

SUPREME COURT VERDICT WILL ENSURE A MORE INDEPENDENT ELECTION COMMISSION

Context: A five-judge bench of the SC unanimously ruled (in **Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India**) that a high-power committee consisting of the PM, LoP in Lok Sabha, and the CJI must pick the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs).

Articles (324-329) in Part XV (Elections) of the Indian Constitution

324.	Superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission
325.	No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex
326.	Elections to the House of the People and to Legislative Assemblies of states to be on the basis of adult suffrage
327.	Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures
328.	Power of Legislature of a state to make provision with respect to elections to such Legislature
329.	Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters

What is the Background of the Case?

- In 2015, a PIL was filed challenging the constitutional validity of the practice of the Centre appointing members of the Election Commission.
- In 2018, a two-judge bench of the SC referred the case to a larger bench since it would require a **close examination of Article 324 of the Constitution**.
- **Article 324(2) reads:** “The Election Commission shall consist of the CEC and such a number of other ECs, as the **President** may from time-to-time fix and their appointment shall, subject to any Parliamentary law made in that behalf, be made by the **President**.”
- The crux of the challenge is that since there is **no law made by Parliament** on this issue, the Court must step in to fill the “**constitutional vacuum**.”
- This examination also leads to the larger question of **separation of powers** and if the judiciary is overstepping its role in filling this gap in the law.
- **Two corollary issues** that were also examined by the Court are whether the process of removal of the two ECs (by the President if the CEC recommends) must be the same as the CEC and regarding the funding of the Commission.
- As per the current process, the **Law Ministry suggests a pool of suitable candidates to the PM** for consideration and the **President makes the appointment on the advice of the PM**.

The Apex Court’s Verdict:

- The appointment of the CEC and the ECs shall be made by the **President on the advice of a Committee** consisting of the -

- Prime Minister,
- Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha, and in case no leader of Opposition is available, the leader of the largest opposition Party in the Lok Sabha, and the
- Chief Justice of India
- This will be **subject to any law** to be made by Parliament. This means that **Parliament can undo the effect** of the SC verdict by bringing in a new law on the issue.
- The Court's verdict is based on a reading of the **debates of the Constituent Assembly**, when all the Members were of the clear view that elections must be conducted by **an independent Commission**.
- On the issue of the process of removal of ECs, the Court ruled that **it cannot be the same as that of the process of removal of CEC**.
- The Constitution states that the CEC can be removed in a process similar to a judge on grounds of proven incapacity or misbehaviour.
- Though there is equality otherwise between the CEC and ECs in various matters, we must bear in mind that **Article 324 is inoperable without the CEC**.
- **On the issue of funding the Commission**, the Court left it to the government. However, the court made an appeal to provide for a permanent Secretariat and that the expenditure be charged on the Consolidated Fund of India.
- Thus, the court in its ruling maintains **a delicate balance on separation of powers**.

13TH CENTURY HINDU TEMPLE

Recently, a 13th-century Hindu temple was discovered at Pushpagiri Kshetram in the Kadapa district.



Why in News?

- 13th century Hindu temple ruins have been unearthed amidst a shrub jungle northeast of the Durga temple, atop a hillock in the Pushpagiri Kshetram in **Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh**.

- The architectural features of the ruins reveal a style that is contemporary to a temple at Vallur, **built by the Kayastha rulers.**

About Kayastha rulers:

- The Kayasthas (1239 AD - 1297 AD) were **subordinates to the rulers of the Kakatiya dynasty.**
- In the history of the Kakatiyas, the Kayastha played a prominent role both as loyal subordinates and traitors.
- It is believed that they originally belonged to **a class of warriors of Western India.**
- **They ruled the region with Vallur as the capital.**
- Some rulers of this community were -Ganagaya Sahini (1239 - 1258 AD), Jannigadeva (1258 - 1268 AD), and Ambadeva II (1272 - 1294 AD). The last ruler was **Trupurari II** (1294 - 1297 AD).

Pushpagiri Kshetram:

- Pushpagiri is referred to as **Hari-Hara Kshetra**, as there are a number of temples dedicated to both **Shiva and Vishnu.**
- It is located on the **banks of the Pennar river.**
- Pushpagiri is also **called the second Hampi** due to its beautiful architecture.

INDIA'S DNA VACCINE AGAINST DENGUE

India's first prospective DNA vaccine against dengue is under clinical trials.



Why in News?

- The DNA vaccine has been in development since 2019 by scientists from the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bengaluru, in collaboration with nine institutions in India, Africa, and the US.

