

15 MARCH 2019

TUSSLE BETWEEN RTI ACT AND OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT

Why in News?

- On March 15, 2019, the Supreme Court Judge Justice K.M. Joseph declared that as per Section 22 of RTI Act, the RTI has an “overriding effect” over Official Secrets Act.

More on news:

- He also pinpointed that as per Section 24 of RTI Act, it is mandatory for even security and intelligence organization to disclose information on corruption and human rights violations.
- Also Section 8 (2) of RTI act compels the government to disclose information “if public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm of protected interests”.
- However, the Attorney General K.K. Venugopal defended that defence purchases dealt with the security of the state which “supercedes everything else”.
- To this, Justice Joseph said, “The Parliament has passed the RTI act in 2005 and brought about a complete revolution, a complete change. Let us not go back to what it was.

6 NUCLEAR REACTORS TO BE SET UP AT ANDHRA PRADESH

Why in News?

- Both U.S and India agreed to establish 6 nuclear reactors in Andhra Pradesh.

More on News:

- These six reactors will be set up by the US based **Westinghouse Electric company**.
- The agreement to build these reactors is based on **Indo-US civil nuclear agreement** signed in 2008.
- AP-6000** is the name of the nuclear reactors to be set up by Westinghouse Company.
- VVER series** is the name of the nuclear reactors being set up by Russian state owned company Rosatom at Kundankulam, Tamilnadu.
- Both AP-6000 and VVER nuclear reactors are **Light Water reactors**, where water is used both as coolant and moderator.

ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINES AND VVPAT

Why in News?

- On March 14, 23 Opposition parties moved the Supreme Court demanding the random verification of at least 50% Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) using Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) in every Assembly segment or constituency.

Note



More on News:

- Also they wanted the Supreme Court to quash the Election Commission guideline that Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) should be conducted “only for VVPAT paper slips of one randomly selected polling station of an Assembly constituency in case of election to State Legislative Assembly and each Assembly segment in case of election to the House of the People.”
- It quoted the apex court’s judgment in the Dr. Subramanian Swamy case in 2013, which held that the paper trail for EVMs was an indispensable requirement of free and fair elections, thereby making VVPAT inherent in and intrinsic to the very basic structure.

About VVPAT system:

- In the VVPAT system, when a voter presses the button for a candidate of his choice in the electronic voting machines (EVM), a paper ballot containing the serial number, the name of the candidate and poll symbol will be printed for the voter.
- The voters will be able to view the voter-verifiable paper audit trail slip for seven seconds after which it will get deposited in a sealed box.

Despite objections, Bannerghatta National Park’s Eco-Sensitive Zone curtailed

In News:

- Reduction of ESZ area from 268 to 168 sq.kms.
- Bannerghatta National Park’s Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ), which provides a regulated buffer zone around protected areas, will remain at 168.84 sq.km. despite thousands of citizens formally objecting to the reduction of nearly 100 sq. km. as compared to the original proposal.
- In the 33rd ESZ Expert Committee meeting of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) held on February 28, members recommended finalisation after ‘detailed deliberations’ of the November 5 draft notification which declared an ESZ area of 168.84 sq.km. around BNP.

Final notification expected in four months

- This represents a 37% reduction from the first draft notification issued in 2016 which had marked an ESZ area of **268.9 sq.km.**
- The ESZ Committee estimates that between 150 and 200 elephants were observed at BNP.
- MoEF accepted the State government’s position, which is derived from a cabinet sub-committee formed to look into delineation of ESZs in 31 protected areas of the State. In 2015, the State government approved the sub-committee report that reduced ESZ in multiple areas as it ‘may hinder developmental activity’ and was ‘opposed by locals’.
- Citizens’ opposition ignored
- When the revised Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) notification for Bannerghatta National Park was issued in October 2018, citizens were given 60 days to submit their objections. Environmental and civic action groups swung into action and encouraged people to submit their objections to the Ministry of Environment and Forests against the 100 sq.km. reduction of ESZ.
- Over 65,000 people signed various online petitions against the move, apart from researchers and activists who sent specific objections. The fear of many was that this reduction would lead to more quarrying in the area.

