News: A year after 10 water aerodromes were awarded to airlines for seaplane operations, the government is yet to seek environmental clearance for them.

Background

- In January 2019, the government announced winners of the third round of UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) — the government’s low-cost flying scheme.
- Among the routes awarded to airlines were those that provided air connectivity to 10 waterdromes — the Statue of Unity, the Sabarmati riverfront and the Shatrunjay dam in Gujarat; the Nagarjuna Sagar dam and the Prakasam barrage in Andhra Pradesh and Havelock Island, Neill Island and Long island in Andaman and Nicobar. Eight of these waterdromes in Gujarat, Assam and Andaman and Nicobar were awarded to the SpiceJet.

About the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) for aerodromes

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation appointed a consultant, M/s Feedback Infra, to prepare a detailed project report in August last year. Subsequently, a proposal was sent to the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) seeking the “terms of reference” for conducting an environment impact assessment (EIA) for three waterdromes in Andaman and Nicobar, which was granted on November 25.

- Once the EIA is finalised, the apex body under the MoEF, Environment Approval Committee, will take it up for clearance. This process is yet to be undertaken for the remaining seven waterdromes.

- The process of seeking environmental clearance requires a lot of data such as bathymetric test. (Bathymetry is the study of underwater depth of lake or
ocean floors.)

- As per the EAC’s “terms of reference” for the waterdromes in Andaman and
  Nicobar, the Ministry of Civil Aviation will have to provide information about
  toilet waste from flights, disposal of trash collected during flights and waste
  from eateries and shops at the aerodromes. Details have also been sought
  about the impact of noise on the sensitive environment and presence of
  corals.

What is Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)?

- **UNEP** defines Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as “a tool used to
  identify the environmental, social and economic impacts of a project prior to
  decision-making.”

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is the process of examining the
  anticipated environmental effects of a proposed project – from consideration
  of environmental aspects at design stage, through consultation and
  preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR),
  evaluation of the EIAR by a competent authority, the subsequent decision as
  to whether the project should be permitted to proceed, encompassing public
  response to that decision.

- The aim is to predict environmental impacts at an early stage in project
  planning and design, find ways and means to reduce adverse impacts, shape
  projects to suit the local environment and present the predictions and options
  to decision-makers. Although legislation and practice vary around the world,
  the fundamental components of an EIA would necessarily involve the
  following stages:

1. Screening
2. Scoping
3. Assessment and evaluation of impacts and development of alternatives
4. Reporting the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or EIA report
5. Review of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
6. Decision-making
7. Monitoring, compliance, enforcement and environmental auditing