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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Current Affairs Today – February 18, 2026

18 February 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED**IR****SECURITY & DEFENCE****HISTORY & CULTURE****SCIENCE & TECH****ENVIRONMENT****ECONOMY****PERSONS & AWARDS****REPORTS & SCHEMES****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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INDIA-FRANCE ELEVATED TO “SPECIAL GLOBAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP”

French President **Emmanuel Macron** visited India in February 2026, upgrading the India-France relationship to a “**Special Global Strategic Partnership**” — marking 30 years of the strategic partnership (est. 1998).

Key outcomes:

26 Rafale-Marine fighter jets finalised for the Indian Navy (carrier-based operations on INS Vikrant)

H-125 helicopter assembly line launched in Karnataka — India’s **first private-sector helicopter manufacturing facility**, annual capacity 10 helicopters (Airbus + Tata partnership)

Nuclear cooperation: Target of **100 GW nuclear power by 2047**; collaboration on 6 EPR (European Pressurised Reactor) units

Education: 30,000 Indian students in France by 2030 (currently ~10,000)

Namaste France 2028 planned (cultural year)

PM Modi invited to G7 Summit 2026 and Africa Forward Summit (Nairobi, May 2026)

Bilateral trade: **€12.67 billion** (2024-25); French FDI in India: **€9.79 billion** (April 2000–March 2025)

France’s significance: India’s **2nd largest arms supplier** (after Russia); **3rd largest EU trading partner**; ranked 11th largest foreign investor in India.

UPSC angle: India-France defence ties (Rafale deal 2016, MMRCA), INS Vikrant (India’s first indigenously built aircraft carrier), nuclear cooperation (NSG waiver 2008, India-France Civil Nuclear Agreement 2008), EPR technology, Article 368 vs. Article 3 (state name changes, different from defence treaty — treaty under Art. 73 executive power), G7 outreach India, Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defence.

EXERCISE MILAN 2026 — 13TH EDITION AT VISAKHAPATNAM

Exercise MILAN 2026, the Indian Navy’s signature multilateral naval exercise, was held at **Visakhapatnam (February 15–25, 2026)** with **over 70 countries** participating — the largest edition ever.

New participants: Germany, Philippines, UAE. **Key activities:** Anti-submarine warfare (ASW), Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), tactical manoeuvres, interoperability drills.

About MILAN: First held in **1995** at Andaman & Nicobar Islands with 4 countries (Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand). Name means “meeting” in Hindi. Hosted by **Eastern Naval Command** (since 2022 shifted to Visakhapatnam). Held biennially; aligns with India’s **Act East Policy** and **MAHASAGAR** (Maritime Association for Holistic and Agile Security Across Regions) vision.

UPSC angle: MILAN exercise, Act East Policy (2014), Eastern Naval Command HQ Visakhapatnam, MAHASAGAR doctrine, India as net security provider in Indian Ocean Region, ASEAN maritime connectivity, Freedom of Navigation (UNCLOS Article 87), Andaman & Nicobar Command (India’s only tri-service command).

80TH ANNIVERSARY OF ROYAL INDIAN NAVY (RIN) REVOLT

February 18, 2026 marked the **80th anniversary of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Mutiny** (February 18–23, 1946), one of the most significant events in India’s independence struggle.

Key facts:

Epicentre: **HMIS Talwar**, Bombay (now Mumbai)

Participants: Over **20,000 naval ratings; 78 ships and 20 shore establishments**

Spread to: Karachi, Madras, Cochin, Visakhapatnam, Calcutta, Andaman Islands

Triggers: Racial discrimination, poor food, political awakening after INA trials (Red Fort, Nov 1945)

First batch tried: **Prem Kumar Sehgal** (Hindu), **Shah Nawaz Khan** (Muslim), **Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon** (Sikh) — symbolised communal unity

Suppressed by British; leaders arrested; but INA imprisonment remission issued January 1947

Subhas Chandra Bose took INA command: August 25, 1943; **Provisional Government of Azad Hind** established: October 21, 1943, Singapore

UPSC angle: RIN Revolt 1946, INA trials (Red Fort), Subhas Chandra Bose, Azad Hind Fauj, Cabinet Mission (January 1946), Indian independence timeline, communal unity in freedom struggle.

