

04 Apr 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. RTI scrutiny will ruin judicial independence

Context:

Opening up the “highly-sensitive” correspondence of the SC’s collegium and its workings to the Right to Information (RTI) regime would make judges and the government “shy” and “destroy” judicial independence, Attorney General K.K. Venugopal submitted.

Appointment of judges under collegium system:

The Supreme Court Collegium is the panel of judges vested with the responsibility of appointments and elevations of Chief Justices and judges of the Supreme Court and high courts of the country. The Collegium for the appointment of Judges of Supreme Court is headed by the Chief Justice of India and comprises of the four other senior-most judge of the Supreme Court. The decisions of the collegium are made through voting and the majority view prevails in case of difference of opinion.

Evolution of the collegium system:

- Over the course of the three cases, the principle of judicial independence evolved. The judicial independence ensures non-interference of any branch of the state inclusive of the executive and the legislature in the judges' appointments or transfer. The collegium system was thus created.
- This system has been used since the issuance of judgement in the Second Judges Case in 1993.
- However, it is worth noting that the "Collegium System" has no mention in the Indian Constitution, originally or through successive amendments.

Details:

- For the past decade, the Supreme Court has refused to divulge information under the RTI Act about the collegium's confidential communications with the government.
- "If the RTI Act were to be applied to the collegium, its member judges would not be able to sit back and have a free and frank discussion for fear that their confidential views may later come into the public domain." Said Mr. Venugopal.
- Venugopal represents the Supreme Court's Central Public Information Officer (CPIO), who is the authority tasked to respond to RTI queries related to the court.
- There must be a caution against the demand for the application of the Right to Information Act on the judiciary.

Lens on Collegium

The events which led to the RTI on confidential communication between the SC and the Centre



- Activist Subhash Chandra Agarwal files an RTI seeking the correspondence between the SC Collegium and the Centre on the appointment of Justices H.L. Dattu, A.K. Ganguly and R.M. Lodha superseding Justices A.P. Shah, A.K. Patnaik and V.K. Gupta. Justices Dattu and Lodha later became Chief Justices
- SC refuses. The case comes to the

Central Information Commission (CIC), which **rules in favour of Agarwal in 2009** and dismisses SC's argument that judiciary should be free from "intrusions by strangers..."

- SC appeals in the Delhi HC against the CIC verdict. The HC dismisses the appeal
- In January 2010, a three-judge HC Bench of Justice A.P. Shah (now retired) **upholds HC decision**
- In November 2010, SC appeals to itself.

An SC Bench led by Justice B. Sudarshan Reddy (now retired) refers the appeal to a three-judge Bench

- In August 2016, a three-judge Bench refers the appeal to a **Constitution Bench**
- If the Constitution Bench upholds the CIC order of 2009, the ordinary citizen would be empowered to seek confidential details of all judicial appointments and transfers, thus opening a **"judicial Pandora's Box"**

Should Supreme Court come under RTI?

- Challenge to the apex court's immunity from the Right to Information Act has put the focus on judicial transparency.
- There are some valid arguments for the judiciary feeling the need for secrecy.
- For example, collegium discussions can be freewheeling and include the discussion of courtroom corridor gossip and judges' private lives, the examination of fairly invasive government intelligence reports and the expression of judges' personal opinions.
- For judges, their credibility and reputation is hugely important, and many feel that the slightest potential slight on this could be debilitating and prevent judges from doing their job.
- That goes doubly so for judges who may have been rejected by the collegium, but continue to sit in high courts. Some may, perhaps legitimately fear, that a few over-enthusiastic advocates would love to get their hands on dirt against judges that they can take it out of context and use for leverage in court, by asking for their recusal or otherwise, questioning their independence in hearing a case.
- Therefore, being completely subject to RTI is perhaps deeply uncomfortable to the judges at a deeper level.
- This idea that increased exposure to the media leads to a healthier judiciary is debatable.
- Example of USA: In the United States of America, the Connecticut Supreme Court in Clerk of the Superior Court, Geographical Area Number Seven et al vs Freedom of Information Commission (2006) held that the judicial branch's administrative functions relating to its budget, personnel, facilities and records created in carrying out the court's adjudicatory function are exempt from the Freedom of information Act.
- To conclude, it is important that all public institutions are not treated alike. The office of an elected representative cannot be tested on the same grounds as that of the court.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. U.S. State Department approves \$2.6 billion chopper sale to India

Context:

The United States Department of State has approved the sale of 24 MH-60R multi-mission helicopters to India under its Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program.

Details:

- The proposed sale will provide India the capability to perform anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare missions along with the ability to perform secondary missions, including vertical replenishment, search and rescue, and communications relay.
- India will use the enhanced capability as a deterrent to regional threats and to strengthen its homeland defense.
- This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to strengthen the U.S.-Indian strategic relationship and to improve the security of a major defensive partner, which continues to be an important force for political stability, peace, and economic progress in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia region.
- The sale comes on the heels of a few weeks of heightened tensions between India and Pakistan that began with an attack on an Indian security convoy in Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, claiming the lives of 40 CRPF personnel.
- Once the process passes through the notification period without any hitches, the U.S. government will respond to India with a Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LoA).
- The LoA usually expires in 60 days (extendible), before which the purchaser, India in this case, needs to make an initial deposit, failing which the offer expires.

India- USA Defence Relations:

- India was granted the unique Major Defence Partner (MDP) designation in 2016 by the Obama administration — a step towards India accessing U.S. military technology at a level on a par with those of the U.S.'s closest allies.
- India was then given Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 (STA-1) status by the U.S. in August last, the third Asian country after South Korea and Japan (and 37th country globally) to acquire it.
- This was to further facilitate the transfer of technology in the defence and space sectors.
- India also signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) agreement with the U.S., providing a legal basis for the U.S. to transfer secure communication equipment to India, increasing military equipment interoperability and real time data sharing.
- In the case of India and most other non-NATO countries, Congress must be notified for sale of Major Defense Equipment (MDE) of \$14 million and above, defence articles and services of \$50 million and above and design and construction services of \$200 million and above.

MH-60R Seahawk Multi Mission Helicopter:

- The MH-60R is also referred to as 'Romeo'.
- The helicopter is equipped for a range of missions including anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-surface warfare (ASuW), search-and-rescue (SAR), naval gunfire support (NGFS), surveillance, communications relay, logistics support and personnel transfer and vertical replenishment (VERTREP).
- The helicopter operates from frigates, destroyers, cruisers, amphibious ships and aircraft carriers, and is suitable for intense littoral warfare operations for handling numerous contacts in confined spaces, and for open-water operations.
- For anti-surface warfare missions, the helicopter can be equipped with a range of weapons on the four weapons stations.
- The MH-60 helicopter is fitted with dual controls and accommodates the pilot and co-pilot / tactical mission officer. The sensor operator station is installed in the cabin.
- The helicopter is equipped with a fully digital communications suite.
- The MH-60R is constructed with tolerance to small arms fire and medium-calibre high-explosive projectiles. The flight controls have dual-redundancy and ballistically hardened flight controls.

