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## Current Affairs - 18 February 2026

### DEFENCE ACQUISITION COUNCIL (DAC)



• It is the **highest decision-making body** of the **Defence Ministry on procurement**.

- The main objective of the DAC is to ensure **expeditious procurement** of the **approved requirements of the armed forces** in terms of capabilities sought and time frame prescribed by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.
- **Formation:** It was formed after the **Group of Minister's recommendations** on 'Reforming the National Security System', in 2001, post-Kargil War (1999).

#### **Composition:**

- The **Defence Minister** is the **chairman** of DAC.
- Its **members** include **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** and **chiefs of Army, Navy and Air Force**.

#### **Functions:**

- **Give in principle approval** of a **15-year Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP)** for defence forces.
- **Accord of acceptance of necessity** to acquisition proposals.
- **Categorisation of the acquisition proposals** relating to 'Buy', 'Buy & Make', and 'Make'.
- **Look into issues** relating to **single vendor clearance**.
- **Take decisions** regarding 'offset' provisions in respect of **acquisition proposals above Rs 300 crore**.
- **Take decisions** regarding the **Transfer of Technology** under the 'Buy & Make' category of acquisition proposals.
- **Field trial evaluation**

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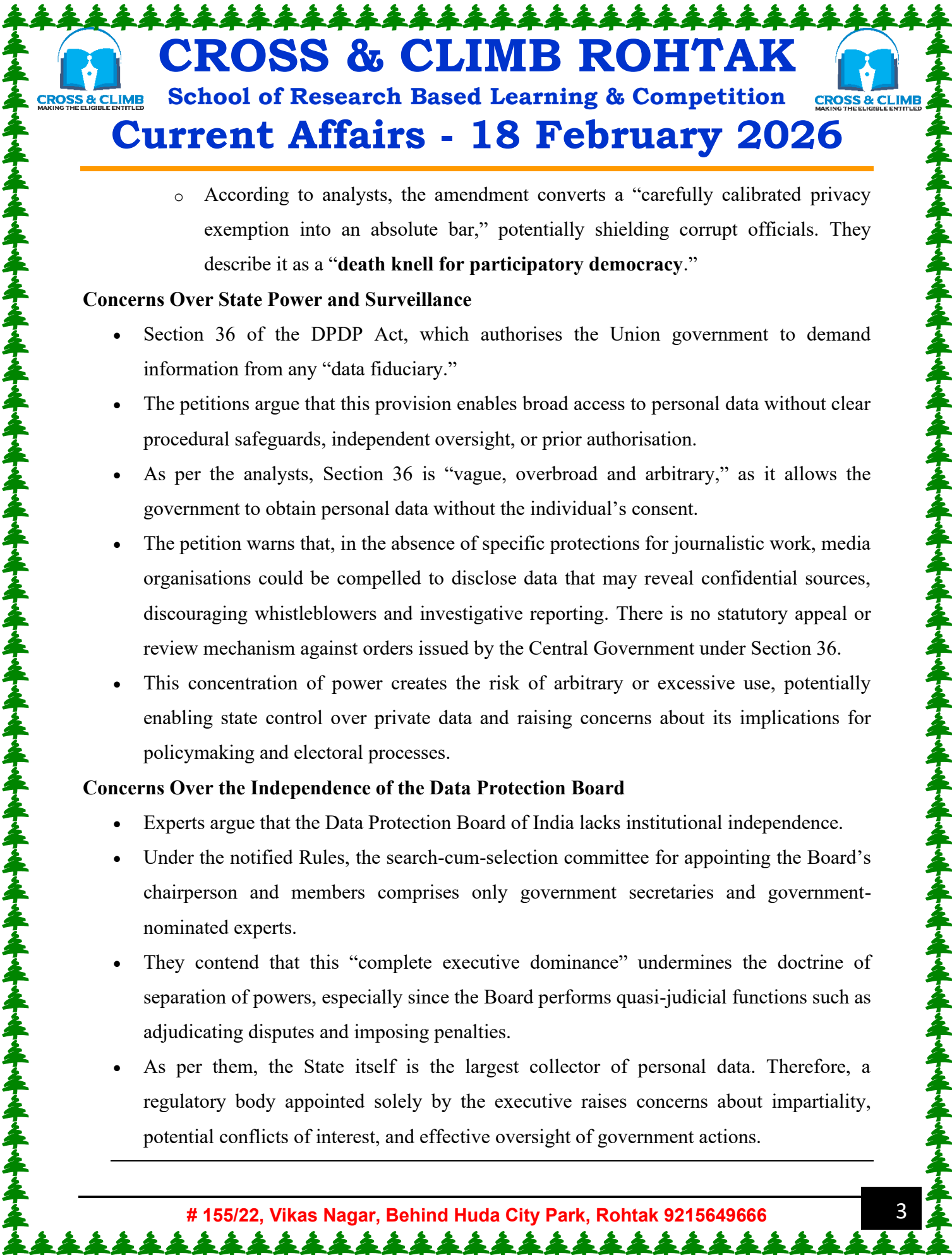
### DIGITAL PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION ACT FACES A CONSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

