DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 21-02-2026

NATIONAL NEWS

National Green Tribunal Clears Great Nicobar Project Worth Rupees 81,000 Crore

The National Green Tribunal has approved the Rupees 81,000 crore Great Nicobar Project, cited its strategic importance while imposed strict environmental safeguards.

The six-member bench headed by Justice Prakash Shrivastava upheld the Environmental Clearance granted in November 2022 and directed strict compliance with all conditions.

The National Green Tribunal upheld the Environmental Clearance granted in November 2022 and found no valid ground to interfere.

The tribunal stated that national interest and strategic requirements must be balanced with environmental protection.

The project will proceed under strict monitoring and legally binding environmental conditions.

The Great Nicobar Project was conceived by NITI Aayog in 2021 under Maritime Vision 2030 and Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.

It includes an International Container Transshipment Terminal, a greenfield international airport, township development and a 450 megavolt ampere gas and solar based power plant.

The project aims to reduce India's dependence on foreign transshipment hubs and strengthen its position in global maritime trade.

The island's proximity to the Malacca Strait enhances India's Indo-Pacific maritime security and strategic presence.

Environmental safeguards mandate protection and scientific translocation of over 16,000 coral colonies and prevention of shoreline erosion.

Protection measures are required for endangered species such as the Leatherback turtle, Nicobar megapode, saltwater crocodile, robber crab and Nicobar macaque.

Concerns remain regarding deforestation, seismic vulnerability and the rights of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups such as the Shompen and Nicobarese communities.

The project area includes ecologically sensitive zones such as Campbell Bay National Park, Galathea Bay National Park and the Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve, which is recognised under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Man and Biosphere Programme.

Great Nicobar Island is separated from the Andaman group by the Ten Degree Channel, and Indira Point, India's southernmost point, is located here.

Losar Festival 2026 Celebrated in McLeod Ganj, Himachal Pradesh

The Losar Festival 2026, marking the Tibetan New Year, is being celebrated from 18 to 20 February in McLeod Ganj, Himachal Pradesh.

The festival marks the beginning of the Fire Horse Year as per the Tibetan lunar calendar.

The presence of Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama has added spiritual significance to the celebrations.

Losar Festival 2026 is being observed from 18 to 20 February in McLeod Ganj, the headquarters of the Tibetan exile community in India.

The festival marks the beginning of the Fire Horse Year, which occurs once in 60 years in the Tibetan zodiac cycle.

In Tibetan astrology, the Fire Horse symbolizes strength, energy, passion and transformation.

Monasteries are conducting special prayer sessions, and devotees are offering prayers for peace, prosperity and freedom for Tibet.

Families are cleaning homes, decorating monasteries and preparing khapse, a traditional deep-fried Tibetan sweet dish.

Devotees are praying for the long life of the Dalai Lama and global peace.

Cultural programmes, traditional attire and community gatherings are being organised across McLeod Ganj.

Losar is celebrated by Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist communities in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet, usually falling in February or March based on the lunar calendar.

In India, major celebrations take place in Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh and Sikkim.

The festival symbolises purification, renewal and the beginning of a new zodiac year.

Mumbai Climate Week 2026 Inaugurated in Maharashtra

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis inaugurated the first Mumbai Climate Week at the Jio World Convention Centre in Bandra, Mumbai.

The three-day global conclave aims to promote actionable climate solutions, renewable energy expansion and sustainable transition strategies, particularly for the Global South.

The event is organised by Project Mumbai in partnership with the Government of Maharashtra and supported by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation.

The first edition of Mumbai Climate Week is a three-day event concluding on 19 February 2026.

The core theme focuses on practical and actionable climate solutions with emphasis on urban resilience and renewable energy expansion.

Special attention is given to climate challenges faced by the Global South.

Union Minister Prahlad Joshi announced the installation of one lakh additional solar pumps in Maharashtra under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan Scheme to strengthen agricultural energy security.

The inauguration was attended by dignitaries including Pankaja Munde, Ritu Tawde and Sanjay Mukherjee.

The event extends beyond the convention centre to include community-based and campus-level climate engagement activities across Mumbai.

BANKING

IDFC First Bank Introduces FD-Backed ‘Hello Cashback Credit Card’ for First-Time Users

IDFC First Bank launched ‘Hello Cashback Credit Card’, a Fixed Deposit (FD)-backed credit card aimed at first-time users and individuals with no credit history.

The card requires no eligibility conditions such as credit score or income proof; customers can avail it by opening a minimum FD of ₹10,000, with the credit limit set at 100% of the FD value.

