Coal Block Allocation Case

Why in news?

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The three Coal Ministry officials, including former Secretary, were convicted.

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Why were they convicted?

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- The secretary was the chairperson of the screening committee that recommended allocations.
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- It functioned for years without regard for guidelines, norms or transparency.
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- The three officials have been found guilty of abusing their positions to procure a coal block for Kamal Sponge Steel and Power Limited.
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- Special CBI Court has now ruled that Coal Ministry officials deliberately allowed an incomplete application from an ineligible company to be taken up for consideration.
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- The accused actually let all applications pass without any checking and arbitrarily exercised their discretion in favour of those companies.
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What is the significance?

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- It is the logical consequence of the 2014 Supreme Court order declaring all coal block allocations made since 1993 illegal and arbitrary.
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- Two previous trials had ended in convictions, but those held guilty were officials of private companies who had deceived the authorities into allotting them blocks.

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- This judgment marks the first case in which individual criminal liability has been fixed on public servants in the coal block scam.
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- The verdict may become a benchmark for other ongoing prosecutions on similar lines.
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- The case also raises questions about the role and responsibility of a Secretary to the government, who is not only the administrative head of a department but also an adviser to the Minister on matters of policy.
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Source: The Hindu

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