Three Public Interest Litigations (PILs) have been filed in the Supreme Court questioning the constitutionality of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act). Although the law aims to protect individuals' digital privacy, the petitioners argue that it **weakens the Right to Information (RTI)**, restricts investigative journalism, and broadens state surveillance powers. The petitioners have contended that certain provisions of the Act and its Rules dilute transparency safeguards and may curb access to public-interest information.

The Supreme Court has admitted the pleas, issued notice to the Centre, and referred the matter to a five-judge Constitution Bench for hearing in March. However, it declined to grant an interim stay on the Act.

#### **Privacy vs Transparency: The RTI Amendment at the Heart of the DPDP Challenge**

- A core objection raised in the petitions concerns **Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act**, which amends **Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, 2005**.
- Earlier, public authorities could deny disclosure of personal information only if it had no relation to public activity or if it caused an “unwarranted invasion of privacy.”
- Crucially, the law allowed disclosure if a “larger public interest” justified it.
- The amended provision now broadly exempts “**information which relates to personal information,**” removing the public interest override.
- **Concerns Over Shielding Corruption**
  - The petitioners argue that this change eliminates the power of Public Information Officers (PIOs) to balance privacy against public interest.
  - Investigative journalism and anti-corruption inquiries often depend on records such as asset disclosures, tender documents, and file notings — all of which may contain personal data.



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- According to analysts, the amendment converts a “carefully calibrated privacy exemption into an absolute bar,” potentially shielding corrupt officials. They describe it as a “**death knell for participatory democracy.**”

### Concerns Over State Power and Surveillance

- Section 36 of the DPDP Act, which authorises the Union government to demand information from any “data fiduciary.”
- The petitions argue that this provision enables broad access to personal data without clear procedural safeguards, independent oversight, or prior authorisation.
- As per the analysts, Section 36 is “vague, overbroad and arbitrary,” as it allows the government to obtain personal data without the individual’s consent.
- The petition warns that, in the absence of specific protections for journalistic work, media organisations could be compelled to disclose data that may reveal confidential sources, discouraging whistleblowers and investigative reporting. There is no statutory appeal or review mechanism against orders issued by the Central Government under Section 36.
- This concentration of power creates the risk of arbitrary or excessive use, potentially enabling state control over private data and raising concerns about its implications for policymaking and electoral processes.

### Concerns Over the Independence of the Data Protection Board

- Experts argue that the Data Protection Board of India lacks institutional independence.
- Under the notified Rules, the search-cum-selection committee for appointing the Board’s chairperson and members comprises only government secretaries and government-nominated experts.
- They contend that this “complete executive dominance” undermines the doctrine of separation of powers, especially since the Board performs quasi-judicial functions such as adjudicating disputes and imposing penalties.
- As per them, the State itself is the largest collector of personal data. Therefore, a regulatory body appointed solely by the executive raises concerns about impartiality, potential conflicts of interest, and effective oversight of government actions.

