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1. Mumbai Trans Harbour Link inaugurated: How the country's longest sea bridge will cut travel time

Why in news?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the country's longest bridge over the sea, the 22 km Mumbai Trans Harbour Link, officially the Atal Setu Nhava Sheva Sea Link. The bridge will cut the travel time between Sewri and Chirle to under 20 minutes.



The Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) is a 22-km-long (16.5 km sea link) including twin-carriageway six-lane bridge over the Thane Creek in the Arabian Sea, connecting Sewri in the island city of Mumbai to Chirle in Raigad district on the mainland.

Making of Trans harbour link

The idea of a bay crossing connecting Mumbai to the mainland was first floated in

1963, but no follow-up action was initiated. The plan was revived in the late 90s, and the first tenders were floated in 2006.

In February 2008, Anil Ambani's Reliance Infrastructure emerged as the preferred bidder after promising to build and recover the cost of building the (then) Rs 6,000 crore bridge in nine years and 11 months through a public private partnership (PPP) model.

Months later, however, Ambani withdrew from the project. Multiple unsuccessful bidding processes followed, and the nodal agency was changed from the Maharashtra

State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) to the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA).

The project finally got moving after MMRDA entered into an agreement with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which agreed to fund 80 per cent of the project cost, with the rest being borne by the state and central governments.

The deal and tendering were finally completed in December 2017, and work commenced in early 2018. A total Rs 21,200 crore has been spent on the project, of which Rs 15,100 is loan from JICA.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: Indian Express and The Hindu

2. Supreme Court Declines Stay on Controversial Law Altering Chief Election Commissioner Appointment Process

Why in news?

The Supreme Court has refused to grant a stay on a recently enacted law that disregards a previous Supreme Court ruling. The law, known as 'The CEC and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023,' replaces the Chief Justice of India (CJI) with a Union Cabinet Minister in the high-powered selection committee responsible for appointing the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs). The petitioner, Jaya Thakur, a Congress party leader, argues that this change dilutes the Supreme Court's earlier judgment.

Key Points

- The Supreme Court declined to stay the new law, emphasizing the inability to stay a statute.
- Jaya Thakur's petition contends that the exclusion of the CJI from the selection committee undermines its effectiveness, making the Prime Minister and the nominated Cabinet Minister the decisive factors.
- The petition raises concerns about compromising free and fair elections and asserts that the law goes against the concept of the separation of powers.
- Senior advocate Vikas Singh argues that the law contradicts the principles of constitutional democracy by lacking an independent mechanism for appointments.

- Another petition by Gopal Singh calls for the implementation of an independent selection committee and seeks an injunction on the Gazette notification of December 28, 2023, which introduced the controversial law.
- The new law alters the appointment process, removing the CJI from the committee and giving the government primacy in the selection of CEC and ECs.
- The legal question at the center of the petitions questions whether the Parliament or any Legislative Assembly has the authority to nullify or amend a Supreme Court judgment, particularly one from a Constitution Bench. The petition emphasizes the constitutional implications of such legislative actions.

Points of contention

A look at what the Sections 7 and 8 of the CEC and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 say



■ **Section 7 mandates the selection committee to consist of the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition or the leader of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha**

■ **Section 8 allows the selection committee to regulate its own procedure in a transparent manner and consider persons other than those suggested by the search committee**

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express & The Hindu

3. Aviation Safety Scrutiny: Recent Incidents Raise Concerns

Why in news?

In recent weeks, the field of aviation safety has come under intense scrutiny, prompted by two notable incidents. The first occurred on January 2, involving a Japan Airlines (JAL) Airbus A350-900 colliding with a Japan Coast Guard De Havilland Canada Dash 8 after landing, resulting in both aircraft catching fire. The second incident, on January 5, involved an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9 experiencing depressurization mid-

air due to a blown-out window panel 'door plug.' These incidents have reignited concerns about air safety, leading to a closer examination of factors such as aircraft technology, crew response, and regulatory oversight.

Key Points

1. Japan Jet Inferno and Alaska Airlines Incident

- The JAL incident resulted in a collision and subsequent fire, with all passengers on the Airbus A350-900 surviving, but five fatalities on the Coast Guard plane.
- The Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9 incident involved a blown-out 'door plug,' causing depressurization. Fortunately, no major injuries were reported among the 171 passengers and six crew members.

2. Boeing 737 MAX 9 Under Scrutiny

- The Boeing 737 MAX 9's safety record has faced renewed attention, leading to increased oversight by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in the U.S.
- The FAA's probe, along with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigation, focuses on the cabin pressure control system.

3. Response to Boeing Case

- Boeing CEO Dave Calhoun acknowledged mistakes in a meeting with employees, and the FAA announced additional oversight on Boeing.
- Aircraft with a plug door, like the one in the Alaska incident, will remain grounded for thorough reviews.

4. Airbus A350 Incident Highlights

- The JAL Airbus A350 incident showcased the survival of all passengers despite the complete hull loss of the aircraft.
- Crew training, response time of fire and rescue teams, and advances in aircraft manufacturing technology played crucial roles in the evacuation.

5. Advancements in Aircraft Technology

- The increasing use of composite materials in Airbus and Boeing aircraft enhances durability, strength, and reduces weight.
- Lessons from incidents like the JAL fire contribute valuable insights into the performance of advanced materials during real-world tests.

6. Safety Improvements and Certification Standards

- The FAA-led improvements include enhanced seat cushion flammability, emergency escape path marking, lavatory safety measures, and improved materials to reduce heat release and smoke emissions.

- Aircraft certification requirements, including the 90-second evacuation rule, apply to all aircraft, ensuring stringent safety standards.

7. Ongoing Concerns and Design Aspects

- While no aircraft can be made entirely fireproof, ongoing efforts focus on factors that enhance passenger survival.

- The JAL incident, with an 18-minute evacuation time, highlights the importance of design aspects in delaying the effects of a fire.

As the aviation industry continues to evolve, addressing these concerns becomes paramount to ensuring the safety of air travel worldwide.



Narrow escape: The burnt-out JAL plane at Haneda airport, on January 3

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Internal Security

Source: The Hindu