PrepAlpine

The Next-Generation UPSC Institution

Where Research Meets Mentorship & Precision

Preparation Meets Precision

A Next-Generation Learning Institution

Disclaimer

The information contained in this book has been prepared solely for educational purposes. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, PrepAlpine makes no representations or warranties of any kind and accepts no liability for any errors or omissions. The use of any content is solely at the reader's discretion and risk.

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 18.02.2026

GS Paper II: International Relations

1. India–France Special Global Strategic Partnership

a. Introduction

India and France have elevated their ties to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership", signalling a deeper and broader alignment in defence, technology, critical minerals and global governance.

In a world marked by geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions and shifting power balances, both countries emphasise three guiding principles:

- Strategic autonomy – independent decision-making without bloc politics
- Multipolarity – a world with multiple centres of power
- Rules-based order – respect for international law and sovereignty

This upgraded framework reflects not just closer bilateral ties, but a shared vision of stability and balance in a turbulent international system.

b. Historical Foundations of India–France Relations

i. Establishment of Strategic Trust

The formal Strategic Partnership was established in 1998, even when India faced global criticism after its nuclear tests. France chose engagement over isolation, demonstrating long-term strategic trust.

ii. Key Areas of Cooperation Over Time

Defence

- Rafale fighter aircraft acquisition
- Scorpene-class submarines
- Long-standing military exercises

Space Cooperation

- Collaboration between ISRO and the French space agency
- Joint satellite missions

Civil Nuclear Energy

- French support for India's civil nuclear programme
- Proposal for the Jaitapur nuclear power plant

Counter-Terrorism and Global Diplomacy

- Coordination at the United Nations
- French support for India's Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership

This steady expansion of cooperation laid the groundwork for the present upgrade to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership."

c. Meaning of a Special Global Strategic Partnership

The upgraded designation signals cooperation beyond defence purchases.

i. Global Coordination

- Joint positions on global governance reforms

- Cooperation in multilateral forums

ii. Strategic Autonomy

- Independent foreign policies
- No formal alignment under any single bloc

iii. Technological and Industrial Collaboration

- Joint production rather than buyer–seller transactions
- Co-development of advanced platforms

Thus, the partnership reflects convergence in worldview as well as practical collaboration.

Defence cooperation remains the core pillar of this relationship.

d. Defence Cooperation: From Procurement to Co-Production

i. Shift in Approach

India–France defence ties are evolving from simple procurement to deeper industrial partnership.

Increasing Indigenous Content

- Greater localisation in platforms like Rafale
- Integration of Indian supply chains
- Skill development and technology absorption

This aligns with India's goal of self-reliance in defence manufacturing.

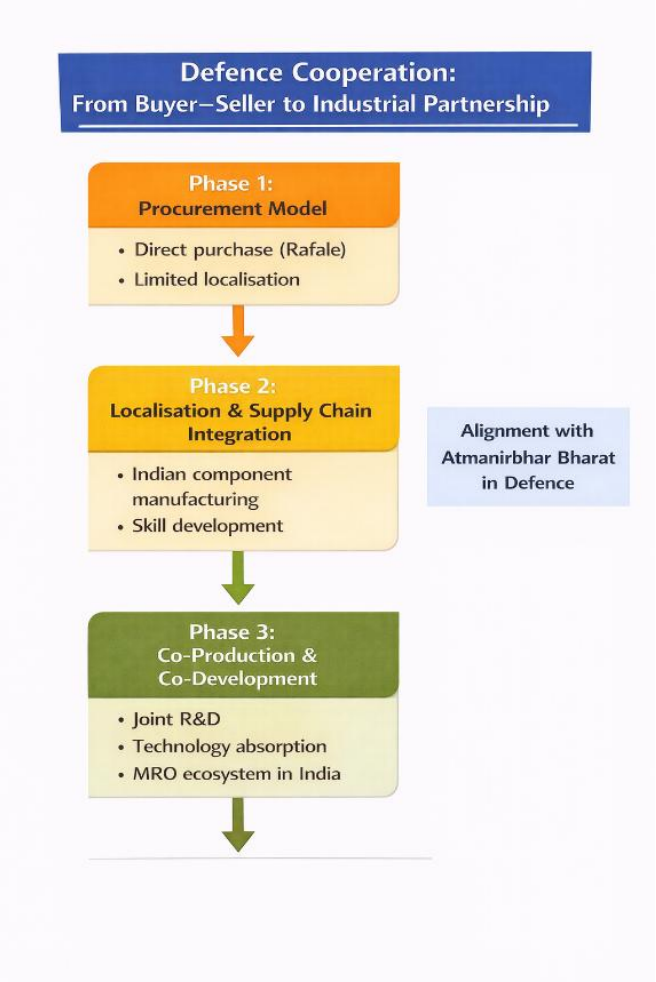
ii. Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) Facilities

