Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy on Monday introduced the Special Protection Group (Amendment) Bill, 2019 in the Lok Sabha

Prelims and Mains focus: about the key features of the Bill and its significance

Purpose of the Bill:

The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill said that it is “considered to amend the Act to focus on core mandate, as the security of the Prime Minister, as Head of the Government, is of paramount importance for Government, governance and national security.”

Key features of the amending Bill:

- As per the Bill, “SPG shall provide proximate security to the Prime Minister and his immediate family members residing with him at his official residence.”

- The Bill says that family members of a former PM who do not reside with him at his official residence will not be guarded by SPG commandos and those who reside with him will get security cover of the SPG only for five years.

- The Bill says that in the existing Act there is no cutoff period for providing SPG protection to former PMs or members of their immediate families. “Thus, the number of individuals to be provided SPG cover can potentially become quite large. In such a scenario, there can be severe constraint on resources, training and related infrastructure of the SPG,” the statement of objects and reasons said.

Origins of SPG:

1. In March 1985, following the recommendations of a committee set up by the Home Ministry, a special unit was created for this purpose under the Cabinet Secretariat. This unit, initially called the Special Protection Unit, was renamed as Special Protection Group in April 1985.
2. Subsequently, the Parliament passed The Special Protection Group (SPG) Act, which was notified in June 1988 “to provide for the constitution and regulation of an armed force of the Union for providing proximate security to the Prime Minister of India and for matters connected therewith”.
3. The SPG Act defined “proximate security” as “protection provided from close quarters,
4. **Coverage**: SPG protection was extended, apart from the Prime Minister, to “former Prime Ministers of India and members of their immediate families” through an amendment in the Act in the aftermath of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

**Categories of security:**

Besides the SPG, VIPs in India are protected by other security forces as well. **The levels of security cover are determined by the threat perception around the individual.**

1. The highest level of security cover is the Z-plus category, followed by Z, Y, and X categories.
2. The higher the level of cover, the larger the number of personnel protecting the individual.
3. Roughly 24-36 personnel with automatic weapons are deployed for Z-plus category protectees and 16-20 personnel guard Z-category protectees.
4. The elite ‘Black Cat' commandos of the NSG are deployed to protect VIPs for whom the threat perception is the highest.