2. A long reign comes to an end

Context:

- Algeria's 9th President (1999-2019) Abdelaziz Bouteflika has resigned following protests by Algerians dissuading him from seeking a fifth term as the President.
- Since February 22, tens of thousands of Algerians, especially the youth, have thronged Algeria's cities, including the capital Algiers, demanding that President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, 82, quit.

About Bouteflika:

- Bouteflika's political career goes back to the Algeria's pre-independence years.
- At age 19, Mr. Bouteflika joined the National Liberation Army, the military wing of the National Liberation Front (FLN) that was fighting the French colonialists for independence.
- In the post-independence government led by revolutionary leader Ahmed Ben Bella, Mr. Bouteflika was a Minister.
- In 1963, Bella appointed him Foreign Minister, a post which he would hold till 1979.
- In 1999, when the country was in the midst of a civil war between the government and the Islamist militants, he won the presidency.
- In three years, Mr. Bouteflika brought the civil war to an end and his government built a strong

welfare state funded by revenues from oil and gas exports.

Why were there protests?

- While Mr. Bouteflika is credited with ending the civil war and stabilising the economy, he is also known for his ruthless administrative style that denied several basic freedoms.
- The presidential elections were hardly free and fair.
- In 2014, he won a fourth term without inviting much public protest even as he had withdrawn from the public by that time following the previous year's stroke.
- But the resentment was gradually rising, particularly amid mounting economic woes following the 2014 commodities meltdown.
- While the country was battling economic woes, the President was missing.
- He has been wheelchair-bound and has rarely been seen in public recently.

Five years of economic troubles and growing scepticism about the President's health have added to the public resentment. So when the ruling party said Mr. Bouteflika will seek a fifth term, the Algerian society erupted into protests.

Why did he resign?

- After protests broke out, he backed off from the early plan to seek a fifth term, but said elections would be postponed.
- He also promised to introduce political and economic reforms.
- Protesters rejected these offers. As it was evident that Mr. Bouteflika could not resolve the crisis, both the FLN, the ruling party, and the Army turned against him.
- Army chief held a meeting with generals and top officials of the Defence Ministry after which he demanded Mr. Bouteflika vacate immediately. Within hours, Mr. Bouteflika announced the resignation.

What next?

- According to Algeria's Constitution, the head of the Council of the Nation, the upper house of Parliament, should become interim leader for up to three months if the President steps down and then elections have to be held.
- Abdelkader Bensalah, the current Parliament chief, has already taken over the responsibility.
- It is to be seen whether the protesters will now vacate the streets and accept the transition.
- Some of them have called for a break with the system and demanded a democratic transition.
- They don't want the vestiges of the old regime to be in control. But for now, only Mr. Bouteflika is gone. The regime he built has survived.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. Air pollution shortened lifespan by 30 months

Context:

The current high level of air pollution has shortened the average lifespan of a South Asian child by two-and-a-half years while globally the reduction stands at 20 months, according to a global study - State of Global Air 2019.

Details:

- State of Global Air 2019 is published by Health Effects Institute (HEI).
- It said, exposure to outdoor and indoor air pollution contributed to over 1.2 million deaths in India in 2017.
- The report added that worldwide, air pollution was responsible for more deaths than many better-known risk factors such as malnutrition, alcohol abuse and physical inactivity.
- In India, air pollution is the third-highest cause of death among all health risks, ranking just above smoking; each year, more people globally die from air pollution related disease than from road traffic injuries or malaria.

In China and India:

- The study found that China and India together were responsible for over half of the total global attributable deaths, with each country witnessing over 1.2 million deaths from all air pollution in 2017.
- China has made initial progress, beginning to achieve air-pollution decline.
- Overall, long-term exposure to outdoor and indoor air pollution contributed to nearly 5 million deaths from stroke, diabetes, heart attack, lung cancer, and chronic lung disease in 2017.
- Out of these, 3 million deaths are directly attributed to PM2.5, half of which are from India and China together.
- The South Asian region — Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan — led the world as the most polluted, with over 1.5 million air-pollution related deaths according to the report.

Steps taken in India:

- India has initiated major steps to address pollution sources:
 1. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana Household LPG program
 2. Accelerated Bharat Stage 6/VI clean vehicle standards
 3. The New National Clean Air Programme.
- These and future initiatives have the potential, if fully implemented as part of a sustained commitment to air quality, to result in significant health benefits in coming years.

2. Bleaching hits world's southernmost coral reef**Context:**

The Australian scientists have observed that the world's southernmost coral reef has been hit by bleaching this summer and warned that the rising sea temperatures from climate change were affecting even the most isolated ecosystems.

Details:

