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Chief Justice of India Inaugurates Tower of Justice, Highlighting Need for Efficient, Inclusive and Constitutionally Rooted Judicial Reforms

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Recent Developments:

- The **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** inaugurated the **Tower of Justice** at **Gurugram, Haryana**, a modern judicial complex comprising **56 courtrooms**, digital court infrastructure and integrated judicial facilities.
- Addressing the gathering, the **CJI** emphasised that **judicial reforms** should not be confined to reducing case pendency but should also ensure an **efficient, impartial, accessible and citizen-centric justice delivery system** rooted in **constitutional values**.
- The **CJI** stressed that no citizen should be denied justice due to **financial, social or procedural barriers**, and called for building a judiciary that is technologically advanced while remaining humane and sensitive to individual rights.

Indian Judiciary:

Constitutional Status:

- The **Judiciary** is one of the **three pillars of Indian democracy**, alongside the **Legislature** and the **Executive**.
- It functions as an **independent constitutional institution** entrusted with protecting the **Constitution, Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights** and **federal balance**.
- The principle of **Judicial Independence** forms part of the **Basic Structure Doctrine**, making it immune from constitutional amendments that undermine its autonomy.

Structure of the Indian Judiciary:

- **Supreme Court of India** is the highest constitutional court with powers relating to **constitutional interpretation, judicial review, advisory jurisdiction, appellate jurisdiction** and **dispute resolution between the Union and States**.
- **High Courts** function as the highest courts within States or groups of States and exercise **original, appellate, writ** and **supervisory jurisdiction**.
- **District and Subordinate Courts** adjudicate civil and criminal disputes at the district level and constitute the primary interface between citizens and the justice delivery system.
- **Specialised Courts and Tribunals**, including **Family Courts, Commercial Courts, Consumer Commissions, Labour Courts** and other statutory tribunals, adjudicate specialised categories of disputes.

Key Principles Highlighted by the Chief Justice of India:

Beyond Speedy Justice:

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- Judicial reforms should prioritise **quality, fairness and impartiality**, in addition to reducing delays in case disposal.
- Speed should not compromise the constitutional commitment to **natural justice** and **due process**.

Accessible Justice:

- Every citizen should have equal access to justice irrespective of **economic status, social background** or **procedural complexity**.
- Justice delivery must minimise barriers that discourage vulnerable sections from approaching courts.

Technology with Constitutional Values:

- Digital transformation should enhance judicial efficiency without compromising **fair hearing, transparency, privacy** and **constitutional morality**.
- Technological innovation must complement, rather than replace, the human element of judicial decision-making.

Human-Centric Judiciary:

- Courts should remain sensitive to the social and human dimensions underlying every dispute.
- Judicial institutions must strengthen public trust through fairness, empathy and accountability.

Major Challenges Facing the Indian Judiciary:

Case Pendency:

- India has more than **5 crore pending cases** across the **Supreme Court, High Courts** and **Subordinate Courts**.
- The growing inflow of new cases continues to outpace disposal rates, affecting timely justice delivery.

Judge Strength and Vacancies:

- Against the sanctioned strength of **1,114 judges** in the **High Courts**, around **347 posts** remain vacant.
- In the **District Judiciary**, approximately **5,300 posts** remain vacant against the sanctioned strength of **25,081 judges**.
- Persistent vacancies increase judicial workload and contribute significantly to case pendency.

Inadequate Judicial Infrastructure:

- Many courts continue to face deficiencies in courtrooms, digital facilities, record management and basic public amenities.
- According to the **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)**, nearly **19.7%** of district courts lack separate toilet facilities for women.
- Infrastructure constraints adversely affect both judicial efficiency and citizen experience.

Limited Gender Representation:

- Women's representation remains relatively low in the higher judiciary despite gradual improvement.
- The **District Judiciary** has achieved better gender diversity, with women constituting approximately **36.33%** of judges.
- Greater diversity strengthens judicial legitimacy and enhances representativeness.

Access to Justice:

- High litigation costs, procedural complexity, language barriers and geographical constraints continue to restrict access to justice for economically weaker sections.
- Legal awareness and availability of quality legal aid remain uneven across regions.

