

## Yet to decide on National Museum's closure: Govt

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**NEW DELHI:** The Union Culture Ministry informed the Parliament on Thursday that the Government is yet to take a decision on the closure of the National Museum in New Delhi, raising questions on the timeline of the Central Vista project.



In response to a series of questions from Trinamool Congress lawmaker Jawahar Sircar in the Rajya Sabha, union culture minister G Kishan Reddy said “no decision has so far been taken by the government” on the timeline for the closure of the museum; whether the artefacts would be moved to a temporary storage; whether any similar shift anywhere in the world has been studied; and whether the government has consulted experts on this.

To be sure, the answer does not suggest a rethink of the Central Vista project that envisioned the demolition of the museum, the construction of buildings that are part of the central secretariat in its stead, and the relocation of the museum to a refurbished North and South Block buildings that currently house key ministries. The original timeline for the demolition of the museum was the end of this year.

HT reported on 30 September that the National Museum was likely to be vacated by the end of 2023 as part of the Central Vista redevelopment project and that the collections would eventually be moved to the proposed Yuge Yugeen Bharat National Museum in the North and South Block of the Raisina Hill complex.

In May 2021, leading art historians and museum curators from within the country and overseas signed a plea to save the museum, National Archives and National Centre for the Arts. To be sure, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts has already been demolished and work on buildings that are part of the Central Secretariat there is in full swing, and only a small part of the existing National Archives building will need to be demolished.

In October 2023, a public petition to save the National Museum was initiated by university students and young people interested in Indian history which was signed by thousands of people.

Sircar, couple of months back wrote to Union housing and urban affairs minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Reddy, and questioned the Centre over reports that the museum was being vacated and wondered if the government was aware of the dangers of shifting priceless artefacts housed in the building, while stressing these treasures belong to the nation, “not to any temporary government holding power”.

The Congress criticised the Modi government for its decision to vacate the National Museum.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said vacating the museum was nothing more than “barbarism, pure and simple.”

HT reached out to the offices of Puri and Reddy but didn't get responses immediately.