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WEEKLY ROUNDUP

Weekly Roundup — Week 8 (Feb 16–22, 2026)

22 February 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED

SECURITY & DEFENCE   IR   ECONOMY   SCIENCE & TECH   POLITY   ENVIRONMENT

HISTORY & CULTURE

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Weekly Roundup — Week 8 (Feb 16–22, 2026)

Week 8 — February 16–22, 2026   `Security Defence`   `International Relations`   `Economy`   `Science Tech`

`Polity`   `Environment`   `History Culture`

📋 WEEK OVERVIEW

India's most defence-intensive week of 2026. The **114 Rafale deal** — India's largest ever defence procurement — was cleared by DAC. **Exercise MILAN 2026** at Visakhapatnam became the biggest multilateral naval exercise India has ever hosted. **India-France** relations hit a historic high with "Special Global Strategic Partnership" status. **Bihar became Naxal-free**. India launched the world's **first CBDC-based PDS**. And the **India AI Impact Summit** concluded with 88 nations endorsing the New Delhi Declaration — positioning India as the architect of inclusive global AI governance.

DEFENCE & SECURITY

114 Rafale Jets — India's Largest Ever Defence Deal

The **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)**, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, approved procurement of **114 Rafale fighter jets from France** at **Rs 3.25 lakh crore (~USD 40 billion)** — India's single largest defence deal ever.

Deal structure:

96 aircraft for the IAF (single-seat Rafale C variant) + **26 Rafale-M (Marine)** for the Indian Navy (carrier-capable)

52 to be built in India (HAL Nasik facility) under Technology Transfer (ToT)

62 direct-from-France deliveries, with the India-built jets following over 7–10 years

Offset clause: 50% of contract value → Indian defence industry participation

Background:

India previously purchased **36 Rafale jets** in 2016 (Rs 59,000 crore deal; all delivered by 2022)

Those 36 formed 2 IAF squadrons; India needs 42 squadrons (current strength ~31-33)

Navy's INS Vikrant (Indigenous Aircraft Carrier-1) requires carrier-compatible jets — Rafale-M fills this role

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Security: Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP 2020) categories (Buy Indian, Buy & Make Indian, Make); HAL's manufacturing capacity; India's Fighter Modernisation Programme; Positive Indigenisation List; IAF's squadron strength vs. sanctioned strength; India-Pakistan-China air balance.

Exercise MILAN 2026 — 74 Nations at Visakhapatnam

The **13th Exercise MILAN** was inaugurated by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at **Visakhapatnam** (Feb 15–25, 2026) — with a record **74 participating nations**, making it the largest multilateral naval exercise India has ever hosted.

MILAN background:

Launched: **1995** by Indian Navy at Andaman & Nicobar Command

Frequency: **Biennial** (every 2 years)

Name: "MILAN" = "meeting" in Hindi

Originally involved small IOR navies (4 nations in 1995); expanded significantly post-2018

What happens at MILAN:

Harbour Phase: seminars, professional exchanges, cultural events

Sea Phase: coordinated manoeuvres, anti-piracy, search-and-rescue, HADR exercises

2026 focus areas: Undersea domain awareness, maritime cybersecurity, drone warfare at sea

India's strategic messaging: With 74 nations — including QUAD partners (US, Japan, Australia), ASEAN navies, Pacific Island states, Africa — MILAN demonstrates India as the **preferred maritime security partner** of the Global South.

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Security: MILAN vs. RIMPAC (US-led) vs. Malabar (India-US-Japan) distinction; SAGAR doctrine; Indian Navy's mission-based deployment (MBD) in IOR; Andaman & Nicobar Command (tri-service); India's Far Seas operations doctrine.

Bihar Declared Naxal-Free — LWE Endgame

Bihar became India's **first state declared completely free of Left Wing Extremism** after **Suresh Koda** — identified as the last armed Maoist — surrendered in **Munger district**, completing the clearance of all 23 previously-affected districts.

