

Amendments to Ancient Monuments Act

Why in news?

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Central government is planning to introduce amendments to "Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958".

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What are prohibited zones?

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- Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Rules of 1959 for the first time noted a prohibited and a regulated zone around protected sites and monuments.

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- In 2010, the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act was passed.

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- This legislation brought the prohibited and regulated zones around monuments within the ambit of the Act itself.

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- A designated prohibited area means that at least within a 100-m radius of the monument, no new construction is allowed.

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- The National Monuments Authority was set up.

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What are the existing problems?

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- The records with the government show that there are around 5,00,000 unprotected and endangered monuments.

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- But only 3,650 monuments are nationally protected in a country.

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- There are encroachments around monuments by government agencies and individuals.

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- e.g The 2013 CAG report noted that of the 1,655 monuments, 546 of them were encroached.

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- It is mainly due to the severe lack of basic manpower in the form of monument attendants.

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- More than two-thirds of India's monuments that the Central government is supposed to protect were poorly guarded.

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- There are also numerous instances where politicians have protected those who have illegally occupied the prohibited zone around monuments.

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- Heritage bye-laws for nationally protected monuments are yet to be prepared even after 6 years of passing the law.

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What is the new amendment?

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- The government is planning to dilute the 100m prohibited area around nationally protected monuments.

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- The proposed amendment aims to allow the Central government to construct within that area all kinds of structures.

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What is the importance of prohibited zones?

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- The above mentioned problems reveal that, at present, only solid protection to monuments comes from courts of law.

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- Courts prevent constructions mainly using the legal provisions of prohibited zone around monuments.

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- India's monuments form an irreplaceable archive of our civilizational heritage.

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- So it is essential to continue with the 100 m protected area in order to prevent monuments from defacement and to prevent the present constructions from displacing the past aesthetics.

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Source: The Hindu

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