VVPAT Machines

What is the issue?

The Cabinet on April 19, 2017 agreed to release over Rs 3,100 crore so that the Election Commission (EC) could procure 1.6 million VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) machines.

How well the safeguards are in the present system?

- The EC has repeatedly assured voters that there are enough procedural and technical safeguards to prevent large-scale tampering or manipulation of EVMs.
- EVMs feature encoded software that is **burnt one-time on to programmable chips,** enabling them to be used as stand-alone machines rather than computer-connected units, thus **preventing any hacking by remote devices.**
- **Model 3 machines** produced after 2013 have additional features such as **tamper detection.**
- The EC has laid down procedural rules of locking and storing EVMs before and after polling, besides **functional checks and tests** in the presence of representatives of political parties.

What is VVPAT?

- Based on consultations with political parties the EC was of the view that VVPATs will help ensure transparency in the voting process.

- These machines were first used in a **by-election in Nagaland in 2013.**
- A VVPAT is a machine that is **attached to the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM).** A voter casts his or her vote on the EVM as is currently being done.
- The VVPAT attached to the EVM **generates a paper slip** which has the name of the candidate voted for and the symbol of his party. This is recorded in the machine's control unit. A printer is attached to the balloting unit and kept in the voting compartment.
- The paper slip remains visible on the VVPAT for seven seconds through a transparent window. The paper slip can later be retrieved and tallied with the button pressed in the EVM.
- The use of VVPATs falls under **Rule 49A of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961,** which provides that every EVM shall have a control unit and a balloting unit.
- It further states that a printer with a drop box may also be attached to a voting machine for printing a paper trail of the vote.

Why is it important?

- **In case of any dispute, the paper slips in the VVPATs can be tallied** with the buttons pressed on the EVMs. These printed slips can be counted to verify the results.
- At the moment, EVMs do not have this feature of cross checking. The use of VVPATs becomes important as a number of political parties have raised questions about the EVMs being tamper proof.
- Though the EC has maintained that the EVMs cannot be tampered with, the use of VVPATs will ensure that there is greater transparency in the voting process.
- As a part of the democratic process, **every voter has the right to know** that his or her vote went to the candidate chosen. VVPATs will ensure this and further strengthen the electoral process.

- It is also perhaps the final step in **making the voting process as transparent** as it can get.

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Source: Business Line

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