Note



Safe zone:

- While thousands of objections were sent to the MoEF, they were dismissed by the ESZ Committee as a ‘safe zone’ of 1km around protected areas is already in place across the country, thus allowing other developmental activities to take place that can have adverse impacts on the forests.
- According to environmentalists, An ESZ is supposed to complement the conservation of forests and manage these activities sustainably,”
- Possible impacts of the reduction:
 1. Development at the cost of environment
 2. Quarrying activities
 3. Dense habitation around the park which will lead to man and wild life conflict soon.

Prelims titbits: A Must revise topic

About Bannerghatta National Park:

- **Bannerghatta National Park**, - Karnataka founded in 1970, declared as a National Park in 1974.
- In 2002 a portion of the park, became a biological reserve, the **Bannerghatta Biological Park**.
- It is located in the Anekal range.
- It has a hilly terrain of granite sheets under moist deciduous forest valleys and scrubland on higher areas.
- A Wild life corridor for elephants.
- It is contiguous with Talli reserve forest in the south east and Bilikal forest in the south.
- Swarnamukhi stream runs through the National park.



Fire outbreak in Bandipur again

In News:

- A fresh outbreak of fire was reported from Kundkere range of Bandipur Tiger Reserve

The Problem of forest fire:

- Vast swathes of Bandipur were ravaged by a major fire in February and satellite data analysis indicated that the area affected was in excess of 15,000 acres.
- Prelims titbits: A must read for Prelims

Bandipur National Park:

1. Established in 1974 as a tiger reserve under Project tiger
2. A national park in Karnataka, a state with highest tiger population in the country.
3. It has many types of biomes, but dry deciduous forest is dominant.

Note



4. Along with the adjoining Nagarhole N.P, Wayanad Wild life sanctuary and Mudumalai National park, it is a part of the Nilgiri biosphere reserve, making it the largest protected area in southern India and largest habitat of wild elephants in south Asia.

India wants visa free access to Kartarpur:

In News:

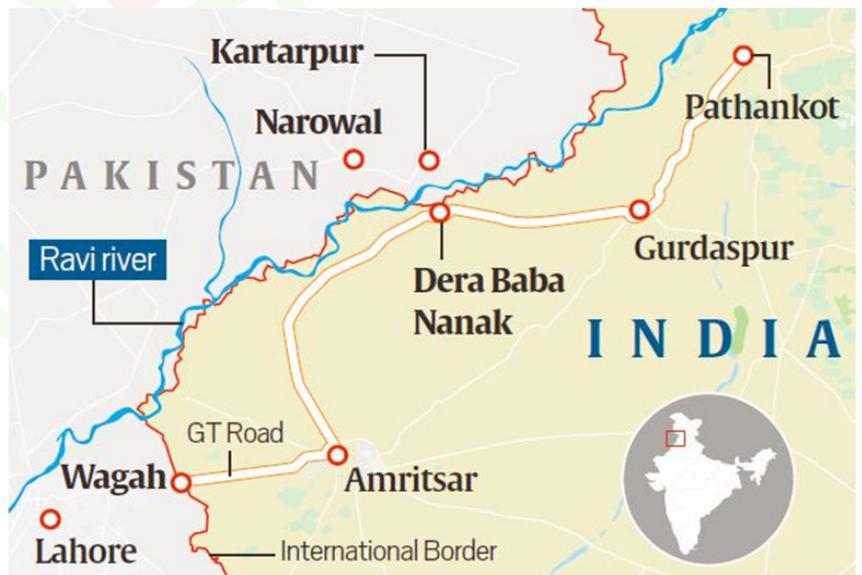
India on Thursday sought visa-free access from Pakistan for 5,000 pilgrims per day to the historic Sikh shrine in Kartarpur.

A meeting took place between an Indian and Pakistani delegation and it was the first after the Pulwama attack and the retaliatory air strikes.

