

## Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

### Why in news?

Recently, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture has presented the '359<sup>th</sup> Report on the Functioning of ASI' before the Parliament.

### What is ASI?

- Premier organization for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation.
- **Ministry** - Ministry of Culture
- **Prime functions** - Custodian of all *Centrally Protected Monuments (CPM)* in India.
- Maintenance of ancient monuments, archaeological sites and remains of national importance.
- The recently added [Hoysala Temples](#) in Karnataka and [Santiniketan](#) in West Bengal in UNESCO World Heritage List were conserved and protected by ASI.

*India has a total of 3,693 Centrally Protected Monuments or Sites with Uttar Pradesh having the largest number in the country at 743, followed by Tamil Nadu which has 412.*

- **Regulating functions** - It regulates all archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the,
  - Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
  - Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.
  - Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) (Amendment) Act, 2010.
- Takes actions against encroachments and issues demolition orders to the Collector requesting for the demolition of the encroachments.

### ASI's Conservation Measures in Foreign Countries

- Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan
- Ta Prohm and Preah Vihear temples in Cambodia
- My Son Group of Temples in Vietnam
- Friday Mosque in Maldives
- Authorities in Fayaztepa and Karatepa Buddhist Sites in Uzbekistan are interested in giving their conservation work to ASI

## What are recommendations of the parliamentary committee?

- **To rationalise the list** - Centrally Protected Monuments (CPM)\_list should be categorised on the basis of their national significance, unique architectural value and specific heritage content.
- This is based on *government's decolonisation agenda* where monuments glorifying colonial era would be taken out while that reflecting Indian ethos will be included in the list.
- Deletion of some of the *kosminars (milestones of Mughal era)* may also be considered in the way of road-widening exercises.
- **Ease restrictions around monuments** - The provision of 100-metre prohibited area and 300-metre regulated area around ASI protected monuments leads to public inconvenience.
- In some cases, the entire village is within a radius of 300 metres, making it difficult for them to repair their residential houses.

*The ASI through AMASR Act, prohibits and regulates all activities like mining and construction around 100 metres and 300 metres of all the protected monuments.*

- **Fixing ASI's core mandate** - The committee recommended the ASI to
  - Develop preservation plans for all its work, especially before excavations.
  - Establish clear strategies for documenting findings, conserving artefacts, and restoring structures to ensure minimal impact on the site's integrity
  - Focus on areas that have the potential of historical significance and contribute to a deeper understanding of India's rich past
  - Use advanced technologies such as LiDAR, ground-penetrating radar and 3D scanning
- Some of these techniques were recently used inside the [Gyanvapi complex](#) in Varanasi by the ASI for its court-mandated non-invasive survey.
- It also advised *bifurcation of the ASI* where the ASI can look after the core mandate while the *India Heritage Development Corporation (IHDC)* can deal with ASI's revenue.
- **Prioritising conservation** - On the backdrop of the *CAG report which had declared 92 CPMs as missing*, the committee recommend ASI to prioritise the physical security of all CPMs.
- It said that ASI should *maintain digital log books* that include textual and photographic/ video records with location coordinates to check encroachment of any CPMs at an early stage.
- **Enhance financial resources** - The panel said that India spends a little amount on the protection and upkeep of monuments.

*India spends around Rs 11 lakh per monument of national importance (Rs 428 crore for 3693 monuments) in 2019-20.*

- **Strengthen human resources** - There is an issue of shortage of human resources when it comes to conservation.
- Outsourcing some work has its own limitations as such expertise is not available even outside.
- **Preference to original relevance** - Some restoration is being done without taking cognizance of the original design/beauty of the monument.
- Indigenous traditional practices and sustainable practices such as using eco-friendly materials, energy-efficient techniques need to be emphasised.
- **Engagement with other stakeholders** - It recommended that only experienced Monument Mitras (under [Adopt a Heritage scheme](#)) may be hired as lack of experience in this arena have resulted in avoidable damage or destruction.

*Monument Mitras are businesses (Private firm or PSU) that enter into agreements with the Union Ministry of Culture to adopt and maintain State-owned archaeological sites or monuments.*

## Quick Facts

### National Monuments Authority (NMA)

- It is under the Ministry of Culture which has been setup as per the AMASR Act, 2010.
- Composition - 1 chairperson, up to 5 whole time and 5 part time members each and a Member Secretary.
- The Director General of ASI is an ex officio Member.

### National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities

- It was launched in 2007 for the preparation of a database of the Indian antiquities.
- Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is the nodal agency for the implementation.

## References

1. [IE| Parliamentary committee recommendation on ASI](#)
2. [ASI web| Archaeological Survey of India](#)