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LAW MINISTRY REPORT HIGHLIGHTS POOR INFRASTRUCTURE

Context

- A recent report published by the Ministry of Law and Justice on the **state of infrastructure in district courts** across the country has revealed significant deficiencies that are hindering the efficient delivery of justice.

About

- The study, conducted across **20 district courts from 10 States** — covering two districts each from the North, South, West, Central, and East regions, including the northeastern zones of India — focused on the **infrastructure issues faced by district judges, advocates, and supporting administrative staff**.
- The report is part of the scheme for **Action Research and Studies on Judicial Reforms** under the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice.

Major Findings

- **Overcrowding in Courtrooms:** There is severe overcrowding in courtrooms, which are heavily burdened with case files and archived documents, leading to a lack of space for people inside.
 - ♦ As a result, advocates, litigators, and parties have to stand in the courtroom due to limited space inside.
- **IT infra shortfalls:** Only 45% of judicial officers surveyed reported having electronic display facilities, while 20% indicated that installations are still in progress.
 - ♦ **Availability of video conferencing facilities in jail:** Around 32.7% of judicial officers responded that they do not have any such facility available in their district court complex.
 - ♦ 41% of support staff reported the absence of computer units with multifunctional printers.
- **Lack of Fire Safety: Around 39%** of judicial officers reported the absence of fire safety equipment within their courtroom premises which indicates a potential safety hazard.
- **Comfort and functionality** are further compromised by insufficient furniture, with 36.3% of judicial officers agreeing that their courtrooms lack adequate seating and essential furnishings.

- **Lack of Basic Amenities:** A large portion of the staff lacks access to basic amenities such as common rooms and attached toilets.
 - ♦ Only 14.6% of male support staff and 10.7% of female support staff have common rooms, while 73.7% of all support staff do not have attached toilets.

Way Ahead

- The entire lower judicial system **needs restructuring**.
- The issue of lack of infrastructure and human resources in terms of the space of courtrooms, availability of basic furniture, digital infrastructure, and skilled manpower needs to be **monitored at the lower judiciary level**.
- The keystone of a **strong and stable judicial system is sound infrastructure**, which simultaneously plays a pivotal role in the justice dispensation process.

Source: TH

FIVE YEARS OF ABROGATION OF ARTICLES 370 AND 35(A)

In Context

- The Prime Minister commemorated the fifth anniversary of the Parliament's decision to abrogate Articles 370 and 35-A through the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.

About

- The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 Act revoked the **special status of Jammu and Kashmir** and reorganised the erstwhile state into two union territories, namely Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.
- The Article 370 was incorporated into the Indian Constitution in 1949 to grant special autonomous status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir.
 - ♦ Under this, Jammu and Kashmir had its own Constitution and autonomy over internal matters except defense, foreign affairs, finance, and communications.
- And, Article 35A stemmed from Article 370 which granted the Jammu and Kashmir Legislature the authority to define "permanent residents" of the state.

- In 2023, the Supreme Court in a 5-0 unanimous ruling upheld the Centre's abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution.

Impacts Post Abrogation of Article 370

- The end of Article 370 marked the **end of separatism and terrorism** in the region. However, there is a recent increase in militancy incidents in Jammu due to diversion of force to India-China border post Galwan incident, Jammu's challenging terrain and forest cover and local support.
 - ♦ 70% decline in Total Terrorism Related Cases
 - ♦ 81% reduction in Civilian Deaths and 48% decrease in Casualties of Security Forces
- Integration of J&K with Indian mainstream. J&K no longer has its own flag, constitution, or penal code (Ranbir Penal Code).
- Tourism and trade have increased significantly, ease of doing business has improved with reduced unrest.
- Reduction in stone pelting, curfews, and increase in tourist visits has improved the local economy.

Source: PIB

LOK SABHA PASSES APPROPRIATION BILL FOR 2024-25 BUDGET

In News

- The Lok Sabha passed the Appropriation (No. 2) Bill, 2024 .

