday Kotak** (replaces Hasmukh Adhia) | Padma Bhushan 2026

Henley Passport Index 2026:

India: **75th rank** | Visa-free access: **56 destinations** | (vs. 85th, 52 in 2025)

Ol Chiki Script:

Created: **1925** by **Pandit Raghunath Murmu**, Rairangpur, Mayurbhanj, Odisha

Language: **Santhali** | 8th Schedule inclusion: **2003** (92nd Constitutional Amendment)

Number of Eighth Schedule languages: **22** (Santhali was 22nd addition in 2003)

Other Relevant Facts:

Urban Challenge Fund: **₹1 lakh crore** (FY26-31); 25% Centre + 50% market | Startup India FoF 2.0: **₹10,000 crore**

Railway Multitracking: **₹18,509 crore**, 389 km (Delhi-Ambala, Kasara-Manmad, Ballari-Hosapete)

Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu: Six-lane bridge, Guwahati; travel time cut 30 min → **7 min**

BIRAC-RDI: First call ₹2,000 crore (India GERD: ~0.7% GDP; target: 2%)

Mia Mottley (Barbados): Re-elected Feb 11, 2026; BLP won all **30 seats**; 3rd consecutive term

C-DOT + Rashtriya Raksha University (Gandhinagar) MoU: Innovation centre for cybersecurity, quantum, 5G

Sources: Drishti IAS, AffairsCloud, IndiaBix

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