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## Current Affairs - 19 February 2026

### LAKHPATI DIDI INITIATIVE



- A Lakhpati Didi is a **Self-Help Group member** who earns an **annual household income** of Rupees **One Lakh (Rs. 1,00,000)** or more.
  - This income is calculated **for at least four agricultural seasons** and/or business cycles, with an average monthly income exceeding Rs. 10,000 so that it is sustainable.
- It **focuses on the individual SHG women** and not on the Self-Help Group (SHG).
- This initiative **facilitates diversified livelihood activities**, by ensuring convergence across all Government departments/ Ministries, Private sector and Market players.
- **Objective:** To encourage **women to start micro-enterprises** within their villages.
- The **initiative has been initiated by DAY-NRLM**, wherein each SHG household is encouraged to take up multiple livelihood activities coupled with value chain interventions.

#### **Lakhpati Didi Strategy:**

- **Deepen, Strengthen and Expand Livelihood options:** The households will be facilitated and enabled to take up diversified income-generating activities.
- **Capacity Building:** A Cascade Training Strategy is adopted to enable training and handholding of Potential Lakhpati Didis (SHG members) from across all States and Union Territories in India.
- **Financial Assistance:** DAY-NRLM serves as a catalyst, **facilitating financial assistance** and providing a platform for these women to thrive.

**Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Rural Development

**Revised Target:** 6 crore Lakhpati Didis by **March 2029**.



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### VOICERA



- It is an **open-source**, end-to-end Voice AI stack.
- It is deployed on the **BHASHINI National Language Infrastructure**.

- It establishes a **national execution layer for multilingual Voice and Language AI**.
- It is designed to be open, pluggable, interoperable, cloud deployable, and on premise ready.
- The platform enables **secure and scalable deployment of voice systems** across government, research institutions, and innovation ecosystems.
- **Significance**
  - Modularising the **voice stack reduces duplication of effort** and eliminates vendor lock-in.
  - The integration of VoicERA **strengthens BHASHINI's role as India's national language**
  - It expands **BHASHINI's capabilities from translation and language technologies to real-time speech systems, conversational AI, and multilingual telephony** at a population scale.

### What is BHASHINI?

- BHASHINI, or the **BHASHa INterface for India**, is an **artificial intelligence (AI)-powered language translation platform**.
  - It is developed by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** under its National Language Translation Mission.
  - It aims to build a **National Public Digital Platform for languages** to develop services and products for citizens by leveraging the power of AI and other emerging technologies.
  - It helps people **translate content into various Indian languages**.
  - Bhashini currently **supports more than 22 languages**, enabling inclusivity for a broad range of linguistic communities.
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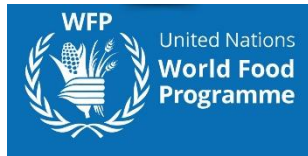
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### WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME



- It is a **branch of the United Nations** that deals with **hunger eradication** and promotes **food security in the world**.

- It is the world's **largest humanitarian agency** and was established in **1961**.
- It **operates in more than 120 countries**, provides food assistance during emergencies and works with communities to enhance nutrition and generate resilience.

**Funding:** WFP is funded by **voluntary donations from governments, corporates and private donors**.

- The organization's work is guided by **Sustainable Development Goal 2**, which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030.

#### **Governance:**

- It is governed by the **WFP Executive Board**, which consists of **36 Member States** and provides intergovernmental support, direction and supervision of activities.
- WFP is **headed by an Executive Director**, who is **appointed jointly by the UN Secretary-General and the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization** of the United Nations.
- The Executive Director is appointed for **fixed five-year terms**.
- It is a member of the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**.
- WFP was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize in 2020**.
- **Reports by WFP:** Report released by the WFP is the **Global Report on Food Crisis** which describes the scale of acute hunger in the world.
- **Headquarters:** Rome, Italy.



