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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 27.02.2026

## GS Paper II: Current Affairs

## 1. Rail Tech Policy And Railway Claims Tribunal Reforms

### a. Introduction: Modernising Infrastructure and Governance Together

The Ministry of Railways has introduced the Rail Tech Policy for Start-ups under the "52 Reforms in 52 Weeks" initiative. At the same time, it has digitised the Railway Claims Tribunal through a fully online e-RCT system.

Together, these reforms aim to achieve two parallel goals:

- Technological modernisation of railway infrastructure.
- Citizen-centric reform of compensation and dispute resolution.

Indian Railways is not just a transport service; it is a backbone of economic integration, freight logistics, employment, and regional connectivity. Therefore, governance and technology reforms in this sector have wide developmental implications.

### b. Background and Institutional Context

Indian Railways is one of the largest rail networks in the world. It carries millions of passengers daily and handles a significant share of bulk freight such as coal, cement, and food grains. Efficient railway functioning reduces logistics costs and strengthens supply chains.


**Alignment with National Initiatives**

- Digital India – promoting e-governance and digitisation.
- Startup India – encouraging innovation-driven entrepreneurship.
- National Logistics Policy – reducing logistics costs and improving efficiency.

### c. Rail Tech Policy for Start-ups

The Rail Tech Policy formally integrates start-ups into railway problem-solving.

**Rationale**

- Modern railway systems require advanced safety and monitoring technologies.
- Traditional procurement systems are often slow and rigid.

- Start-ups provide agile, technology-driven solutions.

By opening its ecosystem, Indian Railways aims to accelerate innovation.

**Financial and Institutional Support**

- Up to 50% financial assistance for selected innovations.
- Tripling of scale-up grants.
- Doubling of prototype development grants.

This reduces financial risk and encourages experimentation in real railway conditions.

## d. Key Technological Interventions

The policy emphasises artificial intelligence, drones, sensors, and renewable energy systems.

**Predictive Maintenance and Safety**

*Predictive maintenance* means using data and sensors to detect problems before failure occurs.

- Drone-based broken rail detection.
- Rail-stress monitoring systems.
- Sensor-based load calculation to prevent overloading.

This shifts management from reactive (repair after breakdown) to proactive (prevent breakdown).

**Artificial Intelligence in Safety**

*Artificial Intelligence (AI)* refers to computer systems that can analyse data and make decisions similar to human reasoning.

- Elephant Intrusion Detection Systems to reduce human-animal conflict.
- AI-based fire detection systems in coaches.
- Obstruction detection in foggy conditions.

This integrates safety with environmental conservation.

**Energy and Sustainability**

- Solar panels on railway coaches.
- Energy-efficient monitoring systems.

These align railway modernisation with climate and sustainability goals.

**Administrative Applications**

- AI-based cleanliness monitoring.
- Digital pension and dispute resolution systems.

Thus, technology is applied both in operations and governance.

## e. Significance of the Rail Tech Policy

**Infrastructure Modernisation**

- Improves reliability of railway operations.
- Reduces long-term maintenance costs.
- Enhances passenger safety.

**Logistics Efficiency**

- Faster fault detection reduces downtime.

- Improves freight movement speed.
- Supports export competitiveness by lowering logistics costs.

**Boost to Innovation Ecosystem**

- Provides a real-world testing platform for start-ups.
- Encourages public-private collaboration.
- Promotes frugal innovation suitable for large-scale deployment.

**Environmental and Wildlife Protection**

- Reduces wildlife fatalities.
- Balances infrastructure growth with conservation goals.

While infrastructure is being modernised, governance reform has also taken place through tribunal digitisation.

## f. Railway Claims Tribunal Reform: The e-RCT System

**Background**

The Railway Claims Tribunal handles compensation for:

- Railway accidents.
- Loss or damage of goods.
- Related claims and disputes.

Earlier, procedures involved physical filing and frequent in-person visits, causing delays.

