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Current Affairs - 03 February 2026

WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2026



World Wetlands Day 2026 theme explores the long-standing connections between the habitats and cultural practices, traditions and knowledge systems of communities.

- It is celebrated every year on **2 February**.
- It was **first celebrated in 1997** and has been a **United Nations International Day** since 2022.
- It **marks the anniversary of the Ramsar Convention**, signed in Ramsar, Iran, on 2 February 1971.
 - The agreement is also known as the **Convention on Wetlands of International Importance**.
 - It is **one of the oldest modern international environmental agreements** and the **only one focused entirely on a single ecosystem: wetlands**.
 - There are **172 Contracting Parties** to the convention.
 - Each year, the **Convention Secretariat leads the World Wetlands Day campaign**, with participation from governments, conservation organisations, businesses, NGOs, media, youth groups, and communities worldwide.
- World Wetlands Day 2026 Theme: The global theme for 2026, 'Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage', highlights the role of indigenous and local communities in conserving and managing wetlands.

New Ramsar Sites in India:

- **Patna Bird Sanctuary in Etah, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhari-Dhand in Kutch, Gujarat**, have been officially designated as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, bringing the **total number of Ramsar sites in India to 98**.



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MOLTBOOK PLATFORM



A new tech phenomenon called Moltbook has erupted across social media as the first social network designed exclusively for artificial intelligence agents.

- Moltbook is a new **online platform** where **artificial intelligence agents** interact with each other without direct human participation.
- It was launched by developer Matt Schlicht.
- It allows AI systems to post, interact, and exchange information in a shared digital space.
- **Key Features of Moltbook**
 - **Diverse Discussions:** It is designed as a **machine-to-machine space** where discussions range from technical issues to philosophical topics like "consciousness" or identity.
 - The agents generate **text based on patterns they learned from training data** and from interactions.
 - **Autonomous Interaction:** On Moltbook **AI agents do talk to each other by posting**, replying and upvoting comments in thread conversations.
 - This communication happens autonomously once a human owner connects their agent to the platform, but the agents themselves use APIs and programmed behaviour to interact without direct human input at each step.
 - **Emergent Behavior:** AI agents on **Moltbook appear to update their behaviour** based on interactions with other bots.
 - They remix ideas they encounter in discussions and sometimes adjust responses over time, creating threads that resemble ongoing debates.

What Are AI Agents?

- AI agents are **software entities that can be assigned tasks**, examine their environments, take actions as prescribed by their roles, and adjust based on their experiences.
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DELHI DECLARATION 2026: DECODING INDIA'S MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY

- The Delhi Declaration strongly stresses respect for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Sudan, Libya and Somalia, while rejecting any external interference.
- This reflects a shared India–Arab League position in favour of internationally recognised governments rather than rival or breakaway authorities.
- **Middle East Power Rivalries in the Background**
 - These conflicts are shaped by a broader power tussle within the Middle East.
 - On one side are countries aligned with **Saudi Arabia**, and on the other a camp associated with the UAE and Israel, with US backing.
 - Though these camps are not officially acknowledged, their differences play out clearly in conflict zones.
 - **Sudan:** The UAE is widely accused of backing the Rapid Support Forces, which have fought the Sudanese government, set up a parallel authority, and carried out large-scale violence against civilians.
 - **Libya:** The UAE has long supported Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army, which opposes the UN-recognised government in Tripoli. Saudi Arabia and other Arab states have instead focused more on reconciliation.
 - **Somalia:** Israel is the only UN member to recognise Somaliland, a breakaway region. The UAE's acceptance of Somaliland passports in 2025 has gone against the wider Arab League position.
 - India clearly rejected any recognition of Somaliland and aligned with the Arab League's stance.
- **India's Clear Alignment**
 - India joined the Arab League in explicitly supporting recognised governments in Sudan and Libya and condemning violence against civilians.
 - This marks a firm diplomatic position amid regional divisions.

