



# PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial

## Current Affairs

Posted at: 23/05/2019

### 1. **EC rejects Opposition plea for VVPAT tally before vote count:**

#### **Why in news?**

A day ahead of the counting of votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll, the Election Commission (EC) rejected the demand of Opposition parties for tallying of the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips in five polling booths in each Assembly segment with the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), prior to the vote count.

#### **EC Stand:**

- In a statement the EC said the VVPAT counting sequence would remain as per the Supreme Court-approved guidelines.
- A delegation of 22 Opposition parties had met the full Election Commission.
- Among other things, they requested the EC to count the VVPAT slips before the start of counting of votes polled in EVMs.
- Subsequently, the EC deliberated on the issue with senior officials concerned, and after two rounds of “in-depth” discussions, it arrived at the decision.
- It has neither been found possible nor feasible to accede to this demand in the overall context and especially in view of the judgment of the Supreme Court in writ petition delivered on April 8,” it said.
- According to the EC, the judgment directs that the **random selection of VVPATs** be subjected to the process of slip verification as per the guidelines 16.6 of the EVM manual in force.

#### **Procedural issues:**

- There were some other procedural issues like **allowing counting agents of candidates along with all Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers**, on which necessary instructions have already been reiterated and, wherever required, made more candidate-friendly.
- The EC assured the political parties of strict adherence to the set procedures for the entire counting process, especially the security of the strong rooms and the counting centres.
- The parties had also demanded that in case of any discrepancy in the EVM-VVPAT verification, 100% counting of the slips at all polling booths be done in that

particular segment

- According to sources, during the meeting, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora had cited the Supreme Court order and also told the Opposition leaders that a discussion on the issue was a waste of time, which triggered sharp reactions from them.

### Controversies:

- During the elections, there were a series of controversies surrounding the Election Commission's decisions.
  - Its alleged delay in deciding the Model Code of Conduct violation allegations against several speeches of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah led the Congress to approach the Supreme Court.
  - It was after the Supreme Court set a deadline of May 6 that the complaints were disposed of. Mr. Modi was not found to have violated the Code in all the matters, but Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa gave dissenting opinions in some cases.
  - It triggered another round of controversy, as **Mr. Lavasa objected to his views not being incorporated in the final orders**. He recused himself from MCC proceedings.
  - Later the full Commission took up the issue raised by Mr. Lavasa and, by a majority of 2:1, **decided that minority views would only be recorded in internal files**. They will not be made part of the final orders, as per previous practice.
  - It is learnt that Mr. Lavasa then decided that he would continue to skip MCC meetings. As a result, several matters still remain pending.
- 

## 2. **Documents stolen from IAF Rafale team office in France:**

### Why in news?

In a major security breach, a break-in and theft occurred in the Paris office of the **Indian Air Force (IAF) Project Management Team (PMT)** overseeing the Rafale fighter deal and some documents have been taken, according to multiple defence sources. There was break-in in two other offices in the premises, another source said.

### Security Breach:

- The incident occurred on Sunday night and some documents have been taken. An investigation is under way," a defence source told.
- It is Dassault Aviation's responsibility as it has been on their premises, the source added. The **PMT consists of four IAF officers and is headed by a Group Captain**.
- At least two sources confirmed that some safes were broken open and the culprits managed to get away with some documents inside.
- However, the nature of the documents was not immediately known. Defence

Ministry and IAF officials when contacted declined to comment.

- However, a second source said it looks like a case of burglary.
  - PMT, one among three offices of Dassault broken into. Money was stolen from other offices,” the source said.
  - A third source said the burglary looks like a diversion and the matter is of serious concern. What kind of documents have been taken is yet to be ascertained, the source said.
  - The local police have been informed and a case has been registered, another source said.
  - In September 2016, **India and France signed a €7.87 billion Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) for 36 Rafale multi-role jets in a fly-away condition.**
- 

### 3. **Centre clears names of four judges to SC:**

#### **Why in news?**

The Centre has cleared four names recommended by the Collegium for elevation as Supreme Court judges. With their appointment, the **court will reach its full sanctioned strength of 31 judges**. The government has cleared the names of Jharkhand High Court and Gauhati High Court Chief Justices Aniruddha Bose and A.S. Bopanna.