Judicial Reform Initiatives:

Information and Communication Technology (ICT):

- **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)** is being integrated into judicial administration to improve transparency, efficiency and accessibility.
- Digitisation has facilitated electronic filing, digital record management and virtual judicial processes.

Electronic Supreme Court Reports (e-SCR):

- **Electronic Supreme Court Reports (e-SCR)** provide authenticated digital access to judgments delivered by the **Supreme Court of India**, improving legal research and public accessibility.

Virtual Courts:

- Virtual hearings through **video conferencing** have expanded access to justice while reducing travel costs and procedural delays.
- Hybrid court systems are increasingly becoming part of judicial administration.

e-Courts Project:

- The **e-Courts Project**, implemented under the **National e-Governance Plan**, aims to computerise courts, improve judicial services and enable end-to-end digital case management.
- The project is currently being implemented under its **Phase III**, with emphasis on paperless, integrated and citizen-centric courts.

National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG):

- **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)** provides real-time information on pending and disposed cases across different levels of the judiciary.
- The platform enhances transparency, judicial monitoring and evidence-based policy formulation.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR):

- **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** mechanisms, including **Arbitration**, **Mediation** and **Conciliation**, reduce the burden on regular courts through consensual settlement of disputes.
- The **Commercial Courts Act, 2015** mandates **pre-institution mediation** for specified commercial disputes.

Fast Track Courts:

- **Fast Track Courts** have been established for speedy disposal of cases involving **women, children, senior citizens** and other priority categories.

Important Constitutional Provisions Related to Judiciary:

Constitutional Articles:

- **Article 32** guarantees the **Right to Constitutional Remedies** through the **Supreme Court**.
- **Article 50** directs the State to separate the **Judiciary** from the **Executive** in public services.
- **Articles 124–147** deal with the **Supreme Court of India**.

- **Articles 214–231** deal with **High Courts**.
- **Articles 233–237** govern the **Subordinate Judiciary**.

Important Committees and Reports:

Malimath Committee (2003):

- Recommended reducing the duration of court vacations by **21 days** to improve judicial productivity.
- Suggested several criminal justice reforms to improve efficiency and victim-centric justice.

Law Commission Recommendations:

- Various **Law Commission** reports have recommended increasing judge strength, strengthening infrastructure, simplifying procedures and expanding **Alternative Dispute Resolution** mechanisms.

Way Forward:

Increase Judicial Capacity:

- Courts should expand disposal capacity to match or exceed the annual inflow of fresh cases.
- Scientific workload assessment should guide the creation of additional judicial posts.

Fill Judicial Vacancies:

- A uniform national recruitment calendar should be institutionalised for timely appointment of judges across all levels.

Strengthen District Judiciary:

- **District-Level Case Management Committees** should be established for better case monitoring, record reconstruction and efficient docket management.
- Institutional coordination between **District Courts** and **High Courts** should be strengthened to remove administrative fragmentation.

Modernise Judicial Infrastructure:

- Court complexes should be equipped with adequate digital infrastructure, accessible buildings, gender-sensitive facilities and integrated judicial services.

Promote Inclusive Justice:

- Judicial appointments should encourage greater representation of women and other underrepresented sections.
- Expansion of legal aid, multilingual judicial services and digital inclusion should improve access to justice.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Judicial Doctrines:

- **Basic Structure Doctrine** — Protects essential constitutional features, including **Judicial Independence**.
- **Judicial Review** — Empowers constitutional courts to examine the validity of legislative and executive actions.
- **Judicial Activism** — Permits proactive judicial intervention for protection of constitutional rights and public interest.

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- **Judicial Restraint** — Encourages courts to respect the constitutional boundaries between the Judiciary, Legislature and Executive.

Important Judicial Institutions:

- **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA):** Provides free legal aid and promotes access to justice under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**.
- **National Judicial Academy:** Conducts training and capacity building for judges across the country.
- **India Justice Report:** Periodically assesses the performance of States in terms of justice delivery, police, prisons, legal aid and judiciary