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### INDIAAI MISSION 2.0

Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav has unveiled the broad roadmap for **IndiaAI Mission 2.0**, marking a strategic shift from infrastructure-building to deeper research, development, and widespread adoption of artificial intelligence across sectors.

The renewed mission aims to accelerate AI innovation, strengthen indigenous R&D capabilities, and ensure meaningful diffusion of AI technologies—particularly for India’s vast MSME ecosystem. By embedding AI into small and medium enterprises, the government seeks to enhance productivity, competitiveness, and global integration.

The announcement coincides with the **India AI Impact Summit 2026** at Bharat Mandapam, underscoring India’s ambition to position itself as a major global AI player while aligning technology deployment with domestic economic priorities.

### **IndiaAI Mission 2.0: MSME-Focused AI Stack on the Lines of UPI**

- India is preparing the next phase of its AI Mission with a strong focus on creating a **bouquet of ready-to-use AI solutions for MSMEs**.
- Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said these solutions will be hosted on a **common digital platform**—similar to UPI—allowing small and medium enterprises to easily access and deploy AI tools across key sectors.
- **Boosting Compute Capacity and Democratizing Access**
  - India will expand its AI compute infrastructure by adding **20,000 GPUs** to the existing 38,000.
  - Unlike many countries where AI infrastructure is concentrated in a few corporations, India is working to ensure **broad-based access to AI compute capacity**.
  - Several sovereign AI models launched at the summit, he said, have outperformed many global systems on multiple evaluation parameters.



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- **Global Recognition and Investment Momentum**
  - Citing Stanford's ranking, Union IT Minister noted that India is now among the **top three AI nations**
  - He projected that over the next two years, more than **\$200 billion in investments** could flow into the ecosystem, with venture capital commitments spanning all **five layers of the AI stack**—from hardware and models to applications.
  - The minister also acknowledged the overwhelming response from youth at the summit, despite logistical challenges on the opening day.
- **AI and India's IT Services Sector**
  - Addressing concerns about AI's impact on India's IT services industry amid recent market volatility, the minister said the sector remains a key national strength.
  - He stressed the need for collaboration between government, industry, and academia to upskill the existing workforce and prepare future talent for technological transitions.
- **Fair Remuneration for News Publishers**
  - IT Minister also underscored the government's view that news publishers must receive fair compensation when AI models use their publicly available content for training.
  - The government is in discussions with major AI platforms on remuneration mechanisms.
  - A **DPIIT committee's white paper** has recommended a mandatory blanket licensing regime, under which AI companies would pay royalties for copyrighted material.
  - If adopted, India could become the first country to implement a statutory licensing framework with government-determined royalty rates for AI developers.

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### FREEDOM OF SATIRE AND THE LIMITS OF STATE POWER IN INDIA

- Freedom of speech and expression is guaranteed under **Article 19(1)(a)** of the Constitution of India.
- However, this right is not absolute. Under **Article 19(2)**, the State may impose reasonable restrictions in the interests of sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency, morality, and prevention of incitement to an offence.
- Satire, cartoons, and comedy fall within the broad domain of artistic and political expression protected under Article 19(1)(a). Courts have consistently held that democratic discourse must tolerate dissent, exaggeration, irony, and ridicule.

#### **Satire as a Form of Democratic Expression**

- The Supreme Court has repeatedly recognised satire as a legitimate artistic tool. In **Indibly Creative (P) Ltd. v. State of West Bengal (2019)**, the Court described satire as an exaggeration that exposes societal absurdities and hypocrisies. It emphasised satire’s “unique ability” to make complex points accessible and impactful.
- Courts have also observed that satire should be evaluated from the perspective of a “reasonable person” and not a “hypersensitive individual.”
- The Madras High Court in **Kama v. M. Jothisorupan (2018)** termed political cartoons as a “weapon of ridicule,” meant to sting and provoke thought rather than flatter authority.