#### **Request turned down:**

- On May 8, the Collegium refused the government’s request to reconsider its April 12 recommendation to elevate the two judges.
- The government also gave its nod to the Collegium’s May 8 recommendation for elevation of Justice B.R. Gavai, a judge of the Bombay High Court, and Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court Surya Kant.

#### **Recommendation**

- The Collegium had reiterated its recommendation on Justices Bose and Bopanna in the face of the government’s reluctance.
  - It resent the files to the government, saying there was nothing adverse found in their conduct, competence or integrity.
  - This made it binding on the government to clear their appointments.
  - The Collegium had said the elevation of Justices Gavai and Kant was an attempt to provide “due representation” to all High Courts and all sections of society.
- 

### 4. **Centre misled SC on Rafale:**

#### **Why in news?**

The petitioners in the Rafale deal case has accused the government of having “wilfully and deliberately misled” the Supreme Court by feeding it untruths which amounted to “wholesale fraud”.

### **Petitioners stand:**

- This is part of the 41-page written submissions filed by the petitioners, including former Union Ministers Yashwant Sinha and Arun Shourie and advocate Prashant Bhushan.
- The written submissions covered points raised by the petitioners for initiating a case of perjury against officials responsible for “suppressing the facts” of the Rafale purchase.
- It also addressed issues raised for reviewing the court’s December 14 judgment which had upheld the purchase.
- Instead of providing the court with the original and complete records of the deal for 36 Rafale jets from Dassault Aviation in France, the government saw the court make do with two notes filed in sealed covers, the petitioners said.

### **False Information:**

- It suppressed the truth and thereby insinuated utter falsehoods: facts and documents of the greatest significance, which have direct and overarching bearing on the matter that the court was considering, and which were available with the government were suppressed from the court,” the submissions said.
- It was not just one fact or document that might have been left out accidentally. But a series, and all of them conformed to a pattern,” the petitioners said.
- The falsehoods and suppression of facts were so extensive that they amount to wholesale fraud: and a judgment [December 14] obtained by fraud is ipso facto void.
- The submissions pointed out several instances, including a press release, which according to the Supreme Court in its judgment, suggested that there was “possibly an arrangement between the parent Reliance company and Dassault starting from 2012.
- This is an obvious error. The Reliance company that entered into an offset arrangement with Dassault first entered the defence sector only in December 2014.
- The government’s note thus deliberately confounded “Reliance Industries” with “Reliance Infrastructure” and thereby misled the court into committing an embarrassing error,” the petitioners said.
- They also pointed out how the government had kept the court in the dark about the “parallel negotiations” conducted by the Prime Minister’s Office.
- Further, they alleged that “notwithstanding objections of the Ministry of Defence and the mandatory provisions of the Defence Procurement Procedure, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval again interfered without mandate and conducted negotiations with the French in Paris on 12.01.2016 and 13.01.2016 on issues of Bank Guarantee, Sovereign Guarantee, Seat of Arbitration, etc”.

- A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi had reserved the review and application for perjury on May 10 for judgment.
  - On the last day of hearing, the Bench asked the government why there was still no FIR registered on a corruption complaint made in October to the CBI in connection with the deal.
  - Question here is whether you are obliged under the law to register an FIR when a complaint is made?" Justice Joseph had asked Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal on Friday.
- 

## 5. **Determined to fight terror:**

### **Why in news?**

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj mentioned the Pulwama terror strike and the Islamic State attacks in Sri Lanka and urged member-nations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation for greater counter-terror cooperation.

### **Regional connectivity and peace:**

- Addressing the ministerial meet of SCO at Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, the Minister said India remained committed to regional connectivity and peace in Afghanistan.
  - The meeting acquired additional significance as Ms. Swaraj and her Pakistan counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi exchanged pleasantries on the sidelines.
  - Sources said the interaction did not amount to a meeting as the two spoke to each other at the Foreign Ministers' lounge where others were also present.
  - This was the first time after the Pulwama attack that the two Ministers greeted each other.
  - Our heart goes out to our brothers and sisters of Sri Lanka, who have recently witnessed the ghastly act of terrorism. Our wounds of Pulwama attack were still raw and the news from the neighbourhood has made us more determined to fight firmly (and) resolutely against this menace," said Ms. Swaraj addressing a gathering which included Mr. Qureshi.
  - Ms. Swaraj said India was open to strengthening the **Regional Anti Terror Structure or RATS of SCO** to fight terrorism and security challenges in the region.
  - Taking up the situation in Afghanistan, the Minister said India wanted it to be "united, peaceful, secure, stable, inclusive and economically vibrant".
  - Ms. Swaraj cited air connectivity between Kandahar, Kabul and Mumbai, Delhi as a sign of continued commitment to regional connectivity projects.
- 

## 6. **Finance Ministry begins pre-Budget discussions:**

### **Why in news?**



The Finance Ministry has begun the pre-Budget consultation exercise with industry bodies in the run-up to the full Budget for the current financial year to be unveiled by the new government sometime in July.