It integrates standard credit card functionalities, including contactless payments, Equated Monthly Installment (EMI) conversion options, and enhanced security features.

The card provides tiered online cashback:

3% on the first ₹10,000 of online spending per billing cycle.

5% spends beyond ₹10,000.

1% cashback on UPI payments made through IDFC FIRST Bank apps.

The joining fee is ₹1,000, waived until March 31, 2026, and the annual fee is ₹1,000, fully waived on annual spends of ₹2 lakh or more, and 50% waived on ₹1 lakh spends.

Additional benefits include ₹2 lakh personal accident cover, ₹25,000 purchase protection, and fuel surcharge waivers.

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development and National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Launch Price

Protection Scheme

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and National Commodity & Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) launched a Price Protection Scheme to help farmers manage price volatility through put options trading in turmeric, jeera, and dhaniya (coriander).

Under the scheme, NABARD subsidises premiums for put options for Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) across seven states.

Eligible organisations include FPOs promoted by NABARD, Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC), National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), NAFED, State Rural Livelihood Missions, and cooperatives.

The scheme has been launched in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Karnataka.

In the first phase, the scheme has covered 80 FPOs and 1.34 lakh farmers, with 6,544 tonnes of produce hedged.

Mastercard Conducts India’s First AI-Powered Fully Authenticated Agentic Commerce Transaction at India AI Impact Summit 2026

Mastercard completed India’s first fully authenticated agentic commerce transaction at the India AI Impact Summit 2026, showcasing AI-led payments.

The transaction was conducted inside a Large Language Model (LLM)-powered interface, using tokenisation to replace card details with secure digital identifiers, reducing fraud risk.

The initiative is part of Mastercard’s Agentic Commerce Framework and aligns with its Agent Pay Framework for secure AI-driven payments.

The demonstration involved Mastercard cards issued by Axis Bank and RBL Bank, with payment processing by Cashfree, Juspay, PayU, and Razorpay.

Merchant partners included Swiggy/Instamart, Zepto, Vodafone Idea, and Tira, demonstrating ecosystem-wide interoperability.

The transaction used Model Context Protocol (MCP), an open-source standard for connecting AI applications to external systems.

Tokenisation replaced sensitive card details with unique digital identifiers, enhancing security during transactions.

The initiative signals Mastercard’s readiness for AI-led payments in India, one of its fastest-growing markets, and is part of its Asia-Pacific expansion.

Airtel Money Gets Reserve Bank of India Approval to

Operate as Type II Non-Deposit NBFC-ICC

Airtel Money, a subsidiary of Bharti Airtel, has received a Certificate of Registration (CoR) from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as a Type II – Non-Deposit Taking Non-Banking Financial Company – Investment and Credit Company (Type II NBFC-ND (ICC)).

The CoR was issued under Section 45-IA of the RBI Act, 1934, bearing Registration No. N-14.03676.

Being a non-deposit taking NBFC, Airtel Money is prohibited from accepting public deposits, ensuring compliance with RBI prudential norms.

The company is authorised to engage in credit and investment-related activities, including lending and financial transactions, without soliciting deposits from the public.

Type II NBFC-ND (ICC) entities are regulated by RBI, do not accept public deposits, but may interact with customers and raise funds from financial institutions.

Such NBFCs focus on specialised financial operations like microfinance (NBFC-MFI), factoring (NBFC-Factor), or infrastructure financing (NBFC-IDF).

This registration allows Airtel Money to commence operations as a non-banking financial institution, adhering to conditions prescribed by the RBI.

DEFENCE

Indigenous Cadet Training Ship ‘Krishna’ Launched by Indian Navy

The first indigenously designed and built Cadet Training Ship (CTS) ‘Krishna (Yard 18003)’ of the Indian Navy was launched at Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Shipbuilding facility, Kattupalli near Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

The ship was launched by Anupama Chauhan, President of Defence Wives Welfare Association (DWWA), in the presence of General Anil Chauhan, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).

CTS Krishna is the first of three Cadet Training Ships being constructed by M/s L&T Shipyard under a contract signed with the Ministry of Defence on 07 March 2023.

The ship is named after River Krishna, the third longest river in India, following Naval naming traditions.

Key Specifications: The ship is 122 metres long, has a displacement of 4,700 tonnes, a maximum speed of nearly 20 knots, and an endurance of about 60 days at sea.

Crew Capacity: The vessel will accommodate 20 Officers, 150 Sailors, and 200 Cadets.

Primary Role: To provide basic sea training to Naval Cadets, including seamanship, navigation drills, ship handling, and onboard life exposure.