LWE trajectory:

LWE-affected districts: **126 (2010) → ~38 (2026 national)** — Bihar down from 23 → 0

Naxalbari origin: **1967, Darjeeling, West Bengal** (Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal)

SAMADHAN strategy (2017): India's multi-pronged LWE response:

S — Smart Leadership

A — Aggressive Strategy with proactive operations

M — Motivation and Training

A — Actionable Intelligence Network

D — Dashboard-Based KPIs and Key Performance Indicators

H — Harnessing Technology

A — Action Plan for each Theatre

N — No access to Financing

Bihar's success factors:

Aggressive surrender scheme (cash + rehabilitation)

Development push in LWE districts (roads, schools, mobile towers)

CoBRA battalion deployment + state police coordination

Sealing of Bengal-Jharkhand borders (Maoist supply routes)

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Security: LWE vs. insurgency distinction; Fifth Schedule (Scheduled Areas governance); Scheduled Tribe land rights and Maoist recruitment; Aspirational Districts convergence in LWE zones; CAG reports on development in LWE areas.

CTS Krishna — Indigenous Naval Training Ship

India launched **Cadet Training Ship (CTS)** *Krishna* at **L&T Shipbuilding, Kattupalli, Chennai** — the first of three planned indigenous training vessels for the Indian Navy. Launched by Anupama Chauhan (DWWA President).

Significance: Reduces dependence on foreign training ships; India currently trains naval cadets partially on hired/leased vessels. CTS Krishna marks India's indigenous capability in specialised naval training ship construction.

L&T Kattupalli: India's largest and most modern private shipyard — strategically important for India's naval shipbuilding ambitions. Also building frigates and other warships.

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Security + Economy: India's shipbuilding capacity vs. defence procurement needs; Make in India in defence; GRSE (Kolkata) + L&T Kattupalli + MDL (Mumbai) — India's major naval shipyards; Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India-France Special Global Strategic Partnership

French President **Emmanuel Macron's** state visit upgraded India-France relations to a **"Special Global Strategic Partnership"** — above the existing Strategic Partnership (1998) — anchored by three major agreements.

Three pillars of the upgraded relationship:

Rafale-Marine (26 jets) for Indian Navy — finalisation of carrier-capable Rafale-M jets for INS Vikrant; DAC had approved this as part of the 114-jet mega-deal (same week)

100 GW Nuclear Target by 2047: India-France civil nuclear cooperation expanded — targeting deployment of **EPR (Evolutionary Pressurised Reactor) reactors at Jaitapur, Maharashtra** (6 reactors × 1,650 MW = 9,900 MW — would be world's largest nuclear power park when complete)

H-125 Helicopter Manufacturing: Airbus Helicopters + Tata Advanced Systems JV to manufacture **H-125 light utility helicopters** in India — India's first private-sector helicopter manufacturing facility. Replaces ageing Cheetah/Chetak fleets.

India-France historical markers:

1998: Strategic Partnership (oldest India has with any country)

2003: India-France space cooperation (ISRO-CNES)

2016: Rafale jets deal (36 jets)

2026: "Special Global Strategic Partnership" + 114 Rafale + Jaitapur nuclear + H-125

UPSC Angle — GS-2 / IR: France's Indo-Pacific strategy (La Perouse exercise with India); Jaitapur JNPP controversy (seismic zone, Marine protected area, local opposition); France as only P5 member outside US-UK to deeply engage India on defence; CNES-ISRO joint satellite missions (Megha-Tropiques, TRISHNA upcoming).

ECONOMY & DEVELOPMENT

CBDC-Based PDS — World's First e-Rupee Food Subsidy System

India launched the world's **first CBDC (Central Bank Digital Currency)-based Public Distribution System** in Gandhinagar, Gujarat — integrating the **e-Rupee (Digital Rupee)** into India's Rs 2 lakh crore food subsidy architecture.

