



## **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 20-02-2026**

### **Mapping Perspective**

1. Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve

### **Prelims Perspective**

2. Indian Inscriptions in Egypt
3. VoicERA

### **Mains Perspective**

4. Constitutional Debate on Judicial Appointments
5. States' Capex Holds Key To Growth Momentum

## **Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve**

**Syllabus: GS-3: Protected Areas – Tiger Reserves.**

### **Context:**

- The **Madhya Pradesh High Court** has directed the Field Director of **Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve** to submit a **detailed report on recent tiger deaths** within the reserve and adjoining landscapes.
- The directive highlights concerns regarding **tiger mortality, habitat safety, and protection measures** in one of India's highest tiger-density reserves.

### **About Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve**

#### **Location & Physiography**

- Located in **Umariya district, Madhya Pradesh**.
- Lies across the **Vindhyan hill ranges** with rugged terrain.
- **Name origin:** Derived from Bandhavgarh Fort, believed in mythology to have been gifted by **Lord Rama to Lakshmana** ("Brother's Fort").

#### **Topography & Cultural Features**

- Landscape includes **steep ridges, dense forests, grassland meadows, and valleys**.
- Around **39 caves** containing **Pali inscriptions and animal carvings**.
- Presence of **ancient stupas, sculptures, and archaeological remains (1st century BCE)** indicating historical habitation.

