Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2019

Why in News?

The Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha recently.

What does the bill seek to do?

- The Bill seeks to amend the Arms Act, 1959 by reducing the number of firearms allowed per person from the current three to one.
- It also proposes new categories of offences and an increase in the penalty for certain offences.
- Since the Bill was introduced, the Punjab government and groups in Rajasthan have opposed it.

Why are people in Punjab unhappy?

- In Punjab, protesters include individuals who own more than one weapon (includes businessmen, former Army personnel and farmers).
- The Punjab government's position is that over 50% of the state's farmers stay in remote villages and need arms to protect themselves.
- Villagers close to the Pakistan border are also insecure about infiltrators.
- Some Punjab residents still keep the guns they had acquired during the days of militancy in the 1980s and 1990s.
- Many residents inherited vintage weapons from their ancestors, which they do not want to part with.
- **CM's stand** - Chief Minister has said the state doesn't have a problem with any other provisions of the Act, but with the limit on firearm possession.
- He has written to the Centre urging it not to reduce the number "in view of the sensitive location and troubled history of the state".

Who are protesting in Rajasthan?

- **Rajput community** - The members of the Rajput community have opposed the proposed amendments.
- They have antique guns as family heirlooms and worship weapons.
- So, they think that the new amendment bill if passed will rob them of their treasured possessions.
- **Outfits** - The outfits such as the Karni Sena have threatened to protest if a person is not allowed to keep more than one firearm.

- According to Additional Director General of Crime (Rajasthan), at present there are 1.72 lakh gun licences issued in Rajasthan.
- Around 10% of these licence holders are people with multiple weapons.
- Mainly such people are president who owns ancestral weapons, are in the sport of shooting, or personnel from the armed forces.

What is the government stand?

- It maintains the move will help reduce firearms-related crime.
- According to National Crime Record Bureau's 2016 report,
    1. In Punjab, 48 were murdered by use of firearms, out of which 22 were licensed firearms and 26 were illegal.
    2. In Rajasthan, 23 victims were murdered by use of firearms and all murders were committed using illegal weapons.
- The latest NCRB report for 2017 does not give a breakdown of murder using firearms.

Source: The Indian Express

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