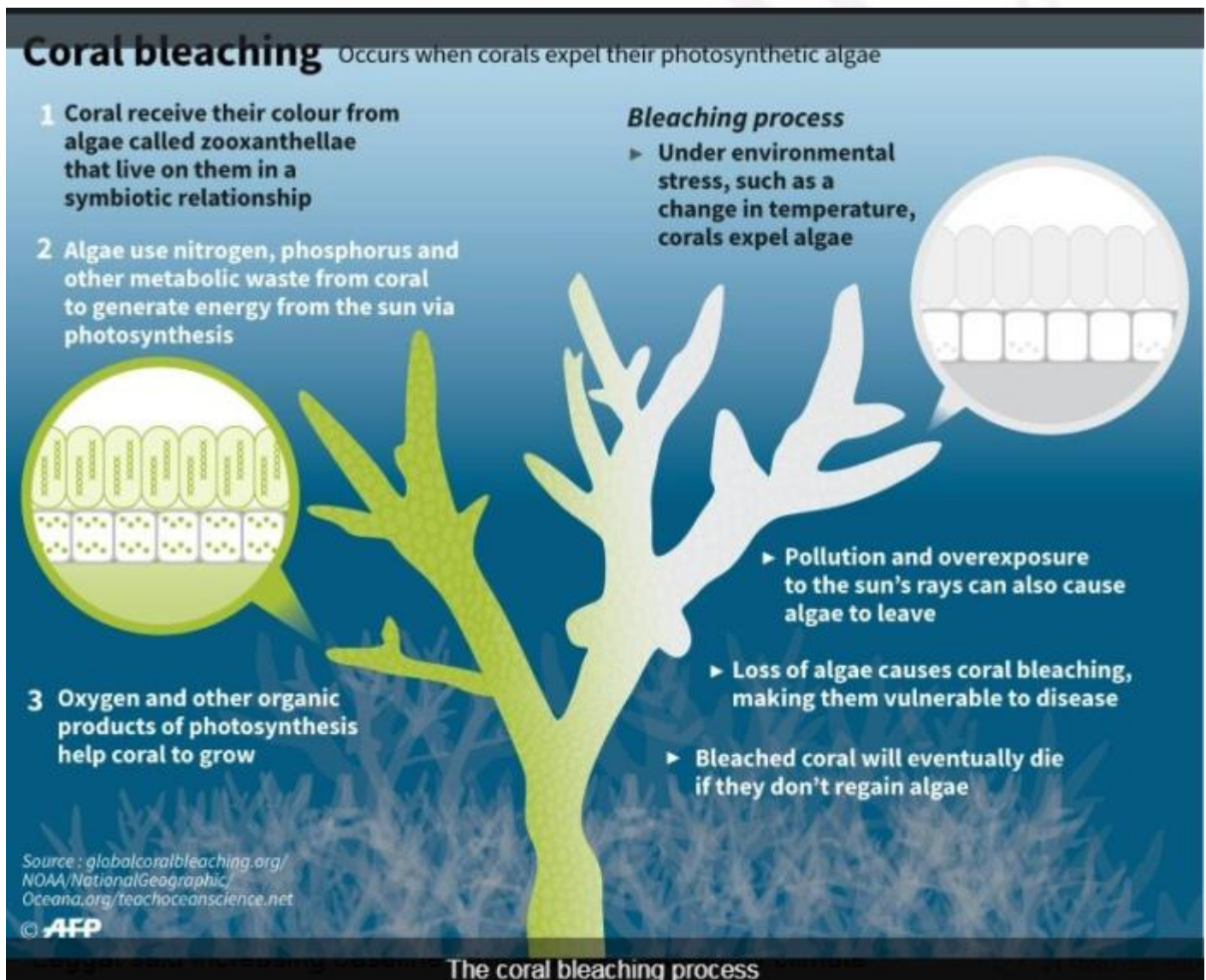
- The corals off Lord Howe Island 600 km offshore from Sydney are affected by elevated temperatures this summer, despite escaping severe bleaching that damaged the Great Barrier Reef in 2016 and 2017.
- It's a strong indicator that climate change is affecting everywhere around the world.
- It was inferred that the baseline temperatures caused by climate change, and local factors such as elevated temperatures in the area this summer, caused the bleaching to occur.
- The scientists are set to return to Lord Howe in the next few months to find out if some corals have been so severely bleached they can't recover.

Corals:

- Coral colonies are made up of hundreds or even thousands of genetically identical individuals called polyps. These polyps have microscopic algae called zooxanthellae living within their tissues.
- The coral provides the zooxanthellae with the compounds necessary for photosynthesis, which are metabolic waste products of the coral. In return, the zooxanthellae produce oxygen and help the coral to remove wastes. Most importantly, they supply the coral with organic products of photosynthesis which are predominantly carbohydrates.
- These compounds are utilized by the coral as building blocks in the manufacture of fats, as well as the synthesis of their calcium carbonate skeletons. Each coral polyp builds a skeleton of calcium carbonate. These corals together form a coral reef.
- Coral reefs make up less than one percent of Earth's marine environment, but are home to an estimated 25 percent of ocean life, acting as nurseries for many species of fish.

Coral Bleaching:

When corals face stress by changes in conditions such as temperature, light, or nutrients, they expel the symbiotic algae zooxanthellae living in their tissues, causing them to turn completely white. This phenomenon is called coral bleaching.



Why does Coral bleaching occur?

- Bleaching occurs when abnormal environmental conditions, such as warmer sea temperatures, cause corals to expel tiny photosynthetic algae, draining them of their colour.
- It could also occur because of ocean acidification, chemical pollution and other anthropogenic activities.
- Corals can recover if the water temperature drops and the algae are able to recolonise them.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. South Korea first to roll out 5G services

Context:

South Korea will become the first country to commercially launch fifth-generation (5G) services beating U.S. and China as it rolls out the latest wireless technology with Samsung Electronics' new 5G-enabled smartphone Galaxy S10.

Details:

- With one of the world's top smartphone penetration rates, South Korea is in a race with China, the United States and Japan to market 5G, hoping the technology will spur breakthrough in fields such as smart cities and autonomous cars, and drive up its economic growth that slowed to a six-year low in 2018.
- 5G will change the landscape of the gaming industry as it allows games streamed with minimal delay to be played on smartphones.

5G:

- 5G is the latest generation of cellular mobile communications.
- It succeeds the 4G (LTE-A, WiMax), 3G (UMTS, LTE) and 2G (GSM) systems.
- 5G performance targets high data rate, reduced latency, energy saving, cost reduction, higher system capacity, and massive device connectivity.
- The technology can offer 20-times faster data speeds than 4G long-term evolution (LTE) networks and better support for artificial intelligence and virtual reality with low latency.
- Sometimes it can offer 100-times faster speeds.
- SK Telecom is working with its memory-chip making affiliate SK Hynix to build a highly digitised and connected factory powered by 5G technology.
- While security concerns over 5G networks using telecom equipment made by China's Huawei have marred the buildup to the release of these services, South Korean telcos have tried to shrug them off.

2. Dark matter not made up of tiny black holes

Context:

An international research team including researchers from Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune has ruled out the possibility of primordial black holes being a major constituent of dark matter. This finding disproves a theoretical claim of Prof Stephen Hawking.

Dark matter:

- In the solar system, Mercury, the planet closest to the Sun, takes just 88 days to make one revolution

around the sun, while Neptune, the farthest one, takes 165 years to make one round.

- In like manner, laws of gravity expect us to see stars closer to the centre of galaxies rotating faster than the stars on the edge.
- However, in most galaxies, the stars closer to the centre and the stars at the edge of the galaxies take almost same time to make one revolution.
- This implied that something invisible and enveloping the galaxies was giving an extra push to the outer stars, speeding them up.
- This entity has remained as one of the central unresolved puzzles in cosmology since 1930s. It is, no wonder, named 'Dark Matter'.
- The material is considered to be a 'matter' since it appears to have gravitational attraction and it is 'dark' because it does not seem to interact with light (or for that matter any part of the electromagnetic spectrum).
- Detailed surveys of the cosmos indicate that almost 85% of the total mass of the Universe is composed of dark matter.
- Thus, stars, galaxies, and atoms that we see all around are just the tip of the iceberg and the elusive dark matter makes up the bulk of the Universe.

Primordial black holes:

- Cosmologists have come up with various hypothesis and theories to explain the dark matter.
- Some postulate it to be composed of neutrinos, which are particles that have no charge but have tiny mass and, therefore, do not have interact with electromagnetic spectrum, but are gravitationally interacting.
- Some others have postulated they may be some new kind of elementary particles - 'weakly-interacting massive particles (WIMPs)', or 'gravitationally-interacting massive particles' (GIMPs), which are yet to be detected.
- When the big bang hypothesis was proposed, two Soviet physicists, that at the initial instant of the big bang, the densities would have been very high at many points, resulting in the formation of small black holes. They were named 'primordial black holes'.
- Stephen Hawking investigated them in 1971. He computed that the mass of the primordial black holes could range from as low as one-hundredth of a milligram to as high as more than the mass of thousand Suns.

