By-elections in Kashmir

Why in news?

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By-Polls in Kashmir's Anantnag was pushed back to May 25.

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Why was it postponed?

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- Violence by political protesters during the by-election in the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency, resulted in one polling station set afire and temporarily shut down of many.
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- This further resulted in the lowest-ever voter turnout of around 7%.
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- Hence the Election Commission put off the by-election in Anantnag.
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- EC ignored the Union Home Ministry’s say on the condition of Kashmir Valley.
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- Though not consulting Union Government for Lok Sabha By-election is a right move, it left the security forces unprepared for the scale of violence, and failed to ensure conditions for free, unrestricted polling.
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Why low voter turn-out?

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- Recent years recorded a higher voter participation in in the Valley.
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- The current situation is indicative of a dramatic slide in the political situation.
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- The killing of Burhan Wani, a ‘commander’ of the Hizbul Mujahideen, by

security forces in July last year set off a new cycle of violence in Kashmir.
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- Subsequent violence resulted in tremendous alienation of people and the youth are up in arms.
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- In these circumstances, by-elections may have no political meaning.
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- In general election, a change of government is possible.
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- It is not the case in the by-election, so it does not interest voters.
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- Protesters find it easier to disrupt the polling process in a by-election.
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- Therefore for voters, the political stakes are low and the physical risks high.
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What should be done?

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- Free re-polling in all the booths that witnessed violence should be done.
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- Re-polling in Srinagar too should be put off by a few weeks.
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- Kashmiris should also be provided a larger political motivation to go to the polling booths, a belief that their vote will count for something.
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Source: The Hindu

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