**Features of the e-RCT System**

- Fully online case filing.
- Electronic documentation and communication.
- Faster disposal of claims.
- Reduced need for physical presence.

This represents a shift toward paperless, accessible justice.

## g. Governance Significance of e-RCT

**Access to Justice**

Article 39A emphasises equal access to justice. Digitisation reduces procedural barriers and travel costs.

**Transparency and Accountability**

- Online case tracking improves visibility.
- Reduces discretion-based delays.

**Citizen-Centric Administration**

- Faster compensation reflects empathy.
- Strengthens public trust in institutions.

However, reforms must also address practical challenges.

## h. Challenges and Concerns

**Digital Divide**

- Rural claimants may lack digital literacy.
- Internet access may be limited.

Assisted access mechanisms are essential.

**Cybersecurity Risks**

- Increased digitalisation increases vulnerability.
- Strong data protection frameworks are required.

**Implementation Capacity**

- Scaling pilot technologies nationwide is complex.
- Requires trained manpower and financial resources.

**Integration with Legacy Systems**

- Older infrastructure may not easily integrate with digital tools.
- Interoperability challenges may arise.

Learning from global experiences can help address these concerns.

### i. Comparative Perspective

Countries such as Japan and China use advanced predictive maintenance systems.

For example:

- Japan's Shinkansen system uses continuous monitoring for near-zero accident rates.

India's model differs because it relies heavily on start-up-driven innovation supported by public funding. This reflects a uniquely Indian blend of large public infrastructure and entrepreneurial agility.

### j. Way Forward

**Institutionalise Innovation Cells**

- Establish dedicated innovation units in railway zones.
- Facilitate smoother collaboration with start-ups.

**Strengthen Data Protection and Cybersecurity**

- Align with Digital Personal Data Protection Act.
- Regular cybersecurity audits.

**Capacity Building**

- Train personnel in AI and data analytics.
- Develop digital management skills.

**Ensure Inclusive Access**

- Use Common Service Centres for assisted filing.
- Provide digital help desks at railway stations.

**Integrate Sustainability Goals**

- Expand solarisation.
- Promote green rail initiatives.

### Conclusion

The Rail Tech Policy and the e-RCT reform together represent a dual transformation: technological modernisation of infrastructure and humanisation of governance processes.

Artificial intelligence-driven safety systems improve efficiency and reliability, while digitised compensation mechanisms strengthen accountability and compassion.

If implemented inclusively and securely, these reforms can enhance infrastructure resilience, reduce logistics costs, and build public trust in one of India's most vital public institutions.