Gravitational lensing:

- Black holes are not radiant and will not be visible through any telescope.
- However, as first suggested by Albert Einstein, if by chance, a tiny primordial black hole eclipses a distant star, light rays of the star will bend around the black hole due to gravitational effect, resulting in the star appearing to be brighter than it originally is for a short while.
- Called 'gravitational lensing', this rare phenomena can occur only when the star, the black hole and the observer on the Earth are aligned in a straight line.
- When the black hole is in alignment with a distant star, due to gravitational attraction, light rays are bent inwards like a lens, making the star appear brighter.

Details:

- The research team kept observing the entire disk of the Andromeda galaxy consisting of lakhs of stars.
- Now, there is a chance for some primordial black holes, if they do exist in sufficient numbers, eclipsing any of these stars becomes significant.
- The eclipsed star may brighten up for a period of a few minutes or a few hours due to gravitational lensing, requiring the team to take multiple images to catch the flicker, if any.
- If the Universe is filled with invisible tiny primordial black holes, with masses lighter than the moon,

as postulated by Stephen Hawking, then we should have seen at least 1,000 gravitational lensing events. We saw at most one such candidate event, if not none. This implies Prof Stephen Hawking's theory that such black holes make up all of dark matter is wrong," says the researcher.

- Previous studies had already ruled out the existence of large numbers of primordial black holes that could range in size from the mass of the Moon to about 10 solar masses.
- The present study rules out the presence of primordial black holes with masses comparable to the moon and sizes of about 0.1 millimetre too.
- This implies that at best the lunar mass primordial black holes can contribute 0.1% of all dark matter mass.
- The researchers are planning to further develop their analysis of the Andromeda galaxy. One new theory they will investigate is to find whether binary black holes discovered by gravitational wave detector LIGO are in fact primordial black holes.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Proving a point on audit trail

Note to Students:

- The issue concerning Electronic Voting Machines (EVM's) and VVPAT's are in the news considering the fact that the general elections are around the corner.
- Here we present a gist of points covered in two articles covered in the Hindu newspaper, namely, "Proving a point on audit trail" which was published on the 4th of April, 2019 and, "Will VVPAT silence those sceptical of EVMs?" that was published in the Hindu on the 31st of March, 2019.

What's in the news?

- The Election Commission indicated to the Supreme Court on 29th March, 2019, that if the 50% Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slip verification is carried out, it will delay counting by six days.
- Twenty-one Opposition parties had moved the Supreme Court against the EC's guideline that VVPAT counting would take place only in one polling station in each Assembly segment in the coming Lok Sabha election.

What is the VVPAT and how does it function?

- The Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail device is an add-on connected to the Electronic Voting Machine.
- It allows voters to verify if their vote has indeed gone to the intended candidate by leaving a paper trail of the vote cast.
- After the voter casts his or her mandate by pressing a button related on the ballot machine (next to the symbol of the chosen party), the VVPAT connected to it prints a slip containing the poll symbol and the name of the candidate.
- The slip is visible to the voter from a glass case in the VVPAT for a total of seven seconds and the voter can verify if the mandate that s/he has cast has been registered correctly.

- After this time, it is cut and dropped into the drop box in the VVPAT and a beep is heard, indicating the vote has been recorded.
- Prior to voting, the VVPAT unit is calibrated to ensure that the button pressed on the ballot unit of the EVM is reflected correctly on the printed slips by the VVPAT.
- The presence of the slips that correspond to voter choice on the EVM helps retain a paper trail for the votes and makes it possible for the returning officer to corroborate machine readings of the vote.
- The VVPAT machines can be accessed only by polling officers.
- The units are sealed and can be opened during counting by the returning officer if there's a contingency.
- The VVPAT has been a universal presence in all EVMs in the Assembly elections from mid-2017. Only a few VVPAT machines are tallied to account for the accuracy of the EVM.
- Currently slips in one randomly chosen VVPAT machine per Assembly constituency are counted manually to tally with the EVM generated count.
- The EC has stated that VVPAT recounts have recorded 100% accuracy wherever it has been deployed in Assembly elections.

Why is the VVPAT necessary?

- The EC began to introduce EVMs on an experimental basis in 1998, and it was deployed across all State elections after 2001.
- EVMs have made a significant impact on Indian elections.
- Prior to the deployment of EVMs, elections were held with ballot papers.
- In some States, the election process was vitiated by rigging, stuffing of ballot boxes and intimidation of voters.
- Besides this, ballot paper-based voting resulted in the casting of a high number of invalid votes — voters wrongly registering their choices instead of placing seals, and so on.
- The EVMs allowed for elimination of invalid votes as the voting process was made easier — registering the vote by pressing a button.
- It also allowed for a quicker and easier tallying of votes.
- Cumulatively, the tallying and elimination of invalid votes reduced the scope for human error.
- Secondly, the EVMs made it difficult to commit malpractices as they allowed for only five votes to be registered every minute, discouraging mass rigging of the scale that was seen in earlier days when ballot papers were used.
- That said, there have been questions raised about the security of the EVMs and whether they can be manipulated and tampered with.
- The EC has addressed the possibility of tampering by gradually introducing newer security and monitoring features, upgrading EVMs with technological features that allow for dynamic coding and time-stamping of operations on ballot units and later, features such as tamper-detection and self-diagnostics.
- Furthermore, there are administrative steps that prevent EVMs from being stolen and tampered with.
- The introduction of the VVPAT adds another layer of accountability to the electoral process. The recount rules out any EVM tampering, despite the safeguards, through an “insider fraud” by EC officials or EVM manufacturers.

What problems have been encountered?

- In the initial phase of VVPAT implementation in the Lok Sabha by-elections in States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra and the Assembly election in Karnataka, there was a high rate of failure of VVPAT machines due to manufacturing glitches.
- In the Lok Sabha by-elections in 2017, the rate of VVPAT replacement, owing to glitches, was more than 15%, higher than the acceptable rates of failure (1-2%).
- In Karnataka, the failure and replacement rate was 4.3%.
- Coincidentally, the failure rate of the EVM unit (excluding the VVPAT) was very low.

- These glitches also caused severe disruptions to polling.
- To account for failure rates, the EC has tried to provide back-up machines to allow for swift replacement.
- The EC admitted later that the machines had high failure rates owing to hardware issues that occurred during the transport of EVMs and their exposure to extreme weather conditions.
- It sought to correct these problems by repairing components related to the printing spool of the VVPAT machines.
- The deployment of many corrected machines in the Assembly elections held recently in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh resulted in much reduced replacement rates (close to 2.5% in Madhya Pradesh and 1.9% in Chhattisgarh).
- This suggests that the EC is relatively better prepared to handle VVPAT-related glitches in the upcoming Lok Sabha election, where the VVPATs will be deployed in nearly 10.5 lakh polling stations nationwide.

