Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

Prelims: *Current events of national importance | Art and Culture*

Why in News?

Digitisation of historical/religious sites and antiquities done by ASI recently.

- It is the premier organization for ***archaeological research and the protection of cultural heritage*** in India.
- **Established in -** 1861 by Alexander Cunningham, 1st Director General.
- **Headquarters-** The Director-General leads the ASI from its headquarters in New Delhi.
- **Purpose-** Its primary role is to survey, explore, and excavate archaeological sites, and conserve national monuments.
- **Structure-** It operates through 24 circles, museums, and specialized branches, including excavations, epigraphy, science, horticulture, and underwater archaeology.
- **Functions -** The ASI functions under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR Act), 1958, and manages the Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.
    - **Monument Protection -** Administers and maintains over 3,690 ancient monuments and archaeological sites of national importance under the AMASR Act, 1958.
    - **Research and Excavation -** Conducts systematic scientific explorations to unearth India's past, notably discovering the Indus Valley Civilisation in the 1920s.
    - **Antiquities Regulation-** Regulates the export of non-antiquities and prevents illicit trafficking under the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972.
    - **Public Engagement-** Manages over 50 site museums located near historical excavations and publishes academic journals like Indian Archaeology – A Review.
- **World Heritage Sites in India -** ***44 UNESCO sites*** managed by ASI.
- The 44 sites are categorized into 3 types to ensure a balance of cultural

and natural preservation

- **Cultural (36 sites) -** Includes iconic monuments like the Taj Mahal, Ajanta Caves, Hampi, and the Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai.
- **Natural (7 sites) -** Protects critical ecosystems like Kaziranga National Park, Sundarbans, and the Western Ghats and
- **Mixed (1 site) -** Khangchendzonga National Park in Sikkim is uniquely recognized for both its natural beauty and its sacred spiritual meaning to indigenous communities.

Italy (61 sites) and China (60 sites) currently hold the highest number of World Heritage Sites globally and India holds the 6th place by holding 44 sites.

- **Latest Inscriptions in India (2024–2025)**
- **Maratha Military Landscapes (2025)-** India's 44th site, consisting of 12 historic forts (11 in Maharashtra and 1 in Tamil Nadu) that demonstrate the strategic military architecture of the Maratha Empire.
- **Moidams – Ahom Mound Burials (2024) -** Located in Assam, these are the 700-year-old royal burial mounds of the Ahom dynasty and the first cultural site from Northeast India to be inscribed.

Reference

PIB | ASI