Expectations from Indian side:

- Delhi wanted access for both Indians and people of Indian origin to the shrine, located where Sikhism's founder Guru Nanak Dev spent the last years of his life.
- The Indian side has urged the other side to allow the visit of pilgrims for all seven days without break.
- It must be absolutely visa free, no additional procedures or documentation.
- India also wants Pakistan to allow devotees who want to travel on foot to the shrine across the border.
- A must read for Prelims and Mains

Location and significance of the corridor, issues involved in its construction.



About the Kartarpur Corridor:

Kartarpur corridor is proposed from Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur district to the international border, in order to facilitate pilgrims from India to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur on the banks of the Ravi river, in Pakistan, where Shri Guru Nanak Devji spent eighteen years. Pilgrims would then be able to visit the holy shrine throughout the year.

Key facts:

The Kartarpur corridor will be implemented as an integrated development project with Government of India funding, to provide smooth and easy passage, with all the modern amenities.

Government of India will put in place suitable facilities for smooth passage of pilgrims. Government of Pakistan will be urged to recognize

Note



the sentiments of the Sikh community and to develop a corridor with suitable facilities in their territory as well.

The shrine:

The gurdwara in Kartarpur stands on the bank of the Ravi, about 120 km northeast of Lahore. It was here that Guru Nanak assembled a Sikh community and lived for 18 years until his death in 1539. The shrine is visible from the Indian side, as Pakistani authorities generally trim the elephant grass that would otherwise obstruct the view. Indian Sikhs gather in large numbers for darshan from the Indian side, and binoculars are installed at Gurdwara Dera Baba Nanak.

Access to gurdwaras in Pakistan:

Sikh jathas from India travel to Pakistan on four occasions every year — for Baisakhi, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev, the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev. These Indian pilgrims are given access to all gurdwaras in Pakistan.

Complex issue:

The “corridor” would bring Pak infrastructure right up to the Indian border. Over the past year, gurdwaras in Pakistan have been used for a pro-Khalistan campaign.

Earlier this year, a gurdwara displayed posters and distributed pamphlets for the so-called “Sikh Referendum 2020”, and Pakistan denied permission to the Indian envoy and diplomats to visit it. Pakistan’s intent also remains suspect, and Indian officials are wary of the corridor being misused by both state and non-state actors in that country.

Govt. defends electoral bonds scheme in SC

What is Electoral Bond?

An electoral bond is designed to be a bearer instrument like a Promissory Note — it will be similar to a bank note that is payable to the bearer on demand and free of interest. It can be purchased by any citizen of India or a body incorporated in India.

How do you use it?

The bonds will be issued in multiples of Rs1,000, 10,000, 1 lakh, 10 lakh and 1 crore and will be available at specified branches of State Bank of India. They can be bought by the donor with a KYC-compliant account. Donors can donate the bonds to their party of choice which can then be cashed in via the party’s verified account within 15 days.

What are the other conditions?

Every party that is registered under section 29A of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951 (43 of 1951) and has secured at least one per cent of the votes polled in the most recent Lok Sabha or State election will be allotted a verified account by the Election Commission of India. Electoral bond transactions can be made only via this account.

The bonds will be available for purchase for a period of 10 days each in the beginning of every quarter, i.e. in January, April, July and October as

Note



specified by the Central Government. An additional period of 30 days shall be specified by the Central Government in the year of Lok Sabha elections.

‘Ensures transparency, checks misuse’

Electoral bonds have been introduced to promote transparency in funding and donation received by political parties, the government told the Supreme Court.

A climate vulnerability index for India

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) will be commissioning a study to assess the climate risks faced by States in India

This study aims to assess the risk faced by 12 Himalayan states due to Global warming

Calculation Methodology

Last year the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) at Mandi and Guwahati, and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, coordinated with Land of Seven Sisters (North East State authorities) and the hill districts of West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir to evolve a common methodology and how they are equipped to face climate risk

The researchers prepared a vulnerability index based on District level data. Eight Parameters are considered to calculate the vulnerability score

Eight Parameters includes both Geographical and Socio-Economic situation

1. Percentage of area in districts under forests,
2. Yield variability of food grain,
3. Population density,
4. Female literacy rate,
5. Infant mortality rate,
6. Percentage of population below poverty line (BPL),
7. Average man-days under MGNREGA act
8. And the area under slope > 30%.

