NGT ban on Jantar Mantar Protests

Why in news?

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Recently National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned protests at Jantar mantar, Delhi.

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What is the significance of Jantar mantar?

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- The Jantar Mantar area in Delhi became the preferred site for those protesting against government policy and injustice, since it is easily accessible to citizens while being close to Parliament.
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- It is the place where many defining moments of citizens' actions like the Anna Hazare fast against corruption, rallies and meetings demanding justice for Rohith Vemula, Indian farmers protest and sit-ins against lynching and in defence of free speech have taken place.
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- These have underlined India's democratic culture, reminding institutions and legislators of the anxieties and rights of the citizens they are supposed to address and serve.
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How NGT justifies this ban?

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- Some permanent residents of this part of central Delhi had pleaded to the NGT that the protests cause noise pollution and inconvenience to the residents.
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- The NGT ban has come primarily on three grounds:
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1. Jantar Mantar is not an authorised site for protests as there is no executive order that demarcates it as such.
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2. Jantar Mantar Road is marked as a residential area in the Delhi Master Plan and hence cannot be allowed to be used for other purposes.
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3. The protestors and agitators cause pollution, particularly noise pollution, because of unregulated use of loudspeakers and amplifiers, public address systems, etc.
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- Issues of littering, sanitation, and even of cow protection groups bringing cows and carts to the area have been mentioned in the NGT order as justification for the ban.
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What is the way ahead?

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- NGT has clearly ignored in its passion to sanitise the area is that master plans and zoning laws are open-ended documents.
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- They must necessarily incorporate room for changes that urban areas undergo over time.
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- If NGT says that no protests should be allowed at Jantar Mantar because it is noisy, then every part of India should have a right to noise protection.
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- Thus NGT ban must be urgently reconsidered as democracy and protest is also important in a society.
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Source: Indian Express

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