About Appropriation (No. 2) Bill, 2024

- It is a crucial legislative measure that authorises the Central Government of India to draw funds from the Consolidated Fund of India to meet its expenditure for the financial year 2024-25.
- This bill is a significant step in ensuring the smooth functioning of various government departments and the implementation of numerous public welfare schemes.

Key Highlights

- **Introduction of bill:** It was introduced by the Finance Minister and passed by a voice vote in the Lok Sabha.
 - ♦ The Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Om Birla, guillotined discussions on budgets for several ministries before taking up the Appropriation Bill for consideration and passage.

- **Financial Provisions:** The bill outlines the specific amounts to be allocated to different ministries and departments.
 - ♦ For instance, significant allocations have been made for the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, among others. These allocations are crucial for the continued operation and development of these sectors
- **Impact on Public Welfare:** The funds appropriated through this bill will support numerous public welfare schemes and projects.
 - ♦ For example, the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, aimed at boosting the fisheries sector, and various health and education initiatives will benefit from these allocations.

Importance

- The Bill underscores the government's commitment to ensuring that funds are available for essential services and development projects.
- It reflects the government's focus on equitable distribution of resources across states, as highlighted by the allocations made to states like West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra
- It is a vital legislative measure that ensures the availability of funds for the government's planned expenditure for the financial year 2024-25.

Consolidated Fund of India

- All revenues received by the government, loans raised by it, and also its receipts from recoveries of loans granted by it form the Consolidated Fund.
- All expenditure of the government is incurred from the Consolidated Fund and no amount can be withdrawn from the fund without authorisation from the Parliament.

Guillotine

- In legislative terms, a guillotine means to expedite the passage of financial business by grouping it together, a common practice in the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session.

Source:TH

SHEIKH HASINA'S EXIT AND INDIA-BANGLADESH TIES

Context

- Recent exit of Bangladesh's Prime Minister from power could jeopardise India-Bangladesh relationships and affect growing trade ties,

restricting the movement of people and goods, and stalling a potential free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries.

Background

- Sheikh Hasina, who has been a key ally to India since coming to power in 2009, has played a crucial role in fostering a healthy relationship between New Delhi and Dhaka.
- During her tenure, efforts were made to eradicate anti-India terrorist groups that operated from safe havens in Bangladesh.
- Additionally, economic, social, and cultural ties between the two countries flourished.
- However, her recent resignation as Bangladesh's Prime Minister introduces uncertainties that could affect bilateral relations in several ways.

India-Bangladesh Ties

- **Beginning:** India's relationship with Bangladesh is anchored in common history, heritage, culture and geographical proximity, the foundation of which was laid in the **1971 Bangladesh Liberation War**.
- India provided critical military and material support to assist Bangladesh in its fight for independence from Pakistan.
 - ♦ It became a primary factor in shaping the newly independent nation's policy, as acknowledged by 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: '**Friendship with India is a cornerstone of the foreign policy of Bangladesh**'.
- But There was a rise in anti-India sentiment in the mid-1970s over issues ranging from boundary disputes and insurgency to the sharing of water.

Bilateral Trade

- **Significance:** Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in the subcontinent, while India ranks as Bangladesh's second-largest partner in Asia after China.
- **Trade Volume:** In the financial year 2023-24, their total bilateral trade amounted to \$13 billion.

Exports and Imports:

- Bangladesh is the biggest export destination for India's cotton, accounting for 34.9% of India's total cotton exports (some \$2.4 billion in FY24). Other major Indian exports to Bangladesh are petroleum products and cereals.

- India's top import from Bangladesh are readymade garments, amounting to \$391 million in FY24.

Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Discussions

- In October 2023, India and Bangladesh initiated discussions on a FTA during a meeting of the Joint Working Group on Trade in Dhaka. An FTA would reduce or eliminate customs duties, promote further trade, and facilitate investments.
 - ♦ **A 2012 working paper published by the World Bank** estimated that a full FTA for goods would increase Bangladesh's exports to India by 182%, whereas a partial FTA could lead to a 134% increase.
 - ♦ However, an FTA accompanied with improved transport infrastructure and better connectivity could see Bangladesh's exports rise to 297%.
 - ♦ India, too, would see an increase to its exports by as much as 172% in this scenario.
- **Potential Impact:** Sheikh Hasina's departure could stall progress on the FTA, affecting market access and economic ties between the two nations.

Infrastructure and Connectivity

- **Growing Ties:** Infrastructure development and connectivity have been crucial aspects of India-Bangladesh relations.
- **Lines of Credit:** India extended three lines of credit to Bangladesh since 2016, totaling \$8 billion. These funds were earmarked for **road, rail, shipping, and port infrastructure development**.
 - ♦ The **Akhaura-Agartala rail link** was inaugurated that connects Bangladesh and the northeast through Tripura.
 - ♦ It is likely to boost **small-scale industries and develop Assam and Tripura**.
 - ♦ The **Maitree Express** connecting Kolkata with Dhaka was started in 2008 after a hiatus of over 40 years.
 - ♦ Bangladesh is also part of the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** which has its headquarters in Dhaka.
- **Uncertainty:** With an interim Bangladeshi government in place, the continuity of these infrastructure projects remains uncertain.
- **Regional Stability:** Stable infrastructure and connectivity contribute to regional stability and economic growth.
 - ♦ A disruption in Indo-Bangladesh ties could thus restrict India's access to the Northeast, which will be connected to mainland India

only through the narrow 'Chicken's Neck' — only 22 km at its narrowest — between **West Bengal and Assam**.

Regional Geopolitics

- **Influence from Jamaat-e-Islami and Pakistan:** Sheikh Hasina's departure may lead to increased influence from groups like Jamaat-e-Islami, which historically had ties with Pakistan. This could impact **regional dynamics and stability**.

Other Ongoing Issues and Concerns

- **Teesta dispute:** The issue revolves around the sharing of Teesta's waters, with Bangladesh seeking an equitable distribution.
- **Rohingya issue:** The Bangladesh government aims for the peaceful repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar, but its talks with the military junta have been unsuccessful so far.
- **Cross-border terrorism and infiltration** are additional threats to internal security. The rise of majoritarian forces adds another layer to the complex landscape.
- **China Factor:** India's concern is the deepening relationship between Bangladesh and China, marked by the substantial Chinese investments in infrastructure in recent years.

Conclusion

- Bangladesh's Prime Minister resignation introduces complexities and challenges for India-Bangladesh relations. The movement of people, goods, and the progress of critical agreements like the FTA hang in the balance.
- As the situation unfolds, both countries will need to navigate this transition carefully to maintain their positive trajectory of cooperation and friendship.

Source: IE

SC UPHOLDS L-G'S POWER TO NOMINATE ALDERMEN

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court of India upheld the Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G)'s power to nominate aldermen.

Background

- In January 2024, the Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G) nominated ten aldermen, a move that significantly impacted the functioning of the MCD.
- However, the legality of this nomination was challenged, leading to a prolonged impasse.

SC Verdict

- After fifteen months of deliberation, the Supreme Court finally clarified the L-G's authority, and ruled that the Centre-appointed **Delhi L-G has the explicit power** to nominate aldermen **without requiring the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers** from the Delhi Government.
- It comes as a major development in the ongoing tussle between the L-G and the state government.
- Verdict clarifies the L-G's authority and ensures that the nomination process for aldermen remains legally valid, and resolves the impasse that had disrupted key functions of the MCD.

Aldermen

- They are individuals nominated by the L-G under **Section 3 of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957 (DMC Act)**.
- They must be above 25 years of age and possess special knowledge or experience in municipal administration.
- Although aldermen do not have voting rights in Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) meetings, they serve on the Wards Committee within their respective zones, and play a crucial role in the MCD's functioning.