What makes this unique — programmability:

Traditional PDS: beneficiary gets a ration card → goes to Fair Price Shop → receives subsidised grain

CBDC-PDS: beneficiary receives **programmable digital tokens** — can only be used to purchase specific items (rice, wheat, pulses, oil) at authorised Fair Price Shops

Eliminates **diversion** (grain sold in black market by corrupt dealers) — tokens cannot be converted to cash or spent elsewhere

Aadhaar-linked biometric authentication at FPS

e-Rupee (CBDC) facts:

Launched: **December 1, 2022** (retail pilot); **December 1, 2023** (full roll-out)

Type: **Retail CBDC (e-R)** — for citizens; plus **Wholesale CBDC (e-W)** for interbank settlement

Issued and managed by **RBI** (not banks)

Works offline via NFC (near-field communication) for low-connectivity areas

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Economy: CBDC vs. UPI vs. cryptocurrency distinction; RBI's digital currency mandate (RBI Act Section 26); programmable money advantages (conditionality, traceability, eliminating leakage); PMGKAY (PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana) → National Food Security Act 2013 architecture; AadhaarlinkedPDS → One Nation One Ration Card.

Export Promotion Mission — Niryat Framework for MSME Exports

The government launched **7 new interventions** under the **Export Promotion Mission (EPM)** — a **Rs 25,060 crore, 6-year (2025-31) programme** — through the **"Niryat" (export) framework** targeting MSMEs, e-commerce exporters, and geographically disadvantaged districts.

Two-stream Niryat framework:

Niryat Mitra: Mentorship and handholding for first-time MSME exporters — includes export credit facilitation, ECGC (Export Credit Guarantee Corporation) cover, logistics subsidies

Niryat Hub: 75 District Export Hubs (DEH) in underperforming districts — cluster-based, integrating ODOP (One District One Product) with export targets

India's export target: $1 trillion by 2030 (goods + services); current level ~$778 billion (FY25). MSMEs contribute **45% of exports** but face challenges: compliance costs, trade finance gaps, logistics inefficiency.

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Economy: India's export promotion architecture (DGFT + Commerce Ministry + EXIM Bank + ECGC); RoDTEP (Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products) scheme; MSME's share in total exports; India's FTA strategy and market access; WTO-compatibility of export subsidies (India's dispute with US/EU at WTO over certain schemes).

ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

Great Nicobar Island Project — NGT Approval

The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** approved the **Rs 81,000 crore Great Nicobar Island development project** — India's most strategically significant and ecologically contested infrastructure plan.

Project components:

Transshipment Port — to capture Indian Ocean container transshipment traffic (currently dominated by Colombo, Singapore, Port Klang)

International Airport — upgrade existing facility for wide-body aircraft

Township — for 3.5 lakh residents (workers + families)

270 MW Holistic Power Plant

Ecological concerns:

130 sq km of tropical rainforest to be cleared — Great Nicobar's primary forest is one of the most biodiverse in India

Shompen tribe (~250–400 individuals; Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, PVTG) — some settlements within project area

Leatherback sea turtle nesting beaches (IUCN Vulnerable) at direct risk from port construction and light pollution

Nicobar Megapode (Schedule I, WPA) — endemic bird species nesting habitat loss

Galathea Bay (proposed port site) — currently a wildlife sanctuary (Galathea National Park)

Strategic rationale: Great Nicobar lies at the southern tip of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands — 90 nautical miles from the Malacca Strait and critical Indian Ocean shipping lanes. India needs a strategic port to monitor and project power in this zone.

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / Environment: NGT's jurisdiction and powers; EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) notification 2006; PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) rights under PESA + Forest Rights Act 2006; Shompen's status; Leatherback turtle biology; CRZ (Coastal Regulation Zone) IA notification; Andaman & Nicobar's strategic geography.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

India AI Impact Summit 2026 — New Delhi Declaration

The **India AI Impact Summit 2026** (Feb 16–22, New Delhi) concluded with **88 nations endorsing the New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact** — establishing India as a key architect of inclusive global AI governance.