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### REIMAGINING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR AN AI-DRIVEN INDIA

- AI is transforming how knowledge is produced, transmitted, and applied. In such a world
  - Routine, pattern-based tasks are increasingly **automated**.
  - Human value lies in critical thinking, creativity, contextual judgement, and interdisciplinary integration.
  - Education-employment linkages are no longer linear or static.
- The Budget rightly avoids privileging one discipline over another or reducing education to short-term market alignment. Instead, it stresses -
  - Interdisciplinary learning
  - Future-ready skills
  - Innovation-led education
  - Ethical and social grounding in knowledge systems
- The reference to ancient **Nalanda** underscores a civilisational model of integrated learning — where astronomy, law, literature, theology, and mathematics coexisted without rigid boundaries.

### **Strengthening the Education–Employment–Enterprise Nexus:**

- The Budget proposes a **High-Powered Standing Committee** to examine linkages between education, employment, and enterprise, particularly in the services sector, emerging technologies, and AI-driven industries.
- If effectively operationalised, this could address persistent gaps in -
  - Curriculum relevance
  - Pedagogical reform
  - Institutional infrastructure alignment
- This is significant in the context of India's demographic dividend and employability challenges.

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### Science Inspiration and National Missions:

- The catalytic effect of national missions on youth imagination is well established. For example,
  - The success of **Chandrayaan-3** made astrophysics a visible career pathway.
  - The upcoming human spaceflight under **Gaganyaan** is expected to deepen scientific aspiration.
- New telescopes and research platforms can replicate this catalytic impact across regions.

### Key Challenges and Way Forward:

- **Implementation deficit:** Translating intent into institutional reform. Institutionalise the education–employment standing committee with measurable outcomes. Monitor NEP implementation through transparent performance metrics.
- **Faculty capacity constraints:** Interdisciplinary teaching requires re-trained faculty.
- **Regional inequalities:** Access gaps between metros and smaller towns. Develop regional innovation clusters around new scientific infrastructure.
- **Funding sustainability:** High-end scientific infrastructure demands long-term support. Incentivise interdisciplinary research through funding reforms.
- **Industry-academia disconnect:** Persistent lag in research commercialisation. Strengthen public-private partnerships in design and frontier research.
- **AI governance and ethics gaps:** Need for regulatory and ethical frameworks alongside technical growth. Embed AI ethics, digital governance, and social responsibility in curricula.
- **Gender gap:** Expand scholarships and mentorship programmes for women in STEM.

### Conclusion:

- The Union Budget 2026–27 recognises a fundamental truth: in an AI-driven century, nations compete not merely through infrastructure or enrolment numbers, but through the **intellectual architecture** of their education systems.
  - The task ahead lies in weaving these strands into a sustained institutional transformation. If executed effectively, India can redefine educational excellence in the AI era.
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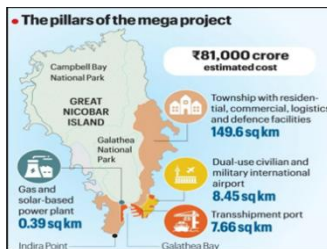


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### GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT GETS NGT NOD: STRATEGY GAINS, ECOLOGICAL QUESTIONS RISE

- Great Nicobar Island, spanning 910 sq km and home to India's southernmost point, Indira Point, is set to be developed as a major economic and defence hub.
- The project aims to transform the island into a strategic gateway in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Four Core Components of the Project**



- **Integrated Township**
  - Covers around 149 sq km.
  - Will include residential, commercial, tourism, logistics, and defence facilities.
  - Designed to anchor long-term economic and strategic activity on the island.
- **Transshipment Port**
  - Proposed at Galathea Bay, on the southern tip.
  - Intended to position India as a key maritime logistics hub.
  - Located in an ecologically sensitive area, known for Leatherback turtle nesting sites and the Galathea River outflow.
- **Civil and Military Airport**
  - Dual-use international airport proposed east of the port.
  - Will be the second air facility after INS Baaz Naval Air Station.
  - Requires acquisition of 4.2 sq km of land, affecting 379 families.
- **Power Plant**
  - A 450-MVA gas and solar-based plant.
  - Occupies around 0.39 sq km.
  - Intended to ensure reliable energy supply for the township and associated infrastructure.