Is the current rate of VVPAT recounts enough?

- Political parties, primarily of the Opposition, have demanded a greater VVPAT recount than the one booth per Assembly/Lok Sabha constituency rule that is now in place.
- The EC responded to a plea by the Opposition parties in the Supreme Court that there was a need for 50% VVPAT recount, saying such an exercise would delay the counting by six days.
- Statistically speaking, it does not require a 50% sample to adequately match VVPAT tallies with those of EVMs.
- The Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, has presented a report on possible and appropriate VVPAT counts to the EC, in which it said a sample verification of 479 EVMs and VVPATs of a total 10.35 lakh machines would bring the level of confidence in the process to 99.9936%.
- The logic behind counting only one booth per constituency in each State stems from the understanding that there are nearly 10.35 lakh polling stations and 4,125 Assembly constituencies in the country.
- By counting the slips in at least one VVPAT in each Assembly constituency, the EC argues, a relatively high sample size of the EVMs (0.5%) is verified.
- Critics have argued that this sample size is not enough to statistically select a potentially tampered EVM within a high confidence level and adjusting for a small margin of error (less than 2%) as the unit of selection must be EVMs in each State rather than the entire country as a whole.
- One suggestion, by the former bureaucrat Ashok Vardhan Shetty, is for adjusting the VVPAT counting process to factor in the size of the State, population of the constituency and turnout to account for a higher confidence level and a low margin of error.
- This would entail the certain tallying of more than one VVPAT per constituency, in fact close to 30 per constituency in smaller States and less than five per constituency for larger States.
- The Supreme Court has said the EC must increase the VVPAT count to more than the current number.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that as the campaign for the 2019 general election builds up, so too with the debate on electronic voting machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs).
- For example, as a result of a new development in the Nizamabad parliamentary constituency in Telangana, the Election Commission (EC) would have been forced to conduct elections using ballot papers — there are 185 candidates in the fray.
- This exceeds the capacity of an EVM, which can cater to 64 candidates (63 candidates and the None of the Above, or NOTA, option).
- The EC is now considering using special machines which can accommodate up to 384 candidates. These will use 24 ballot units connected in series. For this it will have to buy at an enormous cost 26,820 ballot units, 2,240 control units and 2,600 VVPATs.

- Experts question the likelihood of acquiring so many machines with technical changes in the short time available.

A Brief look at the past in A.P.

- The use of ballot papers to conduct elections is not new; they were used in the same State in 2010 in a near comic situation.
- In July 2010, the Telangana agitation was at its peak, and 12 MLAs of the Andhra Pradesh Assembly had resigned and were contesting the by-elections.
- This coincided with the Bharatiya Janata Party-led anti EVM campaign. After the EC turned down the request of political parties to go back to paper ballots, the parties resorted to a smart ploy.
- The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) decided to field more than 64 candidates in each constituency. So, there were 114 nominations in Yellareddy (then in Nizamabad district and 107 in Sircilla. Even after large-scale rejection of nominations, the numbers in six constituencies exceeded 64.
- The EC was forced to conduct elections in these constituencies by ballot paper.
- The EC took it as a great opportunity to showcase the relative strength of EVMs. While the EVM results were available in four hours, the ballot paper results took 40 hours. Adding to this were thousands of invalid votes. The other issues were the economic and environmental costs of printing ballots and prolonged drudgery for polling staff. Ironically, the results from both systems across seats were similar.
- Questions arise: Where did the political parties stand then? A media report said the TRS opposed EVMs “because it [had] reliable information that the Congress [would] try to manipulate the machines to win the polls”. The Telugu Desam Party president N. Chandrababu Naidu demanded that ballot papers be used in all 12 constituencies.
- Bandaru Dattatreya, BJP president in then undivided Andhra Pradesh, said, “We have been demanding that there should be a nationwide debate on EVMs. The TRS has used the right strategy.”
- A Congress spokesman said it was unfortunate that the parties had doubted the EC’s integrity, forcing it to incur additional printing expenses. So, while the issue remains the same, the characters have changed.
- It is pertinent to point out that the difference between the 2010 incident and this time (in terms of the number of candidates) is that **a large number of farmers are contesting as independent candidates to highlight their problems. It has nothing to do with an anti-EVM movement.**

Stringent trials

- Since the last general election (2014), there have been allegations about the BJP hacking EVMs.
- The EC has repeatedly challenged conspiracy theorists to demonstrate that EVMs can be hacked but no party has accepted it.
- This debate should have ended in October 2010 when the EC called an all-party meeting which unanimously recommended the adoption of VVPATs, which was promptly accepted.
- The two factories manufacturing EVMs were asked to develop VVPATs, and an independent committee of professors from five Indian Institutes of Technology was requested to monitor the process.
- There were a series of trials, followed by two full-day election simulations in five cities across India (with different climatic conditions) in 2011-12. Only after the VVPATs passed all the rigorous tests (climatic endurance and technology) were they deployed, initially in 20,000 polling booths. As manufacturing progressed, all constituencies were equipped with VVPATs.
- In 2013, the Supreme Court lauded the EC’s initiatives, directing the government to release adequate funds for procurement for all booths for the 2019 elections.
- Since 2017, all elections have been held with VVPAT-attached EVMs. A total of 1,500 machines have been counted as per the present norm of counting slips generated by one VVPAT in each Assembly constituency. Not a single mismatch has been detected.

Issue concerning VVPAT audits

- The only pending issue is of VVPAT audits.
- As many as 23 Opposition parties have moved the Supreme Court demanding that half the total slips be tallied. A group of retired bureaucrats and diplomats has also written to the EC regarding the sample size to ensure 99.9% public satisfaction.
- The EC has submitted to the court that the three-member expert panel comprising members from the Indian Statistical Institute, the Chennai Mathematical Institute and the Central Statistics Office has endorsed the current practice of counting one VVPAT per Assembly constituency, and that the sample size proposed by political parties would only serve to delay results by six days. The judgment is expected soon.
- As a matter of fact, S.Y. Quraishi, former Chief Election Commissioner of India, has also proposed an alternative. The top two runners-up in the constituency can choose any two VVPATs to be counted as they have the highest stake in the results. This would serve to do away with a large sample, as only four machines per Assembly would have to be counted to ensure public faith in the system. This is on the analogy of the highly popular and successful Umpire Decision Review System in cricket.

Concluding Remarks:

- EVMs have made India a proud global leader in elections.
- After incorporating VVPATs, the system is now foolproof.
- After the expert panel report, the EC's initiatives in this regard stand vindicated.
- It should now clinch the EVM debate and utilise the opportunity in the Nizamabad constituency to demonstrate the relative superiority of the EVM as the wonder machine of Indian democracy.

