The Waqf Bill

Why in News?

Recently, at **the 'Budget Pe Charcha'** event **in Srinagar**, the **Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs** stated that the proposed amendments in **the Waqf Bill** aimed to **benefit poor Muslims** rather than seize Waqf property.

Key Points

- **Support for the Waqf Bill:**
  - He mentioned that several Muslim MPs have also backed the Bill, with many expressing private approval.
  - Despite opposition from certain political parties, he highlighted that his ministry had received feedback from the Muslim community, including women.
  - The amendments **aim to enhance transparency in Waqf property management,** ultimately serving the best interests of the community.
- **Visit to Dargah Hazratbal Shrine:**
  - The Minister visited **the Dargah Hazratbal shrine** in Srinagar and reviewed ongoing development works.
  - The Minister praised the J&K Waqf Board's development initiatives, calling them a model for religious site management across India.
- **Discussion on Union Budget 2025:**
  - He also chaired a discussion on **the Union Budget 2025**, engaging with local business leaders, industry representatives, and community members.
  - The discussion saw participation from stakeholders across various sectors, including the Hotel Association, Houseboat Owners Association, Industries & Commerce Association, Tour & Travel Association, **Saffron Growers Association**, Shawl Weavers Association, Fruit Growers Association, and Farmers Association.
  - The issues discussed included the implementation of **the Minimum Wages Act,** the revival of **Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)**, rehabilitation of houseboat owners, and conservation of Kashmir's wetlands.
- **Commitment to J&K's Economy:**
  - He acknowledged the significance of **tourism and handicrafts in J&K's economy** and assured policy support for these sectors.
  - He emphasized **sustainable tourism and environmental conservation**, particularly in preserving **wetlands** and rehabilitating houseboats.
  - He reiterated the government's commitment to promoting **eco-friendly tourism** while safeguarding local livelihoods.

Waqf Act, 1995

- **Background:**
  - The Waqf act was first passed by Parliament in **1954.**
  - It was later repealed, and a **new Waqf Act** was passed in **1995**, which gave more powers to Waqf Boards.
  - In **2013**, the Act was further amended to grant the Waqf Board **extensive powers** to

designate property as **'Waqf Property.'**

- **Waqf:**
  - It is the permanent dedication of **movable or immovable properties for religious, pious or charitable** purposes as recognised by Muslim law.
  - It implies the **endowment of property**, whether movable or immovable, tangible or intangible, to God by a Muslim, under the premise that the **transfer will benefit the needy.**
  - The proceeds from a Waqf typically fund **educational institutions, graveyards, mosques and shelter homes.**
  - Waqfs in India are **regulated by the Waqf act, 1995.**
- **Waqf Board:**
  - A Waqf board is a **legal entity** capable of **acquiring, holding** and **transferring** property. It can **sue and be sued in court.**
  - It **administers** Waqf properties, **recovers** lost properties and **sanctions** the transfer of immovable Waqf properties through sale, gift, mortgage, exchange, or lease, with at least two-thirds of the board members voting in favour of the transaction.
  - The **Central Waqf Council (CWC)**, established in **1964**, oversees and advises state level Waqf Boards across India.
- **Waqf Properties:**
  - The Waqf board is said to be **the third-largest landholder** in India after the Railways and the Defence department.
    - Currently, there are 8,72,292 registered Waqf properties spread across 8 lakh acres. These properties generate Rs 200 crore in revenue.
    - Once a property is designated as a Waqf, it becomes **non-transferable** and is **detained perpetually** as a charitable act toward God, essentially transferring ownership to God.