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Current Affairs - 23 February 2026

WHAT IS THE PRASHAD SCHEME?



Union Civil Aviation Minister recently said that the Centre is preparing plans to further develop tourist destinations around prominent temples in Andhra Pradesh under the PRASHAD scheme.

- The **PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive)** was launched in the year 2014-2015 under the Ministry of Tourism.
 - It is a **Central Sector Scheme** with the objective of **integrated development of identified pilgrimage destinations**.
 - The primary objective of the scheme is to **develop tourism infrastructure at pilgrimage and heritage sites**, ensuring a more enriching experience for pilgrims and heritage enthusiasts.
 - Under the scheme, the ministry provides **financial assistance to state governments and Union Territory administrations** for the development of tourism infrastructure at these sites.
 - The **Central Government provides 100% funding** for the **project components undertaken for public funding**.
 - It also welcomes **voluntary contributions made through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) AND Public Private Partnership (PPP)**.
 - The **Ministry of Tourism has set up a Mission Directorate for implementing the PRASAD scheme**.
 - The Mission Directorate **identifies projects in the identified cities and coordinates with the states/UTs** and other stakeholders to implement this scheme.
 - The scheme contributes to employment generation while also enhancing awareness and fostering skill and capacity development of the local communities.
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CAN INDIA'S POWER GRID HANDLE THE DATA CENTRE BOOM

- AI-driven data centres represent intense electricity loads, often requiring direct transmission-level connectivity rather than traditional sub-transmission networks.
- Their projected growth to **8–10 GW by 2030** will significantly strain grid infrastructure.
- Unlike conventional industrial demand, data centres exhibit sharp variability, rapid load ramps, and “silent exits” from the grid.
- As inverter-based systems, sudden withdrawal of 1–2 GW could destabilise grid operations.
- **Planning and Resource Adequacy**
 - Experts emphasise the need for proactive infrastructure planning, including robust transmission networks, strong connectivity, and compliance mechanisms.
 - Data centres must also meet resource adequacy norms, covering primary energy, reserves, and balancing requirements.
 - Given AI's unpredictable load patterns, especially during peak processing phases, forecasting becomes difficult.
 - Grid authorities stress that risks cannot be fully absorbed by the grid and must be managed at the demand side.
- **Evolving Standards and Storage Integration**
 - Globally, many jurisdictions require data centres to have dedicated generation capacity.
 - India's grid codes, standards, and energy storage integration must evolve to accommodate these emerging large-scale, dynamic loads.

Risk of Chaos Without Strategic Planning

- Rapid expansion of hyperscale data centres — each requiring nearly 1 GW — could severely strain the grid if not carefully planned.
- Such demand necessitates high-voltage substations and coordinated planning by central and state transmission utilities.



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- Since hyperscale data centres have steady baseload demand, they require long-duration, stable generation sources.
- While the US increasingly relies on nuclear power, India may need a diversified supply approach.
- **Mixed Energy and Storage Solutions**
 - Experts recommend combining grid supply with captive generation, renewable energy, and long-duration battery storage (6–9 hours) to manage reliability and reduce dependence on the grid alone.
 - To avoid chaotic infrastructure expansion and rising tariffs, authorities should identify and pre-plan dedicated data centre zones.
 - Without coordinated planning, ad hoc grid expansion could lead to inefficiencies and higher costs for consumers.

Renewables and Efficiency in Data Centre Expansion

- Renewable energy can power new data centres through the open access route, which allows large consumers (1 MW+) to buy electricity directly from suppliers or exchanges, bypassing DISCOMs.
 - Surplus generation capacity and upcoming pump hydro projects could support affordable round-the-clock green power.
 - **Semiconductor-Level Efficiency Gains**
 - Semiconductor firms are central to the AI-driven power challenge.
 - Under Intel's 18A process, innovations such as RibbonFET, backside power delivery, and advanced packaging improve efficiency by about 15% and reduce energy use by limiting data movement.
 - Intel also promotes a “heterogeneous AI” approach, arguing that not all AI tasks require energy-intensive GPUs.
 - Optimised workload allocation across processors can significantly reduce total power consumption.
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STREET DOGS, LAW AND COMPASSION - THE NEED FOR EVIDENCE-BASED URBAN ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

- Recent attacks reveal increasing **intolerance** toward people involved in feeding, sterilising, and vaccinating street dogs, despite such activities being lawful.
- **Key concerns:**
 - Citizens feeding dogs have faced physical assaults and intimidation.
 - Victims were engaged in activities consistent with legal animal welfare frameworks.
 - Public rhetoric and social media debates have contributed to anti-feeder **vigilantism**.
 - Weak law enforcement response has emboldened perpetrators.
- This reflects a breakdown in rule of law and civic tolerance.