BHARAT VISTAAR — AI ADVISORY PLATFORM FOR FARMERS

Bharat VISTAAR (Versatile, Integrated and Smart Technology for Agri-Advancement and Resources) was launched by Union Agriculture Minister **Shivraj Singh Chouhan** at the State Institute of Agricultural Management (SIAM), **Jaipur, Rajasthan** (Phase 1 launch).

Toll-free helpline: **155261**

AI voice assistant: “**Bharati**”; available in Hindi and English initially, expanding to 11 languages

Integrates 10 government schemes: **PM-KISAN, PMFBY, Soil Health Card (SHC), KCC, PM-AASHA, PMKSY, AIF, PDMC, MISS, SMAM**

Data sources: AgriStack, ICAR knowledge base, IMD weather forecasts, mandi prices (eNAM)

Phase 1 states: Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan

UPSC angle: Digital agriculture, AgriStack (National Agriculture Digital Infrastructure), PM-KISAN (2019), PMFBY crop insurance, eNAM (electronic National Agriculture Market), AI in agriculture, GS3 technology + agriculture convergence.

SAHI AND BODH — HEALTH AI PLATFORMS LAUNCHED

At **India AI Impact Summit 2026**, two flagship health AI platforms were launched:

SAHI (Sustainable AI in Healthcare for India): National roadmap and policy framework for **responsible AI adoption in healthcare** — diagnostics, drug discovery, clinical decision-making

BODH: Platform to **test, benchmark, and validate AI health solutions** before clinical deployment; ensures safety and efficacy standards

Both anchored in **National Health Policy 2017** and **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM, 2020)**.

UPSC angle: Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), Health ID, ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account), AI in healthcare, National Health Policy 2017, IndiaAI Mission (MeitY), digital health governance.

NHAI BEE CORRIDOR INITIATIVE

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) launched India's first **Bee Corridor initiative** along national highways — planting native flowering species every 500m–1km to create pollinator habitat.

Native species: **Neem, Karanj, Mahua, Palash, Bottle Brush, Jamun, Siris**

FY 2026-27 target: **~40 lakh trees; 60% under Bee Corridor initiative**

Initial phase: At least 3 pollinator corridors

UPSC angle: Pollinator conservation, biodiversity, ecosystem services (pollination = critical for 75% of global food crops), NHAI green corridor initiatives, National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), SDG 15 (Life on Land).

DEMWE LOWER HYDEL PROJECT — ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE EXTENDED TO 2037

The **Expert Appraisal Committee** under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** granted an 11-year extension to the **1,750 MW Demwe Lower Hydel Project** on the **Lohit River, Arunachal Pradesh** (valid until 2037).

Earlier subject to **NGT** interventions over wildlife clearance and biodiversity concerns

Lohit River: tributary of the **Brahmaputra**; originates in **Tibet (China)**; enters India at Arunachal Pradesh; one of the trans-Himalayan rivers

Arunachal Pradesh hydro potential: **50,000 MW** (one of the largest in India)

EAC under: Environment Protection Act 1986 / EIA Notification 2006

UPSC angle: Hydroelectric projects on trans-Himalayan rivers, EIA Notification 2006, Expert Appraisal Committee, NGT (National Green Tribunal), Lohit River geography, Arunachal Pradesh strategic significance (borders China).

BIOASIA 2026 — 23RD EDITION IN HYDERABAD

The **23rd BioAsia Summit** was inaugurated by **Telangana CM A. Revanth Reddy** in **Hyderabad**.

Theme: “**TechBio Unleashed – AI, Automation, Revolutionary Changes in Life Sciences**”

Vision: Telangana as world-class biopharma hub by **2047**

Hyderabad is India’s “**Genome Valley**” — home to 800+ pharma/biotech companies; Bulk Drug Park (SPA Telangana); Bharat Biotech, Dr. Reddy’s, Biological E. HQ

UPSC angle: India’s pharmaceutical sector (3rd largest globally by volume), Hyderabad Genome Valley, biotechnology policy, BioE3 policy (Dept. of Biotechnology), Make in India in pharma, vaccine diplomacy.

