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## Current Affairs - 12 February 2026

### CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX



India climbed five places to the 91st position out of 182 countries and territories on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025.

- It is the most widely used global corruption ranking in the world.
- The index has been published annually by the **non-governmental organisation Transparency International** since 1995.
- **Methodology Used:**
  - It is an index which ranks countries “by their **perceived levels of public sector corruption**, as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys.”
  - It uses a **scale of zero to 100**, where “zero” is highly corrupt and “100” is very clean.

### **Key Highlights of Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025:**

- **Least Corrupt nations:** Denmark, Finland and Singapore.
- **Most Corrupt nations:** South Sudan, Somalia and Venezuela.
- **India’s Performance:** Its rank improved from 96 (2024) to 91 (2025).

### RASHTRIYA KARMAYOGI LARGE SCALE JAN SEVA PROGRAMME



- It is a national **behavioural transformation initiative for civil servants.**
- It is launched by the **Capacity Building Commission (CBC).**
- It was designed to **emphasize upon the deeper sense of Seva Bhav** (spirit of service) and **Svadharna** (duty aligned with personal purpose) among Government servants, with the objective of strengthening citizen-centric governance.

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- It is focused on **improving quality of service delivery**, enhancing responsiveness and collaboration across governance structures, and fostering greater engagement and satisfaction among officers.

### What is Capacity Building Commission?

- It is the **executive body of the Mission Karmayogi framework**, to drive civil service reforms through capacity building and competency-based learning.
  - **Functions of Capacity Building Commission**
    - It works to **strengthen the human resource foundations** of the government by focusing on developing individual and institutional capacities, promoting citizen-centric governance, future readiness.
    - It fosters a **culture of lifelong learning** across all levels of public administration.
    - The Commission **designs frameworks**, sets standards, and encourages collaboration to make governance more transparent, accountable, citizen-centric, and future-ready.
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### US DILUTES TRADE DEAL LANGUAGE: WHAT IT MEANS FOR INDIA

The United States has revised its factsheet on the India–US trade deal, softening language on India’s commitments and removing references to digital services taxes and tariff cuts on pulses. It also modified the joint statement to reflect non-binding intent.

- The earlier factsheet stated that India had “committed to” purchasing over \$500 billion worth of US energy, ICT, coal, and other products.
- The updated version replaces this with “intends”, aligning it with the joint statement and clarifying the non-binding nature of the provision.
- **Dropping Digital Services Tax Clause**
  - The original factsheet claimed that India would:
    - Remove its digital services taxes
  - This section, which was not part of the joint statement, has now been removed entirely.

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- **Changes on Agricultural Tariffs**
  - The earlier factsheet mentioned tariff reductions on “certain pulses”, a politically sensitive issue in India.
  - The updated version drops pulses and instead lists products such as:
    - Dried distillers’ grains (DDGs)
    - Red sorghum
    - Tree nuts
    - Fresh and processed fruit
    - Soybean oil
    - Wine and spirits
  - The earlier language had triggered criticism from Opposition parties and farmers, who viewed the claims as excessive concessions.

### **\$500 Billion Purchase Target: What It Means for India**

- **Trade Snapshot: India–US Commerce** - In FY 2024–25, India imported \$45.62 billion worth of American goods and exported \$86.51 billion to the United States. The US remains one of India’s largest trading partners.
  - **From ‘Committed’ to ‘Intends’** - The original US factsheet claimed India had “committed” to purchasing \$500 billion worth of American goods over five years (about \$100 billion annually). The revised version softens the wording to “intends”, reflecting the non-binding nature of the provision.
  - **Farmers’ Concerns Over Import Surge** - The \$500-billion figure raised concerns among farmers about a sharp increase in agricultural imports, potentially affecting domestic prices and market stability. Fears centre on increased competition and pressure on farm incomes.
  - **Government Clarification: Not Legally Binding** - Indian officials have clarified that the target is not a sovereign commitment, as purchases would be made by private companies, not governments.
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### CIVIL SERVICES REFORMS - PERFORMANCE SCORECARDS FOR UNION SECRETARIES

- According to a report (of The Indian Express), the Cabinet Secretariat has introduced performance scorecards for Union Secretaries.
- This marks a significant **shift** in the **evaluation** framework of senior civil servants at the Centre, forming an important theme of the Civil Services reforms.