2. Turf issues in fighting corruption

Note to Students:

- The issue concerning the Lokpal has been in the news for quite some time now. However, it has recently emerged into prominence again due to the appointment of Justice P.C. Ghose as the first Lokpal of India.
- Here we take into account some of the points published in three articles namely, "Lokpal, at last", published in the Hindu on March 19th, 2019, "The principle and procedure in Lokpal" that was published by the Hindu on April 3rd, 2019 as well as "Turf issues in fighting corruption" that was published in the Hindu on April 4th, 2019.

Larger Background:

- The idea of constituting an Ombudsman type institution to look into the grievances of individuals against the administration was first mooted in 1963 during a debate on Demands for Grants for the Law Ministry.
- In 1966, the First Administrative Reforms Commission recommended that two independent authorities at the central and state level be established to enquire into complaints against public functionaries (including Members of Parliament).

A Trace of History:

- The Lokpal Bill was introduced for the first time in 1968 but it lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. It was introduced seven more times in Parliament, the last time in 2001. However, the Bill lapsed each time except in 1985 when it was withdrawn.
- In 2002, the report of the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution urged

that the Constitution should provide for the appointment of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas in the states but suggested that the Prime Minister should be kept out of the purview of the authority.

- In 2004, the UPA government's National Common Minimum Programme promised that the Lokpal Bill would be enacted.
- The Second Administrative Reforms Commission, formed in 2005, also recommended that the office of the Lokpal be established without delay.

Why recently in the news?

- Recently, Justice P.C. Ghose was appointed as the first Lokpal. This appointment has come after an unjustified delay of five years. Nevertheless, experts opine that it ought to be welcomed as a milestone in the cause of fighting corruption in high places.
- It is important to note that the concept of an institutional mechanism, or an anti-corruption ombudsman, has been around for over 50 years. It was finally enacted as a law in 2013, and came into effect on January 16, 2014.
- Some of the credit for driving this legislation must be given to Anna Hazare's movement against what many saw as unreasonable levels of corruption under the previous UPA regime.
- However, since then, barring a report by the Standing Committee of Parliament and a couple of amendments passed in 2016 on the declaration of assets by public servants, there has been very little progress.

A Run-through of recent events:

- At one point, the government's lack of political will to establish a Lokpal became obvious, leading to the Supreme Court repeatedly asking it to show progress in its efforts.
- Ultimately, it was the court's stern ultimatum to appoint a Lokpal within a timeframe that worked.
- The appointment system is quite long, a two-stage process.
- A search committee has to be formed. It recommends a panel of names to the high-power selection committee, which comprises the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Justice of India (or his nominee) and an eminent jurist. The selection panel has to choose from a short-list consisting of names for the posts of Lokpal chairperson, and judicial and non-judicial members.
- The government had initially taken the position that it was awaiting the passage of amendments based on the parliamentary committee report.
- One amendment pertained to including the leader of the largest party in the Opposition in the selection committee, in the absence of a recognised Leader of the Opposition.
- In a verdict in April 2017, the Supreme Court rejected the excuse and said there was no legal bar on the selection committee moving ahead even if there was a vacancy.
- It is not clear why this simple amendment, carried out in respect of selection committees for the posts of CBI Director and Chief Information Commissioner, was not made in the Lokpal Act.

'Special Invitee': A Source of Friction

- The Congress leader in the Lok Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, did not want to attend selection committee meetings as a 'special invitee' and wanted full membership.
- Now that the Lokpal has been chosen, victims of corruption have a viable avenue of redress.
- It is important to note that the Lokpal will take over the work of sanctioning prosecution, besides exercising its power to order preliminary inquiries and full-fledged investigations by any agency, including the CBI. It may be unrealistic to expect any dramatic impact on the lives of the common people, but the Lokpal and other members have a historic responsibility to live up to popular expectations.

Further Analysis:

The Supreme Court's ultimatum to the Centre to appoint a Lokpal within a given time frame, and the subsequent appointment of the first Lokpal in the country, is to be welcomed. After all, the fight for a Lokpal has been long-drawn-out.

A Brief Look at History:

- It is important to note that from 1963, India has been nurturing the ambition to appoint a Lokpal, a phrase coined by L.M. Singhvi.
- Copied from Sweden's Ombudsman and its adaptation in the U.K. in 1967, the idea was to expose 'maladministration', which British MP Richard Crossman defined as "bias, neglect, inattention, delay, incompetence, ineptitude, arbitrariness and so on".
- Despite affirmations to its need, no one really wanted a Lokpal in India, preferring instead the mild Vigilance Commission from 1964 to 2003.
- In one sense, the National Human Rights Commission and the various national commissions dealing with Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, children and even safai karmacharis are all special Lokpals within their areas. But nobody fears them because they are promotional and deal with individual grievances. They hurt no one and have become semi-ineffective. No one wanted a strong Lokpal because it would demand accountability from politicians and bureaucrats.
- After the Emergency, a new model of Lokpal emerged, a model for 'regime revenge'. The 'maladministration' model gave way to an anti-corruption model with a sweep clause of five years. This meant that the Lokpal would re-examine Emergency and target the Indira Gandhi government. It meant that it would target politicians, but not bureaucrats. The power of the bureaucracy to stultify anti-corruption measures is well known. This model continued with regularity.
- The 2011 Anna Hazare movement, which fought to get the Lokpal Bill passed, faltered in many ways. When the Modi government came to power, it did not appoint a Lokpal either. It did not want Lokpal accusations and investigations to mar its tenure.
- **Directed by the Supreme Court, the Lokpal appointment process began in 2018, which was too late to scrutinise the Modi government before the 2019 general election.**
- The government constituted an eight-member Search Committee in September 2018, headed by former Supreme Court Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, to recommend names for the posts of Lokpal chairperson and members.
- The names recommended were scrutinised by a Selection Committee, comprising Prime Minister Narendra Modi; the Chief Justice of India's nominee, Justice S.A. Bobde; Speaker of the Lok Sabha Sumitra Mahajan; and eminent jurist Mukul Rohatgi. The 'special invitee', who was Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge, refused to attend the meetings.
- Experts have opined that we can see that the Prime Minister and the Lok Sabha Speaker are from the BJP. The eminent jurist was the Attorney General of India from 2014 to 2017. Only the Chief Justice's nominee is not connected to the party.

Neither transparent nor fair: An allegation

- Critics ask a pertinent question: Was this entire procedure transparent and fair? Unfortunately, no.
- When the matter was argued in the Supreme Court, advocate Prashant Bhushan asked for the names of those who had applied for the post.
- This suggestion was shot down during the argument.
- We don't know who applied to be considered as chairperson and as a member of the Lokpal. Did former Supreme Court judge, Justice Pinaki Ghose, apply even though he was a member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) at the time? Who were the others?
- Section 4(3) of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act of 2013 states that the Selection Committee "may also consider any person other than the persons recommended by the Search Committee". This makes the procedure futile.