Wards Committees and MCD Standing Committee

- Delhi is divided into 12 zones, each with its Wards Committee. The aldermen are part of these committees, alongside elected representatives.
- The Wards Committees play a critical role in MCD governance.
- Each Wards Committee elects a member to join the MCD Standing Committee during its first meeting.
- Aldermen participate in these elections and can stand as candidates for membership in the Standing Committee.

Importance of the Standing Committee

- While the Mayor is the nominal head of the MCD, the Standing Committee effectively manages the corporation's functions.
- It cannot be constituted without the participation of aldermen in the voting process.
- The remaining six members of the Standing Committee are directly chosen by the MCD house after mayoral elections.

Lieutenant Governor

- A lieutenant governor serves as the **constitutional head** of five of India's eight union territories.
- The President of India appoints the lieutenant governor for a five-year term, and they serve at the President's pleasure.
- **Responsibilities:** The LG is the constitutional head of the UT, representing the President of India. Their role is largely ceremonial, similar to that of a Governor in a state.
 - ♦ The LG exercises **executive powers on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers**, headed by the Chief Minister. However, they have discretionary powers in certain matters, such as law and order, land, and police, which can lead to conflicts with the elected government.
 - ♦ The LG can summon, prorogue, and dissolve the Legislative Assembly. They can also reserve certain bills for the President's consideration.
 - ♦ The LG is responsible for the **administration of the UT** and can appoint administrators for various departments.

Source: IE

RISE IN SEA LEVELS IN INDIA DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Context

- According to a report **Mumbai** has witnessed the **maximum rise in sea levels (4.44 cm)** among 15 Indian coastal cities **between 1987 to 2021**.

Major Highlights of the Report

- The report presents **information on changes in sea levels under historical and future climate scenarios** for 15 Indian coastal cities and towns.
- Mumbai is followed by Haldia, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Paradip, and Chennai.
- **Future Outlook:** The rise in sea levels will continue until the end of the century under all scenarios in all 15 cities and towns, with the highest rise predicted for Mumbai.
- **The socio-economic factors** such as population, education, and urbanisation might affect greenhouse gas emissions over the next century, thereby impacting climate change.

- **Land Submersion:** More than 10% of the land in Mumbai, Yanam, and Thoothukudi, 5%–10% in Panaji and Chennai, and 1%–5% in Kochi, Mangalore, Visakhapatnam, Haldia, Udipi, Paradip, and Puri would be submerged due to **rise in sea levels by 2040**.
- **Key sectors that will be impacted** include water, agriculture, forest and biodiversity, and health.
 - ♦ The beaches, backwaters, and mangrove forests are particularly at risk, impacting biodiversity and tourism.
- **Reason: Climate change** brought on by **fossil-fuel burning** and **greenhouse gas emissions** has led to a steady increase in global temperatures.
 - ♦ As a result, **sea surface temperatures and glacier** melting have increased, eventually rising sea levels and posing a major threat to coastal cities worldwide, including Indian coastal cities.

Climate Change

- Climate change refers to **long-term shifts in global or regional climate patterns**.
- It's primarily **driven by human activities**, such as burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes, **which release greenhouse gases** like **carbon dioxide (CO₂)** and **methane into the atmosphere**.
- These gases trap heat, causing the Earth's temperature to rise—a **phenomenon known as global warming**.
- **Impact:** It threatens the essential ingredients of good health – clean air, safe drinking water, nutritious food supply and safe shelter – and has the potential to undermine decades of progress in global health.

Greenhouse Gases

- Gases that **trap heat in the atmosphere** are called greenhouse gases. The gases act like the glass walls of a greenhouse – hence the name, greenhouse gases.
- Without this greenhouse effect, temperatures would drop to as low as -18°C (-0.4°F); too cold to sustain life on earth.
- **CO₂** accounts for **76 percent** of the global warming effect, while **methane** accounts for **16 percent** and **nitrous oxide** accounts for **6 percent**.
- **Three industrial fluorinated gases** – hydrofluorocarbons (HFC), perfluorocarbons (PFC) and sulphur hexafluoride (SF₆) – are solely man-made during industrial processes and do not occur in nature.