TEJASWIN SHANKAR — ASIAN INDOOR ATHLETICS GOLD

Tejaswin Shankar won the **gold medal** in the **men’s heptathlon** at the **Asian Indoor Athletics Championships 2026** in **Tianjin, China** with **5,993 points** — a new **national indoor record** (previous: 5,650 points, 2021). India’s overall tally: 5 medals; this was India’s only gold.

Tejaswin is the **first Indian to win an Asian indoor athletics gold** in the combined events category. He earlier competed in the high jump at the Tokyo Olympics (2021).

UPSC angle: Athletics achievements (Arjuna Award eligibility criteria), Sports Authority of India (SAI), Khelo India initiatives, Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), Asian Indoor Athletics Championships (Athletics Asia governing body).

SMRITI MANDHANA — BBC INDIAN SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR 2025

Smriti Mandhana was named the **BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year 2025**, cited for leading India to a **historic Women's World Cup victory** in 2025.

Other nominees: **Divya Deshmukh** (Chess World Cup winner), **Preethi Pal** (Paralympic silver + bronze, Paris 2024)

Lifetime Achievement Award: Anjali Bhagwat (shooting, Arjuna Awardee 2000)

UPSC angle: Women's cricket (BCCI governance), ICC Women's World Cup, sports governance in India (National Sports Code), Arjuna Award, Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna (now Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award).

FOREST RIGHTS ACT — IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES IN MAHARASHTRA

Tribal communities across Maharashtra held protests over the **high rejection rate of claims** under the **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA)**.

Rejection rate: Over **45% of claims** in some regions

FRA eligibility: **3 generations (75 years)** of residence before December 13, 2005

Maximum individual title rights: **4 hectares** per family

Four types of rights: Title Rights, Use Rights, Relief and Development Rights, Forest Management Rights

Historical context: Indian Forest Act, 1878 introduced "eminent domain" extinguishing tribal rights. Post-independence, Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and Forest Conservation Act 1980 further restricted forest access. FRA 2006 was enacted to "undo historical injustice."

UPSC angle: FRA 2006, Community Forest Rights (CFR), Gram Sabha role in FRA, NTFP rights, Scheduled Areas (5th Schedule), PESA Act 1996, tribal welfare, MoEFCC vs. tribal ministry conflicts.

PM RAHAT — CASHLESS TREATMENT SCHEME FOR ROAD ACCIDENT VICTIMS

PM Modi approved the **Pradhan Mantri Road Accident Victim Hospitalization and Assured Treatment (PM RAHAT) Scheme** — providing **cashless treatment up to ₹1.5 lakh per victim for 7 days** at empanelled hospitals, integrated with the **ERSS 112 helpline**.

In the same set of approvals: **Lakhpati Didi** target doubled to **6 crore** (from 3 crore); **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund** increased from ₹1 lakh crore to **₹2 lakh crore**.

UPSC angle: Road safety policy, ERSS 112 (Emergency Response Support System), MoRTH (Ministry of Road Transport and Highways), Lakhpati Didi scheme (SHG women earning ₹1 lakh+/year), AIF scheme (post-harvest infrastructure, cold chains, logistics).

INDIA'S FIRST UNDERWATER TWIN-TUBE BRAHMAPUTRA TUNNEL APPROVED

The **CCEA (Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs)** approved India's **first underwater twin-tube road-cum-rail tunnel** under the **Brahmaputra River** at a cost of **₹18,662 crore**. The tunnel will connect Guwahati's north and south banks, reducing travel time and strengthening strategic connectivity in a region prone to GLOF and flash floods.

In the same CCEA session: ₹11,000+ crore highway projects approved — NH-160A (Maharashtra), NH-56 (Gujarat, ₹4,583 crore, Hybrid Annuity Mode), NH-167 (Telangana).

UPSC angle: Brahmaputra geography (originates as Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, enters India at Arunachal Pradesh, crosses Assam, exits into Bangladesh as Jamuna), twin-tube tunnel technology, CCEA composition, HAM (Hybrid Annuity Model) in highway PPP, strategic connectivity in Northeast India.

INDIA TOPS 17TH ASIAN RIFLE/PISTOL CHAMPIONSHIP

India topped the **medal tally** at the **17th Asian Rifle/Pistol Championship 2026** held at the **Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range, New Delhi (February 2–14)** with **94 medals (51 gold, 23 silver, 20 bronze)** out of **300+ athletes from 20 countries**. Kazakhstan finished 2nd (26 medals); Uzbekistan 3rd. Organised by **NRAI (National Rifle Association of India)** under the **Asian Shooting Confederation (ASC)**.

UPSC angle: NRAI (National Rifle Association of India), Asian Shooting Confederation, Dr. Karni Singh (legendary Indian shooting champion, Arjuna Awardee, Rajasthan royalty), Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), Sports Authority of India (SAI).

'PUPPETS OF INDIA' — 8 COMMEMORATIVE STAMPS RELEASED

The **Department of Posts** released **8 commemorative stamps** (face value ₹5 each) showcasing India's traditional puppetry forms, at the Indian Habitat Centre, New Delhi. Designed by **Sankha Samanta**; released by Secretary **Vandita Kaul**.

Eight puppetry forms featured:

Kathputli — Rajasthan (string puppet; oldest tradition)

Yakshagana — Karnataka (rod and string)

Daanger Putul — West Bengal

Kathi Kundhei — Odisha (rod puppet)

Benir Putul — West Bengal (wire puppet)

Pavakathakali — Kerala (glove puppet)

Ravanachhaya — Odisha (shadow puppet)

Tolu Bommalatta — Andhra Pradesh (shadow puppet)

UPSC angle: UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (India has 15 inscribed elements), Sangeet Natak Akademi (traditional arts preservation), Puppetry as part of India's folk tradition (Natyadharmi vs. Lokadharmi in Bharatmuni's Natyashastra).

WATERJET PRODUCTION FACILITY — INDIA BECOMES 3RD GLOBALLY

Coast Guard DG **Paramesh Sivamani** inaugurated an M/s **Marine Jet Power** waterjet production and testing facility in **Goa** — making India the **world's 3rd country** (after USA and South Korea) to manufacture maritime waterjets domestically. Developed under a **Manufacturing and Transfer of Technology (MToT)** framework. ICG currently operates **100+ waterjet systems**; 42 additional units planned.

UPSC angle: Waterjet propulsion (used in high-speed patrol vessels, hovercrafts — no propeller, uses water intake and high-pressure jet), Make in India in defence, Indian Coast Guard (under Ministry of Defence since 2009, previously Home Affairs), MToT frameworks in defence procurement.

PERSONS IN NEWS

Emmanuel Macron — French President; upgraded India-France ties to Special Global Strategic Partnership; finalized 26 Rafale-Marine deal.

Tejaswin Shankar — Athlete; won Asian Indoor Athletics Championship gold in heptathlon with national record 5,993 points.

Smriti Mandhana — Cricketer; named BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year 2025.

Anjali Bhagwat — Former shooter; received BBC India Lifetime Achievement Award.

FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

India-France Special Global Strategic Partnership:

Partnership established: **1998** | Upgraded to: “**Special Global Strategic Partnership**” (2026)

Bilateral trade: **€12.67 billion** (2024-25) | FDI (April 2000–March 2025): **€9.79 billion** (11th largest investor)

France’s rank: **2nd largest arms supplier** to India (after Russia); **3rd largest EU trade partner**

26 **Rafale-Marine** jets: carrier-based variant for INS Vikrant

H-125 helicopter: Airbus H125 (formerly AS350); India’s first private-sector helicopter manufacturing; annual capacity: **10 helicopters**; location: **Karnataka**

Nuclear target: **100 GW** by 2047; 6 EPR units planned

Indian students in France: current ~10,000; target: **30,000 by 2030**

Namaste France: **2028** (30-year partnership anniversary)

Exercise MILAN 2026:

Edition: **13th** | Dates: **February 15–25, 2026** | Location: **Visakhapatnam**

Countries: **70+** | Hosting command: **Eastern Naval Command**

First held: **1995**, Andaman & Nicobar Islands; original 4 countries: Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand

New participants 2026: Germany, Philippines, UAE

Focus: ASW, HADR, tactical interoperability

RIN Revolt (1946):

