

Government to set up heritage site commission

The central government plans to set up a national heritage sites commission to frame guidelines for conserving heritage monuments and sites.

Speaking at the 33rd meeting of the central advisory board of Archaeology, Culture Minister Ambika Soni said her ministry has proposed constitution of the commission to the cabinet.

Legislation on setting up the commission is under preparation and it will be sent to the cabinet soon for approval.

The commission would frame broad policy guidelines and also take steps to ensure that they are observed.

Observing that encroachment was a 'major problem' in maintaining and improving the ambience of the monuments, Soni said the government is providing alternative commercial hubs to encroachers for necessary livelihood so that the exterior ambience of monuments remains presentable.

She said alternative commercial hubs have already been provided at Mahabalipuram, Agra and Bodh Gaya.

Noting that vandalism against monuments and law and order situation in the areas where monuments are situated are major concerns, she said steps should be taken by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which protects the historical monuments in the country, and the concerned state governments to work together to ensure that cultural heritage of the country is well-preserved and visitor friendly.

She said the country is at risk of losing a number of archaeological sites due to rapid urbanization and developmental work.

With this in view, she said they have decided to create within five years a national register to built heritage and antiquities of India. 'A National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities has been constituted for this purpose,' she added.

The mission will document the monuments and antiquities spread across India and prepare data both at the regional as well as national level so that both public and scholars could assess it.

Soni said the year 2007 saw an impressive growth of tourism sector in the country.

'As per estimates the final figure of foreign tourist arrivals in the country is likely to touch five million with a foreign exchange earning of over \$10 billion,' she said.

'We have to strive hard to keep pace with growing tourism and try to maintain a balance between conservation and development without destruction,' she added.

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