Legal Framework for Street Dog Management:

- **Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023:** The ABC Rules framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 provide the official policy framework.

Judicial Interventions and Policy Confusion:

- **Supreme Court directions:**
 - Recent (August 2025) judicial interventions have added **uncertainty**.
 - The apex court directed municipal bodies in Delhi-NCR to remove street dogs and house them in shelters indefinitely.
 - The critics argued that this contradicted the ABC Rules, 2023.
- **Subsequent developments (2026 hearings):**
 - The earlier orders were reversed and partially restored.
 - The court held that feeding should occur within private premises, and states could be liable for compensation if dog attacks occur.
- **Concerns:** Courts entering the policy-making domain. Lack of clarity for municipal authorities. Conflicting interpretations of animal welfare law.

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Evidence-Based Solutions:

- **Strengthening ABC implementation:** Large-scale sterilisation is the most effective strategy. Scientific data shows that around 70% sterilisation coverage slows reproduction, stabilises populations, reduces bite incidents, and controls rabies transmission.
- **Adoption of Indian-breed dogs:** Encouraging adoption can reduce free-roaming populations, promote animal welfare, and reduce commercial breeding demand.
- **Legal protection for caregivers:**
 - Animal caregivers fill gaps left by under-resourced municipalities, assist vaccination and monitoring.
 - Therefore, policy should recognise caregivers legally, protecting them from harassment and violence.
- **Rabies and public health measures:** Dog bites can be reduced through vaccination campaigns, public awareness, safe human-animal interaction, and waste management.

Major Challenges:

- **Policy and legal ambiguity:** Due to lack of coordination between courts and municipalities.
- **Administrative weakness:** Poor funding for sterilisation programmes. Limited veterinary infrastructure. Inadequate municipal capacity.
- **Social polarisation:** Anti-feeder sentiment, vigilante violence, and public fear of dog attacks.
- **Public health concerns:** India accounts for a large share of global rabies deaths. Poor vaccination coverage.
- **Urban governance issues:** Poor waste management sustains dog populations. Rapid urbanisation increases conflict.

Conclusion:

- India's street dog issue cannot be resolved through elimination or reactionary policies.
 - Policy must be guided by science, legality, and compassion, ensuring both public safety and animal welfare.
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PARLIAMENT'S HISTORIC LAW, AN EXTENDED WAIT FOR WOMEN

- The Women's Reservation Act, passed in September 2023, promises **one-third reservation** for women in the **Lok Sabha** and **State Assemblies**.
- It seeks to correct the long-standing underrepresentation of women in Indian politics and was widely celebrated as a step toward gender equality and inclusive democracy.
- Yet the legislation postpones its own operation. The Act links implementation to future constitutional processes, meaning women will not immediately receive guaranteed political participation.
- The reform therefore recognises women's rights in principle while delaying their exercise in practice, raising questions about the real pace of democratic reform.

The Constitutional Framework Behind the Delay

- **The Two Mandatory Preconditions**
 - The Act makes reservation conditional upon two sequential processes:
 - A national **Census** conducted after 2026.
 - A **delimitation** exercise based on that Census.
 - Both steps are constitutionally required and cannot be bypassed.
- **The Census Timeline**
 - The next Census is expected in **2027**. After enumeration, the data must be verified and officially published, a process historically taking **12–18 months**.
 - Only after publication can the next constitutional step begin.
- **Delimitation Process**
 - After publication, the President establishes a **Delimitation Commission** under **Article 82**.
 - The Commission must redraw 543 parliamentary constituencies and thousands of Assembly constituencies while ensuring population balance, administrative boundaries, and existing **SC/ST reservations**, along with women's reservation.

