

Standing Committee Report Summary

Functioning of Archaeological Survey of India

- The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: Mr. V. Vijayasai Reddy) submitted its report on ‘Functioning of Archaeological Survey of India’, on September 21, 2023. Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is a body set up by the central government for maintenance of monuments of national importance. It also regulates archaeological activities in the country. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Rationalisation of the list of centrally protected monuments:** Centrally protected monuments are the monuments and archaeological sites of national importance, which are in the Union List and under the charge of the ASI. The Committee observed that at least a quarter of the 3,691 centrally protected monuments are minor monuments with no architectural or historical significance. It recommended that the list of these monuments be rationalised based on national significance, unique architectural value, and specific heritage content. It also recommended that the ASI ensure the physical security of all monuments maintained by it. It identified lack of personnel to be a key gap in ensuring security.
 - **Restricted areas around monuments:** Within the radius of 300 metres of archaeological sites, various activities including construction and mining are restricted under law. The Committee observed that this invites public criticism and inconvenience, as in some cases, an entire village is covered within such radius. It recommended that these restrictions should be rationalised.
 - **Gaps in excavation of sites:** The Committee observed that several issues related to excavation activities remain unresolved. These include lack of centralised monitoring of excavation activities, lack of action plans, and insufficient budget allocation. It recommended that preservation plans must be developed before undertaking excavation, to minimise the impact on the site’s integrity. It also suggested that advanced technologies such as 3D scanning should be utilised for enhanced accuracy.
 - **Issues in restoration:** The Committee observed that restoration at certain sites is not in line with the original design of the place. It recommended ASI to retain the original structure of the monuments. Further, it should integrate climate change adaptation strategies into the restoration plans. It also recommended ASI to implement a monitoring system to assess the condition of sites regularly. This will enable proactive maintenance.
- **Sluggish pace of documentation:** The Committee observed that out of a total of 58 lakh antiquities, only 16.8 lakhs have been documented so far under the National Mission on Monuments and Antiques (NMMA). NMMA has been launched to create a database on heritage sites and antiquities. It recommended that NMMA invest in capacity building to expedite this process.
- **Vacancies and restructuring of ASI:** The Committee observed that about 31% of positions in ASI are vacant. It stated that vacancies lead to delays and hinderances in carrying out various works. It also recommended that ASI should be restructured. It recommended dividing ASI into two wings- the ASI wing and the India Heritage Development Corporation wing (IHDC). The ASI wing would deal with core mandates of exploration, conservation, and excavation. The IHDC would deal with the management of monuments and sites, including licensing, ticketing, safety, and other tourist-facing operations.
- **Involvement of private entities:** The Committee observed that under the Monument Mitra scheme, 24 agreements have been signed, however, only four have seen effective engagement. The scheme allows private entities to restore and maintain heritage sites. It recommended that ASI should promote public-private partnerships and corporate social responsibility initiatives in preservation and conservation of art and culture.
- **Dealing with encroachments:** The Committee recommended that ASI conduct regular surveys on encroachments around monuments and create a database for it. Further, it recommended: (i) involving local communities as stakeholders to seek co-operation in dealing with encroachment, and (ii) providing support to families and individuals affected by eviction.

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