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1. A change in India's power export rules

Introduction

On August 14, Reuters reported an amendment to India's power export rules. The change allows Indian power exporters to reroute their output to Indian grids if there is a delay in payments from partner countries, primarily as a safeguard against political risks in Bangladesh. Despite this amendment, Adani Power has assured that its existing contract with Bangladesh remains unaffected.

The Godda Project

Adani Power's subsidiary in Jharkhand supplies 1,496 megawatts of power to Bangladesh from the Godda ultra-supercritical thermal power plant. This is under a 25-year Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), signed in November 2017. The Godda plant is India's first transnational power project dedicated entirely to another nation, contributing about 6% of Bangladesh's total power capacity.



Criticisms of the Project

Criticism of the project centers on the use of imported coal from Australia, which raises costs. The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) noted that the PPA allows Adani Power to pass the high costs of coal importation and electricity transmission onto Bangladesh. There have been calls from Bangladesh for a revision of the PPA, particularly concerning the high coal prices and charges, which are deemed excessive by local standards.

Bangladesh's Dependence on Power Imports

Despite significant progress in expanding electricity access, Bangladesh faces fuel and gas supply constraints that limit the full utilization of its power plants. The country also deals with overcapacity issues, having an installed generation capacity much higher than its peak usage. Consequently, Bangladesh continues to rely on power imports to meet its needs, especially during periods of energy crises.

Current Situation and Impact

The regulatory change in India's power export rules gives greater flexibility to exporters by allowing them to access the domestic market, reducing dependency on external markets. Delays in payments from Bangladesh have been common, and the recent amendment allows for adjustments in response to these delays. However, experts suggest that even if power supplies from India are halted temporarily, the impact on Bangladesh would be short-term, lasting only 2 to 3 days.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: The Hindu

2. What Justice Hema Committee report says, why its release was delayed

Introduction

The Justice Hema Committee report was released by the Kerala government four-and-a-half years after it was submitted to the Chief Minister. The 233-page document provides a damning indictment of the discrimination and exploitation faced by women in the Malayalam film industry.



What led to the formation of the Justice Hema Committee?

On February 17, 2017, a leading Malayalam film actress was abducted and sexually assaulted in her car by a group of men. A prominent actor would later be implicated in the case which sparked outrage across Kerala, and brought under the scanner the discriminatory treatment faced by women in the Malayalam film industry.

The Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), comprising women actors, producers, directors and technicians, was formed in response to this incident. On May 18, 2017 the WCC submitted a petition to the Kerala Chief Minister demanding an inquiry into the incident, and larger gender issues plaguing the state's film industry.

In July, the state government formed a three-member committee headed by Justice K Hema, a retired Kerala High Court judge, to look into issues of sexual harassment and pervasive gender inequality in the Malayalam film industry. After speaking to multiple women in the industry on a variety of issues, the Committee submitted a 295-page report to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in December 2019.

What does the Hema Committee report say?

Some key takeaways from the report are:

- * A culture of sexual harassment pervades the Malayalam film industry. The Committee reported the existence of casting couch (wherein powerful men demand sexual favours from women in return for opportunities in films), frequent suggestive and vulgar comments made by men at the workplace, and drunk male co-actors forcing themselves into rooms of women, among other things.
- * A fear of retribution prevents sexual harassment from being reported. Justice Hema writes in the report: "Many who were examined before the committee were afraid to reveal things which they experienced... we realised that their fear is well-founded." Beyond direct retribution, the report also mentions the fear of cyber harassment, especially from toxic fan clubs, as a means by which women are forced into silence.
- * An all-male "mafia" of influential actors and producers calls the shots across the industry, and wields their power with impunity. "No man nor woman dare to utter any word which may offend anyone belonging to the power group, because such a person will be wiped off the industry by the powerful lobby," the report says.
- * A male-dominated industry has failed to offer even basic facilities to women, including the lack of toilets and changing rooms on sets. The report says that women staff on film sets continue to remain at the mercy of open spaces or shared bathrooms to relieve themselves, often risking UTIs and hospital admission.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains

Source: Indian Express

3. Government Cancels Lateral Recruitment Process

Background

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) recently invited applications for 45 specialist positions, including from the private sector, for middle and senior levels in the Union government. However, the process was cancelled following a request from the Central government.

Reason for Cancellation

The government cited the absence of reservation for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) as the primary reason for cancelling the recruitment. Union Minister of State for Personnel, Jitendra Singh, wrote to UPSC Chairperson Priti Sudan, requesting the withdrawal of the recruitment process.



Response to Backlash

The decision to cancel the recruitment came after protests from various quarters, including the Opposition and the Lok Janshakti Party, a National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partner, who deemed recruitment without quotas for SC and ST communities as "unacceptable."

Government's Stance on Lateral Entry

In his letter, Mr. Singh emphasized that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, the process of lateral entry, which had previously been ad-hoc, was being made transparent. He pointed out that the idea of recruiting talent from outside the government was recommended by the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2005) and the Sixth Pay Commission (2013), both under a Congress-led government. However, he stressed that under the current government, lateral entry must align with the principles of equity and social justice, particularly regarding reservations.

Commitment to Social Justice

Mr. Singh reiterated that Prime Minister Modi firmly believes that lateral entry must uphold the principles of social justice enshrined in the Constitution, with reservation in employment being a key aspect of addressing historical injustices.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu