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NOTA

Syllabus: GS-2; Elections

Context:

- **BJP's Shankar Lalwani won in Indore with a significant margin of 10.09 lakh votes.**
- **Lalwani received 12,26,751 votes in total.**
- **The closest competitor to Lalwani was the NOTA option, which received 2,18,674 votes.**
- **This result in Indore marks the highest number of votes ever received by the "None Of The Above" (NOTA) option in any constituency.**
- **The previous record for the highest NOTA votes was in Gopalganj, Bihar, in 2019, with 51,660 voters opting for this choice.**
- **NOTA allows voters to reject all candidates in an election if they find them unsuitable.**

When and why was the NOTA option introduced?

- **Introduction of NOTA:** *The Supreme Court directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to introduce the NOTA (None Of The Above) option for voters in September 2013.*
- **Reason:** *The introduction aimed to protect the secrecy of voters' choices.*
- **Background:** *The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) approached the Supreme Court in 2004, seeking measures to protect the 'right to secrecy' of voters during elections.*
- **Argument:** *PUCL argued that the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 violated secrecy as the Presiding Officer maintained a record of voters who chose not to vote.*
- **Government's stance:** *The central government argued that the right to vote is a statutory right, and secrecy only applies to voters who cast their vote, not those who abstain.*
- **Supreme Court ruling:** *The Supreme Court held that secrecy must be maintained whether a voter chooses to cast a vote or not, emphasizing its importance in ensuring free and fair elections.*
- **Secrecy with EVMs:** *With the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), the court noted that maintaining secrecy became more crucial, as anyone present in the polling booth could identify if a voter abstained from voting.*
- **ECI's suggestion:** *The Election Commission, in 2001, proposed the introduction of NOTA to protect voter secrecy and allow dissent against contesting candidates.*
- **Court's acceptance:** *The Supreme Court accepted the ECI's suggestion, stating that it would compel political parties to field candidates of integrity and directed the ECI to install a NOTA button in EVMs.*

What happens if NOTA receives the highest number of votes in a constituency?

- **Legal Consequence:** *Currently, NOTA has no legal consequence attached to it. Even if NOTA receives the highest number of votes in a seat, the second most successful candidate wins.*
- **Potential Change:** *The Supreme Court is considering a petition that suggests elections should be considered "null and void" if NOTA receives the highest number of votes in a constituency.*
- **Petition Details:** *Shiv Khera, founder of the Country First Foundation, filed the petition in April 2024. The petition urges the Election Commission of India (ECI) to frame guidelines/rules for uniform implementation of the NOTA option, with consequences for candidates who do not surpass NOTA.*
- **State Examples:** *The petition cites examples from Maharashtra, Haryana, Puducherry, Delhi, and Chandigarh, where the State Election Commission declared NOTA as a "Fictional Electoral Candidate" in local elections. If NOTA receives more votes than all other individual candidates combined, fresh elections will be held in these states and union territories.*
- **Purpose of NOTA:** *The petition argues that NOTA, introduced in 2013, has not fulfilled its purpose of increasing voter participation or encouraging political parties to field better candidates.*
- **Request for Consequences:** *The petition suggests that candidates who poll fewer votes than NOTA should be debarred from contesting all elections for a period of 5 years. It requests the Supreme Court to direct the ECI to frame rules for this.*

Monetary Policy Committee

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Economy –Monetary Policy.

Context:

- *The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), which is scheduled to meet from June 5 to 7, is expected to keep the repo rate steady at 6.5 per cent as sticky food inflation continues to remain a threat to the inflation.*

So, what is expected from the RBI's upcoming monetary policy?

- *The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is expected to keep the repo rate at 6.5% for the eighth time in a row.*
- *The repo rate is the interest rate at which the RBI lends money to banks.*
- *The policy will be cautious due to the risk of rising food prices caused by a heat wave.*
- *The RBI aims to keep consumer price inflation (CPI) between 2% and 6%.*

- *Headline inflation in April was 4.8%, slightly down from 4.9% in March.*
- **Food inflation rose to 7% in 2023-24, driven by high prices of cereals, pulses, spices, and vegetables.**
- *Ongoing hot weather is affecting food prices, and the RBI may wait to see the impact of the monsoon season on food inflation before changing its policy.*

Will there be any change in monetary policy stance?

- *Analysts expect the RBI's monetary policy stance of 'withdrawal of accommodation' to remain unchanged in June.*
- **Liquidity (availability of money) was in deficit in May 2024, compared to a surplus in April.**
- **Limited government spending** during general elections contributed to this liquidity pressure.
- *The RBI is expected to keep liquidity tight to maintain pressure on short-term interest rates, which could help support the rupee.*
- *Keeping the 'withdrawal of accommodation' stance signals that the RBI is not planning to cut interest rates soon due to uncertainty about food inflation and U.S. Federal Reserve policies.*

Will RBI revise GDP and inflation projections?

- *Most economists think the RBI will keep the real GDP forecast at 7%.*
- *The RBI is expected to keep the FY25 inflation forecast unchanged at 4.5%.*

So, what happens to lending rates if repo rate is left steady?

- *If the RBI keeps the repo rate at 6.5%, lending rates linked to the repo rate won't increase.*
- *This means borrowers with loans tied to the repo rate won't see their monthly payments (EMIs) go up.*
- *However, lenders might raise interest rates on loans linked to the marginal cost of fund-based lending rate (MCLR).*
- *This is because the full impact of past repo rate hikes hasn't been applied to MCLR-based loans yet.*

Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)

- *The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a key institution responsible for determining the monetary policy in India.*
- *It was established in accordance with the amendments to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act, 1934, through the Finance Act, 2016.*
- *MPC's primary objective is to maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth.*

Composition:

The MPC consists of six members:

- **Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**, who is the chairperson of the committee.
- **Deputy Governor of the RBI**, responsible for monetary policy.
- **One officer of the RBI**, appointed by the Central Board.
- **Three members nominated by the Government of India**, based on their expertise in economics and monetary policy.

Functions:

- **Formulating Monetary Policy:** *The primary function of the MPC is to formulate the monetary policy of India. It sets the short-term interest rate at which the central bank lends to commercial banks (the repo rate) and the rate at which the central bank borrows from commercial banks (the reverse repo rate).*
- **Maintaining Price Stability:** *MPC aims to achieve the target inflation rate set by the government. Currently, the target is to maintain Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation within a band of 4% (with a tolerance level of +/- 2%).*
- **Growth and Employment:** *While maintaining price stability is the primary objective, MPC also considers the broader economic environment, including growth and employment. It aims to support sustainable economic growth while controlling inflation.*
- **Communication:** *The MPC communicates its decisions and the rationale behind them through various channels, including press conferences, policy statements, and publications. This transparency helps stakeholders, including financial markets and the public, understand the central bank's stance and expectations.*

Decision-making Process:

- **The MPC meets at least four times a year** to review the monetary policy stance.
- **Decisions are made through voting**, with each member having one vote. In case of a tie, the Governor, as the chairperson, has a casting vote.
- **The committee considers various economic indicators**, including inflation trends, growth projections, global economic conditions, and domestic factors, before making its decision.
- **The MPC's decisions are guided by the mandate to achieve the inflation target while supporting growth and employment objectives.**

Netherlands became India's third-largest exporter

Syllabus: India-Netherlands Relations.

Context:

- *The Netherlands is now India's third largest export destination after the U.S. and UAE for 2023-24.*



More about news:

- *India's exports to the Netherlands grew by 3.5% to \$22.36 billion in 2023-24 from \$21.61 billion in 2022-23.*
- *Key exported goods to the Netherlands include petroleum products (\$14.29 billion), electrical goods, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.*
- *India's trade surplus with the Netherlands increased to \$17.4 billion in 2023-24 from \$13 billion in 2022-23.*
- *The Netherlands has surpassed the U.K., Hong Kong, Bangladesh, and Germany in receiving Indian exports.*
- *Exports to the Netherlands have been rising since 2000-01, starting from \$880 million.*
- *The Netherlands has become a major hub for Europe due to its efficient ports and connectivity with the EU.*

- *The Netherlands is a significant trading partner for India in Europe and a major investor, with \$5 billion in foreign direct investment in 2023-24.*
- *Over 200 Dutch companies operate in India, including Philips and KLM, while more than 200 Indian companies, such as TCS and Infosys, operate in the Netherlands.*

The significance of the Netherlands emerging as a major export destination for India includes:

- **Economic Growth:** *Increased exports to the Netherlands boost India's overall export revenues, supporting economic growth.*
- **Trade Surplus:** *The growing trade surplus with the Netherlands strengthens India's trade balance, positively impacting the economy.*
- **Market Diversification:** *Expanding into the Dutch market helps diversify India's export destinations, reducing dependence on traditional markets like the U.S. and UAE.*
- **Strategic Hub:** *The Netherlands serves as a gateway to Europe due to its efficient ports and connectivity, facilitating easier access for Indian goods to other European markets.*
- **Investment Opportunities:** *Significant foreign direct investment from the Netherlands into India (about \$5 billion in 2023-24) promotes industrial growth and job creation.*
- **Bilateral Relations:** *Strengthened economic ties enhance diplomatic relations, fostering cooperation in various sectors beyond trade.*
- **Presence of Indian Companies:** *The establishment of over 200 Indian companies in the Netherlands, including major IT firms, signifies a strong business presence and opportunities for further expansion.*
- **Technological and Industrial Growth:** *Collaboration with Dutch companies, known for their technological and industrial expertise, can lead to advancements in India's own industries.*

Tmesipteris ob lanceolate

Syllabus: GS-3; Environment and Ecology

Context

- *A fern has entered the record books for having more DNA than any other living thing.*
- *Scientists say it's a "crazy" amount of DNA for a tiny plant that most people would walk by without noticing.*



About

- *New research shows that a fork fern species, called *Tmesipteris ob lanceolata*, has a genome — all the genetic information of an organism — that is 7% larger than that of the previous record-holder, the Japanese flowering plant *Paris japonica*, and more than **50 times the size of the human genome**.*
- *The metric for genome size was the number of base pairs, the fundamental units of DNA, in an organism's cellular nuclei.*
- *If stretched out like from a ball of yarn, the length of the DNA in each cell of this fern would extend nearly 350 feet (106 meters), taller than New York's Statue of Liberty, the clock tower for London's Big Ben or India's Taj Mahal. The human genome would extend a mere 6-1/2 feet (2 meters).*
- *The fern grows primarily on the ground or atop fallen tree trunks in New Caledonia, about 750 miles (1,200 km) east of Australia, and on neighboring islands such as Vanuatu.*

Fern

- *Fern, (class Polypodiopsida), class of nonflowering, **herbaceous vascular plants** that possess true roots, stems, and complex leaves and that reproduce by spores.*
- *Ferns are plants that do not have flowers.*
- *Similar to flowering plants, ferns have roots, stems, and leaves.*

- *However, unlike flowering plants, ferns do not have flowers or seeds; instead, they usually reproduce sexually by tiny spores or sometimes can reproduce vegetatively.*
- *The ferns constitute an ancient division of vascular plants, some of them as old as the **Carboniferous Period** (beginning about 358.9 million years ago) and perhaps older.*
- *Some ferns play a role in **ecological succession**, growing from the crevices of bare rock exposures and in open bogs and marshes prior to the advent of forest vegetation.*

Genome

- ***The genome is the complete set of DNA instructions within a cell containing all the information needed for a living thing to develop and grow.***

Significance

- *Genome size is an important biodiversity character as it has been shown to play a role in influencing how, where and when a plant is able to grow and compete, and respond to environmental challenges such as climate change and pollution*

Indira Gandhi Zoological Park

Syllabus: GS-3; Biodiversity

Context

- *Indira Gandhi Zoological Park in Visakhapatnam triumphs in conservation breeding programme*

About

- *Indira Gandhi Zoological Park is located amidst **Kambalakonda Reserve Forest** in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India.*
- ***It is the third largest zoo in the country.***
- *It is situated in Visakhapatnam amidst the scenic Eastern Ghats of India.*
- *It is surrounded by the Eastern Ghats on three sides and Bay of Bengal on the fourth side.*
- *In February 2022, the zoo was received accreditation from the **World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA)** for coordinating a successful dhole breeding programme.*

What is a conservation breeding program?

- *Zoos and aquariums take part in cooperative international and regional **ex situ breeding programmes** to form viable populations that can benefit in situ conservation efforts.*
- *These breeding programmes serve many purposes: **Support demographic and genetic backup to wild populations.***

Striped hyenas



- *Striped hyenas, one of the three hyena species in the world, are listed as **near threatened** by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), as the global population continues to be affected due to habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, poaching, and illegal wildlife trade.*

Know more

- *The conservation breeding of hyenas is one of the success stories of IGZP.*
- *The zoo is also recognised by the **Central Zoo Authority (CZA)** for conservation breeding of Asiatic wild dog or dhole.*
- *This means it is the only zoo in India that is responsible for creating off-display conservation breeding centres (CBCs) for this species.*
- *Dholes are listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List and are considered to be at high risk of extinction.*
- *In addition to striped hyenas and wild dogs, IGZP has seen successful conservation breeding of species such as the Indian grey wolf, ring-tailed lemur, Indian bison, blue and gold macaw, jungle cat and eclectus parrot.*

Zoological Parks in India