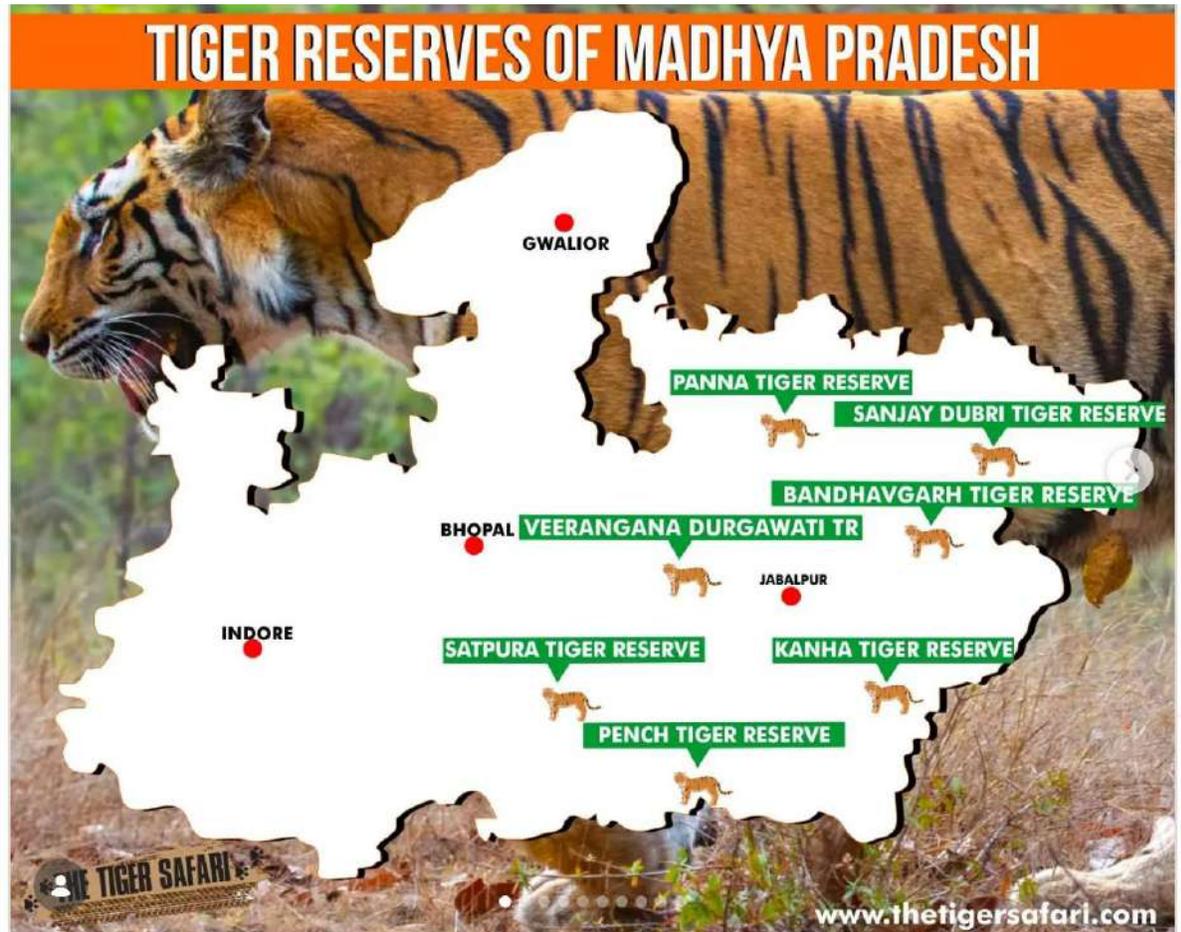
#### **Flora**

- Dominated by **moist deciduous Sal forests in valleys** and **bamboo vegetation on slopes**.
- Important species: **Saj, Dhaora, Tendu, Arjun, Amla, Palas, etc.**

#### **Fauna**

- Known for **one of the highest tiger densities globally**.
- Key mammals: **Leopard, Gaur, Sambar, Chital, Nilgai, Wild boar, Sloth bear, Indian wolf, Jackal**.
- Primates: **Langur and Rhesus macaque**.

- Avifauna: 250+ bird species including Crested serpent eagle, Malabar pied hornbill, White-rumped vulture, Indian roller.



## Indian Inscriptions in Egypt

Syllabus: GS-1: Indian Culture – Language and Script.

Context:

- **Tamil Brahmi inscriptions** discovered inside **Egyptian tombs** indicate the presence of Indian visitors/traders in **Roman-era Egypt (1st–3rd century CE)**.
- Found in **six tombs of the** Valley of the Kings within the **Theban Necropolis** along the Nile.
- Inscriptions were written in **Tamil Brahmi, Prakrit and Sanskrit**, reflecting diverse Indian origins.



### Key Findings

- ~30 inscriptions identified dating between 1st–3rd century CE.
- Repeated Tamil name “CikaiKorran” engraved **eight times across five tombs**, suggesting a recurring visitor/trader.
- Other Tamil names: **Kopan, Cātan, Kiran** — associated with **Sangam-age Tamil society**.
- Evidence parallels earlier discoveries at the Red Sea port of Berenike, strengthening Indo-Mediterranean trade links.
- Indian visitors followed the **Mediterranean graffiti tradition**, carving names alongside **Greek inscriptions**.

### Historical Significance

- **Strong evidence of Indo-Roman trade** between **Tamilagam and Roman Egypt**.
- Suggests **Indian merchants travelled beyond ports** into the Nile valley and elite cultural spaces.
- Supports literary references in **Sangam texts** and Greco-Roman works (e.g., Periplus of the Erythraean Sea).
- Demonstrates **early cultural mobility and diasporic merchant communities**.

### Valley of the Kings — Key Facts



### Location & Recognition

- Situated on the **west bank of the Nile near Luxor (ancient Thebes), Egypt.**
- Part of the **Ancient Thebes UNESCO World Heritage Site (1979).**

### Historical Use

- Used during **18th–20th Dynasties (c. 1539–1075 BCE)** of the **New Kingdom.**
- Burial ground of pharaohs from **Thutmose I to Ramses X**, plus queens and nobles.

### Why the Shift from Pyramids?

- Hidden desert valley chosen to **reduce tomb robbery** and improve security.

### Architectural & Religious Features

- Rock-cut tombs with **descending corridors, pillared halls, burial chambers and shafts.**
- Decorated with funerary texts such as:
  - Book of the Dead
  - Book of Gates
  - Amduat (Book of the Underworld)
- Over **60 tombs discovered**, including **Tutankhamun's tomb (KV62).**

## **VoicERA**

**Syllabus: GS-3: Science and Technology –Artificial Intelligence.**

### **Context:**

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) unveiled **VoicERA** at the **India AI Impact Summit 2026**.