Establishment of MRO facilities in India for French-origin systems has strategic importance:

- Reduces operational downtime
- Cuts long-term maintenance costs
- Enhances aerospace ecosystem
- Generates employment and technical capacity

This shift strengthens India's defence preparedness while deepening industrial cooperation.

However, the partnership is expanding well beyond defence.



e. Expanding Cooperation Beyond Defence

i. Critical Minerals

Critical minerals such as lithium and rare earth elements are essential for:

- Electric vehicle batteries

- Renewable energy systems
- Advanced defence electronics

India–France collaboration aims to diversify supply chains and reduce dependence on dominant suppliers.

ii. Technology and Innovation

Emerging areas of collaboration include:

- Artificial Intelligence
- Digital infrastructure
- Startup ecosystems
- Clean energy technologies

Joint research initiatives enhance competitiveness and promote shared technological standards.

iii. Indo-Pacific Strategy

France is a resident Indo-Pacific power due to its overseas territories in the region.

Areas of Convergence

- Maritime security
- Freedom of navigation
- Respect for international maritime law

Naval exercises and maritime domain awareness cooperation reflect shared commitment to a stable Indo-Pacific order.

This expansion reflects the broader geopolitical context in which both countries operate.

f. Geopolitical Context: Strategic Autonomy in a Multipolar Era

The strengthening of India–France ties must be viewed against:

- Ongoing global conflicts
- Intensifying major power rivalry
- Supply chain vulnerabilities

Both countries support a multipolar world order where nations retain autonomy in decision-making.

France has consistently respected India's independent foreign policy stance, while India values France's flexible approach within European and transatlantic structures.

This shared outlook enhances diplomatic trust.

g. Economic and Strategic Significance

i. For India

- Access to advanced defence and aerospace technology
- Diversification of defence suppliers
- Strengthening of domestic manufacturing
- Enhanced diplomatic leverage

ii. For France

- Access to a large and stable defence market
- Strong Indo-Pacific partner
- Gateway to broader Asian engagement

Thus, the partnership is mutually beneficial, combining commercial and strategic interests.

h. Challenges and Constraints

Despite strong alignment, some challenges persist.

i. Financial Constraints

Defence platforms require long-term financial commitments.

ii. Technology Transfer Complexities

Negotiations over intellectual property and local production can be time-consuming.

iii. Implementation Delays

Large projects, such as Jaitapur, have progressed slowly.

iv. Balancing Other Partnerships

India maintains ties with the US and Russia.
France coordinates within the EU and NATO frameworks.

Diplomatic balancing is necessary to maintain flexibility.

i. Way Forward

- **Deepening Technology Collaboration:** Focus on joint research in aerospace, AI and clean energy.
- **Institutionalising Critical Mineral Cooperation:** Long-term agreements for secure supply chains.
- **Strengthening Maritime Cooperation:** Regular naval exercises and information sharing.
- **Sustained Strategic Dialogue:** Structured high-level consultations to maintain continuity.

A forward-looking and institutionalised approach will ensure resilience.

Conclusion

The elevation of India–France ties to a Special Global Strategic Partnership represents a transition from transactional engagement to long-term strategic collaboration.

In a fragmented and uncertain world, partnerships between like-minded middle powers contribute to balance and stability. The relationship embodies trust, respect for sovereignty and commitment to strategic autonomy.

For India, it supports diversification and self-reliance. For France, it strengthens Indo-Pacific engagement and global relevance.

Ultimately, the India–France partnership illustrates how sustained diplomatic trust, technological collaboration and shared geopolitical vision can create resilient and future-oriented bilateral ties in a multipolar world.