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

- It is an **international treaty that came** into force in **1994**.
- **Aim: To stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations** in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.

Key features of the UNFCCC:

- **Parties and Membership:** The Convention has **198 members**.
- **Conference of the Parties (COP):** It is the **supreme decision-making body** of the UNFCCC and COP meetings are **held annually**.
- **Funds to Developing Countries:** Industrialized nations agree under the Convention to support climate change activities in developing countries by **providing financial support** for action on climate change-- **above and beyond any financial assistance** they already provide to these countries.
- **Kyoto Protocol:** It was adopted in **1997** and establishes **legally binding emission reduction targets** for **developed countries**.
 - ♦ It operates under the framework of the UNFCCC and has its own decision-making body, the **Meeting of the Parties** to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP).
- **Paris Agreement:** Adopted in **2015 at COP21** in Paris, it is an international treaty that builds upon the UNFCCC.
 - ♦ It aims to limit global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, with efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
 - ♦ The Paris Agreement emphasizes **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** and encourages all countries to take climate action.

India's Efforts to Combat Climate Change

- **Renewable Energy Expansion:** India has set ambitious targets for renewable energy generation, aiming to increase its capacity significantly.
 - ♦ The country has invested heavily in solar and wind energy projects, with the goal of reducing reliance on fossil fuels and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.
- **International Commitments:** India is a signatory to the Paris Agreement, committing to reduce its

carbon intensity and increase the share of non-fossil fuel energy sources in its total energy mix.

- ♦ India has announced its aim to meet **50% of its electricity demands from renewable energy sources by 2030**.
- **Afforestation and Forest Conservation:** Recognizing the role of forests in carbon sequestration and climate regulation, India has initiated programs to increase forest cover, restore degraded lands, and promote sustainable forest management practices.
- **Clean Transportation:** India is promoting the **adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) and has set a target of 30% EV market share by 2030**.
 - ♦ The government has introduced incentives and subsidies to support the production and adoption of EVs.
- **Climate Resilience:** India is investing in measures to enhance climate resilience and adaptation, particularly in vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, water resources, and coastal areas.
 - ♦ This includes the development of climate-resilient crop varieties, water conservation techniques, and disaster preparedness measures.
- **International Cooperation:** India actively participates in international forums and collaborations on climate change, engaging in initiatives such as the **International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**.

Source: IE

NEWS IN SHORT

SRINAGAR DESIGNATED AS WORLD CRAFT CITY

In News

- The World Craft Council's (WCC) has included Srinagar in the World Craft Cities list. Jaipur, Mamallapuram, and Mysore are the other World Craft Cities in India.

About

- Located on the historic Shakra-e-Abresham (Silk Route) the city generated a wealth of ideas related to arts and crafts and facilitated exchange of activities in trade, cultural practices, and scientific knowledge.

- This has opened up a rare window to trace the centuries-old craft influences in the region and provide opportunities to the craftsmen to enhance their skills and roots.

World Crafts Council (WCC)

- Founded in 1961. It is an international organization dedicated to promoting and preserving traditional crafts from around the world.

Source: TH

LADKI BAHIN YOJANA

Context

- The Bombay High Court has dismissed Public Interest Litigation (PIL) challenging **Ladki Bahin Yojana**.

About

- It is the **Maharashtra government's** scheme where **Rs 1,500** will be transferred into the bank accounts of eligible women aged **between 21 and 65 every month**.
 - ♦ Only women whose **family income is below Rs 2.5 lakh** and has **no member paying income tax** are eligible for the scheme.
- The scheme was announced through the **state budget as part of a social welfare measure**.
- The petitioner said that the taxpayers' taxes are collected for infrastructure development and not for such schemes.
 - ♦ The court said that paying tax is compulsory and one cannot say how it needs to be used.

