1. Monument Conservation - History

The Union Ministry of Culture is set to allow private agencies to undertake core conservation work at centrally protected monuments, ending the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) exclusive mandate in this domain

Rationale Behind the Government's Decision

1. Capacity Augmentation of ASI

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is the primary statutory authority responsible for over 3,600 centrally protected monuments. Chronic constraints include

1. Shortage of trained conservation architects and archaeologists.
2. Limited specialised expertise in materials science, structural retrofitting, and climate-resilient conservation.

Private sector participation is intended to bridge the technical and human resource gap without diluting ASI's statutory authority.

2. Time-bound Execution of Conservation Projects

Conservation projects under a single-agency model have often faced

1. Procedural delays.
2. Capacity bottlenecks.
3. Cost overruns.

Introducing private implementing agencies allows

1. Parallel execution of multiple projects.
2. Faster mobilisation of technical expertise.

This aligns with outcomes-based governance and project management best practices.

3. Creation of a National Talent Pool

Empanelment of qualified conservation architects and agencies

1. Encourages professionalisation of heritage conservation.
2. Creates a national ecosystem of trained experts.

Reduces dependence on ad-hoc or under-skilled interventions that risk damaging heritage assets.

4. Efficient Utilisation of CSR and Donor Funds

Large volumes of CSR and philanthropic funds earmarked for heritage remain underutilised due to

1. Administrative delays.
2. Lack of project-ready proposals.

A structured PPP framework ensures

1. Faster fund deployment.
2. Transparent financial flows.
3. Outcome-linked expenditure.

5. Alignment with Global Best Practices

Internationally, heritage conservation increasingly follows a regulated partnership model, where

1. The State retains oversight and ownership.
2. Private and civil society actors provide expertise and funding.

India's move reflects convergence with global conservation governance norms.

The New Public–Private Partnership (PPP) Model in Heritage Conservation

Core Objectives - Enhance institutional and technical capacity for conservation. Accelerate timelines for restoration and structural stabilisation. Enable private participation while preserving public control and accountability.

Regulatory Safeguards - All projects remain

1. Under ASI supervision.
2. Fully compliant with the National Policy for Conservation of Ancient Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Remains (2014).

ASI continues as

1. Final approving authority.
2. Custodian of conservation standards and authenticity.

Checks, Balances, and Eligibility Criteria

Empanelment of Conservation Architects - Only professionally qualified conservation architects with

1. Demonstrated technical competence.
2. Proven heritage conservation track record.

Ensures scientific, reversible, and non-invasive conservation methods.

Eligibility of Implementing Agencies - Agencies must show prior experience in

1. Restoring structures over 100 years old.
2. Handling historically sensitive materials and construction techniques.

This filters out general construction firms lacking conservation expertise.

Monument Selection Mechanism - An initial list of 250 monuments requiring urgent conservation will be published. Donors may

1. Choose from the priority list.
2. Propose additional monuments based on regional or thematic interest, subject to ASI approval.

Prevents arbitrary or commercially driven site selection.

Framework and Implementation Mechanism

Role of the National Culture Fund (NCF) - All project funds will be routed through the National Culture Fund. Established in 1996 with a government corpus of ₹20 crore. Key features

1. Direct donor funding for specific projects.
2. 100% tax exemption under CSR provisions.
3. Transparent accounting and audit mechanisms.

Empanelment Process - The Union Ministry of Culture will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP). Aim- Empanel over a dozen conservation architects across regions. Donors select architects from this panel, ensuring

1. Standardised quality.
2. Reduced conflict of interest.

Project Execution Workflow - Donor + empanelled architect jointly select External implementing agency with relevant experience. Preparation of a Detailed Project Report (DPR). DPR must be

1. Technically vetted.
2. Formally approved by ASI.

This ensures

1. ASI's supervisory authority remains intact.
2. Private players act as implementers, not decision-makers.

Comparison with the 'Adopt a Heritage' Scheme

Adopt a Heritage (Earlier Model) - Allowed corporate entities to act as **"**Monument Mitras". Scope limited to

1. Tourist amenities.
2. Visitor infrastructure (cafes, restrooms, signage).

Explicitly excluded core conservation work.

New PPP Model (Current Initiative) - Allows private participation in

1. Structural conservation.
2. Restoration and stabilisation.

Represents a qualitative policy shift

1. From tourism-centric engagement.
2. To conservation-centric collaboration.

Global Parallels in Heritage Governance

United Kingdom - Churches Conservation Trust

1. Manages historic religious buildings.
2. Strong private and charitable involvement under state regulation.

United States- Extensive role of

1. Private foundations.
2. Non-profit organisations.

State agencies focus on

1. Standards.
2. Legal protection.

Germany and the Netherlands - Heritage managed through

1. Independent foundations.
2. Mixed public–private funding.

Demonstrates sustainable long-term conservation financing models.

Constitutional Safeguards and Jurisdictional Clarity

Union Jurisdiction

Union List – Entry 67

1. Exclusive control over monuments declared of national importance.
2. ASI's authority derives from this entry.

State Jurisdiction

State List – Entry 12

1. States manage monuments not declared of national importance.
2. The new model does not encroach upon State powers.

Concurrent Powers

Concurrent List – Entry 40

1. Both Union and States can legislate on archaeological sites not nationally protected.
2. Facilitates cooperative federalism in heritage governance.

Article 253- International Obligations - Empowers Parliament to legislate for implementing international conventions. Relevant for compliance with UNESCO World Heritage obligations. Ensures that Global conservation standards override federal limitations when required.

Overall Assessment - The initiative represents a structural reform in heritage governance, not mere outsourcing. Key strengths

1. Retains public ownership and oversight.
2. Mobilises private expertise and funding.
3. Aligns with constitutional and international obligations.

Key risks

1. Over-commercialisation.
2. Quality dilution if oversight weakens.

The success of the model will depend on

1. ASI's regulatory capacity.
2. Transparency in empanelment.
3. Strict adherence to conservation ethics.

Conclusion

The new PPP framework reflects a pragmatic shift from state monopoly to state stewardship in heritage conservation. If effectively regulated, it can transform India's heritage management from a capacity-constrained model into a professionally driven, globally aligned conservation ecosystem—while remaining firmly anchored in constitutional authority and public accountability.

Source- https-//indianexpress.com/article/india/asi-conservation-protected-monuments-private-agencies-10462104/