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- Previous commissions have taken several years. Even under optimistic conditions, delimitation is unlikely to finish before 2032–2033.

Why Implementation Before 2029 Is Impossible?

- India's next general election is scheduled for 2029. Because both Census and delimitation cannot be completed beforehand, reservation cannot operate in that election.
- The earliest likely implementation is around **2034**.
- The delay results from constitutional procedures rather than administrative uncertainty.
- Until prerequisites are completed, the promised representation remains legally inoperative.

Historical Background: A Long Wait

- Efforts for reservation **began in 1996**, followed by repeated debates, amendments, and lapses. The proposal passed the Rajya Sabha in 2010 but never became law at that time.
- The **2023 Act** appeared to conclude decades of legislative struggle, yet implementation is postponed for another election cycle, extending a wait that has lasted nearly three decades.

Linkage with Delimitation and Federal Tensions

- Delimitation redistributes seats according to population. States with higher population growth may gain representation, while others may lose proportional strength.
- This **north-south imbalance** has historically caused political conflict and led to the **1976 freeze** on seat redistribution, later extended in **2001**.
- By tying women's reservation to this unresolved federal issue, the Act places women's rights within a broader **federal dispute** unrelated to gender justice.
- Any disagreement over seat allocation can postpone representation further.

Conclusion

- The Women's Reservation Act acknowledges the necessity of women's political participation but delays its realization.
 - By linking implementation to future Census and delimitation processes, the law transforms a reform into a deferred constitutional project.
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EXERCISE VAJRA PRAHAR 2026



- It is the **joint Special Forces exercise** between the **Indian Army** and **US Army**.
 - The exercise is designed to **deepen defence cooperation, enhance interoperability** and joint operational readiness, and enable the exchange of advanced special operations tactics, techniques, and procedures.
 - The year **2026** marks the **16th edition** of the exercise.
 - It will be held at the **Special Forces Training School, Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh**.
 - The **focus** this year will be on the **exchange of advanced special operations tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs)**, honed through rigorous training in realistic combat scenarios.
 - It will place strong emphasis on **counter-terror operations, precision strikes**, intelligence-based missions, and joint planning under simulated battlefield conditions.
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PALAMU TIGER RESERVE



- **Location:** It is located on the **Chhotanagpur plateau** in **Jharkhand**.
 - The reserve forms a **part of the Betla National Park**.
 - It is one of the first 9 tiger reserves created in the country at the **inception of 'Project Tiger'**.
 - It is the first reserve in the world in which a tiger census was carried out as a pugmark count, as early as 1932 under the supervision of J.W. Nicholson.
 - **Terrain:** The terrain is undulating with valleys, hills, and plains.
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- **Rivers:** Three rivers, namely **North Koyal, Auranga, and Burha**, flow through the valleys.
 - The area is drought-prone, with Burha being the only perennial river.
- The geological formation consists of gneiss and includes **granite and limestone**.
- **Resources:** The area is very rich in minerals like **Bauxite and Coal**.
- **Vegetation:** The vegetation comprises **moist deciduous and dry deciduous forests**.
- **Flora:** It mainly consists of Sal and bamboo as the major components.
- **Fauna:** Some keystone and principal species found in the reserve include Tiger, Asiatic Elephant, Leopard, Grey wolf, Wild dog, Gaur, Sloth bear and four horned antelope.

NATIONAL ORGAN AND TISSUE TRANSPLANT ORGANIZATION



- It is a national-level organization set up under the **Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** in New Delhi.
- The establishment of NOTTO is mandated as per the **Transplantation of human Organs and Tissues (Amendment) Act of 2011**.
- It has the **following two divisions**:
 - National Human Organ and Tissue Removal and Storage Network
 - National Biomaterial Centre
- It functions as the apex centre for all India activities of coordination and networking for:
 - procurement and distribution of organs and tissues; and
 - registry of Organs and Tissues Donation and Transplantation in the country
- The following activities are undertaken at National Level by NOTTO.
 - **Lay down policy guidelines** and protocols for various functions
 - All registry data from States and regions would be compiled and published
 - Creating awareness and promotion of deceased organ donation and transplantation activities.