### **For the Full Budget:**

- Finance Ministry officials met representatives of the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) and would hold similar consultation meetings with other key chambers, including CII, next week.
  - Following tradition, the government on February 1 unveiled an interim Budget for 2019-20 in view of the Lok Sabha election.
  - The final Budget for the fiscal is likely to be tabled in July after the formation of the new government.
  - The Ministry has already met the representatives of other Ministries and government departments as part of the Budget-making exercise.
  - According to sources, SIAM suggested measures to boost the auto sector which has been witnessing a demand slowdown, especially in the passenger vehicle segment, for over 10 months now.
  - Industry chambers are also likely to suggest fiscal and non-fiscal measures to boost growth which slipped to five-quarter low of 6.6 per cent in October-December 2018.
- 

### **7. ISRO launches RISAT-2B:**

#### **Why in news?**

In a predawn launch, a PSLV rocket of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) placed **RISAT-2B, an X-band microwave Earth observation satellite**, into orbit 556 km above earth.

#### **Significance:**

- Data from the satellite would be vital for the **Armed Forces, agriculture forecasters and disaster relief agencies**.
- The new satellite “will enhance **India’s all-weather [space-based] capabilities** in agriculture, forestry and disaster management,” ISRO said.
- In a post-launch address from the Sriharikota spaceport, ISRO Chairman K. Sivan hailed the ‘textbook launch’ of a very important and complex satellite.

#### **Advanced Technology:**

- Dr. Sivan described RISAT-2B as “an advanced Earth Observation satellite with an advanced technology of 3.6-metre **radial rib [unfurlable] antenna**.”
- After the satellite separated from the launcher, its solar arrays deployed automatically.
- **ISRO Telemetry Tracking and Command Network at Bengaluru** took

control of the satellite. In the coming days, the satellite will be brought to its final operational configuration,” the space agency said.

- Two important secondary or “piggyback trial payloads that would revolutionise its future missions” were also included in the launch.
- They are the **new Vikram processor** from Semiconductor Laboratory (SCL), Chandigarh, that will control future launchers, and a low-cost microelectronic inertial navigation system from the ISRO Inertial Systems Unit, Thiruvananthapuram.

### **Chandrayaan-2 launch:**

- Dr. Sivan, who is also Secretary, Department of Space, announced that the Chandrayaan-2 lander-rover mission would be launched between July 9-16.
- The **high resolution Cartosat-3**, the first **small satellite launch vehicle (SSLV) mission** and the second test of a future reusable launch vehicle would follow from Sriharikota in the coming months.
- The PSLV-C46 launcher carrying the 615-kg RISAT-2B blasted off at 5.30 a.m. About 15 minutes later, the satellite reached its designated position and started orbiting in space, with an inclination of 37°.
- Designed at ISRO’s **U.R. Rao Satellite Centre (URSC) in Bengaluru** and fast-tracked in just 15 months, the RISAT-2B is built to operate for at least five years.
- Its X-band synthetic aperture radar can give added details such as the size of objects on earth, structures and movement.

### **RISAT System:**

- Information from RISAT-2B will complement data from normal **optical remote sensing satellites**.
- Such data are useful for agencies that need ground images during cloud, rain and in the dark.
- This is the third Indian RISAT in 10 years, and follows the Israeli-built RISAT-2 in 2009 and the ISRO-built RISAT-1 in 2012. The older RISATs have reached the end of their lives.
- ISRO has planned a series of radar imagers in the coming months to enhance its space based observation of Earth and the Indian region

### **Enhance India’s monitoring capabilities for civil and military purposes:**

- With the successful pre-dawn launch of RISAT-2B satellite on May 22, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has added another feather to its cap.
- The satellite will enhance India’s capability in **crop monitoring** during the monsoon season, **forestry mapping** for forest fires and deforestation, and **flood mapping** as part of the national disaster management programme.
- Given that overcast skies are a constant during the monsoon season and during times of flood, the ability to penetrate the cloud cover is essential.
- While **optical remote sensing** that relies on visible light for imaging gets

obstructed by clouds, RISAT-2B will not.

