Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) (Amendment) Bill

Why in news?

The central government is expected to reintroduce the AMASR (Amendment) Bill in Parliament during the second half of the Budget Session.

What is the AMASR (Amendment) Bill?

- The AMASR Act was passed by the Parliament in 1958.
- **Aim of AMASR –** It aims protection and preservation of archaeological and historical monuments and sites.
- It also provides for the regulation of archaeological excavations and for protection of sculptures, carvings and other such objects.
- **Amendments to AMASR –** It includes, allowing the construction of public works in prohibited areas, and the approval and impact assessment of such public works.
- The *original Act prohibits construction* in an area of *100 metres* around protected monuments, and the central government can extend this area beyond 100 metres.
- Now, the government will be allowed to take up infrastructure projects for public works in this prohibited area.
- **Public Works –** The Bill introduces a definition of public works.
- It defines public works as the construction works related to infrastructure financed.
- Such work should be carried out by any department of the central government for public purposes, such as the safety or security of the public at large.
- **Assessment –** The Bill seeks to add the archaeological impact, visual impact and heritage impact assessment of the proposed public works to the functions and powers of the authority.

What qualifies as an Ancient Monument (AM) and Archaeological Sites (AS) and remains?

- **Ancient Monument –** AM is defined as any structure, erection, or monument, or tumulus, or cave, rock-sculpture, inscription, or monolith which is of historical, archaeological, or artistic interest.
- Such things should have been in *existence for not less than 100 years*.
- **Archaeological Sites –** AS mean any area which contains ruins or relics of historical or archaeological importance which have been in existence for not less than 100 years.

Why does the government want to amend the AMASR Act?

- The prohibition of new construction within prohibited areas of a protected monument is adversely affecting the various public works and developmental projects of the

central government.

What is the current status of the Amendment Bill?

- The Amendment Bill was introduced in 2017 and was passed in the Lower House in 2018 and later referred to a Select Committee.
- **Report of the Committee –** It recommended deciding the area limit for prohibiting construction on a *case-by-case basis* rather than drawing a blanket limit of 100 metres.
- The committee also *questioned the definition of public works* specified in the Amendment.
- The committee noted that the *definition does not cover public utility projects*, like Metro construction, that do not specifically fall under safety and security.
- The committee recommended the passage of the Act after consultation with central and State governments and various relevant departments.

References

1. The Hindu | What is the AMASR (Amendment) Bill?
2. The Hindu | AMASR to be reintroduced in Budget session

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