Prelim Bits 17-09-2021 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

Gupta Period Inscriptions

Archaeological Survey of India discovered remains of an ancient temple dating back to the Gupta period in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Etah district.

- **Findings** - The Bilsarh site was declared 'protected' in 1928.
- Every year, the ASI undertakes scrubbing work at the protected sites. This year, the team has discovered,
  a. Two decorative pillars close to one another, with human figurines,
  b. 'Shankhalipi' inscriptions in the stairs of the temple saying, 'Sri Mahendraditya', the title of Kumaragupta I of the Gupta dynasty.

- The stairs led to a structural temple built during the Gupta period.
- **Significance** - The discovery becomes significant since only 2 other structural temples from the Gupta age have been found so far,
  1. Dashavatara Temple (Deogarh) and
  2. Bhitargaon Temple (Kanpur Dehat).

The Guptas were the first to build structural temples, distinctly different from the ancient rock-cut temples.

Shankhalipi Script

- Shankhalipi or 'shell-script' is a term used to describe **ornate spiral characters** assumed to be Brahmi derivatives that look like conch shells or shankhas.
- They are found on temple pillars, columns and rock surfaces across north-central India and they date to between the 4th and 8th centuries.
- Both Shankhalipi and Brahmi are stylised scripts used primarily for names and signatures.
- The inscriptions consist of a small number of characters, suggesting that the shell inscriptions are names or auspicious symbols or a combination of the two.
- **Chronology -** The script was discovered in 1836 on a brass trident in Uttarakhand's Barahat by James Prinsep, who was the founding editor of the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- Prominent sites with shell inscriptions include the
  a. Nagarjuna group of caves in the Barabar Hills near Gaya,
  b. Mundeshwari Temple in Bihar,
  c. Udayagiri Caves in Madhya Pradesh,
  d. Mansar in Maharashtra.
- Shell inscriptions are also reported in Indonesia's Java and Borneo.
- **Meaning -** These shell scripts are not yet deciphered.
- But there are a sufficient number of shell characters to represent the syllables of the Sanskrit language.

Report on Reforms in Urban Planning Capacity

NITI Aayog launched a report on measures to ramp up urban planning capacity in India.

- NITI Aayog developed this report, in consultation with concerned ministries and experts in the domain of urban and regional planning.

India is home to 11% of the total global urban population. By 2027, India will surpass China as the most populous country in the world.

- **Programs for Planning of Healthy Cities** - Every city must aspire to become a 'Healthy City for All' by 2030.
- The report recommends a Central Sector Scheme '500 Healthy Cities Programme', for a period of 5 years, wherein priority cities and towns would be selected jointly by the states and local bodies.
- **Optimum Utilization of Land** - All the urban areas under 'Healthy Cities Programme' must strengthen development control regulations based on scientific evidence to maximize efficiency of urban land.
- The report recommends a sub-scheme 'Preparation/Revision of Development Control Regulations' for this purpose.
- **Ramping Up of Human Resources** - To combat the shortage of urban planners in the public sector, the states/UTs may need to,
    a. Expedite the filling up of vacant positions of town planners, and
    b. Additionally sanction 8268 town planners' posts as lateral entry positions for a period of 3 years to 5 years to meet the gaps.

- States may amend their recruitment rules to ensure the entry of qualified candidates into town-planning positions.
- **Urban Governance** - A high-powered committee must be constituted to re-engineer the present urban-planning governance structure.
- Key aspects that would need to be addressed in this effort are,
    a. Clear division of the roles and responsibilities of various authorities, appropriate revision of rules and regulations, etc.,
    b. Creating a more dynamic organizational structure, standardisation of the job descriptions of town planners and other experts, and
    c. Extensive adoption of technology for enabling public participation and inter-agency coordination.

- **Revision of Town and Country Planning Acts** that enables the States to prepare and notify master plans for implementation is needed.
- For this, an apex committee must be formed at the state level to undertake a regular review of planning legislations (including town and country planning or urban and regional development acts or other acts).
- **Involving Citizens** - A 'Citizen Outreach Campaign' for demystifying urban planning is needed to enable the citizens' participation at relevant stages.
- **Enhancing the Role of Private Sector** in planning at multiple levels is needed to improve the overall planning capacity in the country by,
    a. Adopting fair processes for procuring technical consultancy services,
    b. Strengthening project structuring and management skills in the public sector, and
    c. Empanelment of private sector consultancies.
- **Steps for Strengthening Urban Planning Education System**

a. The Central universities and technical institutions in all the other States/ UTs could offer PG degree programmes in planning to cater to the requirement of planners in the country in a phased manner.
b. All such institutions may synergize with Rural Development Ministry, and Panchayati Raj Ministry & state depts to develop demand-driven short-term programmes on rural area planning.
c. 'Planning' as an umbrella term could be included as a discipline under the MoE's National Institute Ranking Framework (NIRF) to encourage a healthy competition among the institutions.
d. AICTE may retain the names of specializations based on industry requirements, while limiting them to an appropriate number.
e. Faculty shortage in educational institutions conducting degree and PhD programmes in planning must be resolved by 2022.

- **Other Measures** - 'National Council of Town and Country Planners' must be constituted as a statutory body of the Government of India.
- 'National Digital Platform of Town and Country Planners' is suggested to be created within the National Urban Innovation Stack of MoHUA.
- This portal will enable self-registration of all planners and evolve as a marketplace for potential employers and urban planners.

India's 1st Euro Green Bond

Power Finance Corporation Ltd (PFC), the leading NBFC in power sector, has issued its maiden Euro 300 million 7-year Euro Bond.

- It is the first ever Euro denominated Green bond issuance from India.
- Moreover, it is the first ever Euro issuance by an Indian NBFC and the first Euro bond issuance from India since 2017.
- To know more about the Green Bonds, click here.

Source: PIB, The Hindu, The Indian Express

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