- Much like the RISAT-1 satellite that was launched by ISRO in April 2012, **RISAT-2B will also use microwave radiation.**
- Unlike visible light, microwaves have longer wavelength and so will **not be susceptible to atmospheric scattering.**
- Microwave radiation can thus easily pass through the cloud cover, haze and dust, and image the ground.
- Hence, **RISAT-2B satellite will be able to image under almost all weather and environmental conditions.**
- Since it does not rely on visible light for imaging, it will be able to image the ground during **both day and night.**
- The satellite does not have passive microwave sensors that detect the radiation naturally emitted by the atmosphere or reflected by objects on the ground.
- Instead, RISAT-2B will be transmitting hundreds of microwave pulses each second towards the ground and receiving the signals reflected by the objects using radar.
- The moisture and texture of the object will determine the strength of the microwave signal that gets reflected.
- While the strength of the reflected signal will help determine different targets, the time between the transmitted and reflected signals will help determine the distance to the object.

### **RISAT Technology:**

- The RISAT-2B satellite uses **X-band synthetic aperture radar** for the first time; the synthetic aperture radar was developed indigenously.
- Unlike the C-band that was used by RISAT-1, the shorter wavelength of the **X-band allows for higher resolution imagery** for target identification and discrimination.
- Since it has high resolution, the satellite will be able to detect objects with dimensions of as little as a metre.
- This capacity to study small objects and also movement could be useful for surveillance.
- As K. Sivan, ISRO Chairman and Secretary, Department of Space, had said last month, the satellite could be **used for civil and strategic purposes.**
- RISAT-2B will have an **inclined orbit of 37 degrees**, which will allow more frequent observations over the Indian subcontinent.
- With ISRO planning to launch four more such radar imaging satellites in a year, its ability to monitor crops and floods as well as engage in military surveillance will be greatly enhanced.

---

### **8. Under Rent Act, the tenant has a protected status:**

#### **Why in news?**



Protection offered to a statutory tenant by rent control law can only be overcome by following the procedure laid out in the statute. Owner cannot demand re-possession of property without following statutory procedure, the Supreme Court has held.

### SC Judgment:

- The status of tenant does not stand obviated by the death of the person who created the tenancy.
  - The only remedy available to the owner is to pursue eviction proceedings under the rent laws.
  - Only upon the satisfaction of the competent authority that sufficient grounds exist for eviction of the tenant can an order be passed directing the tenant to vacate, a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed in a recent judgment.
  - Restrictions on recovery of possession of the premises let out to the tenants have been imposed for the benefit of the tenants as a matter of legislative policy," the Court said.
  - The verdict came in a case dealing with the provisions of the East Punjab Urban Rent Restriction Act, 1949, which are available to the tenant.
  - Under the Act, the tenant has a protected status. That status cannot be disrupted or brought to an end except on grounds specified in the enactment, the apex court held.
- 

### 9. **Groundwater reserves estimate to be updated soon:**

#### Why in news?

The Union Water Ministry is finalising an updated estimate on the state of groundwater reserves in the country.

#### Groundwater assessment:

- The groundwater assessment, **last done in 2013**, is a survey that samples a sliver of blocks in each State and counts how many blocks have critically low levels of water and how many are well-stocked.
- We have received reports from most States and have passed it on to the Water Resources Ministry for approval. I expect that this will only be made public after the new government comes in," a senior official from the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) told.
- The person said "some States" showed a precipitous decline whereas some blocks showed an "improvement."
- An assessment from Punjab, the official said, pointed to "extreme" overexploitation of groundwater.