### **About VoicERA**

- **Open-source, end-to-end Voice AI stack** designed for multilingual speech technologies.
- Deployed on the **BHASHINI National Language Infrastructure**.
- Functions as a **national execution layer** for Voice and Language AI.
- Key design features:
  - Open, modular and pluggable architecture
  - Interoperable ecosystem
  - Cloud deployable and on-premise ready
- Enables **secure and scalable deployment** of voice systems across:
  - Government services
  - Research institutions
  - Innovation and startup ecosystems

### **Significance**

- **Reduces duplication of effort** by modularising the voice AI stack.
- **Prevents vendor lock-in**, promoting open innovation.

- Strengthens BHASHINI's role beyond translation to include:
  - Real-time speech processing
  - Conversational AI
  - Multilingual telephony at population scale
- Facilitates **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for Voice AI**.

### **BHASHINI (BHASHa Interface for India)**

- AI-powered **language translation and speech technology platform**.
- Developed by **MeitY** under the **National Language Translation Mission**.
- Objective: Build a **National Public Digital Platform for languages** enabling citizen services in local languages.
- Uses **AI and Natural Language Processing (NLP)** to bridge the language divide.
- Implemented by **Digital India BHASHINI Division** under **Digital India Corporation (Section 8 company of MeitY)**.
- Currently supports **22+ Indian languages**, promoting linguistic inclusivity.

## **Constitutional Debate on Judicial Appointments**

**Syllabus: GS-2: Indian Polity – Judiciary.**

**Context:**

- A **Private Member's Bill** has been introduced seeking:
  - **Greater diversity** in appointments to the higher judiciary
- The issue revives debates on **judicial independence, transparency, social representation, and access to justice**.

### **Constitutional Framework for Judicial Appointments**

The Constitution provides only a **broad consultative framework**, leaving scope for judicial interpretation.

#### **Supreme Court Judges — Article 124**

- Judges are appointed by the **President of India**.

- Appointment is made after **consultation with the Chief Justice of India (CJI)** and other judges as deemed necessary.
- The Constitution did not clearly specify **who would have primacy**, leading to later judicial disputes.

### High Court Judges — Article 217

- Appointed by the President after consultation with:
  - Chief Justice of India
  - Governor of the State
  - Chief Justice of the concerned High Court
- The provision aims to ensure **federal balance and judicial input**.

### Seat of the Supreme Court — Article 130

- Supreme Court's seat is **Delhi**.
- However, the CJI may, with the **President's approval**, designate any other place as the Court's sitting venue.

### Early Practice

- Initially, the **executive exercised primacy** in appointments.
- Concerns arose that executive dominance could threaten **judicial independence**, especially during politically sensitive periods.

### Evolution of the Collegium System

The collegium system is a **product of judicial interpretation** and represents a shift toward **judicial primacy**.

### First Judges Case (1981)

- Supreme Court held that **consultation does not mean concurrence**.
- Executive retained **dominant role** in appointments.

### Second Judges Case (1993)

- Landmark reversal.
- Court introduced the **collegium system**, giving **primacy to judiciary** to safeguard independence.

### Third Judges Case (1998 — Presidential Reference)

- Clarified composition and decision-making.
- Collegium must act collectively to prevent arbitrariness.

### Composition

- **Supreme Court** → CJI + 4 senior-most judges
- **High Court appointments** → CJI + 2 senior-most judges

### Procedure

- Collegium recommends names to the Central government.
- Government may **seek reconsideration once**.
- If collegium reiterates → **appointment becomes binding**.

### Advantages

- Protects **judicial independence**
- Reduces risk of **political interference**

### Criticism

- Lack of **transparency and formal criteria**
- Perceived **opacity in decision-making**
- Concerns about **nepotism and favouritism**
- Absence of institutional accountability mechanisms

### NJAC and the Basic Structure Doctrine

#### NJAC (2014)

- Introduced through **99th Constitutional Amendment**.
- Intended to create a **broad-based appointments body**.

#### Composition

- Chief Justice of India
- Two senior Supreme Court judges
- Union Law Minister
- Two eminent persons

#### Objectives

- Increase **transparency and accountability**
- Reduce exclusivity of the collegium

### Supreme Court Judgment (2015)

- NJAC declared **unconstitutional**.
- Court held judicial independence is part of the **Basic Structure**.
- Presence of executive and eminent persons created risk of **external influence**.