#### Performance Scorecards for Union Secretaries:

- **What the scorecard measures?**
  - The performance scorecards **assess** secretaries on around a dozen quantifiable parameters, including -
    - Output delivery
    - Negative marking for lapses
    - A limited discretionary component retained by the Cabinet Secretary
  - **Quantifiable administrative output:** Timely implementation of responsibilities (file disposal rates, reduction of pendency), budgetary discipline (expenditure control), measurable project delivery, etc.
  - **Corporate-style KPIs:** The framework resembles Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used in the corporate sector, privileging speed, efficiency, target-based delivery, and compliance.

#### Key Concerns and Challenges:

- **Erosion of institutional memory:**
  - Treating every initiative as a standalone project undermines long-term policy continuity, learning from administrative experience, and adaptive governance.
- **Speed over scrutiny:**
  - A system that rewards compliance over counsel, speed over scrutiny, may discourage honest dissent, preventive bureaucratic intervention, and early identification of flawed schemes.

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- **Devaluation of the higher civil service:**
  - Reducing secretaries to KPI managers risks undermining the UPSC-based meritocratic recruitment system, dismissing years of training in policy judgement, and weakening the prestige and autonomy of the higher bureaucracy.
  - Ultimately, this could damage the edifice of governance itself.
- **Accountability vs over-simplification:**
  - Accountability is essential. However, institutional accountability mechanisms already exist.
  - E.g. Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), Public Accounts Committee (PAC), and Estimates Committee.
  - Performance evaluation should complement—not replace—the deeper constitutional framework of oversight.

### Way Forward - A Balanced Reform Approach is Needed:

- **Broaden evaluation parameters:** Include quality of policy advice, long-term impact assessment, innovation in governance, inter-ministerial coordination, and crisis anticipation and mitigation.
- **Protect space for dissent:** Institutionalise recorded policy notes, structured internal review mechanisms, and encouragement of reasoned disagreement.
- **Blend quantitative and qualitative assessment:** Evaluation should combine measurable output indicators, peer review, ministerial feedback, and independent expert assessment
- **Reaffirm Constitutional role of Civil Services:** Reforms must align with Article 312, parliamentary accountability, federal integrity, and political neutrality. Efficiency cannot come at the cost of judgement.

### Conclusion:

- Systems do not fail because they are slow; they fail when judgement, institutional memory, and principled dissent are sidelined. The challenge is not to choose between accountability and autonomy, but to design a framework of Civil Services reforms where both reinforce each other.

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### LADAKH TELESCOPE EXPANSION: A NEW ERA FOR INDIAN ASTRONOMY

The Union Budget has approved the establishment of **two new telescopes in Ladakh**—one to study the Sun and another to explore the origins of the universe—alongside the upgradation of an existing telescope.

Ladakh, already a key astronomy hub, hosts multiple observatories and includes **Hanle**, India's first **Dark Sky Reserve**, designated to preserve optimal night-sky conditions.

The move is expected to significantly strengthen India's observational astronomy capabilities, positioning the country—and the Global South—more prominently in cutting-edge space research and deep-sky exploration.

#### **National Large Solar Telescope (NLST): India's Next Solar Observatory**

- The NLST is a 2-metre aperture solar telescope planned in the Merak region near Pangong Tso in Ladakh.
- It will operate in the visible and near-infrared wavelengths, allowing detailed observation of solar activity from the ground.
- Since different parts of the electromagnetic spectrum behave differently and not all radiation penetrates Earth's atmosphere, telescopes must be carefully designed based on their observational goals.
- **Scientific Objectives**
  - The NLST will enable scientists to study:
    - Solar dynamics and magnetism
    - Energetic solar events such as flares and eruptions
    - Space weather processes affecting Earth
  - These studies are crucial for protecting satellites, communication systems, and space missions, as solar disturbances can disrupt national space assets.
- **Strengthening India's Solar Research Network**
  - Once operational—expected within 5–6 years—NLST will become India's third ground-based solar observatory, joining:



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- **Kodaikanal Solar Observatory** (Tamil Nadu, established 1899)
- **Udaipur Solar Observatory** (Rajasthan, established 1975)
  - It will complement Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s space-based solar mission, Aditya-L1, launched in 2023.
  - Together with Aditya-L1, the NLST will enhance India's capabilities in **heliophysics**, reinforcing its position as a significant contributor to global solar research and space-weather forecasting.