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Principal Conflicts: What the Delhi Declaration Says — and Avoids

- **Silence on the US-Led Board of Peace** - The Delhi Declaration makes no reference to the Donald Trump–led Board of Peace (BoP).
 - Although several Gulf states have joined the BoP, India has not yet accepted the invitation extended, signalling caution about formally associating with the initiative.
 - **Clear Preference on Israel–Palestine** - Instead of the BoP, the declaration explicitly backs the Arab Peace Initiative (2002).
 - This framework supports land-for-peace—Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for an independent Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders.
 - While the declaration also notes the outcomes of the **2025 Sharm el-Sheikh summit** (the only place the US role is mentioned), the emphasis on the Arab Peace Initiative reveals India’s and the Arab League’s core preference.
 - **Backing Peace, Not a New Framework** - India and Arab states support efforts to end the violence in Gaza, including US mediation, but stop short of endorsing the broader logic of President Trump’s plan for resolving the Israel–Palestine issue. Both sides reiterate support for Palestinian sovereignty.
 - **Avoiding Escalation with Iran** - The declaration avoids mentioning the most destabilising flashpoint: the US military build-up around Iran and the risk of a wider conflict. This omission appears deliberate, allowing countries to manage bilateral approaches without public confrontation.
 - Key Arab League states, led by Saudi Arabia, are working to discourage US military action against Iran.
 - India’s outreach shows New Delhi’s effort to keep channels open with Iran while navigating US sanctions.
 - Notably, India’s Budget 2026–27 carries no allocation for Chabahar Port, despite a 10-year operational agreement signed in 2024.
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INDIA-US TRADE RESET - REDUCED TARIFFS, STRATEGIC BARGAINS AND THE CHINA FACTOR

- After months of tariff-driven tensions, India-US economic relations have witnessed a significant thaw following a telephonic conversation between the Indian Prime Minister and the U.S. President.
- The U.S. has agreed to reduce its reciprocal tariff on “Made in India” products to **18%**, down sharply from an effective 50% imposed in 2025.
- The announcement signals a possible reconfiguration of India-US trade ties amid global supply chain realignments and geopolitical churn.
- **Reduction in U.S. tariffs on Indian goods:**
 - The U.S. will reduce reciprocal tariffs on Indian exports from 50% to 18%.
 - This includes rollback of 25% tariff, and an additional 25% penalty imposed due to India’s import of Russian oil.
 - The Indian PM termed this a boost to **Make in India**, improving market access for Indian exports.

Strategic Significance:

- **India as a counterweight to China:**
 - The tariff cut reinforces the U.S. view of India as a strategic ally and counterweight to China.
 - With Western economies imposing anti-dumping duties and trade restrictions on Chinese products, India gains a relative advantage in accessing U.S. and EU markets.
- **Macroeconomic and market implications:**
 - The deal was seen as critical amid concerns over capital outflows, pressure on the rupee.
 - Expectations include improved investor sentiment, potential strengthening of the rupee, and a positive market response.

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- **India's expanding trade footprint:**
 - With trade arrangements now in place with the **U.S., UK, and EU**, India is better positioned than many East Asian economies that rely heavily on Chinese investment.
 - A tentative thaw in India–China trade relations adds another layer of complexity.

Challenges and Concerns:

- **Ambiguity in the fine print:**
 - The actual benefits depend on the detailed terms of the agreement, which remain unclear.
 - Past experience suggests that U.S. negotiations under President Trump tend to be **extractive**.
- **Energy and strategic autonomy:** Any formal commitment to halt Russian oil imports could constrain India's strategic autonomy and energy security.
- **Dependence on China:** India's imports from China exceeded \$112 billion last year. China's dominance in rare earth elements has already impacted Indian sectors such as automobiles.
- **Risk of Chinese retaliation:** China has warned of consequences if trade agreements are concluded at its expense, raising concerns of indirect economic or supply-chain retaliation.
- **Domestic political reactions:** The opposition criticised the move, alleging India had “**capitulated**” under U.S. pressure.