### Outcome

- Collegium system revived
- Court acknowledged need for **procedural reforms within collegium**

### Diversity in the Higher Judiciary

#### Present Representation Concerns

- SC/ST/OBC representation (2018–2024) → roughly **20%**
- Women → **below 15%**
- Religious minorities → **below 5%**
- Indicates limited reflection of India's **social diversity**

#### Arguments for Diversity

- Improves **legitimacy of judiciary**
- Brings **multiple social perspectives** into adjudication
- Enhances **sensitivity in cases involving discrimination, gender justice, and minority rights**
- Strengthens **constitutional morality and social justice**

#### Proposal in the Bill

- Mandated representation for SCs, STs, OBCs, women, and minorities
- Representation proportional to population
- Marks a shift from **pure merit narrative** toward **inclusive merit**

#### Constitutional Tension

- Balancing:

- Judicial independence
- Substantive equality and representation

## **States' Capex Holds Key To Growth Momentum**

**Syllabus: GS-2: Fiscal Federalism & GS-3: Capital Expenditure.**

### **Context:**

While the Union Budget sets the national fiscal tone, the fiscal health and spending priorities of the states (which contribute significantly to India's GDP) are crucial for sustaining the 7%+ growth trajectory. A recent analysis of 18 major states (comprising ~89% of India's GDP) for the first nine months (April–Dec) of FY26 reveals a shift in fiscal behavior.

### **Key Statistical Trends (FY 2025-26)**

- **Revenue Growth Shortfall:** Combined revenues of 18 states grew by only **7.7%**, significantly trailing the **22%** growth projected in their budgets.
- **GST Mismatch:** State GST (SGST) collections grew by a mere **3.3%**.
  - *Reason:* Despite high consumption, the growth was offset by the recovery of excess Integrated GST (IGST) previously apportioned to states.
- **Revenue Expenditure Control:** To manage the revenue shortfall, states have slowed down revenue expenditure (salaries, subsidies, etc.) to **7%** growth (vs. the 19% budgeted).
- **Capex Resurgence:** After a slow start in H1, capital spending expanded by **25.7% in Q3**. Overall nine-month growth stands at **12.4%**.

### **The "Dual Engine" of Capex: Centre vs. States**

Capital expenditure (Capex) has a high **multiplier effect** on the economy.

- **Central Government Role:** The Union Budget 2026-27 allocated **₹12.22 lakh crore** for capex (3.1% of GDP). However, the Centre's own capex might see a slight contraction in the final quarter of the current fiscal to meet deficit targets.
- **State Government Role:** States are now expected to do the "heavy lifting." If the Q3 momentum continues, state capex is projected to grow by **16-18%** for the full year.

- **Central Support:** The **50-year interest-free capex loan** (Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment) remains a vital catalyst. Out of ₹1.5 trillion allocated for this year, ₹1.0 trillion was disbursed by Jan 2025.

### Challenges to State Capex

- **Execution Capacity:** States often have a "back-ended" spending pattern, leading to a rush in March which may compromise the quality of assets created.
- **Revenue Constraints:** Sluggish SGST and a decline in Central grants (down 18% in the first nine months) limit the fiscal space for states to spend without increasing borrowings.
- **Crowding-in Issues:** While public capex (Centre + States) has risen to over 25% of Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF), **private investment** remains "cautious" or "fragmented," particularly among unlisted companies.

### Significance

- **Fiscal Federalism:** The reliance on states to drive growth highlights the interdependence of Union and State finances. The role of the **Finance Commission** (16th FC) becomes critical in determining the "divisible pool" and grants.
- **Quality of Expenditure:** Shifting from revenue expenditure (populism/consumption) to capital expenditure (asset creation/infrastructure) is essential for long-term productivity and reaching the "Viksit Bharat" goal by 2047.
- **Economic Resilience:** As global headwinds (interest rates, trade uncertainties) persist, domestic infrastructure spending by states acts as a shock absorber.

### Way Forward

- **Mainstreaming Capex Planning:** States should treat capex as a priority rather than a "residual" item to be cut when revenues fall short.
- **Improving Ease of Doing Business:** To "crowd in" private investment, states must focus on land reforms, efficient logistics, and predictable regulations.
- **Timely Fund Utilization:** Ensuring uniform spending throughout the year rather than a Q4 surge to ensure better project outcomes.