GS Paper III: Science and Technology

2. IndiaAI Mission 2.0 and India's Expanding Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem

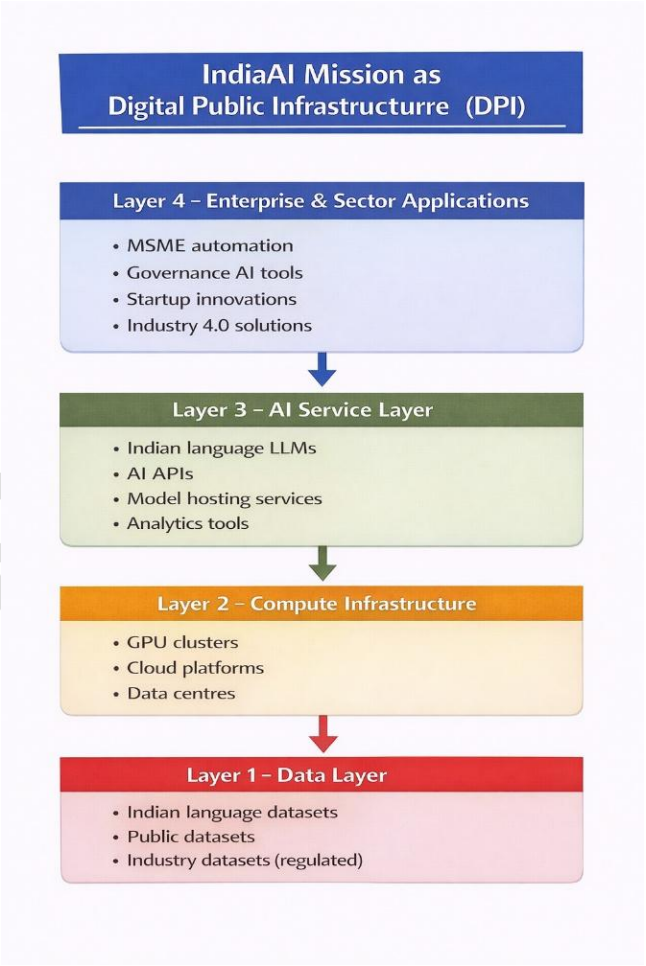
a. Artificial Intelligence as a Strategic Technology

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems that can learn from data, recognise patterns and make decisions with minimal human intervention. Today, AI is seen as a foundational technology, similar to electricity in the industrial age or the internet in the digital age. It influences economic productivity, governance efficiency, military capability and global competitiveness.

Recognising this transformation, India launched the IndiaAI Mission to build domestic capacity in artificial intelligence. The proposed expansion under IndiaAI Mission 2.0 marks a shift from limited capability-building to the creation of a comprehensive Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for AI, including a UPI-like shared platform for enterprises.

b. Background: Objectives of the IndiaAI Mission

The IndiaAI Mission was conceptualised to reduce dependence on foreign AI platforms and develop indigenous capabilities.



Core Objectives

i. Infrastructure Development

- Build large-scale computing facilities
- Ensure access to high-performance hardware

ii. Indigenous Model Development

- Support Indian AI startups
- Promote research collaboration between academia and industry

iii. Ecosystem Strengthening

- Encourage innovation
- Facilitate public–private partnerships

The mission aligns with broader programmes such as Digital India, Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India, reinforcing technological self-reliance.

A key pillar of this initiative is the expansion of compute capacity.

c. Expansion of Compute Capacity: Building the Foundations

i. What is Compute Capacity?

AI models require large computational power for training and deployment. This power is often measured in terms of Graphics Processing Units (GPUs).

A GPU is a specialised electronic circuit designed for parallel processing. It can handle multiple calculations simultaneously, making it ideal for training large AI models.

ii. India's Approach to Compute Expansion

India has deployed tens of thousands of GPUs and plans further expansion.

Key Features of India's Strategy

- Shared public infrastructure model
- Access for startups, researchers and MSMEs
- Reduced dependence on private global cloud providers

Unlike countries where computing power is concentrated in a few tech giants, India's model emphasises democratisation of access.

iii. Strategic Significance

- Strengthens digital sovereignty
- Reduces reliance on foreign cloud services
- Lowers entry barriers for domestic innovators
- Improves India's global AI competitiveness

Infrastructure expansion lays the foundation for indigenous model development.

d. Indigenous Models and Linguistic Strength

i. Importance of Indian Language Models

India is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world. Many global AI systems are primarily trained on English-language datasets.

Why Indigenous Models Matter

- Improve governance applications in regional languages
- Enhance digital inclusion
- Reflect cultural and contextual relevance

ii. Competitive Performance

Recent benchmarks suggest that Indian-developed AI models perform strongly in Indian language tasks.