Way Forward:

- **Clarity and transparency:** India must ensure that commitments—especially on tariffs, energy imports, and non-tariff barriers—are clearly defined and mutually balanced.
 - **Leverage export:** Leverage improved access to the U.S. market to boost manufacturing, value-added exports, and employment.
 - **Supply chain diversification:** Use platforms like the Critical Minerals Ministerial to reduce dependence on China.
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16TH FINANCE COMMISSION'S WARNING ON RISING FISCAL RISKS

- The 16th Finance Commission has cautioned states against the rapid expansion of large, unconditional cash transfer schemes, which now account for over 20% of total state subsidy spending.

Fiscal Concerns Raised by the 16th Finance Commission

- The Finance Commission has warned that the unchecked expansion of unconditional cash transfers can destabilise state finances in the long run.
- Such schemes impose a recurring fiscal burden and reduce flexibility in budgetary allocations.
- The Commission observed that many of these transfers are poorly targeted, expanding into large beneficiary bases that dilute their redistributive effectiveness.
- A major concern is the crowding out of capital expenditure. Rising revenue spending on cash transfers limits states' ability to invest in infrastructure, education, and health, which are critical for long-term growth.
- The Commission also cautioned against financing these schemes through off-budget borrowings, guarantees, or revenue assignments, calling such practices fiscally imprudent due to reduced transparency in public accounts.

Recommendations for Reform

- To address these risks, the 16th Finance Commission has recommended:
 - **Periodic and rigorous review of subsidy schemes.**
 - **Rationalisation of beneficiary bases** to ensure support reaches the most vulnerable.
 - **Introduction of sunset or exit clauses**, especially for non-merit and general unconditional transfers.
 - Discontinuation of **off-budget financing mechanisms** for welfare schemes.
 - The Commission emphasised that welfare policies must align with fiscal responsibility and deficit reduction goals, rather than becoming permanent entitlements without review.
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WHAT IS SAKSHAM 2026?



- Saksham (Samrakshan Kshamatha Mahotsav) is an annual awareness campaign initiated by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India.
- It is designed to promote fuel conservation and raise awareness of sustainable energy practices.
- Organized by oil and gas public sector enterprises in collaboration with local authorities, educational institutions, industries, and key stakeholders, Saksham aims to drive India towards a greener future.

SAKSHAM 2026:

- It is a fortnight-long campaign.
- It features diverse activities to engage citizens, debates, wall paintings, cyclothons, walkathons, workshops, seminars, and awareness programs.
- The campaign will target various groups, such as schoolchildren, youth, LPG users, fleet operators, farmers, and industry professionals.
- The theme for the 2026 campaign, “Conserve Oil and Gas, Go Green” (Tel aur Gas Bachao, Harshit Urja Apnao), underscores the transition towards renewable energy sources and energy-efficient solutions for environmental sustainability.

DEVNIMORI RELICS OF LORD BUDDHA



India is set to undertake a profound gesture of spiritual outreach and cultural diplomacy through the exposition of the sacred Devnimori Relics of Lord Buddha in Sri Lanka.



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- The Devnimori Relics originate from the **Devnimori archaeological site**, located near Shamlaji in the Aravalli district of **Gujarat**.
- It was first explored in 1957 by **eminent archaeologist Prof. S. N. Chowdhry**.

Major Findings of Excavations:

- The excavations **revealed important Buddhist structures** and relics that stand testimony to the flourishing of Buddhism in western India during the early centuries of the Common Era.
 - **Relic casket:** The relic casket found within Devnimori Stupa, is made out of **green schist**.
 - It is inscribed in **Brahmi Script and Sanskrit language**, it reads. "**dashabala sharira nilay**" - the abode of the Buddha's bodily relic.
 - It **holds a copper box** having organic matter with holy ashes, with silk cloth and beads.
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