## GS Paper II: International Relations

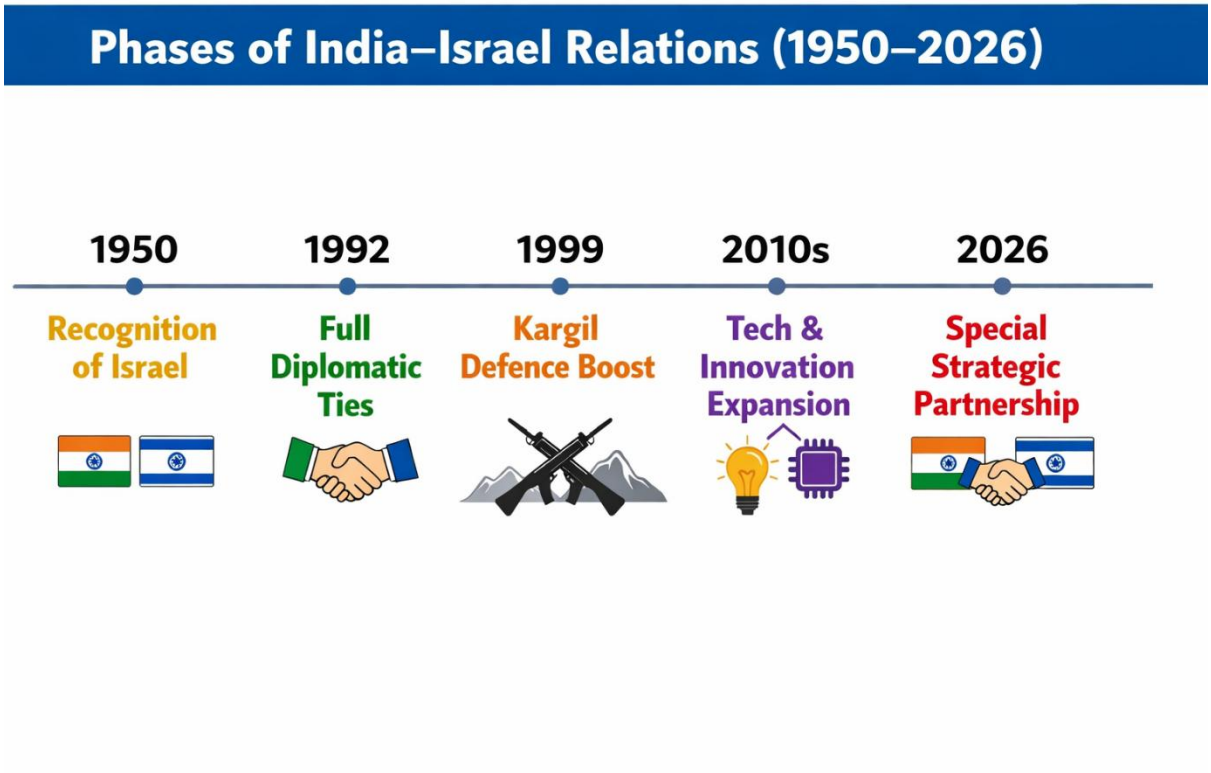
## 2. India–Isreal Special Strategic Partnership (2026)

### a. Introduction: A New Phase in India–Israel Relations

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2026 visit to Israel marked a decisive turning point in bilateral ties. The two countries elevated their relationship to a Special Strategic Partnership for Peace, Innovation and Prosperity, signalling deeper institutional trust and long-term collaboration.

Seventeen agreements were signed, covering artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, critical minerals, defence systems, and innovation ecosystems.

This development reflects a broader transformation in India's foreign policy: strategic partnerships today are defined not only by military cooperation but also by collaboration in frontier technologies and supply chain security.




### b. Historical Evolution of India–Israel Relations

India recognised Israel in 1950, but full diplomatic relations were established only in 1992. For decades, engagement remained cautious due to India's strong support for the Palestinian cause and sensitivities in West Asia.

**Phase of Limited Engagement (1950–1992)**

- India balanced recognition of Israel with political solidarity for Palestine.
- Cooperation remained minimal and largely informal.

**Defence-Centric Expansion (1992–2010s)**

- After the Kargil conflict (1999), Israel supplied critical defence equipment.
- Defence became the core pillar of the relationship.
- Cooperation expanded to surveillance systems, missiles, and radar technologies.

**Diversification into Technology and Innovation (2010s–2026)**

- Expansion into agriculture and water management.
- Growing collaboration in cybersecurity and innovation.
- Institutionalised partnerships in science and technology.

The 2026 elevation to a Special Strategic Partnership represents the consolidation of this gradual deepening.

## c. Key Features of the 2026 Partnership

The new framework rests on three interconnected pillars: security, technology, and innovation.

**i. Elevation to Special Strategic Partnership**

- Indicates higher political trust and structured dialogue mechanisms.
- Implies long-term cooperation beyond sector-specific agreements.
- Signals convergence on regional and global strategic issues.

**ii. Seventeen Bilateral Agreements**

The agreements cover:

- Artificial intelligence (AI).
- Quantum computing and communication.
- Critical minerals cooperation.
- Advanced defence systems.
- Startup and innovation ecosystems.

