VVPAT Machines

What is the issue?

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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.

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How well the safeguards are in the present system?

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- The EC has repeatedly assured voters that there are enough procedural and technical safeguards to prevent large-scale tampering or manipulation of EVMs.
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- 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.**
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- **Model 3 machines** produced after 2013 have additional features such as **tamper detection.**
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- 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.
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What is VVPAT?

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

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- These machines were first used in a **by-election in Nagaland in 2013.**
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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Why is it important?

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- **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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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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