### **National Large Optical–Near Infrared Telescope (NLOT): India's Giant Eye on the Cosmos**

- The NLOT will be a 13.7-metre aperture **segmented-mirror telescope** built in Hanle, Ladakh.
  - Its primary mirror will consist of 90 hexagonal segments, functioning together as a single, large mirror to collect faint cosmic light with high precision.
  - Projected to be completed within the next decade, NLOT will rank among the world's largest optical–infrared telescopes.
  - **Why Ladakh Is Ideal?**
    - Ladakh's high altitude, cold and dry climate, and clear skies provide near-ideal observing conditions.
    - These reduce atmospheric distortion and diffraction, allowing sharper, more accurate astronomical observations compared to many global sites.
  - **Scientific Objectives**
    - NLOT will enable frontier research in:
      - Exoplanet detection
      - Stellar and galactic evolution
      - Supernovae studies
      - Investigating the origins of the universe
    - Its optical–infrared capability allows it to observe distant and faint cosmic objects, crucial for deep-space research.
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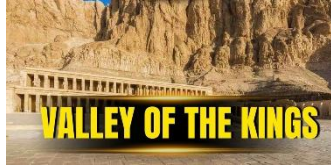
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### VALLEY OF THE KINGS



Kings in Egypt.

Two researchers recently identified close to 30 inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi, Prakrit and Sanskrit at tombs in the Valley of the

- It was the **burial site of pharaohs, or kings, of ancient Egypt.**
- It was **part of the ancient city of Thebes.**
- These pharaohs **ruled from 1539 to 1077 BC**, during the period of Egyptian history known as the **New Kingdom.**
- The tombs in the Valley of the Kings were **carved into rocky hillsides with only a doorway marking their location.**
- In 1979 UNESCO made the Valley of the Kings part of the **World Heritage site** of ancient Thebes.

### CONTINENTAL MANTLE EARTHQUAKES



earthquakes.

Recently the Stanford researchers have produced the first global map of a rare type of earthquake i. e. Continental mantle

- These are seismic events which **originate in the mantle beneath continents.**
- **Origin:** These earthquakes often occur more than 80 km below the **Mohorovicic discontinuity** (boundary between the crust and the mantle).
- **Impact:** They are **too deep to cause much shaking** or danger at Earth's surface.
- **Occurrence:** They occur worldwide but are regionally clustered, particularly beneath the **Himalayas in southern Asia and the Bering Strait between Asia and North America.**



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- **Significance:** The new map will help scientists learn more **about the mechanics** of mantle earthquakes.

### What is Mohorovicic discontinuity?

- It is the boundary lying between **the crust and the mantle** of the earth across which seismic waves change velocities.
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### WHAT IS A MUD VOLCANO?



A mud volcano suddenly erupted in Diglipur, Andaman Islands, recently.

- It is a **mound of mud heaved up through overlying sediments.**
  - The **craters are usually shallow** and may **intermittently erupt mud.**
  - These **eruptions continuously rebuild the cones**, which are eroded relatively easily.
  - **Some mud volcanoes are created by hot-spring activity** where large amounts of gas and small amounts of water react chemically with the surrounding rocks and **form a boiling mud.**
  - **Other mud volcanoes**, entirely of a **nonigneous origin**, **occur only in oil-field regions** that are relatively young and have soft, unconsolidated formations.
  - Mud volcanoes, also known as “sedimentary volcanoes” or “gas-oil volcanoes,”.
  - Mud volcanoes **also exist on the floor of the sea** and can form islands and banks that alter the topography and shape of the coastline.
  - **In India, the only mud volcano lies in Baratang Island**, a part of the **Andaman chain** of islands.
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