Source: IE

BHOJ WETLAND

Context

- There were reports that the **Ramsar site Bhoj Wetland** was under threat of **getting delisted from Ramsar Sites**.
 - ♦ The Union Government has **denied** that the site faces no threat of delisting from **Ramsar Convention list of wetlands of International importance**.

Bhoj Wetland

- Bhoj Wetland comprises two contiguous man-made reservoirs, the **"Upper Lake" and the "Lower Lake"**.
- **The Upper Lake** was created by **Raja Bhoj in the 11th century** by the construction of an earthen

dam across the Kolans river, and the Lower Lake was constructed **nearly 200 years ago**, largely from the overflow of water from the Upper Lake.

- Both the lakes are **urban water bodies**, located in the **city of Bhopal**, the state capital.
- Bhoj Wetland was designated **as a Ramsar site in November 2002**.

Ramsar Convention

- It is an international treaty aimed at conserving wetlands around the world. It was adopted in **Ramsar, Iran, in 1971** and entered into force in **1975**.
- Countries that are parties to the convention commit to designating wetlands of international importance within their territories. These sites are referred to as **Ramsar Sites**.
- **Criteria:**
 - ♦ Supporting vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or
 - ♦ Threatened ecological communities or,
 - ♦ If it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds or,
 - ♦ Is an important source of food for fishes, spawning grounds, and nursery.
- **India** has been a party to the Convention since **1982**.
 - ♦ Presently India has **82 sites designated as Ramsar sites**.

Source: PIB

METHANOTROPHS

In News

- India's first cultures of indigenous methane-mitigating agents, particularly the novel **methanotroph Methylocucumis oryzae**, were reported from rice fields and wetlands in Western India.

About

- **Methylocucumis oryzae**, discovered at Agharkar Research Institute, promotes rice plant growth and has been documented in various habitats.
- These **bacteria oxidize methane**, a potent greenhouse gas, thus helping in mitigating global warming.
- They are oval and elongated in shape, similar to that of a cucumber, and hence the name **'methane eating cucumbers'**.

- Methane is the second most important greenhouse gas, has 26 times more global warming potential compared to carbon-di-oxide.

Source: PIB

HORTICULTURE CLUSTERS

Context

- Recently, the Union Agriculture Minister announced 18,000 crore expenditure on setting up **100 export-oriented horticulture clusters** in the **next five years** to boost farm income.

About Horticulture Clusters

- Horticulture clusters are geographical areas where specific crops are cultivated, processed, and marketed.
- By concentrating resources and expertise, these clusters can achieve economies of scale, improve quality, and enhance competitiveness.
- The goal is to create globally competitive hubs for horticultural produce.

Key Highlights

- **Investment:** The `18,000 crore investment will be used to set up these clusters, focusing on crops like apples, mangoes, bananas, grapes, pineapples, pomegranates, and turmeric. Each cluster will receive targeted support to boost productivity and quality.

- **Export-Oriented Approach:** These clusters are designed with an export-oriented mindset. By aligning production practices with international standards, India aims to increase its share in global horticulture trade.

Impact and Vision

- **Farmers' Income:** The horticulture clusters are expected to benefit around 10 lakh farmers and related stakeholders.
 - ♦ By improving crop quality, streamlining logistics, and creating cluster-specific brands, the program aims to enhance farmers' income.
- **Exports:** The government targets a 20% increase in exports of the targeted crops through this initiative.
 - ♦ By leveraging geographical specialisation and market-led development, India aims to become a significant player in global horticulture trade.
- **Digital Agriculture Mission:** Under the Digital Agriculture Mission, farmers aim to receive a digital identity linked to land records, crop details, and damage assessment. It aims to prevent record manipulation and enhance transparency.
- **Climate-Resilient Crops:** The government envisions developing 1,500 new varieties of climate-resilient crops that can withstand higher temperatures. Diversification into flowers, fruits, and medicinal plants is also on the agenda.

Source: IE

