Repressive condition of court staffs

Why in news?

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- The Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court has made a move in directing that all judicial officers in the State appoint home peons by June 30.
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- The exploitation of judicial support staff continues to be widespread, this direction seems promising for such staffs.
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What is the issue?

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- The lower cadre of employees working in subordinate courts across the country have aired grievances from time to time which are related to the terms of their employment and deplorable conditions of work.
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- While a litigant can approach a court to access justice, these court employees lack an efficient grievance redress mechanism, with none or a rare personal hearing given to them by their senior judicial officers.
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- Written complaints are put aside and the injustices meted out to them often go unreported.
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- If they raise a voice against this victimisation, it has resulted in notices being issued to them, adverse annual confidential reports, fines, transfers out of the district, departmental inquiries or even suspension.
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What are the Repressive conditions of the employees?

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- Reports about the harassment of court employees have been appearing in the media.
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- The main issue is the condition of subordinate court staff who are allegedly being made to work as personal servants in the houses of judges and the provision of home peons which has not been implemented.
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- They work in repressive conditions with long hours, have no leave, face penalties and fines and often unfair arrest warrants, and are overburdened by the sheer volume of file handling and working out of crowded courtrooms.
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- Mounting pendency of court cases results in an increased volume of court files without an increase in judicial staff strength, leading to them being overburdened.
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- Proper care has not been taken to ensure the appointment of qualified staff.
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- Those who are recruited have little or no on-the-job training.
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What is the way forward?

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- The important function played by judicial support staff in keeping the judicial machinery afloat cannot be undermined. Yet these employees have been driven to all forms of protest on how unjustly they are positioned in a system
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- Successive Law Commissions have made suggestions for employee reforms, but little has been done to implement them.
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- The judiciary is uniquely positioned to implement these recommendations through administrative orders.
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- The order issued by Punjab and Haryana court directs that an employee’s post be changed every three years and file handling by them will be limited to 800 files.
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- This will go a long way in ensuring a more fulfilling and just working environment.
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- This needs to be emulated by other High Courts as well if this widespread and systematic exploitation has to be halted and to boost the morale of this

workforce, in the larger interests of justice and equity.
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Source: The Hindu

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