Summit milestones:

> **Sarvam AI** unveiled India's first **30-billion and 105-billion parameter large language models** — domestically trained, targeting Indian-language excellence

> **VoicERA** launched: MeitY's open-source **multilingual Voice AI stack** — enables Indian startups to build voice applications in 22 scheduled languages without paying Western API fees

> **India AI Governance Framework:** 7 principles — Safety, Transparency, Accountability, Fairness, Privacy, Reliability, Inclusivity

New Delhi Declaration — 7 "Chakra" pillars:

> Democratising AI Resources (compute, data access for Global South)

> Trusted and Safe AI (risk-proportionate regulation)

> AI for Public Good (governance, healthcare, agriculture applications)

> Linguistic and Cultural Diversity (multilingual AI)

> Capacity Building (Global South skills development)

> Open Source AI (reducing proprietary lock-in)

> Environmental Sustainability of AI

India's positioning: Distinct from **Bletchley Park (UK, 2023)** and **Seoul (South Korea, 2024)** AI safety summits — which focused on existential risk from frontier AI (GPT-4 class models). India's declaration emphasises **access, inclusion, and application** — reflecting the Global South's different AI needs and risk profile.

UPSC Angle — GS-3 / S&T: IndiaAI Mission (Rs 10,300 crore); EU AI Act (risk classification: unacceptable/high/limited/minimal); NITI Aayog's National AI Strategy (2018); G20 AI Principles (India's G20 presidency 2023); ITU AI for Good; UNESCO Recommendation on AI Ethics (2021); India's data governance gap (DPDP Act 2023 operationalisation pending).

HISTORY, ART & CULTURE

International Mother Language Day — Feb 21, 2026

International Mother Language Day is observed on **February 21** each year — established by UNESCO in **1999** to commemorate the **1952 Dhaka Language Movement** (Bhasha Andolan) in then-East Pakistan.

Historical origin: On February 21, 1952, students of Dhaka University demonstrated for the right to use **Bengali as an official language** alongside Urdu. Pakistani police fired on the crowd — **4 students killed** (Abul Barkat, Rafiquddin Ahmed, Abul Jabbar, Shafiqur Rahman). This martyrdom galvanised Bengali identity and ultimately contributed to Bangladesh's 1971 independence.

2026 theme: "Fostering multilingualism for inclusion in education and society"

India's language landscape:

India has **6,000+ languages/dialects** (Linguistic Survey of India)

22 Scheduled Languages (8th Schedule of Constitution); multiple languages have Classical Language status

People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) documented 780 languages (some extinct)

UNESCO Atlas of World's Languages in Danger: several Indian languages listed as endangered

NEP 2020 and mother tongue: NEP mandates **mother tongue/home language as medium of instruction** at least until Grade 5 (preferably Grade 8) — major departure from English-medium dominance.

UPSC Angle — GS-1 / Culture + GS-2 / Polity: 8th Schedule addition (Articles 344, 351); Classical Language criteria (MHA); Three-Language Formula; Language dispute and States Reorganisation Act 1956; linguistic minorities rights (Articles 29, 30, 350A, 350B); UNESCO endangered language criteria.

📌 **FACTS CORNER — WEEK 8 KNOWLEDGEPEDIA (FEB 16–22, 2026)**

114 RAFALE DEAL:

Cost: Rs 3.25 lakh crore (~USD 40 billion); India's largest ever defence deal; DAC chair: Rajnath Singh

Split: 96 Rafale C (IAF) + 26 Rafale-M (Navy for INS Vikrant); 52 to be built in India (HAL Nasik)

Previous deal: 36 Rafale jets 2016, Rs 59,000 crore; all delivered by 2022; formed 2 IAF squadrons

IAF sanctioned strength: 42 squadrons; current: ~31-33; Rafale fills MRF (Medium Role Fighter) gap

EXERCISE MILAN 2026:

13th edition; Visakhapatnam; Feb 15-25, 2026; 74 nations (record); Defence Min Rajnath Singh inaugurated

Founded: 1995 by Indian Navy; started with 4 nations at Andaman & Nicobar; biennial

MILAN = "meeting" (Hindi); harbour phase (seminars) + sea phase (exercises)