- The Search Committee Rules, 2014 stated that the Selection Committee would select one of the five names recommended for the post of Chairperson of the Lokpal and eight of 24 names recommended for the post of members of the Lokpal.
- The Selection Committee was to lay down the criteria for appointment and decide by majority in cases of difference of opinion.
- It is important to note that the public is entitled to know the list proposed by the Search Committee.
- It is entitled to know who all were considered and why. Critics make the point that the appointment of the Lokpal, shrouded in secrecy is an affront to the very concept of the Lokpal.

Critics view on the background of members:

- Justice Pinaki Ghose is not known for any path-breaking judgments, so it is curious why he was chosen over other retired judges, especially as he was already a member of the NHRC.
- No less than a sitting judge could have been offered this post.
- The other judicial members are Justice Pradip Kumar Mohanty, who was Chief Justice of the Jharkhand High Court; Justice Abhilasha Kumari, who served on the Gujarat High Court and was a chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Gujarat; and Justice Ajay Kumar Tripathi, who was Chief Justice of the Chhattisgarh High Court.
- The first woman chief of the Sashastra Seema Bal, Archana Ramachandran, is a non-judicial member, as are former Chief Secretary of Maharashtra D.K. Jain, former Indian Revenue Service officer Mahender Singh, and former Indian Administrative Service officer of the Gujarat cadre, I.P. Gautam.
- The question is, should IAS and IPS officers be appointed, especially since they have to deal with fellow officers? The field was wide open from non-government sectors as well.
- Hazare was right in being overjoyed that a Lokpal has been appointed at last. And Aruna Roy and others were right in insisting on a wider jurisdiction on maladministration and delivery of services.
- However, unfortunately, this Lokpal would be viewed as a secretly appointed one.
- Much will depend on how it is used and against whom.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts have opined that the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 is complicated.
- This could perhaps not be avoided, given that what was being attempted was a new and bold experiment to pull the anti-corruption campaign out of oblivion.
- This law was badly needed if only to lend a modicum of credibility to the process of enhancing the accountability of those in high places, who were cocking a snook at all efforts to demonstrate to the world that India is not second to any other nation in making its public administration clean and fair.
- Surprisingly, the appointment of India's first Lokpal has not been received with great excitement.
- The preoccupation with the general election of all those likely to be affected by the Act may perhaps explain the apathy.
- Nevertheless, the working of the Act may be expected to be closely followed in the months to come, both by the polity and the legal fraternity, which is how it ought to be in a vibrant democracy.
- The corruption of public servants in India has become such a menace that something drastically new had to be tried, and appointing the Lokpal at least partially meets this crying need.
- There is guarded optimism in a few quarters, and considerable cynicism in others, over the likely efficacy of the Lokpal.
- However, any high expectations that the new mechanism against corruption will measurably transform the scene seem misplaced.

Actors against corruption

- There are now three principal actors at the national level in the fight against graft: the Lokpal, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

- Some people have misgivings over the independence of the Lokpal.
- They wonder how it will work with the other two so that the objective of cleansing public life is achieved with reasonable satisfaction.
- Some critics allege that the Lokpal's composition was dictated solely by the establishment led by the Prime Minister.
- But what about the Chief Justice of India, or his nominee, another important member of the Selection Committee?
- Casting aspersions on the neutrality of the highest judicial authority in the country is unacceptable unless one can prove with reasonable material that he acted in a biased manner in choosing the first Lokpal.
- The decision of the 'special invitee' to stay away from the process on the ground that he was a mere invitee and not a full-fledged member of the Selection Committee is regrettable.
- The accusation that the process of selection of the Lokpal was not transparent falls flat if someone in the Opposition abstains from participating in the Committee's decision and denies himself and the nation the chance of knowing and evaluating how open-minded or not the other members were in choosing the members and chairperson of the Lokpal.

Jurisdiction issues: A Perspective

Experts take the view that what is worrying is how well the CVC and CBI are going to play a complementary role in upholding the objective for which the Lokpal has been appointed.

The Lokpal has jurisdiction over Group A and B public servants.

This does not deprive the CBI of its own jurisdiction over these two groups.

The Lokpal Act permits using the CBI (referred to by the Act as the Delhi Special Police Establishment, from which the CBI was born) for examining a complaint against a public servant for misconduct.

Although the Lokpal has its own Inquiry Wing, it can nevertheless forward a complaint to the CBI for a preliminary inquiry, and thereafter for registering a regular case under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

It is not clear what happens when such a complaint is already being inquired into by the CBI.

Legally speaking, the government, in addition to the Lokpal, is competent to order a preliminary inquiry and permit the CBI to proceed with a regular case.

What is also to be remembered is that the CBI can register a case even without the government's nod in instances in which a public servant is caught red-handed while receiving a bribe.

If an individual lodges a complaint with the government and the Lokpal, what should the Lokpal do? Does it have the authority to give direction to the CBI to keep its hands off the matter and wait for the Lokpal's own Inquiry Wing to handle the matter?

Certain other important perspectives:

The Act creates a Prosecution Wing exclusively for the Lokpal. How will that body coordinate with the CBI's Director of Prosecution in respect of a matter handled by both of them? It is a common practice for complainants in India to dash off their complaints to a host of agencies.

There is a distinct prospect of a clash between the government (which has greater powers of superintendence

over the CBI than the Lokpal) and the Lokpal over a wide spectrum of issues.

The Act gives the impression that superintendence over the CBI is shared by the Lokpal and the government, and neither is in exclusive command of the former.

Can the Lokpal order the CBI to suspend its inquiry in respect of a complaint and report on it to the exclusion of the government?

Concluding Remarks:

The initial days are going to be difficult in terms of coordination. Everything will depend on how well the Lokpal and the government sink their egos and concentrate on the fundamental objective of striking at corruption without getting bogged down by technicalities.

All these imponderables, however, do not reduce the utility of a highly placed ombudsman. It may finally boil down to Justice Ghose's perception of what his role is. He can certainly shape the future of this experiment.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Serious setback

What's in the news?

- Recently, the Honourable Supreme Court of India quashed a circular issued by the RBI on the resolution of bad loans.
- Experts opine that this development is a setback to the evolving process for debt resolution.

Editorial Analysis:

- According to data from the ratings agency ICRA, the voiding of the February 12, 2018 circular could slow down and complicate the resolution process for loans aggregating to as much as ₹3.80 lakh crore across 70 large borrowers.
- The circular had forced banks to recognise defaults by large borrowers with dues of over ₹2,000 crore within a day after an instalment fell due; and if not resolved within six months after that, they had no choice but to refer these accounts for resolution under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.
- Mounting bad loans, which crossed 10% of all advances at that point, and the failure of existing schemes such as corporate debt restructuring, stressed asset resolution and the Scheme for Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets (S4A) to make a dent in resolving them, formed the backdrop to this directive.

