Leasing Out Heritage Monuments

What is the issue?

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- The Red Fort has been leased out to the Dalmia Bharat Group recently.
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- This has lead to widespread criticism due to concerns in heritage conservation.
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What is the Tourism Ministry's scheme?

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- The tourism ministry last year launched the **'Adopt a Heritage'** scheme.
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- **Objective** - This was an attempt to increase public-private partnership in conservation and maintenance of heritage sites.
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- It invited private and public sector companies to become 'Monument Mitras'.
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- **Services** - The **'friends of monuments'** will adopt heritage sites.
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- The CSR arms of the Monument Mitras will fund the maintenance and upkeep work.
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- They will develop basic and advanced amenities at the monuments.
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- **Privileges** - The Monument Mitras will be given "visibility" on the monument premises.
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- They will as well get visibility in the tourism ministry's Incredible India website.
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- **Selection** - Monument Mitras have been selected through “Vision Bidding”.
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- It is the process where agency with the best vision for the heritage site gets

selected.
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What are the checks in place?

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- The five-year contract can be terminated if the company does not comply with the ASI guidelines.
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- The legal status of the monument will not change after adoption.
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- The company will not collect any money from the public unless allowed by the government.
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- Also, profits, if any, will be used to maintain and upgrade tourism facilities.
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- An Oversight and Vision Committee will keep a watch.
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- It is co-chaired by the secretaries of Tourism and Culture, and with the D-G, ASI, as member.
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- Projects will be evaluated based on:
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i. increase in tourist footfall
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ii. improvement in overall tourism sector perception
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iii. increase in employment generation
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What are the notable adoptions?

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- Government-owned NBCC has adopted Purana Qila.
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- SBI Foundation, the CSR arm of state-owned SBI, has adopted the capital’s Jantar Mantar.

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- Yatra.com has Hampi, Qutub Minar, and Ajanta and Ellora caves.
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- GMR and ITC have submitted proposals for the Taj Mahal.
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- In all, 93 Archaeological Survey of India-ticketed monuments are open for bidding.
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- 30 companies have been selected to “adopt” some of these sites.
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What is the recent deal?

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- As per the MoU, the Dalmia Group will spend Rs 25 crore over the next 5 years.
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- It will be on the light and sound show, turnstile gates, app-based multi-lingual audio guide, free Wi-Fi.
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- Besides, a cafeteria and construction of ramps for differently-abled visitors (Tactile Paths) would also be taken up.
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- The Group will get the privilege of placing their name on signage inside the fort.
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What is the significance of Red Fort?

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- In old times, taking control of the fort was considered a symbolic control of the country.
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- Thus, for long, the fort has been synonymous with the regime that ruled India.
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- The Red Fort is seen as a symbol of the country's freedom struggle.
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- The 1857 War of Independence was led by Bahadur Shah Zafar from the Red Fort.

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- That is why every prime minister has addressed the nation from its ramparts every August 15.
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- It is also a world heritage site, one of the three in Delhi.
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- The other two being Humayun's Tomb and Qutab Minar.
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What are the concerns with leasing out?

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- Handing over a symbol of the freedom struggle to a corporate entity has raised concerns.
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- Allowing corporates to become managers of heritage sites raises doubts on credibility in heritage conservation.
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- Corporates will have only limited “access” to core areas.
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- Also, there will be “no handing over of monuments”.
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- Nevertheless, at the sites where there is no ASI involved, the external parties may be allowed to touch the building as well.
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What should be done?

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- ASI has to be cautious in this regard.
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- It must monitor the process and progress of the maintenance and upkeep work.
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- India needs a uniform policy about heritage and heritage conservation.
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- Experts in the field of conservation, senior historians and archaeologists should be involved in formulating a scheme.
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Source: Indian Express, Economic Times

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