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- **Implementation and Governance**
  - Initially conceptualised by NITI Aayog.
  - Now being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Island Integrated Development Corporation Ltd (ANIIDCO).
  - Pre-feasibility study prepared in 2021 by AECOM India Pvt Ltd.

### Strategic Significance of the Great Nicobar Project

- The Centre's push for the Great Nicobar project is anchored in three strategic drivers: geopolitics, maritime trade ambitions, and geographic advantage.
  - **Geopolitical and Maritime Advantage**
    - Great Nicobar is India's closest territory to the Malacca Strait, a critical maritime chokepoint connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
    - Around 94,000 ships pass through the Strait annually.
    - It accounts for nearly 30% of global traded goods and about one-third of the world's maritime oil trade.
    - This location gives India a strategic vantage point in Indo-Pacific maritime dynamics.
  - **Transshipment Hub Ambition**
    - **Expanding India's Port Capacity**
      - The proposed Galathea Bay transshipment port will transfer cargo from large vessels to smaller ones for onward distribution.
      - India currently has only one operational transshipment port at Vizhinjam, Kerala.
    - **Competing with Regional Giants**
      - The Nicobar port aims to compete with:
        - Colombo and Hambantota (Sri Lanka)
        - Port Klang (Malaysia)
        - Port of Singapore
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### INDIA'S MOMENT TO RESTORING BALANCE TO COPYRIGHT

- The rapid development of **artificial intelligence** has reignited an old legal debate: the role of copyright in promoting creativity and access to knowledge.
- Originally intended to encourage learning and artistic production, modern copyright law has expanded into a powerful monopoly that increasingly restricts innovation, accessibility, and technological progress.

#### Artificial Intelligence and Data Use

- The problem becomes more urgent with artificial intelligence. AI models require vast datasets, and language models in particular depend on analysing large volumes of text.
- Copyright law, however, treats **machine data analysis** as equivalent to human reading and this equivalence is flawed.
- AI systems do not read works for enjoyment or expression; they process statistical patterns.
- Many jurisdictions recognise this distinction. Countries such as Japan, Singapore, and members of the European Union permit text and data mining because it does not substitute for the original work.
- Japan's law explicitly allows uses that do not involve experiencing the ideas or emotions of a work.
- Without similar provisions, legal uncertainty surrounds AI development.
- In several countries, even **web search engines** technically **violate** copyright because they must copy webpages to index them. Such restrictions hinder technological progress and research.

#### The Path Forward

- **Addressing the Concerns of the Impact of AI on Creativity, Employment, and Technological Change**



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- Critics argue that AI threatens creative professions, however, copyright law is designed to encourage creativity, not to preserve specific occupations.
- History shows that technological change always reshapes labour markets.
- Photography reduced portrait painting but expanded visual art. Automation eliminated telegraph operators and typesetters but created new professions.
- The impact of AI on creative industries remains uncertain, and social policies such as public arts funding may be necessary.
- Yet these concerns should not be addressed by restricting learning or data analysis through copyright law.
- **Toward Balanced Reform**
  - Rather than abolishing copyright, reform should restore balance. Laws should encourage contributions to the commons, such as **open-source datasets** and publicly accessible AI models.
  - Governments can curate public datasets and protect them from infringement claims when used for research and open innovation.
  - **Flexible exceptions**, similar to fair use or text-and-data mining provisions, would allow accessibility technologies, research tools, and AI systems to operate legally while still protecting commercial exploitation of creative works.
  - This approach aligns copyright with its original objective: focusing on **knowledge creation and dissemination**.

### Conclusion

- Copyright law was established to promote **creativity** and public learning, yet its modern expansion often prevents both.
  - Artificial intelligence has exposed the **limitations of current law**, revealing the urgent need for reform.
  - By adopting flexible exceptions and encouraging shared knowledge resources, societies can ensure that copyright once again serves its true purpose, advancing creativity, technology, and human understanding rather than obstructing them.
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