Creating a credit discipline:

- **The circular was aimed at breaking the nexus between banks and defaulters**, both of whom were content to evergreen loans under available schemes. It introduced a certain credit discipline — banks had to recognise defaults immediately and attempt resolution within a six-month timeframe, while borrowers risked being dragged into the insolvency process and losing control of their enterprises if they did not regularise their accounts.
- RBI data prove the circular had begun to impact resolution positively.
- It is this credit discipline that risks being compromised now. It is not surprising that international ratings agency Moody's has termed the development as "credit negative" for banks. It is true that the circular failed to take into account the peculiarities of specific industries or borrowers and came up

with a one-size-fits-all approach. It is also true that not all borrowers were deliberate defaulters, and sectors such as power were laid low by externalities beyond the control of borrowers.

Concluding Remarks:

- The RBI could have addressed these concerns when banks and borrowers from these sectors brought these issues to its notice.
- By taking a hard line and refusing to heed representations, the RBI may only have harmed its own well-intentioned move.
- That said, it is now important for the central bank to ensure that the discipline in the system does not slacken.
- The bond market does not allow any leeway to borrowers in repayment, and there is no reason why bank loans should be any different.
- The RBI should study the judgment closely, and quickly reframe its guidelines so that they are within the framework of the powers available to it under the law. Else, the good work done in debt resolution in the last one year will be undone.

2. A ladder, not a crutch

What's in the news?

- Experts point out that using behavioural science in the design of cash transfers can make them more effective in the fight against poverty.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts take the view that there are many legitimate questions about the Congress's **Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY) scheme**, which promises to transfer ₹72,000 annually to 20% of families in the poorest of the poor category.
- But the fundamental soundness of the idea should not be in doubt.
- **Evidence from dozens of cash transfer programmes around the world speaks resoundingly in favour of such schemes as a tool for sustainable poverty alleviation.**

What do evaluations of cash transfers suggest?

- Evaluations of cash transfers show that they usually lead to large increases in household consumption, improve health and education outcomes for beneficiaries and their children, and improve women's agency and empowerment when paid to women.
- At the same time, common fears, such as that money will be squandered on alcohol or cigarettes, turn out to be largely unfounded.
- Some experts take the view that neither does handing money to the poor make them reluctant to work or be entrepreneurial.
- Rather, behavioural economists have found that poverty itself makes it harder for people to do things like plan for a future beyond immediate survival. It's hard to be ambitious on an empty stomach. By freeing people's minds from having to fret about their next meal, a cash transfer can enable entrepreneurship or more productive employment.

What does behavioural economics suggest? A Look at International Examples:

- Experts take the view that ideas from behavioural economics are increasingly being used to magnify the already positive effects of giving people cash.
- In Morocco, MIT economist Esther Duflo and her colleagues found that simply 'labelling' a cash transfer as an education transfer can push up school participation.

- In ongoing research with the World Bank and the governments of Madagascar, Kenya, Ghana, and Tanzania, experts are exploring whether it is possible to use the 'mental space' that an infusion of cash enables to help beneficiaries use the money they get more productively.
- In Madagascar, experts asked recipients to develop a plan for how they would use the cash transfer amounts to further their goals. Eighteen months on, those who received this 'nudge' were more food secure, more likely to have invested in livestock, and had higher cash-crop incomes.
- In another study in Madagascar, experts found that helping people visualise how much they needed to save for a goal (for example, a new milch cow) and giving them a pouch to set money aside for it, increased saving. These designs are now being adapted and piloted in Kenya and Tanzania.
- By helping parents invest in the next generation, cash transfers strike at the heart of persistent poverty.
- Incorporating small behavioural interventions makes the money go even further. If a programme like NYAY takes experimentation, design and evidence seriously, its impact on the lives of India's poor could be transformative.

F. Tidbits

1. J&K govt. bars civilian traffic twice a week

- The J&K government banned civilian movement on the 270-km Srinagar-Jammu highway for two days a week, for the next two months, to allow smooth passage of military convoys.
- The decision comes in the wake of a failed suicide attack with a car bomb on a CRPF convoy last Saturday that was meant to repeat the February 14 Pulwama bombing, which killed 40 troopers.
- The decision came as a shock to travel operators, fruit growers and traders.
- It is believed that it would have a negative impact on J&K's tourism.

G. Prelims Facts

1. National Investment and Infrastructure Fund

- National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Limited (NIIFL) is an investor-owned fund manager, anchored by the Government of India (GoI) in collaboration with leading global and domestic institutional investors.
- It is a fund created by the Government of India for enhancing infrastructure financing in the country.
- Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has approved NIIF as an alternate investment fund.
- The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) Limited has been incorporated as a company under the Companies Act, 2013, duly authorized to act as investment manager of National Investment and Infrastructure Fund.
- NIIF will invest in stalled projects, greenfield and brownfield projects.
- NIIF is a fund of funds. So there will be multiple alternate investment funds underneath.
- There could be a stressed-assets fund, renewable energy fund, brownfield projects fund – sponsored by the NIIF.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1) Consider the following statements:

1. Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi was set up to provide financial assistance to patients, living below poverty line and who are suffering from major life-threatening diseases.
2. Tamil Nadu is the first state to release a Rare Diseases and Orphan Drugs Policy.

Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: a

Explanation:

The RAN was set up to provide financial assistance to patients, living below poverty line and who are suffering from major life-threatening diseases, to receive medical treatment at any of the super speciality Hospitals/Institutes or other Government hospitals. Karnataka is the first state to release a Rare Diseases and Orphan Drugs Policy.

Q2) Consider the following statements:

1. Golden Triangle is the region between the borders of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.
2. Golden Crescent is the region spanning across Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.

Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Explanation:

Both the statements are true. Read more about [Golden Crescent](#).

Q3) Global Slavery Index is published by:

- a. UN Commission on Human Rights
- b. Walk Free Foundation
- c. UN Development Programme
- d. UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

Answer: b

Explanation:

Global Slavery Index (GSI) is published by the Walk Free Foundation, a global human rights organization with a mission to end modern slavery in a generation. The report looks at prevalence (the percentage of a country's population that is enslaved) as well as the total number of people living in modern slavery in each country.

Q4) Which of the following is not included in the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List?

- a. Kumbh Mela
- b. Bharatanatyam
- c. Yoga
- d. Chhau Dance

Answer: b

Explanation:

Read more about [UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage from India](#).

Q5) Consider the following questions:

1. The Padma awards are announced only on the occasion of Republic Day every year.
2. Government servants including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are eligible for the Padma Awards.

Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: a

Explanation:

Government servants including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are NOT eligible for these Awards. The Awards are given in three categories: Padma Vibhushan (for exceptional and distinguished service), Padma Bhushan (distinguished service of higher order) and Padma Shri (distinguished service).

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Bringing the Supreme Court under the purview RTI would affect the independence of Judiciary. Critically comment. (15 Marks)
2. Algeria shows the forces of the Arab Spring are still alive. Elucidate. (10 Marks)