The ships will also train Officer Cadets (including women) and Cadets from Friendly Foreign Countries after their shore-based basic training.

Secondary Roles include Hospital Ship services, Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), and Search and Rescue (SAR)

The ship has been indigenously designed and built, marking a major step in the Indian Navy's indigenous shipbuilding programme.

The project supports the Government of India's Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India

Formal delivery of CTS Krishna to the Indian Navy is planned by the end of 2026.

The launch ceremony was attended by senior naval officials including Vice Admiral Sanjay Sadhu and Rear Admiral Upal Kundu, along with leadership from L&T Shipbuilding.

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

CCI Approves Hinduja Leyland Finance Merger with NDL Ventures

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has approved the proposed merger of Hinduja Leyland Finance Limited (HLFL) with NDL Ventures Limited (NDL).

The merger aims to consolidate and integrate the businesses of Hinduja Leyland Finance Limited into NDL Ventures Limited.

NDL Ventures Limited (NDL) currently has no active business operations (following the demerger of its media business).

Hinduja Leyland Finance Limited (HLFL) is an NBFC-Asset Finance Company focused on providing small-ticket loans to urban and semi-urban retail customers.

HLFL's financing portfolio includes:Two-wheelers and three-wheelers, Medium and heavy commercial vehicles (MHCVs), Light commercial vehicles (LCVs) and small commercial vehicles (SCVs), Cars and multi-utility vehicles.

HLFL also provides loans against property, home loans, and affordable housing loans, catering to diverse financial needs.

SPORTS

Tejaswin Shankar Wins Gold at Asian Indoor Athletics Championships 2026

India's Tejaswin Shankar clinched a historic gold medal at the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships held in Tianjin, China.

He won the men's heptathlon event with a record-breaking performance, marking India's only gold medal at the championship.

Tejaswin Shankar won Gold Medal in Men's Heptathlon with 5,993 points.

He created a new National Indoor Record with this performance.

He surpassed his earlier best of 5,650 points set in 2021 in the United States of America.

The Gold Medal was India's only Gold Medal at the championship.

The Heptathlon consists of seven track and field events conducted over two days.

India finished the championship with a total of five medals and secured sixth position in the overall standings.

Other Indian medal winners:

Pooja – Silver Medal in High Jump

Tajinderpal Singh Toor – Silver Medal in Shot Put

Ancy Sojan – Bronze Medal in Long Jump

Host nation China topped the medal table with 34 medals including 10 Gold, 11 Silver and 13 Bronze medals.

IMPORTANT DAYS

World Day of Social Justice

The World Day of Social Justice is annually observed on 20 February to promote efforts toward poverty eradication, full employment and social integration.

It is a global observance and not a public holiday.

The day has been observed since 2009 following its proclamation by the United Nations on 26 November 2007.

World Day of Social Justice is observed every year on 20 February to promote social justice, equality and inclusive development.

The day emphasises poverty eradication, full employment and decent work, and social integration.

The foundation of the observance lies in the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1995, where over one hundred world leaders adopted the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action for Social Development.

The declaration was reviewed by Member States in New York in 2005, reaffirming commitment to social development and equitable societies.

The International Labour Organization, established on 29 October 1919, played a key role in promoting the observance of 20 February as World Day of Social Justice.

The International Labour Organization adopted the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization at the International Labour Conference on 10 June 2008.

The declaration is guided by the Philadelphia Declaration of 1944 and the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work of 1998.

Social development is defined as promoting social justice, solidarity, harmony and equality within and among nations.

Governments are encouraged to build strong frameworks to ensure a society for all, focusing on equal job opportunities, equitable income distribution and greater access to resources.

OBITUTARY

Renowned Documentary Filmmaker Frederick Wiseman

Renowned American documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman passed away at the age of 96 in Massachusetts,United States of America (USA).

He was born on January 1, 1930, in Boston, Massachusetts.

Frederick Wiseman was widely regarded as a master of observational filmmaking (often associated with Direct Cinema).

Over a career spanning more than five decades, he directed 40+ documentaries.

His films primarily focused on institutions such as schools, hospitals, courts, libraries, police departments, and cultural organizations.

His notable documentaries include “Titicut Follies,” “High School,” “Welfare,” “Juvenile Court,” “Boxing Gym,” “La Danse,” “Central Park,” and “Crazy Horse.”

He also directed “The Last Letter” (2002) and "A Couple" (2022), which were his fiction feature films.

In 2016, he received an Honorary Academy Award (Oscar) from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for his extraordinary contribution to documentary filmmaking.