Start date: **February 18, 1946** | End: February 23, 1946

Epicentre: **HMIS Talwar, Bombay**

Participants: **20,000+ naval ratings; 78 ships + 20 shore establishments**

INA trial first batch: Prem Kumar Sehgal, Shah Nawaz Khan, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon (symbolised Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity)

Provisional Govt of Azad Hind: **October 21, 1943**, Singapore

Bharat VISTAAR:

Helpline: **155261** | AI assistant: “**Bharati**”

Launch location: **SIAM, Jaipur, Rajasthan** (Phase 1)

Integrates: **10 schemes** including PM-KISAN, PMFBY, SHC, KCC, eNAM

Demwe Lower Hydel Project:

Capacity: **1,750 MW** | River: **Lohit** (Brahmaputra tributary, originates Tibet)

State: **Arunachal Pradesh** | Extension: to **2037** (11 years)

Arunachal hydro potential: **~50,000 MW**

BioAsia 2026:

Edition: **23rd** | Theme: “TechBio Unleashed — AI, Automation, Revolutionary Changes in Life Sciences”

Location: **Hyderabad** | Inaugurated by: **Telangana CM A. Revanth Reddy**

Hyderabad pharma cluster: **800+ companies** — “**Genome Valley**”

Tejaswin Shankar:

Event: Men’s heptathlon | Score: **5,993 points** (national indoor record)

Championship: **Asian Indoor Athletics Championships 2026**, Tianjin, China

India’s total tally: **5 medals** | India’s golds: **1** (Tejaswin only gold)

PM RAHAT Scheme:

Full form: Pradhan Mantri Road Accident Victim Hospitalization and Assured Treatment

Coverage: **₹1.5 lakh cashless treatment per victim for 7 days**

Integrated with: **ERSS 112** (Emergency Response Support System)

Same approval: Lakhpati Didi target → **6 crore** | AIF → **₹2 lakh crore**

Brahmaputra Underwater Tunnel:

Type: India’s **first underwater twin-tube road-cum-rail tunnel**

River: **Brahmaputra** | Location: Guwahati area | Cost: **₹18,662 crore**

CCEA also approved: NH-56 Gujarat (**₹4,583 crore**, HAM); NH-160A Maharashtra; NH-167 Telangana

Asian Rifle/Pistol Championship 2026:

Venue: **Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range, New Delhi** | Dates: Feb 2–14, 2026

India: **94 medals** (51 gold, 23 silver, 20 bronze) — **topped tally**

Countries: **20** | Athletes: **300+** | Body: **NRAI / Asian Shooting Confederation**

Puppets of India Stamps:

Stamps issued: **8** | Face value: **₹5** each | Designer: **Sankha Samanta**

Forms: Kathputli (RJ), Yakshagana (KA), Daanger Putul (WB), Kathi Kundhei (OD), Benir Putul (WB), Pavakathakali (KL), Ravanachhaya (OD), Tolu Bommalatta (AP)

Waterjet Facility — Goa:

India: **3rd country** globally (after USA + South Korea) to manufacture maritime waterjets

Partnership: M/s Marine Jet Power | Framework: **MToT (Manufacturing and Transfer of Technology)**

ICG waterjet systems operating: **100+** | Planned: 42 additional

Other Relevant Facts:

India-Ireland digital cooperation: UPI, DBT, 5G, quantum communications; Indian rep: Jyotiraditya Scindia

NHAI Bee Corridor: **40 lakh trees** target FY27; native species: Neem, Karanj, Mahua, Palash, Jamun

23rd BioAsia Summit: TechBio Unleashed; Hyderabad = India's Genome Valley

Forest Rights Act 2006: 4 hectares max; 3 generations (75 years) eligibility; 4 types of rights

ABDM (Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission): Launched September 2021; ABHA health ID; SAHI + BODH platforms launched under this framework

Tamil Nadu Semiconductor MoUs: MinebeaMitsumi (Japan) ₹1,980 crore (Tiruvallur); Aequs Group ₹4,000 crore aerospace/defence cluster (Krishnagiri); Total: ₹5,980 crore

Sources: Drishti IAS, IndiaBix, PIB

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