About DNA Vaccine:

- DNA vaccines use **engineered DNA to induce an immunologic response in the host against bacteria, parasites, and viruses.**

- The **basic working principle** behind DNA vaccine involves the use of a DNA plasmid that **encodes for a protein that originated from the pathogen** in which the vaccine will be targeted.
- DNA vaccine will **avoid extracellular degradation** and **successfully enter the nucleus of target cells** to induce a long-term immune response.
- It is considered to be **more stable, cost-efficient, and easier to handle** than traditional vaccines.

Dengue disease:

- Dengue is a mosquito-borne viral infection **found in tropical and sub-tropical climates** worldwide, mostly in urban and semi-urban areas.
- The primary vectors that transmit the disease are **Aedes aegypti mosquitoes**.
- The **virus** responsible for causing dengue is called the **dengue virus (DENV)**.
- It can be **transmitted to humans through the bite of infected mosquitoes**.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) also states that the **virus can transmit from pregnant mother to baby**.
- There is **no specific treatment for dengue/severe dengue**. Early detection of disease progression associated with severe dengue and access to proper medical care lowers fatality rates of severe dengue to below 1%.

WHAT IS THE SATHEE (SELF ASSESSMENT TEST AND HELP FOR ENTRANCE EXAMS) PLATFORM?

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is set to launch a self-assessment platform for Indian students.



About the SATHEE Platform:

- SATHEE is a new **initiative by the Ministry of Education in association with IIT Kanpur**.
- It provides Indian students with a **self-paced interactive learning and assessment platform to prepare for competitive and other exams**.
- It will help students gain access to training and **coaching for competitive examinations for free**.

- SATHEE aims to make the students learn the concepts and focus on their weak topics so they feel confident to give any exams by watching videos prepared by IIT and IISc faculty members.
- It provides free learning resources, including 800 videos in 12 regional languages.
- The platform will also provide regular all-India mock tests to help prepare for competitive exams, in addition to mentorship sessions by IIT and AIIMS students who shall act like SATHEES.
- The interactive programme is currently open for coaching help for JEE and NEET.
- It makes use of an indigenously-developed AI programme called Prutor, which was developed by IIT-Kanpur.

ANCIENT CITY OF SISUPALGARH

Land mafias have damaged a portion of the wall of the fortified ancient city of Sisupalgarh.



About Sisupalgarh:

- It is located near the city of Bhubaneswar in Odisha.
- It was once the capital of Kalinga, which is the ancient name of Odisha.
- It is considered one of the largest and best-preserved ancient fortifications in India.
- The fortifications are over 2,000 years old and date back to the 3rd or 4th century BC.
- The remains of the fortification were discovered in 1948 by the Indian archaeologist B.B. Lal.
- Features:
 - It was designed and constructed in a complete square shape that was surrounded by defensive walls.
 - Each side spreads for over half a mile, and the interior is full of stone ruins and sculptures.
 - The walls of the fortification are a little over nine meters (30 feet) tall.
 - There were eight gateways into the city, two in each of the four sides of the wall.
 - The gateways were connected by streets in a grid-like arrangement with the palace in the center.

- The gates were elaborate structures made of brick and stone.
- There is evidence of stone-lined reservoirs that were likely used for harvesting rainwater.
- Intelligent traffic management, pedestrian-friendly pathways, grand gateways with guard houses, wide roads, and a vast open space were some of the key features of this ancient city.
- The city is believed to have a population of around 20,000 to 25,000.

WORLD WILDLIFE DAY 2023

World Wildlife Day is celebrated every year on March 3 to raise awareness about the importance of protecting the world's flora and fauna.



About World Wildlife Day :

- It is a United Nations International day to celebrate all the world's wild animals and plants and the contribution that they make to our lives and the health of the planet.
- It is celebrated every year on March 3.
- This date was chosen as it is the birthday of CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, signed in 1973.
- The theme of World Wildlife Day 2023 is 'Partnerships for Wildlife Conservation'.

Key facts about CITES:

- CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments.
- Aim: To ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species.
- It was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of IUCN (The World Conservation Union). It entered into force in July 1975.
- Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties– in other words, they have to implement the Convention – it does not take the place of national laws.
- The CITES Secretariat is administered by UNEP and is located in Geneva, Switzerland.

- The **Conference of the Parties** to CITES is the **supreme decision-making body** of the Convention and comprises all its parties.
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METHANE EMISSION: IEA'S ANNUAL REPORT SHOWS THAT FOSSIL FUELS FIRMS FAILED TO CURB EMISSIONS

Why in News?

- The annual **Methane Global Tracker report 2023** of the **International Energy Agency (IEA)** states that fossil fuel companies released 120 million metric tonnes of methane into the atmosphere in 2022.

What is the Background in which the Report Came Out?

- The report has come just weeks after energy giants (Shell, BP, ExxonMobil) reported record profits last year as the **Russia-Ukraine war drove up oil and natural gas prices**.
- Though some progress is being made, methane emissions are still high and not falling fast enough even as **methane cuts are among the cheapest options to limit near-term global warming**.

