Threats to Taj Mahal

Why in news?

The Supreme Court has directed the Agra Development Authority to stop all commercial activities within a 500-metre radius of the Taj Mahal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

What is Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ)?

- The emissions from industries near the Taj Mahal are causing the white marble surface of Taj Mahal to discolour.
- In order to protect the monument from pollution, the central government had demarcated a trapezoid shaped area of 10,400 sq. km around the Taj, called the Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ).
- TTZ is spread across Agra, Firozabad, Mathura, Hathras and Etah district, and Rajasthan's Bharatpur District.
- The TTZ comprises monuments including three World Heritage Sites the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri.

What is the TTZ case?

- Environmentalist M C Mehta had filed a petition before the Supreme Court in 1984 to take immediate measures to stop air pollution within the TTZ to protect the Taj Mahal.
- He claimed that industries, foundries, vehicles and the nearby Mathura petroleum refinery were releasing toxic gases like sulphur dioxide, which were harmful.
- In 1996, the Supreme Court in a landmark judgement in M.C. Mehta vs Union Of India & Ors, stated that the atmospheric pollution in TTZ has to be eliminated at any cost.
- It banned the use of coal/ coke in industries located in the TTZ.
- It directed the 292 industries operating in the zone to switch to natural gas as industrial-fuel, or relocate from their area.

How was the pollution after TTZ case?

- The National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) report, 2010 found that despite various government schemes, the iconic Taj Mahal continued to face a threat from water and air pollution.
- Though the creation of a bypass, improvements in power supply and reduction of diesel generators had a positive impact, the emissions of nitrogen oxide and particulates had reached higher than the previous decade.
- The Yamuna water, contaminated with industrial discharge, sewage and solid waste, was also damaging the monument as well.
- **Other damages**- The Taj Mahal has also become discoloured due to contamination of

the Yamuna, which has resulted in a loss of aquatic life.
- Now there is no sign of any aquatic species, which ate the insects and their larvae.
- This leads to insect and algae infestation of monuments situated on the river-bank.

References

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/how-pollution-insects-are-threatening-taj-mahal-and-what-supreme-court-has-said-8176610/

