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Delisting of Monuments by ASI

Why in news?

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) plans to declassify 18 monuments from protected status citing diminished national significance.

Archaeological Survey of India

- **About-** It is a premier organization for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation.
- **Established year-** 1861
- **Founder-** Alexander Cunningham, he is the first Director-General of ASI.
- **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.
- **Centrally protected monuments-** India has a total of 3,693 Centrally Protected Monuments or Sites.
 - 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.
- **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

What is called as monument of national importance?

- **AMASR Act, 1958-** Section 4 of the Act states that ancient monuments or archaeological sites which are of historical, archaeological or artistic interest and which have been in existence for not less than 100 years may be declared as of national importance.
- **Coverage-** It covers temples, cemeteries, inscriptions, tombs, forts, palaces, step-wells, rock-cut caves, and even objects like cannons and mile pillars ("kos minars") that may be of historical significance.

- **Designation importance**- If designated by ASI, it authorises the central government to “*maintain, protect and promote the site*”, which may be considered of significant historical importance, as mandated by the Act.
- **Protection**- The monuments of national importance are to be conserved and maintained by the ASI as an important site pertaining to history and culture, and any kind of construction-related activity is not allowed around the protected site.
- **Regular inspection**- ASI should regularly inspect protected monuments to assess their condition, and to conserve and preserve them.
- **Prohibit encroachments**- In cases of encroachment, the ASI can file a police complaint, issue a show-cause notice for the removal of the encroachment, and communicate to the local administration the need for demolition of encroachments.
- **Delisting monuments**- ASI plans to delist 18 monuments demand no longer of national importance, drawn from a list of 24 traceable monuments.

Why ASI plans to delist monuments?

This is the first such large-scale delisting exercise in several decades.

- ASI has invoked section 35 under AMASR Act to delist the 18 monuments, stating that these “have ceased to be of national importance”.
- **Section 35**- It states that if the Central Government is of the opinion that any ancient monument or archaeological site and remains have ceased to be of national importance, it may, by notification in the Official Gazette, declare that such a monument or site and remains shall no longer be considered to be of national importance.
- **Delisted monuments**- The precise location of these monuments, or their current physical state, is not known.

Plan to delist monuments	Location
Kos Minar No.13	Haryana
Barakhamba Cemetery	Delhi
Gunner Burkill’s Tomb	Jhansi
Telia Nala Buddhist ruins	Uttar Pradesh

- **Untraceable**- It refers to those sites that have been lost due to various factors such as urbanisation, encroachments, construction of dams and reservoirs, or sheer neglect.
- **Lost monuments**- Some lesser-known sites have deteriorated or disappeared, with no public memory remaining to identify their locations.
- **Impact**-Delisting means the ASI will no longer protect these monuments, allowing for regular construction and urbanization activities in the area.
- **Public feedback**- A gazette notification invites public objections or suggestions within 2 months regarding the delisting of these monuments.

What are the challenges faced by ASI?

- **Historical dysfunctionality**- ASI focused more on uncovering new archaeological

sites rather than conserving and protecting existing ones.

- **Poor resource allocation**- Post independence, the government's allocation of resources prioritized sectors like health, education, and infrastructure over heritage protection which resulted in limited funding and attention towards preserving historical monuments.
- **Loss of monuments**- The Ministry of Culture's report to a parliamentary committee revealed that 50 out of India's 3,693 centrally protected monuments were missing which underscores the challenges in adequately safeguarding these sites against various threats such as urbanization, encroachment, and neglect.
- **Shortage of security personnel**- Only 6.71% of the protected monuments have security guards, this compromises the ability to monitor and protect these sites effectively, leaving vulnerable to damage and theft.
- **Urban development**- The Parliamentary panel suggested that the Barakhamba Cemetery in Delhi might have been compromised due to the redevelopment of the New Delhi railway station
- **Remote monuments**- While high-profile monuments may receive more attention, smaller and remote sites are often neglected, increasing the risk of their loss.
- **Failed guardianship**- Supreme Court observed that Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) failed to act as guardian of India's heritage in the context of Taj Mahal as it faces threats from political interference and encroachments.

What lies ahead?

- A comprehensive holistic approach is required to increase funding, improved coordination between government agencies, community engagement, and leveraging technology for better monitoring and conservation efforts.
- The recent delisting of monuments reflects larger effort to rationalize and categorize monuments based on their significance and heritage value.
- However it also underscores the need for better preservation strategies and resources to protect India's rich cultural heritage.

References

1. [Indian Express- ASI delists 18 untraceable monuments](#)
2. [ASI- History of Archaeological Survey of India](#)



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