Ranking

Index score is ranging from 0-1, where 1 carries the highest possibility of vulnerability and 0 carries the least vulnerability.

Top of the scale were Assam with a score of 0.72 and Mizoram at 0.71, whereas Sikkim, with an index score of 0.42 was relatively less vulnerable. “This doesn’t mean that States with a lower score are safe in an absolute sense.

Factors Contributing to Vulnerability

Each state has its own set of factors which makes them vulnerable.

Note



In Arunachal Pradesh, the key factors are low female literacy and high percentage of population above BPL whereas in Nagaland the key issues are loss of forest cover, steep slope and high yield variability.

Wholesale price inflation quickens to 2.93% in February

In News:

Wholesale price inflation in February snapped a three-month declining trend by rising to 2.93% on the back of firming food and fuel prices.

In Brief:

Growth in the wholesale price index (WPI) accelerated in February from 2.76% in January, the lowest level it had touched since March 2018.

Within the index, the primary articles category saw inflation quickening to 4.84% in February from 3.54% in January. The food articles category witnessed inflation quickening to 4.28% from 2.34% over the same period.

At a more disaggregated level, inflation in some of the select cereal items such as wheat, jowar, bajra, maize, barley is now in double digits.

Pulses, which as a category was witnessing deflation till November 2018, is now witnessing double digit inflation.

It is difficult to say whether this is a lagged impact of the government announcement of raising MSPs to 1.5 times of production costs or the lower sowing area under rabi crops.

The crude petroleum and natural gas segment also saw inflation quickening in February, to 5.87% from 3.87% in January. Overall, the fuel and power segment saw inflation moving up to 2.23% from 1.85% over the same period.

The manufactured products sector was one of the few to see inflation easing in February to 2.25% from 2.61% in the previous month.

Wholesale Price Index (WPI)

Wholesale Price Index (WPI) is based on the price prevailing in the wholesale markets or the price at which bulk transactions are made.

It includes three components:

- Manufactured products = 64.2%
- Primary articles = 22.6%
- Fuel and power = 13.1%

Base year has been changed from 2004-05 to 2011-12 recently.

Note

FSDC panel discuss ways to improve quality of credit ratings

In News:

Sebi was represented by Whole Time Member G Mahalingam, while the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India was represented Whole



Time Member by NavrangSaini.

In Brief:

The Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), headed by Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das, discussed ways to address challenges pertaining to the quality of credit ratings in the wake of the IL&FS defaults crisis.

Credit rating firms, currently regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), had come under sharp criticism from the RBI recently for failing to identify financial troubles in various companies, especially in the case of IL&FS, which commanded AAA rating just before it started defaulting.

The FSDC panel also discussed interlinkages between housing finance companies and housing developers. Mortgage sector regulator National Housing Bank (NHB) had recently proposed to increase the capital adequacy ratio (CAR) of housing finance companies (HFCs) to 15 per cent in a phased manner in order to protect them from untoward events which arise as a result of liquidity risk as well as the credit risk that the HFCs are exposed to in the normal course of their business.

Credit Rating Agencies reforms

- SEBI has released a consultation paper seeking feedback on a new set of rules drafted to improve “market efficiency” and enhance “the governance, accountability and functioning of credit rating agencies

New Rules:

- Provisions to restrict cross-shareholding between rating agencies without regulatory approval to 10%
- Increase the minimum net worth requirement for existing and new agencies from 5 crore to 50 crore
- There should be at least five years’ experience for promoters of rating agencies
- SEBI has proposed disclosure norms to improve investor awareness about the operations of rating agencies
- It is to prevent rating agencies from resorting to collusion in reaching decisions.

Note

