Adopt a Heritage Scheme

Why in news?

Private firms, companies, and public sector units can enter into agreements with the Union Ministry of Culture to adopt and maintain State-owned archaeological sites or monuments.

What is Adopt a Heritage Scheme about?

- It is an initiative of the ***Ministry of Tourism***, in collaboration with the ***Ministry of Culture*** and the ***Archaeological Survey of India***.
- The government invites entities, including public sector companies, private sector firms as well as individuals, to develop selected monuments and heritage and tourist sites across India.
- It includes providing and maintaining basic amenities, including drinking water, ease of access for the differently abled and senior citizens.
- The sites/monument for this scheme will be selected on the basis of tourist footfall and visibility.
- Businesses that enter such agreements are going to be known as ***Monument Mitras***.
- The Monument Mitras are selected by the '*oversight and vision committee*,' co-chaired by the Tourism Secretary and the Culture Secretary.
- The corporate sector is expected to use *corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds* for the upkeep of the site.
- The Monument Mitras, in turn, will get limited visibility on the site premises and on the Incredible India website.
- The oversight committee also has the power to terminate a memorandum of understanding in case of non-compliance or non-performance.

What are the issues with the scheme?

- **Lack of experience –** Permitting a watch company without expertise in bridge engineering to maintain a colonial era *bridge in Morbi, Gujarat,* possibly contributed to heart-wrenching tragedy.
- **Sarnath initiative –** The current plan also side lines the mandate of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and abandons the Sarnath Initiative.

  The Sarnath initiative is the guidelines devised by the ASI, the Getty Trust, U.S., the British Museum, and National Culture Fund to safe keep excavated objects and present them to visitors in an engaging manner.

- **Redundancy –** Monuments selected, such as, the stupas at Sanchi, the Brihadeshwar temple in Thanjavur, and Akbar's palace city at Fatehpur Sikri, already have tourist

infrastructure.

- **Livelihood of local communities –** The scheme undermines the local communities and their relationships with historical sites.
- Guided tours led by employees of large businesses, may endanger livelihoods of those who have lived near the site and made a living by regaling visitors with stories of its colourful past.
- **Night tourism –** Keeping these spots open from dawn to dusk has limited footfall and thus preserved them from excessive wear and tear.
- Night tourism will also pull electricity away from rural homesteads and hospitals.
- **Monuments not adopted by Monument Mitras –** The Uttar Pradesh government has started turning over such monuments to the Tourism Department to convert them into hotels.
- They include Chunar Fort, a citadel overlooking Barwasagar Lake, and several residences built by Awadh's Nawabs.
- **Corporate interest over historical preservation –** The move by U.P government confirms that the scheme is continuing to place reckless tourism and corporate interests over historical preservation.

How can we overcome the challenges?

- **Schools –** Traders and shopkeepers can give funds to school libraries for collecting archival materials including books, maps, and old photographs relevant to monuments.
- **Universities –** Corporates can give them a new lease of life to humanities and social sciences departments by instituting fellowships, endowing professorships, and supporting research training programmes.
- **Building infrastructure –** The CSR funds can be used to purchase new equipment that protect the monuments from hazards created by pollution.
- **Expertise of the private sector –** The private sector's resources and expertise may also help the ASI and State Archaeology Directorates to secure monuments from dams, mining projects, defacement, and looting.

Reference

1. The Hindu | A thumbs down for the 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme

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