This marks a shift from a defence-dominated relationship to a multi-sectoral strategic partnership.

**iii. Critical and Emerging Technologies Focus**

- AI applications in civilian and defence sectors.
- Quantum technologies for secure communication.
- Securing supply chains of lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements.
- Joint research platforms linking startups and universities.

Technological capability is now central to national power, and this partnership reflects that reality.

## d. Strategic Significance for India

**i. Technological Sovereignty**

*Technological sovereignty* means the ability of a country to independently develop and control critical technologies.

- Enhances India's AI and cybersecurity capacity.
- Supports Atmanirbhar Bharat — self-reliance initiative.
- Combines Israel's innovation strength with India's digital public infrastructure — Aadhaar, UPI.

**ii. Critical Minerals Security**

*Critical minerals* are essential for EVs, semiconductors, renewable energy, and electronics.

- Reduces dependence on concentrated global suppliers.
- Strengthens energy transition goals.
- Enhances long-term economic resilience.

**iii. Defence and Internal Security**

- Cooperation in drones and unmanned systems.
- Missile defence and radar systems.
- Surveillance technologies for border management.

These are crucial for counter-terrorism and maritime security.

**iv. West Asia Strategic Balancing**

*Multi-alignment* refers to maintaining relations with competing powers simultaneously.

- Strong ties with Israel.
- Deep engagement with UAE and Saudi Arabia.
- Continued relations with Iran.

India seeks stability, energy security, and strategic autonomy in West Asia.

India's partnership with Israel must therefore be seen within its larger regional interests.

## e. India's Broader Security Interests in West Asia

**i. Energy Security**

- Around 60% of India's crude oil imports come from West Asia.
- Regional instability directly impacts economic stability.

**ii. Diaspora and Remittances**

- 8–9 million Indians reside in Gulf countries.
- Remittances significantly support foreign exchange reserves.

**iii. Maritime Trade Routes**

- Red Sea and Suez Canal routes are vital for trade.
- Maritime domain awareness strengthens economic security.

**iv. Counter-Terror Cooperation**

- Intelligence sharing.
- Advanced digital surveillance cooperation.

The partnership also complements broader groupings like the India–Israel–UAE–USA framework.

## f. Concerns and Challenges

**i. Regional Instability**

- Ongoing conflicts in West Asia.
- Risk to trade routes and energy supplies.

**ii. Israel–Palestine Sensitivities**

- India supports a two-state solution.

- Requires diplomatic balancing.

**iii. Technology Governance and Ethics**

- AI raises privacy and surveillance concerns.
- Need for regulatory safeguards.

**iv. Risk of Technological Dependence**

- Excessive imports may hinder indigenous R&D.
- Technology transfer and co-production are essential.

### g. Way Forward

**i. Deepen Joint Research and Development**

- Expand co-creation funds.
- Encourage joint patents and manufacturing.

**ii. Integrate Critical Minerals Strategy Globally**

- Link cooperation to global supply chain frameworks.
- Promote transparency and resilience.

**iii. Maintain Strategic Autonomy**

- Balanced relations with all West Asian actors.
- Continued support for peaceful conflict resolution.

**iv. Develop Ethical AI Frameworks**

- Democratic accountability in surveillance use.
- Strong data protection norms.

**v. Strengthen Maritime and Energy Security Cooperation**

- Protect sea lanes of communication.
- Enhance regional stability mechanisms.

These steps can transform the partnership into a long-term strategic asset.

### Conclusion

The India–Israel Special Strategic Partnership reflects the changing character of global diplomacy, where innovation, emerging technologies, and supply chain resilience are as important as military alliances.

For India, the partnership enhances technological capacity, strengthens defence preparedness, and consolidates its presence in West Asia.

Yet, its success will depend on diplomatic balance, ethical governance of emerging technologies, and sustained investment in indigenous capability. If managed carefully, this partnership can become a cornerstone of India's twenty-first century strategic architecture.

## 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.