4. SC Judgement on ESZ

Why in News?

- Recently, The Supreme Court modified its previous judgment regarding Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ) around protected forests, stating that ESZs cannot be uniform across the entire country, and instead need to be tailored to the specific protected area.

Highlights

- The SC ordered that ESZs of a minimum of one kilometer should be declared around protected forests, national parks, and wildlife sanctuaries across the country.
- The court had said that ESZs would act as a "shock absorber" for the protected areas and prevent encroachment, illegal mining, construction, and other activities that could harm the environment and wildlife.
- The court had also directed the Centre and the States to notify the ESZs within 6 months and file compliance reports.
- The June 2022 order affected hundreds of villages in the peripheries of forests. ESZs cannot be uniform across the country and have to be decided on a case-by-case basis.
- Geographical features, population density, land use patterns, and other factors of each protected area need to be taken into account.
- The order would hamper the development activities and livelihoods of the people living in the ESZs, as well as the conservation efforts of the forest departments.
- The bench led by Justice B.R. Gavai agreed with the submissions of the Centre and the States and modified its previous order by saying that:
- The purpose of declaring ESZs is not to hamper the day-to-day activities of the citizens but to protect the environment and wildlife.
- A stringent observance of the June 2022 order would cause more harm than good, as it would increase man-animal conflict, prevent basic amenities and infrastructure for the villagers, and hinder eco-development activities around protected areas.
- The Centre and the States should notify ESZs as per their own proposals or as per recommendations of expert committees within 6 months.
- However, mining within the national parks/wildlife sanctuaries and within an area of 1 km from their boundary shall not be permissible.