Themes 2026: undersea domain, maritime cyber, drone warfare

INDIA-FRANCE SPECIAL GLOBAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP:

Upgraded from: Strategic Partnership 1998 (oldest India has with any country)

Rafale-M: 26 jets for Navy/INS Vikrant; Jaitapur JNPP: 6 × EPR reactors (1,650 MW each) = 9,900 MW total

H-125 helicopter: Airbus + TASL (Tata Advanced Systems); first private helicopter manufacturing in India

La Perouse: India-France-US-AUS-UK naval exercise in Indo-Pacific

BIHAR NAXAL-FREE:

Suresh Koda: last armed Maoist; surrendered Munger; all 23 districts cleared

Naxalbari origin: 1967, Darjeeling, WB; Charu Mazumdar + Kanu Sanyal

SAMADHAN: 2017 strategy (8 pillars); LWE districts: 126 (2010) → ~38 (2026); Bihar: 23 → 0

CoBRA: CRPF's 10-battalion jungle warfare unit; key in Bihar operations

CBDC-PDS:

World's first CBDC-based PDS; launched Gandhinagar, Gujarat; Home Min Amit Shah

e-Rupee (Digital Rupee): launched Dec 1, 2022 (retail pilot); issued by RBI

Programmable: tokens locked to FPS purchases (rice/wheat/pulses/oil); eliminates diversion

Retail CBDC (e-R) for citizens; Wholesale CBDC (e-W) for interbank; works offline via NFC

NEW DELHI DECLARATION ON AI:

Summit: India AI Impact Summit 2026; Feb 16-22, New Delhi; 88 nations endorsed

7 Chakra pillars: Democratise, Trust/Safety, Public Good, Linguistic Diversity, Capacity Building, Open Source, Environmental Sustainability

Sarvam AI: 30B + 105B parameter LLMs; VoicERA: MeitY open-source voice AI stack (22 languages)

India AI Governance Framework: 7 principles: Safety, Transparency, Accountability, Fairness, Privacy, Reliability, Inclusivity

Contrast: Bletchley (2023, UK) + Seoul (2024, SK) = existential risk focus; India = access + inclusion focus

GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT:

Cost: Rs 81,000 crore; NGT approved Feb 2026; transshipment port + airport + township + 270 MW power plant

Ecology: 130 sq km tropical rainforest cleared; Shompen PVTG (~250-400 pop.); Leatherback turtle nesting sites; Nicobar Megapode (Schedule I)

Strategic: 90 nautical miles from Malacca Strait; Indian Ocean shipping lane control; Andaman & Nicobar Command

Galathea Bay (port site) = former wildlife sanctuary

EXPORT PROMOTION MISSION:

Rs 25,060 crore; 6 years (2025-31); 7 new interventions; Niryat Mitra + Niryat Hub

75 District Export Hubs; ECGC cover; ODOP linkage; MSMEs = 45% of India's exports

India's export target: USD 1 trillion by 2030 (goods + services); FY25: ~USD 778 billion

MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY:

Date: February 21 (annual); UNESCO declared 1999; commemorates 1952 Dhaka Language Movement

4 student martyrs (Feb 21, 1952): Abul Barkat, Rafiquddin Ahmed, Abul Jabbar, Shafiqur Rahman

India: 6,000+ languages; 22 Scheduled Languages (8th Schedule); People's Linguistic Survey: 780 languages

NEP 2020: mother tongue medium instruction to Grade 5 (preferred Grade 8)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Seva Teertha: new integrated PMO complex; replaces South Block (1930, Lutyens' Delhi); PM RAHAT scheme for road accident victims (launched from new complex)

PMGKAY: PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana; free grain to 81.35 crore beneficiaries; linked to NFSA 2013 (10 kg free grain under PM AWAS PLUS)

CTS Krishna: L&T Shipbuilding, Kattupalli, Chennai; first of 3 training ships; launched by DWWA President Anupama Chauhan

Sources: PIB, The Hindu, Indian Express, DD News

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