Supreme Court order on Puri Heritage Corridor

Why in news?

The Supreme Court will pronounce orders on petitions against construction around the Jagannath temple.

What about Puri Jagannath Temple?

- The Shree Jagannath Temple is located in Puri, Odisha.
- It is an important Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Jagannath, a form of lord Vishnu.
- It is well known for its annual Ratha Jatra, or chariot festival.
- The temple is one of the four great 'Char Dham' pilgrimage sites.
- Char Dhams are the pilgrimage sites found at India's four cardinal points.
- The other three are Badrinath (Uttarakhand), Dwarka (Gujarat), and Rameswaram (Tamil Nadu).

What is the Puri Heritage Corridor case about?

- The case in the Supreme Court comes at a time when the Orissa High Court is already hearing a plea against construction by the state government along the 800-year-old Puri Jagannath temple.
- Puri residents had moved the High Court alleging that the structural safety of the temple could be in jeopardy if land around the temple were dug up.
- The court had earlier also asked the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) to file an affidavit before the court and even conduct a joint inspection along with the state government.
- The ASI then told the court that the state government had no requisite permission for the project.
- Following the ASI’s affidavit, different petitioners have moved the Supreme Court.
- The SC is examining whether such an appeal through a Special Leave Petition can be permitted before hearing the plea on merits.

What is the construction in question?

- Conceived in 2016, the ambitious Puri Heritage Corridor Project has become the centre of a political tussle.
- It involves redevelopment of Puri into a heritage site at a cost of Rs 3,200 crore.
- The project includes 22 schemes redeveloping major portions of the temple town.
- The project includes
    - Redevelopment of the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration building
    - A Srimandir reception
    - Jagannath Cultural Centre including Raghunandan Library
    - Integrated command and control centre
    - Badadanda heritage streetscape
    - Improvement of Srimandir amenities

- Jagannath Ballav pilgrim centre
- Beachfront development
- Puri lake, Musa river revival plan

What is the ASI's role in this?

- The Jagannath temple is a centrally protected monument, with the ASI as its custodian.
- As per the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, the National Monuments Authority (NMA) grants approval for construction and mandates that a heritage impact assessment study must be carried out before developmental work.
- The NMA had issued a no objection certificate (NOC) to the state government for constructions within the prohibited 75-metre zone.
- However, after a joint inspection, ASI Director General flagged concerns on the project before the High Court.
- The ASI also wrote to the state government to review the the project for the development around the Puri Srimandir.
- **State's response**- The state government has cited a 2019 verdict which highlighted the lack of facilities and mismanagement of the Puri temple premises.

The NMA, which functions under the Union Ministry of Culture, was set up for the protection and preservation of monuments and sites.

Why is the project being opposed in the Supreme Court?

- The petitioners have contended that the project has no valid permission.
- They contended that the construction was happening in violation of Section 20A of the Ancient Monuments Act that sets a minimum of 100 metres within which construction around a protected monument is prohibited.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-puri-heritage-corridor-case-jagannath-temple-odisha-7949919/lite/

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