Amendments to Ancient Monuments Act

**Why in news?**

Central government is planning to introduce amendments to "Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958".

**What are prohibited zones?**

- Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Rules of 1959 for the first time noted a prohibited and a regulated zone around protected sites and monuments.
- In 2010, the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act was passed.
- This legislation brought the prohibited and regulated zones around monuments within the ambit of the Act itself.
- A designated prohibited area means that at least within a 100-m radius of the monument, no new construction is allowed.
- The National Monuments Authority was set up.

**What are the existing problems?**

- The records with the government show that there are around 5,00,000 unprotected and endangered monuments.
- But only 3,650 monuments are nationally protected in a country.
There are encroachments around monuments by government agencies and individuals.

e.g. The 2013 CAG report noted that of the 1,655 monuments, 546 of them were encroached.

It is mainly due to the severe lack of basic manpower in the form of monument attendants.

More than two-thirds of India’s monuments that the Central government is supposed to protect were poorly guarded.

There are also numerous instances where politicians have protected those who have illegally occupied the prohibited zone around monuments.

Heritage bye-laws for nationally protected monuments are yet to be prepared even after 6 years of passing the law.

What is the new amendment?

The government is planning to dilute the 100m prohibited area around nationally protected monuments.

The proposed amendment aims to allow the Central government to construct within that area all kinds of structures.

What is the importance of prohibited zones?

The above mentioned problems reveal that, at present, only solid protection to monuments comes from courts of law.

Courts prevent constructions mainly using the legal provisions of prohibited zone around monuments.

India’s monuments form an irreplaceable archive of our civilizational
So it is essential to continue with the 100 m protected area in order to prevent monuments from defacement and to prevent the present constructions from displacing the past aesthetics.

Source: The Hindu