#### Break-up:

- In 2013, the CGWB assessed 6,584 units across the country and found 4,520 to be

“safe,” 681 to be “semi-critical” 253 to be “critical” and 1,034 to be “overexploited.” About 96 blocks were “saline”. **The overall contribution of rainfall to the country’s annual ground water resource is 68%.**

- The share of other resources, such as canal seepage, return flow from irrigation, recharge from tanks, ponds and water conservation structures taken together is 32%.
- The **national per capita annual availability of water** has reduced from 1,816 cubic metres in 2001 to 1,544 cubic metres in 2011, a **reduction of 15%.**

#### **Cause of concern:**

- That India’s groundwater has been depleting at a worrying rate since 1995, the CGWB has shown.
- In 1995, only 3% of districts had overexploited their groundwater reserves whereas by 2011, that had increased to 15%.

---

#### **10. OBC categories commission receives 2-month extension:**

##### **Why in news?**

A commission appointed in 2017 to examine the **sub-categorisation of the Other Backward Classes (OBC)** has been given a two-month extension by President Ram Nath Kovind, according to an order of the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

##### **Mandate of the Commission:**

- The tenure of the commission was to end on May 31 but had now been extended till July 31, the order said.
- The commission had been constituted to “examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of Other Backward Classes with reference to such classes included in the Central List”, the October 2, 2017 order notifying its creation said.
- The commission was meant to “**work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorisation** within such OBCs and to take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of OBCs and classifying them into their respective sub-categories”, the order had said
- The commission, whose chairperson was **former Delhi High Court Chief Justice G. Rohini**, was supposed to present its report to the President in 12 weeks from the time the chairperson assumed charge.
- Since considerable time was taken up in obtaining the data and thereafter in analysing of the data, the tenure of the Commission has been extended from time to time and last till 31.05.2019.

---

## 11. **Bishnoi bride fills troughs of water for deer before wedding:**

### **Why in news?**

A young woman of **Rajasthan's Bishnoi community**, known for its beliefs associated with nature worship and wildlife conservation, turned her wedding into a unique event by filling the troughs dug up in agricultural fields with water for quenching the thirst of deer and blackbucks before the commencement of marriage rituals. Her initiative last week supported the community's efforts to protect wild ungulates facing intense heat this summer.

### **Community Efforts:**

- Bishnoi farmers in Sriganganagar and Hanumangarh districts of northern Rajasthan have dug up about 70 troughs, many of them in their own agricultural fields, in a 60-square km area and filled them up with water for antelopes foraging in the plains of the region.
- The animals were earlier losing their lives by drowning while trying to drink water at the two major canals.
- The **Indira Gandhi Canal and Bhakra Canal** irrigate the fields in the otherwise arid areas of the two districts.
- Blackbucks were earlier climbing up the canal banks trying to drink the flowing water, but ended up drowning as the canal edges have 45-degree slopes that the animals were unable to scale.

### **Threat of stray dogs:**

- About 30 deer were losing their lives every year while trying to drink water from the canals.
- If they approached water sources in villages, stray dogs attacked them.
- The crisis affected a population of about 10,000 deer and blackbucks with temperatures ranging between 40-45 degrees Centigrade.
- The villagers started digging small troughs two years ago and lined them with plastic sheets to prevent loss of water through seepage. These troughs are filled with water and replenished every 10 days.
- Shailja, 23, daughter of environmental activist Anil Bishnoi, went to the fields with her friends and relatives before her wedding at Pilibanga and filled several troughs with water.
- She appealed to villagers to take care of wild ungulates and also to keep containers with water on rooftops for birds. The bride also presented saplings to the guests at her wedding.

---

## 12. **Crested ibises fly free in South Korea:**

## Why in news?

An **endangered bird** was reintroduced to the wild by South Korean authorities, four decades after it went extinct on the peninsula.

## Conservation:

- The crested ibis is listed as South Korea's National Monument number 198, but was last seen in the wild in 1979 in the demilitarized zone dividing the peninsula.
  - China and Japan are also part of the species' natural range, but the species was driven to the edge of extinction **partially because pesticide use** eliminated its food sources until captive breeding programmes were set up.
  - Starting with birds donated by Beijing, the South Korean captive-bred population has reached 363, and the Environment Ministry said 40 of them had been selected and released into the Upo wetland 350 km southeast of Seoul.
  - The species, *Nipponia nippon*, is also known as the Japanese crested ibis, but is best known for a popular children's song composed in the 1920s, when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule.
  - The song describes the sound of the bird's call as a sad reminder of a lost mother, and was banned by the Japanese authorities who reportedly saw it as a form of anti-colonial resistance but became popular again after Korea regained its independence in 1945.
- 
- 

