Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the project; about EAC

News: The Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), an apex environmental screening committee has deferred a decision on clearance to the Parliament redevelopment project.

Why?

- This has been done on the grounds that there was a dispute, being heard in the Delhi High Court, regarding the land on which some of the proposed structures were to come up.

- The petitioner in the Delhi High Court has pleaded that no environment clearance be given, as the alterations which are proposed will involve land-use change not in conformity with Delhi’s Master Plan.

- The petitioner also prayed that no permission be granted to cut trees for the expansion and renovation of the Parliament building,

About Parliament redevelopment project:

- It is part of the Central Vista Redevelopment project and involves redeveloping the 3-km stretch from Rashtrapati Bhawan to the India Gate in Lutyens’ Delhi.

- The revamp, which was announced in September, envisages a new triangular Parliament building that is targeted to be constructed by August 2022, when the country will be celebrating its 75th Independence Day.
Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) of the Environment Ministry

- Recommendations of EACs, expert committees appointed by the Environment Ministry play a crucial role in the Ministry’s decision to clear a developmental/infrastructure project.

- The EACs’ primary role in the environmental clearance (EC) process is to give recommendations to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) on project proposals after considering the potential impacts of the project.

- Based on these recommendations, the MoEFCC either rejects the proposal or grants a clearance with conditions which would mitigate the impacts or compensate for the same.

What is the process of getting an Environmental Clearance (EC)? What kinds of projects require one?

- The Central Government issued a Notification under the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 on 14 September, 2006 requiring certain categories of projects to obtain an EC prior to commencing any project work. This Notification is popularly referred to as the EIA Notification 2006 as EIA studies form an important part of the EC process.

- The categories of projects that require a prior EC, listed in the Schedule to the EIA Notification, include thermal power projects, river valley power/irrigation projects, mining, industries, airports, highways, solid waste management projects, etc. Depending on the size and capacity of these projects, the EC is either sought from the MoEFCC or from the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), which is constituted by the Central Government in each state for this purpose.

- The EC process begins with the project proponent submitting an application with relevant information about the proposed project to the relevant regulatory authority (the MoEFCC or the SEIAA). The next stage is the issuance of detailed and comprehensive Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the preparation of an EIA report by the project proponent. The EACs may
intervene to amend standardised ToRs to address specific issues with regard to particular projects.

- The draft EIA report prepared by the project proponent, based on the ToRs and other relevant documents, is then made available in the public domain (offices of local and regional authorities and official websites) for public consultation. Certain projects are exempt from the public consultation process, and these are listed in the EIA Notification. The outcome of the public consultation is sent to the project proponent who is expected to respond to the material concerns raised and finalise the draft EIA report.

- The final EIA report, the outcome of the public consultation (including minutes and video recording of the hearing), and other relevant documents are then appraised by an EAC. The EAC is expected to undertake a detailed scrutiny of the documents and the project proponent’s presentation, and then recommend the proposal for grant (or rejection) of EC or recommend additional studies before making a final decision. Based on the EAC’s recommendations, the MoEFCC issues its final decision. The MoEFCC normally accepts these recommendations, but it could disagree and ask the EAC to reconsider its recommendations.