This strengthens:

- Accessibility for non-English speakers
- Domestic innovation ecosystem
- Technological self-reliance

The next phase—IndiaAI Mission 2.0—aims to extend these capabilities to enterprises.

e. IndiaAI Mission 2.0: A UPI-like Platform for MSMEs

i. Concept of a Shared AI Platform

The vision is to create a common AI service platform analogous to the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

UPI succeeded because it provided interoperable infrastructure where multiple banks and fintech companies could innovate.

Similarly, an AI platform would:

- Provide standardised APIs (Application Programming Interfaces)
- Offer plug-and-play AI tools
- Enable interoperability across sectors

ii. Target Beneficiaries: MSMEs

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) form the backbone of India's economy but often lack resources for advanced technology adoption.

Potential Applications

- Predictive inventory management
- Automated accounting and compliance
- Customer analytics
- Language translation
- Workflow automation

By lowering technological barriers, the platform can improve productivity and competitiveness.

iii. Economic Significance

- Enhances efficiency and reduces operational costs
- Encourages innovation among small firms
- Supports inclusive economic growth

This move transforms AI from a high-end research tool into a widely accessible economic utility.

f. Artificial Intelligence and Copyright: Towards a Royalty Framework

i. The Copyright Challenge

AI systems are trained on vast datasets that may include copyrighted material such as articles, books and creative works.

Key Concerns

- Intellectual property infringement
- Fair compensation to content creators

ii. Proposed Licensing and Royalty Mechanism

The idea of a statutory licensing framework with royalty payments seeks to:

- Protect content creators
- Ensure fair compensation
- Maintain feasibility of AI model development

If implemented effectively, India could pioneer a balanced regulatory approach in AI governance.

g. Impact on India's IT Sector

i. Job Displacement Concerns

AI automation may reduce demand for repetitive coding and routine service tasks.

ii. Emerging Opportunities

However, AI also creates new roles in:

- Model development
- Data engineering
- Cybersecurity
- System integration

The long-term impact depends on reskilling and upskilling initiatives.

Thus, workforce transformation is as important as infrastructure expansion.

h. Broader Strategic Significance

- **Economic Dimension:** Improves productivity and enterprise competitiveness.
- **Technological Dimension:** Strengthens indigenous innovation and model development.
- **Geopolitical Dimension:** Enhances digital sovereignty and reduces strategic dependence.
- **Governance Dimension:** Enables data-driven public service delivery.
- **Social Dimension:** Promotes linguistic inclusion and accessibility.

AI thus becomes a strategic national capability rather than merely a commercial tool.

i. Implementation Challenges

Despite its promise, several structural challenges exist:

- **Hardware Dependency:** India remains dependent on imported semiconductors and GPUs.
- **Energy Consumption:** AI data centres require significant electricity, raising sustainability concerns.
- **Ethical Risks:** Algorithmic bias and misinformation require regulatory oversight.
- **Data Protection:** Strong privacy safeguards are necessary.
- **Talent Gap:** The demand for AI-skilled professionals may exceed supply.

Infrastructure expansion must therefore be accompanied by systemic reforms.

j. Way Forward

- **Semiconductor Ecosystem Development:** Strengthen domestic manufacturing under the India Semiconductor Mission.
- **Ethical and Regulatory Framework:** Establish responsible AI guidelines and oversight mechanisms.
- **Multilingual Dataset Expansion:** Ensure inclusiveness across Indian languages.
- **Public–Private Partnerships:** Share risks and accelerate innovation.
- **Human Capital Development:** Large-scale reskilling programmes in collaboration with industry and academia.

AI policy must align with broader development goals, including industry, innovation and infrastructure.

Conclusion

IndiaAI Mission 2.0 represents a strategic shift in India's technological trajectory. Instead of remaining primarily a global IT service provider, India seeks to become a creator of foundational AI infrastructure and indigenous models.

By expanding compute capacity, building shared platforms for enterprises, encouraging domestic innovation and exploring balanced copyright frameworks, India aims to combine technological advancement with inclusion and sovereignty.

The success of this mission will depend not only on hardware deployment but also on ethical governance, talent development and institutional capacity. In shaping its AI ecosystem, India is not merely adopting technology—it is defining its own developmental pathway in the digital age.

Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density.
To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

The complete Monthly Current Affairs Module will be released soon, optimized to a compact 100–150 pages — comprehensive yet concise, exam-ready, and revision-efficient.