What are the Findings of the Report?

- **The energy sector** accounts for around **40%** of the total average methane emissions from human activity.
- Oil and natural gas companies release methane into the atmosphere **when natural gas is flared or vented**.
- The greenhouse gas (GHG) is also **released through leaks** from valves and other equipment during the drilling, extraction and transportation process.
- **More than 260 billion cubic metres (bcm)** of natural gas (mostly composed of methane) is wasted globally.
- The fossil fuel companies have **done little to tackle the problem** despite their pledges to find and fix leaking infrastructure.

What are the Measures Suggested in the Report to Reduce Methane Emissions?

- The **right policies and implementation** can bring 200 bcm of additional gas to markets.

- Emissions can be reduced by over **75%** with the help of cheap and readily available technology for **leak detection, repair programmes and upgrading leaky equipment.**
- The implementation of such measures would cost **less than 3%** of the net income received by the oil and gas industry in 2022.
- 80% of the available options to curb the emissions could be implemented by the fossil fuel industry **at net zero cost.**
 - This is because the outlays for the abatement measures are less than the market value of the additional gas that is captured.

What will be the Probable Benefits of Reducing Emissions?

- This could **lower global temperature rise** by nearly 0.1 degree Celsius by mid-century.
- This would have the **same effect on the soaring global temperatures** as immediately stopping GHG emissions from vehicles across the world.

How are Methane Emissions Driving Climate Change?

- Methane is a **GHG**, which is **responsible for 30% of the warming** since preindustrial times, second only to CO₂.
- While CO₂ remains in the atmosphere for much longer than methane, methane is **roughly 25 times more powerful at trapping heat in the atmosphere**, and has an important short-term influence on the rate of climate change.
- In recent years, scientists have repeatedly sounded the alarm regarding the **increasing amount of methane in the atmosphere.**

SWAYATT

A function was recently held to commemorate the success of the “SWAYATT” initiative.



About SWAYATT:

- It was **launched in February 2019** by the Union **Ministry of Commerce & Industry.**
- It is an initiative to **promote Start-ups, Women, and Youth advantage**

through e-transactions on Government e-Marketplace (GeM).

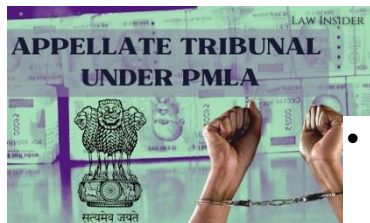
- The intent was to promote the inclusiveness of various categories of sellers and service providers on the portal.

Government e-Marketplace (GeM):

- GeM is an **Online Market platform set up under the Directorate General of Supplies and Disposals (DGS&D), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in 2016.**
- It is a one-stop portal to facilitate online procurement of common-use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments / Organizations / PSUs.
- The **purchases through GeM by Government users were made mandatory** by the Ministry of Finance.
- It aims to **enhance transparency, efficiency, and speed in public procurement.**
- GeM is a **completely paperless, cashless, and system-driven e-market place.**

PMLA APPELLATE TRIBUNAL

Recently, Delhi High Court has directed the Union Government to take expeditious steps for appointing Chairperson and other members of the Appellate tribunal under PMLA 2002.



About PMLA Appellate Tribunal:

- The **Central Government has been given the power to set up an Appellate Tribunal under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA).**
- **Composition:** The Tribunal consists of a **Chairperson and two other Members.**
- **Qualifications for appointment:**
 - A person shall not be qualified for appointment as **Chairperson** unless he is or has been a Judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court judge or is qualified to be a Judge of the High Court.
 - A person shall not be qualified for appointment as a **Member** unless he/she has been a member of the Indian legal service/Indian revenue service/Indian economic service/Indian Customs and central excise service/Indian Audit and accounts Service.

- **Tenure:** They are appointed for a **term of five years or till the age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.
 - **Functions:** Appellate Tribunal has been constituted to **hear appeals against the orders of the Adjudicating Authority and the authorities under the PMLA.**
- Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002:**
- PMLA, 2002 was enacted in January 2003 to prevent money laundering in India.

Objective:

- To prevent and control money laundering.
- To confiscate and seize the property derived from, or involved in, money laundering.
- To provide punishment for the offense of money laundering.
- To appoint the Adjudicating Authority and Appellate Tribunal to deal with the matter connected with money laundering.
- To put obligations on banking companies, financial institutions, and intermediaries to maintain records.
- To deal with any other issue connected with money laundering in India.
- PMLA **empowers certain officers of the Directorate of Enforcement to carry out investigations** in cases involving the **offense of money laundering** and also to **attach the property** involved in money laundering.