#### **Legal Framework for Blocking Online Content**

- The recent controversy arises in the context of the **Information Technology Act, 2000** and related rules.
- **Section 69A of the IT Act**
  - Section 69A empowers the Union government to block public access to online content on specific grounds aligned with Article 19(2).
  - Blocking orders must be reasoned, recorded in writing, and subject to review.

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- **IT Rules and Amendments**

- Amendments to the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2026**, reduce the time for social media platforms to remove content deemed illegal from 24-36 hours to three hours.
- The Karnataka High Court upheld the government's 'Sahyog' content-blocking portal, which automates notice transmission to intermediaries. However, concerns have been raised about bypassing procedural safeguards.
- Petitions before the Supreme Court challenge the IT (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009, particularly provisions allowing emergency blocking without prior notice and maintaining confidentiality of blocking orders.

### Judicial View on Artistic Freedom

- Indian courts have repeatedly affirmed the importance of artistic and satirical expression.
- In a March 2025 verdict, the Supreme Court observed that 75 years into the Republic, India cannot be so fragile that poetry, stand-up comedy, or artistic expression would automatically incite hatred.
- The Delhi High Court has similarly defended creative liberty, stating that satire exposes societal ills through exaggeration. Globally too, democracies afford cartoons and satire greater latitude, recognising them as essential to public life.
- The Supreme Court has even invoked philosopher Albert Camus to underline that art unites society while tyranny separates it.

### Tension Between National Security and Free Expression

- The recent blocking of a satirical cartoon video reportedly featuring the Prime Minister was justified on grounds such as national security, defence, and foreign relations.
  - While Article 19(2) permits restrictions, courts insist that such limitations must be reasonable, proportionate, and procedurally fair. Overbroad or opaque blocking measures risk chilling free speech and undermining democratic accountability.
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### CHARAX SPASINOU



**CHARAX SPASINOU**

- It was an **ancient port city** located at the **confluence of the Tigris and Choaspes rivers**, near the **modern border of Iraq and Iran**.

- **Founded** during the **Hellenistic period**, it was **initially established by Alexander the Great**.
- It was reportedly **founded in 324 BCE**.
- The city was later **rebuilt by Hyspaosines**, who became **its first king** and is recognized for **founding the kingdom of Characene with Charax Spasinou as its capital**.

Due to its favourable location, Charax became a very **important harbour in the Persian Gulf area** and a **major trading point between Mesopotamia** (a region in the Middle East) **and India**.

- The city was home to a succession of local rulers who minted coins from the late second century BC to the third century AD.

Charax's **prominence waned around AD 224–28** with the **rise of the Sassanian Empire**, marking the end of Characene's political significance.

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### H-125 HELICOPTER



**H125 Helicopter**

- It is a **single-engine light utility helicopter** from the legendary **Ecureuil family**.

- It is valued for its **reliability, low maintenance and adaptability**.
- The H125 is the only helicopter in history to have **landed on the summit of Mount Everest**.



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**Uses:** It is used in emergency services, aerial filming, tourism, law enforcement, firefighting, and civil transport.

### Features of H-125 Helicopter:

- **High-Altitude Performance:** It can operate efficiently in “hot and high” environments, meaning high mountains or hot desert conditions.
- **Operational Versatility:** It can be reconfigured for multiple roles such as rescue, medical evacuation, firefighting, passenger transport, and aerial work missions.
- **Simple and Robust Design:** Its reliable engine and aerodynamics make it easier to maintain and operate in varied conditions.
- **High Cruise Speed and Range:** With a range of approximately 662 km, it is capable of covering long distances without compromising performance.

**Significance to India:** It provides edge in high-altitude logistics, ensuring the delivery of vital supplies to remote frontline outposts, and serves as a rapid-response asset for search and rescue or medical evacuation operations.

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